

A Bible Adventure

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A Giant's Challenge

A retelling of 1 Samuel 17

The sudden buildup of Philistine troops in Judah was proof enough that war was imminent, and as soon as King Saul heard the report, he gave orders to deploy his army to the Valley of Elah. There the Israelite and the Philistine armies faced each other from opposite hills with the valley between them.

As the armies were arraying themselves in battle lines, the Philistine champion, the giant Goliath of Gath, who was over nine feet tall, made his first appearance, striding toward the Israelites' camp with his shield bearer before him. Goliath wore a bronze helmet, a heavy coat of mail, and brass greaves on his legs. He menacingly

clutched an enormous spear that had a staff the size of a weaver's beam.

"Do you really need a whole army to settle this?" Goliath jeered at the Israelite ranks. "I am a Philistine, and aren't you the servants of Saul? Why not choose a man from among you to come down and fight me in single combat? If he wins and kills me, we will become your subjects. But if I overcome and kill him, you will surrender and serve us."

The warrior's challenge terrified King Saul and his men.

It had been forty days since Goliath the great warrior

had begun his taunts. Every morning and evening he provoked the Israelites, but no one had dared step out to take up the challenge. It was at this time that David, a young shepherd, was on his way to the Israelite camp, taking food to his brothers who had joined the army ranks. When David arrived on the outskirts of the camp, the soldiers had just left for their positions on the battlefield. So, leaving his provisions with the baggage keeper, David rushed out to the ranks to greet his brothers.

As he was speaking with them, they heard a commotion coming from the enemy camp.

Amidst the cheers and battle cries of the Philistines, Goliath had returned to taunt the Israelites, who, as soon as they saw the advancing giant, began to run away in fright.

"Have you seen him?" a soldier answered when David asked about Goliath. "He is the tallest man I ever saw! I reckon he's easily nine feet tall."

See "To Win an Enemy" and "Exploits of a King-to-Be" for other stories on King David's life.

“Don’t call him a *man!*” said another soldier who was hurrying away from the front line. “He’s nothing like us—he’s a *giant!*”

The soldiers had been nervously discussing the reward that King Saul had offered to the man who could kill this enemy of Israel, and were wondering if the reward was worth the risk of fighting such a giant.

“Who is this idol-worshipping Philistine that he should insult and defy the armies of the living God?” David demanded. He was angered to see the despondence and dread that had taken hold of the Israelite army, and he

repeatedly asked why no one had taken the challenge.

It wasn’t long before some bystanders reported to the king all that David had said. “That is the type of courage we need!” King Saul said in response. “Bring him to me.”

“O king, let no man lose heart because of him!” David exclaimed when he appeared before Saul. “I will go and fight with this Philistine.”

“You?” said the king. “A youth such as you cannot defeat such a man. Goliath is a seasoned fighter—not to mention many times your size!”

“While tending my father’s sheep,” David replied, “I was confronted with both a lion and a bear who wished to take a lamb from the flock. I went out after them and took the lamb from their mouths. When each beast turned against me, I grabbed it, and struck and killed it.

“Therefore, O king, the Lord who has protected me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, the same will protect me from the hand of this Philistine!”

Seeing the youth’s unshakable faith, King Saul was impressed. “Go, my son, and may the Lord be with you,” he said.

Then King Saul insisted that David dress in his own royal tunic, and he put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet and fastened his sword to David’s side. David had never worn armor before, and after a little while, he shook his head.

“I cannot go in these, for I have never proved them,” he said, and doffed the sword and the armor.

“B-but how will you fight Goliath and protect yourself from him?” the king asked.

“I will fight him with my staff and sling,” David answered.

After King Saul dismissed him, David made his way to a nearby brook. There he selected five smooth stones and put them into his shepherd's bag, and with his sling in hand, approached the area where Goliath stood.

As the curious soldiers watched in silent awe, Goliath, seeing David alone and apart from the Israelite army, began striding toward him.

“Do the people of Israel mock me?” the giant bellowed. “Am I a dog that you come to me with a stick? Come here, and I will feed your flesh to the birds and wild animals.”

“You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a shield,” David replied, “but I come to you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

“This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands ... and the world will know that there is a God in Israel! And all those gathered here will know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands!”

Goliath, grasping his enormous spear, began to

advance, and David ran to meet him. David then took a stone out of his bag, placed it in his sling, and hurled it, striking the Philistine in his forehead. The giant warrior stopped, stumbled, and fell face down. The ranks of Israel's soldiers let out a thunderous cheer!

David ran toward the fallen Philistine and slew Goliath with the giant's own sword.

That day a young shepherd triumphed over the mighty champion of the Philistines with nothing but faith, a sling, and one smooth stone.

Seeing David's courageous conquest, the Israelite soldiers chased the Philistines all the way back to their own country, and then retrieved great spoil from the Philistines' abandoned camp. The battle was over, and Israel was safe.

See “Heroes of the Bible: King David” for more on this fascinating Bible character.