FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 17

*David and Goliath*

**Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Socoh in Judah. They pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Socoh and Azekah. 2 Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. 3 The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them. 4 A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. 5 He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; 6 on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. 7 His spear shaft was like a weaver’s rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him. 8 Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, “Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. 9 If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us.” 10 Then the Philistine said, “This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.” 11 On hearing the Philistine’s words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified. 12 Now David was the son of an Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah. Jesse had eight sons, and in Saul’s time he was old and well advanced in years. 13 Jesse’s three oldest sons had followed Saul to the war: The firstborn was Eliab; the second, Abinadab; and the third, Shammah. 14 David was the youngest. The three oldest followed Saul, 15 but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father’s sheep at Bethlehem. 16 For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand.17 Now Jesse said to his son David, “Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. 18 Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them. 19 They are with Saul and all the men of Israel in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines.” 20 Early in the morning David left the flock with a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry. 21 Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other. 22 David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and greeted his brothers. 23 As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. 24 When the Israelites saw the man, they all ran from him in great fear. 25 Now the Israelites had been saying, “Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father’s family from taxes in Israel.” 26 David asked the men standing near him, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” 27 They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him, “This is what will be done for the man who kills him.” 28 When Eliab, David’s oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, “Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.” 29 “Now what have I done?” said David. “Can’t I even speak?” 30 He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before. 31 What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him. 32 David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.” 33 Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth.” 34 But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, 35 I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. 36 Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. 37 The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you.” 38 Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. 39 David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. “I cannot go in these,” he said to Saul, “because I am not used to them.” So he took them off. 40 Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine. 41 Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. 42 He looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him. 43 He said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 44 “Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!” 45 David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. 47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.” 48 As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. 49 Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground. 50 So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him. 51 David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine’s sword and drew it from the scabbard. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword. When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran. 52 Then the men of Israel and Judah surged forward with a shout and pursued the Philistines to the entrance of Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Their dead were strewn along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron. 53 When the Israelites returned from chasing the Philistines, they plundered their camp. 54 David took the Philistine’s head and brought it to Jerusalem, and he put the Philistine’s weapons in his own tent. 55 As Saul watched David going out to meet the Philistine, he said to Abner, commander of the army, “Abner, whose son is that young man?” Abner replied, “As surely as you live, O king, I don’t know.” 56 The king said, “Find out whose son this young man is.” 57 As soon as David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with David still holding the Philistine’s head. 58 “Whose son are you, young man?” Saul asked him. David said, “I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem.”**

Battlefield layout consisted of a line of shield-bearing spearmen with archers at the rear. Once battle began, the troops engaged in hand-to-hand combat. A trumpet gave the signal for attack and retreat. Before David’s time, the Israelites had not had a leader since Joshua who understood strategy and tactics. (TLSB)

**17:1** *Socoh.* Located about 15 miles west of Bethlehem (see 2Ch 28:18) near the Philistine border. (CSB)

*Ephes Dammim.* Pas Dammim in 1Ch 11:13 (see 2Sa 23:9). (CSB)

*Azekah.* Located a little over a mile northwest of Socoh. (CSB)

**17:2** *Valley of Elah.* Located between Azekah and Socoh along the Wadi es-Sant. (CSB)

Valley in Judah, protected by cities of Azekah and Libnah. For safety, opposing armies were lined up on both sides of a valley. (TLSB)

**17:4** *champion.* The ancient Greeks, to whom the Philistines were apparently related, sometimes decided issues of war through chosen champions who met in combat between the armies. Through this economy of warriors the judgment of the gods on the matter at stake was determined (trial by battle ordeal). Israel too may have known this practice (see 2Sa 2:14–16). (CSB)

Hebrew word occurs only here in OT. Inference is that Goliath, over 9 ft tall, represents the best of the Philistine soldiers. (TLSB)

**17:5–7** Goliath’s coat of armor weighed c 125 lb. His javelin could be used in defense or offense. His spearhead weighed 14½ lb. Comparing his spear to a weaver’s beam probably describes its shape rather than its size. Descriptions of his armor and arms are not in Semitic terms. (TLSB)

**17:8** Of considerable height himself, Saul, as king, should have been Israel’s champion. Duels between representative strongmen were a common way to avoid more widespread bloodshed. Cf 2Sm 2:12–15. (TLSB)

**17:9** Cf 2Sm 21:15–22. Same principle of representation occurs when leaders act on our behalf, or when our Lord fights and defeats the forces of evil on our behalf. (TLSB)

**17:10** *the Philistine*. Term is used derisively throughout ch 17 for overly self-confident Goliath. (TLSB)

*defy*. In defying Israel’s army, Goliath defies God, the protector and defender of His people. (TLSB)

**17:11** *Saul and all the Israelites were … terrified.* Israel’s giant warrior (see 9:2; 10:23) quails before the Philistine champion. The fear of Saul and the Israelite army (see vv. 24, 32) betrays a loss of faith in the covenant promises of the Lord (see Ex 23:22; Dt 3:22; 20:1–4). Their fear also demonstrates that the Israelite search for security in a human king (apart from trust in the Lord; see notes on 8:5, 7) had failed. On the basis of God’s covenant promises, Israel was never to fear her enemies but to trust in the Lord (see 2Sa 10:12; Ex 14:13–14; Nu 14:9; Jos 10:8; 2Ch 20:17). (CSB)

Saul and his people were greatly afraid because the odds seemed overwhelmingly against them; they lost their faith in God’s power. They felt too weak to attack. If they did not accept Goliath’s offer, they could lose by default. (TLSB)

**17:12** *Ephrathite.* See note on Ru 1:2. (CSB)

*Bethlehem*. Village within the larger Ephrathah clan. (TLSB)

**17:13** As Jesse was too old for military service, his three oldest sons served instead. Cf Nu 1:3. (TLSB)

**17:15** *David went back and forth from Saul.* David’s position at the court (see 16:21–23) was not permanent, but was performed on an intermittent basis. For the relationship between chs. 16 and 17 see note on v. 55. (CSB)

Now that Saul had focused on military matters, David was not always needed at Saul’s court. See notes, 16:18–23. Shepherds had little social rank in Israel. There were no professional shepherds. This lowliest of jobs went to the youngest capable family member. (TLSB)

**17:17** Too young to fight, David provided food for his older brothers. (TLSB)

**17:18** Jesse gave special treatment to his sons’ commander so the commander might care for Jesse’s sons. (TLSB)

*cheeses*. Lit, “slices of milk.” (TLSB)

**17:20** *the sheep*. Small flock of perhaps no more than 100 sheep (cf Mt 18:12; Lk 15:4) would need only one person to watch it. Cf v 28. (TLSB)

**17:22** David is eager to attend the battle. He takes the initiative to meet his brothers. (TLSB)

*keeper of the baggage*. Supply keeper, who looked after the provisions that fathers provided for their sons.

**17:23** In contrast to Saul, when David hears Goliath’s threats, David will respond in faith. (TLSB)

**17:24** *great fear.* See note on v. 11. (CSB)

Israelites fled because of their lack of faith in God’s help. (TLSB)

**17:25** *The king will give great wealth.* See 8:14; 22:7. (CSB)

Lavish offer to entice bravery. Saul will later renege on his offer to David. (TLSB)

*free*. Victor’s family will be exempt from taxes or obligated labor. (TLSB)

*give him his daughter in marriage.* See 18:17–26; cf. Jos 15:16. (CSB)

**17:26** *Who is this … .?* David sees the issues clearly—which sets him apart from Saul and all the other Israelites on that battlefield. (CSB)

David’s character is captured in the first words attributed to him. He sees the issues more clearly than Saul and his soldiers. He makes the first theological comment. David sees no military giant. (TLSB)

*uncircumcised*. Term of contempt for a pagan. (TLSB)

**17:27** David’s question in v 26 comes after the answer of v 25 and is directed to a different group of people (as v 27 makes clear). David asks his question to ensure he has heard correctly. (TLSB)

**17:28** *he burned with anger.* Eliab’s anger may arise from jealousy toward his brother and a sense of guilt for the defeatist attitude of the Israelites. He recognizes, but does not comprehend, David’s indomitable spirit (see 16:13). (CSB)

Eliab’s anger may arise from jealousy toward his brother and a sense of guilt for the defeatist attitude of his people. His language is similar to that used to describe Joseph’s brothers’ rage against him (Gn 37). (TLSB)

*presumption*. Hebrew means “arrogantly taking too much on oneself.” (TLSB)

**17:29** *What have I done now?* David protests his innocence. Eliab should be angry at Goliath rather than at David. (TLSB)

**17:31–32** David weighed the difficulties from a divine perspective. Here was an opportunity for God to display His power. Ambrose: “David … was chosen from among all to rule the people. How gentle and kindly he was, humble in spirit too, how diligent and ready to show affection. Before he came to the throne he offered himself in the stead of all” (*NPNF* 2 10:48–49). (TLSB)

**17:32** *Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine.* David’s confidence does not rest in his own prowess (see vv. 37, 47) but in the power of the living God, whose honor has been violated by the Philistines and whose covenant promises have been scorned by the Israelites. (CSB)

**17:33** *You are not able.* Saul does not take into account the power of God (see vv. 37, 47). (CSB)

Saul continues to view the situation from a human point of view, failing to take into account what God can do. Hannah had already proclaimed how God can defeat the mighty and exalt the lowly (2:4–9). This will soon happen. (TLSB)

*youth*. Hbr *na‘ar*, “boy” or “young man.” The same term described Jonathan’s armor-bearer (14:1). Men were obligated for military service at age 20 (Nu 1:3). David is still younger than 20, but his age is not clear. Cf 20:35, where the noun is modified by “little,” which could describe size or age. (A feminine form, Hbr *na‘arah*, is used for girls; 2Ki 5:2.). (TLSB)

**17:34** In response to Saul’s practical observation, David delivers a testimony of faith in God’s almighty help. He speaks in the past tense of being a shepherd, anticipating a new future provided by God (TLSB)

*lion.* For the presence of lions in Canaan at that time see 2Sa 23:20; Jdg 14:5–18; 1Ki 13:24–26; Am 3:12. (CSB)

*bear.* See 2Sa 17:8; 2Ki 2:24; Am 5:19. (CSB)

**17:35** *struck*. With either a sling or club. (TLSB)

**17:36** *this uncircumcised Philistine.* See note on 14:6. (CSB)

David sees no greater difficulty in defeating Goliath than in defeating the wild animals that attacked his flock. Goliath can be compared to a bear or lion (Pr 28:15). (TLSB)

**17:37** *The Lord… will deliver me.* Reliance on the Lord was essential for the true theocratic king (see notes on 10:18; 11:13). Here David’s faith contrasts sharply with Saul’s loss of faith (see 11:6–7 for Saul’s earlier fearlessness). (CSB)

Deliverance from enemies depicted as predatory animals is a biblical motif (Ps 22:21). Remembrance of God’s deliverance in the past fills David with confidence that God will not let him down. (TLSB)

*lion*. Asian lion, which existed in Israel until the fourteenth century AD. (TLSB)

*bear*. Syrian brown bear. (TLSB)

*Saul said to David, “Go.”* Saul is now dependent on David not only for his sanity (see note on 16:16) but also for the security of his realm. (CSB)

**17:38** Wearing someone else’s armor imbued the wearer with the owner’s essence. Also, Saul could claim credit for David’s victory. (TLSB)

**17:39** David prefers to attack Goliath on his own terms. (TLSB)

**17:40** *his staff.* God’s newly appointed shepherd of his people (see 2Sa 5:2; 7:7; Ps 78:72) goes to defend the Lord’s threatened and frightened flock. (CSB)

*stones.* Usually the stones chosen were round and smooth and somewhat larger than a baseball. When hurled by a master slinger, they probably traveled at close to 100 miles per hour. (CSB)

*his sling.* For the Benjamites’ skill with a sling see Jdg 20:16. (CSB)

**17:42** Goliath’s pride was offended when he saw a youthful David come as his challenger. (TLSB)

**17:43** Goliath’s derision and curse are part of warfare at that time. (TLSB)

*Am I a dog … ?* See note on 2Sa 9:8. (CSB)

Later became a slur word specifically for Gentiles. (TLSB)

**17:44** Goliath does not suspect that this youth’s impertinence is a carefully considered maneuver. Appearances can be deceptive (16:7). (TLSB)

**17:45** *spear*. For throwing and thrusting. (TLSB)

*javelin*. Or a type of sword, based on the Qumran Order of War. (TLSB)

*name*. David’s secret weapon: he comes in the name of the living God. He is acting more for God than for Israel. (TLSB)

*in the name of the Lord Almighty.* David’s strength was his reliance on the Lord (see Ps 9:10; Pr 18:10). For the expression “name of the Lord” see notes on Ex 3:13–14; Dt 12:11. (CSB)

**17:46** *the whole world will know.* The victory that David anticipates will demonstrate to all the world the existence and power of Israel’s God (see Ex 7:17; 9:14, 16, 29; Dt 4:34–35; Jos 2:10–11; 4:23–24; 1Ki 8:59–60; 18:36–39; 2Ki 5:15; 19:19). (CSB)

The theological significance of the event is that God is the true deliverer of His people. The victory David anticipates will demonstrate to all the world the existence and power of Israel’s God. (TLSB)

**17:47** *assembly may know*. Event would be recounted and recalled in the liturgical assembly of God’s people. Glory belongs to God; David takes no credit for the victory over Goliath. (TLSB)

*saves*. Both Israelite and Philistine armies will be shown the error of placing trust in human devices for national security. Point of the OT is that salvation comes from God alone. (TLSB)

*the battle is the Lord’s.* Both the Israelite and the Philistine armies will be shown the error of placing trust in human devices for personal or national security (see 2:10; 14:6; 2Ch 14:11; 20:15; Ps 33:16–17; 44:6–7; Ecc 9:11; Hos 1:7; Zec 4:6). (CSB)

Luther: “You see that [David] was righteous and acceptable to God, strong and constant in faith, before he did this work. Accordingly, David’s ‘doing’ is neither a natural doing nor a moral doing; it is a doing in faith” (AE 26:263). (TLSB)

**17:48** *arose*. Beginning of his attack, not that he had been seated. (TLSB)

**17:49** String of actions rapidly brings the story to its climax. Having testified to his faith in God, David makes short work of Goliath. (TLSB)

*forehead*. Goliath’s helmet (v 5) should have protected him. He may not have worn it or adjusted it properly. Later Gk artwork depicts soldiers with their helmets pushed toward the back of their heads when not in battle. (TLSB)

**17:51** *killed*. Hbr verb has sense of finishing Goliath off. Ironically, David kills Goliath with the Philistine’s own sword. David’s victory affirms the superiority of faith in God over the supposed marvels of human technology and skill. Luther: “Sin is destroyed by its own fruit and is slain by the death to which it gave birth, as a viper is devoured by its own offspring. It is a glorious spectacle to see how sin is destroyed, not by the work of another, but by its own, and how it is stabbed with its own sword, as Goliath is beheaded by his own sword [I Sam. 17:51]. Goliath also was a kind of sin, a giant terrifying to all except the young boy David, that is, to Christ, who singlehandedly laid him low, beheaded him with his own sword” (AE 42:151–52). (TLSB)

*they turned and ran.* Most likely the Philistines saw the fall of their champion as the judgment of the gods, but they did not honor Goliath’s original proposal (see v. 9). (CSB)

**17:52** *Gath*. On coastal plain of southern Philistia. (TLSB)

*Ekron*. C 25 mi W of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

*Shaaraim*. On the line of the Philistine flight from Azekah, before the parting of ways to Gath and Ekron. (TLSB)

**17:54** *brought it to Jerusalem.* Jerusalem had not at this time been conquered by the Israelites. David may have kept Goliath’s head as a trophy of victory and brought the skull with him to Jerusalem when he took that city and made it his capital (see 2Sa 5:1–9). Or, having grown up almost under the shadow of the Jebusite city, he may have displayed Goliath’s head to its defiant inhabitants as a warning of what the God of Israel was able to do and eventually would do. (CSB)

Although Jerusalem was not yet a part of Israel, David displayed Goliath’s head there as a warning to its inhabitants. He put Jerusalem on notice that it, too, would be defeated. These events happened after vv 55–58 (as v 57 makes clear). (TLSB)

*put the Philistine’s weapons in his own tent.* As his personal spoils of the battle. Since Goliath’s sword is later in the custody of the priest at Nob (see 21:9), he must have dedicated it to the Lord, the true victor in the fight (cf. 31:10). (CSB)

Unclear. Could simply mean “home” (cf 2Sm 20:1), or David may have planned to stay with his brothers at the battlefield. (TLSB)

**17:55** *whose son is that young man?* The seeming contradiction between vv. 55–58 and 16:14–23 may be resolved by noting that prior to this time David was not a permanent resident at Saul’s court (see v. 15; 18:2; see also note on 16:21), so that Saul’s knowledge of David and his family may have been minimal. Further, Saul may have been so incredulous at David’s courage that he was wondering if his family background and social standing might explain his extraordinary conduct. (CSB)

David was not permanently at Saul’s court. Saul had taken little note of David’s family. Saul’s unstable mental condition may have affected his memory. (TLSB)

*As your soul lives*. Oath formula meaning “by your life.” (TLSB)

**17:58** Saul seeks more information than the name of David’s father. He is likely considering the politics of the situation. Though David comes from a relatively unimportant clan, he was a member of the most powerful tribe, Judah, which could throw support behind him in a coup. (TLSB)

**Ch 17** This gripping story of the faith of young David provides a superb example of how God grants victory in the face of impossible odds. It anticipates Jesus’ victory on the cross in the face of all the powers against Him. We are not to place our trust in human endeavors and devices. The message of the cross is that God chose what is weak to shame the strong, and the “weakness” of God is stronger than human strength (1Co 1:18–27; 1Jn 4:4). • Lord God, when I feel insecure, let me cast my cares on You, knowing that You care for me. Amen. (TLSB)