

# FIRST SAMUEL

## Chapter 17

### *David and Goliath*

Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. And they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. 2 And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines. 3 And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. 4 And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. 5 He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. 6 And he had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. 7 The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. And his shield-bearer went before him. 8 He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. 9 If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." 10 And the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together." 11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. 12 Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in years. 13 The three oldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. 14 David was the youngest. The three eldest followed Saul, 15 but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. 16 For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening. 17 And Jesse said to David his son, "Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain, and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers. 18 Also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See if your brothers are well, and bring some token from them." 19 Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. 20 And David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went, as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the encampment as the host was going out to the battle line, shouting the war cry. 21 And Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. 22 And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers. 23 As he talked with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him. 24 All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid. 25 And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. And the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel." 26 And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" 27 And the people answered him in the same way, "So shall it be done to the man who kills him." 28 Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men. And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle." 29 And David said, "What have I done now? Was it not but a word?" 30 And he turned away from him toward another, and spoke in the same way, and the people answered him again as before. 31 When the words that

David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him. 32 And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." 33 And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth." 34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, 35 I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. 36 Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God." 37 And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!" 38 Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, 39 and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." So David put them off. 40 Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine. 41 And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. 42 And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. 43 And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 44 The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field." 45 Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, 47 and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand." 48 When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. 49 And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. 50 So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. There was no sword in the hand of David. 51 Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. 52 And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron. 53 And the people of Israel came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp. 54 And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent. 55 As soon as Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is this youth?" And Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know." 56 And the king said, "Inquire whose son the boy is." 57 And as soon as David returned from the striking down of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. 58 And Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" And David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

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 ... dismayed and greatly afraid*. 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; 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** *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. (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. (CSB)

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

**17:24** *much afraid.* Israelites fled because of their lack of faith in God's help. (TLSB)

**17:25** *The king will enrich the man who kills him.* 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)

**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** *his anger was kindled.* 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 man’s heart fail.* 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.* 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 . 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 ... ?* 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 of hosts.* David's strength was his reliance on the Lord (see Ps 9:10; Pr 18:10). For the expression "name of the LORD." (CSB)

**17:46** *the earth may 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 fled*. 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 his armor in his 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 this youth?* 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)