

1 Samuel 17:1-30

Goliath's Challenge

1 Samuel 17:1-3 - "Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh, which belongeth to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephesdammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and there was a valley between them."

Some time had passed since the previous chapter. The Philistines had become aware of Saul's deteriorating mental state and thought this would be a good time to attack Israel.

Now they had pressed into Judah as far as 10 miles from Bethlehem.

The army of the Philistines were encamped on one side of ravine, with Israel on the other. Saul and his army were content with a merely defensive position, without venturing to attack their enemies. The Spirit of God had departed from Saul, and he could not muster any boldness.

A midrash in Aggadas Bereishis 30 notes that the use of the Hebrew word for "this one" shows that the confrontation was actually between good and evil. Goliath is referred to as "this one" in verse **1 Samuel 17:25**. Satan who supported him is referred to as "this one" in **Job 6:3**. David is called "this one" in the previous chapter (**1 Samuel 16:12**). The ministering angels who support Israel are each called "this one" in **Isaiah 6:3**. Satan the accuser said Israel deserved to be punished for the sin of the Golden Calf, when they said "This is your god." in **Nehemiah 9:18**. To which the angels retorted that Israel had used the same phrase in an eloquent expression of gratitude: "...he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation" (**Exodus 15:2**).

This same midrash explains that David was apprehensive about confronting Goliath until the Lord reminded him that Moses had prophesied of the tribe of Judah that God would "be a help to him against his enemies" (**Deuteronomy 33:7**). It was to be true and fulfilled of David as well as the Messiah.

The impasse had lasted for 40 days, with the giant warrior Goliath taunting Israel and challenging them to send their best warrior to fight in single combat.

David was back at his father's sheepfold. He would only visit the palace when requested by Saul for his lyre playing to soothe Saul's affliction.

Goliath

1 Samuel 17:4 - "And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span."

Goliath was one of the few descendants of the Anakim, the giants who had frightened the spies who gave an evil report:

- **Numbers 13:33** - "We even saw the Nephilim there--the descendants of Anak that come from the Nephilim! We seemed like grasshoppers in our own sight, and we must have seemed the same to them!"

Rashi - the giants: Heb. גִּפְיִלִים, giants, descended from Shamhazai (Nidah 61a) and Azael (Yoma 67b), who fell (שָׁנַף לְוַי) from heaven in the generation of Enosh.

Anak and his sons were giants. The Bible describes them as very tall descendants of the Nephilim (**Genesis 6:1-4**). They are also described as Rephaites (**Deuteronomy 2:11**). Rephaim are the inhabitants of Sheol, the underworld (e.g. **Isaiah 14:9-11; 26:13-15**) or "weakeners." The Ammonites called the Rephaites "Zamzummim" (**Deuteronomy 2:18-21**).

Joshua and Caleb had disagreed with the report of the other spies:

- **Numbers 14:9** - "Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not."

In fact, Joshua told the people, "for they are bread for us" - Instead of being a danger, the challenge of confronting these enemies from a standpoint of faith will actually sustain and nourish our spirits, because we will see and experience new ways for God to display His power.

In truth, we can see all tribulation, suffering and disappointment in the same light. God transforms it into spiritual food.

Before crossing the Jordan, Joshua again reminded the people that the giants could be defeated with God's help:

- **Deuteronomy 9:1-3** - "Hear, O Israel: Today you are about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities fortified to the heavens. The people are strong and tall, the descendants of the Anakim. You know about them, and you have heard it said, "Who can stand up to the sons of Anak?" But understand that today the LORD your God goes across ahead of you as a consuming fire; He will destroy them and subdue them before you. And you will drive them out and annihilate them swiftly, as the LORD has promised you.

Finally the Anakim had been driven out of Israel by Joshua:

- **Joshua 11:21-22** - "At that time Joshua proceeded to eliminate the Anakim from the hill country of Hebron, Debir, and Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah and of Israel. Joshua devoted them to destruction, along with their cities. No Anakim were left

in the land of the Israelites; only in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod did any survive."

Are any "Giants" standing in the way of your entering the Rest?

- **Hebrews 4:1** - "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

How Tall was Goliath?

Six cubits and a span. The ancient world did not have a uniform standard for a cubit. It was supposedly based on the length from the elbow to the middle finger. (The Latin *cubitum* means "elbow").

The Egyptian royal cubit was a little over 20 inches. The rabbinical cubit was anywhere from 19 to 21 inches. The Greek cubit was about 18 inches.

The Septuagint translation has four cubits and a span instead of six in this verse. So Goliath was anywhere between eight feet to 11 feet tall.

Goliath's armor and weapons are described. He was virtually impenetrable and a formidable foe.

As David was descended from Ruth, Goliath was said to descend from Orpah. Ruth received six measures of barley from Boaz (**Ruth 3:17**), representing six blessings. Orpah, by turning back from Israel, received six measures of condemnation (**Ruth 1:14**). Thus her descendant Goliath was six cubits tall.

1 Samuel 17:8 - "And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me."

The Targum also adds Goliath blustering and bragging that he killed the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, had been instrumental in taking the ark captive (**1 Samuel 4:11**), and carried it into the temple of Dagon, and had grabbed the tablets of the Law out of the Ark, which Saul subsequently recovered.

1 Samuel 17:9-10 - "If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together."

A similar single-combat fight was said to have happened between Paris and Menelaus in the Trojan war. In fact, the death of Goliath through his single exposed weak point - his forehead - is similar to Achilles and his vulnerable heel.

1 Samuel 17:11 - "When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid."

Saul had been a valiant warrior, as was Jonathan and the general Abner. But Saul's confused and dispirited state affected everyone.

Re-introduction to David

This is odd and has been seen as an add-on by a later editor from a different source.

1 Samuel 17:12 - "Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehemjudah, whose name was Jesse; and he had eight sons: and the man went among men for an old man in the days of Saul."

Rashi - and the man was old in Saul's time, coming among men, i.e. counted in the assemblies of the esteemed men.

Three of his brothers were serving in the army with Saul.

1 Samuel 17:14-16 - "And David was the youngest: and the three eldest followed Saul. But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days."

The Jews (Babylonian Talmud Sotah, fol. 42. 2.) say, Goliath chose those times - morning and evening - on purpose to disturb them in reading their "Shema" and saying their prayers morning and evening.

"presented himself forty days" - Goliath was granted 40 days of grace before he was killed by David, on the merit of the 40 steps Orpah took accompanying Naomi towards Israel until she turned back.

1 Samuel 17:17-18 - "And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren; And carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge."

David arrived at the camp just as the army was preparing for action. He then tracked down his brothers.

1 Samuel 17:23-24 - "And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard them. And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid."

Not only was Goliath defying the Israelite army, he was blaspheming God.

1 Samuel 17:25 - "And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up: and it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's

house free in Israel."

Later in **1 Samuel 17:27**, the people assured him again of the same thing his brothers were telling him. But there is nothing said afterwards about the fulfillment of these promises.

1 Samuel 17:26 - "And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

David's mention of the "Living God" creates an immediate contrast with the false gods and idols of the Philistines and the other pagan nations.

- **1 Thessalonians 1:9-10** - "For they themselves report what kind of welcome you gave us, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and TRUE God and to await His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead — Jesus our deliverer from the coming wrath."

1 Samuel 17:28 - "And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle."

Like Joseph and Jesus, David was misunderstood by his family. Here, Eliab may have been stung by David's words, being a reflection on his own zeal and courage.

1 Samuel 17:30 - "And he turned from him toward another, and spake after the same manner: and the people answered him again after the former manner."

David was trying to not only gauge the willingness of the soldiers, but also to persuade them of his view.

This incident was relayed to Saul, and in the next lesson we will see how he summons David, who volunteers to slay Goliath just like he had killed a lion and a bear attacking his sheep.

The takeaway here is that when we are confronted by a "giant" standing in the way of the kingdom of God or preventing our entering the spiritual rest, that we see it correctly. God is sovereign and has promised to defeat the giants. Plus, we will gain sustenance as we engage them. They will be food for us, helping us grow and become confident in God.

The giants are also called the Rephaim.

The Rephaim are mentioned in other Near Eastern texts but described as godlike, heroic and bigger than life figures - like Goliath.

But in the Bible the giants, the Anakim and their forefathers the Nephilim, the fallen ones (possibly the fallen angels) are described as “Rephaim” or “the dead.”

The giants once occupied the Promised Land. They had a stake in us, and were settled in our inner being.

But now we see the old powers, gods and idols we have worshipped in the past as merely shadows, vain and empty, with no life in themselves.

- Isaiah 26:13-14 - “O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased (rephaim), they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish.”

Like the Amalekites, their memory is to perish. To disappear from our consciousness.