

## **Zeal for Your Name**

Where is the zeal for God's name, that becomes for us a cause worth dying for? Comfort makes cowards of us all, if we become attached to it. Luxury lulls us to sleep, and soon we will justify every compromise, rationalise away every further concession to the world and false doctrine and tyranny, until there is almost nothing left of our faith.

The wonderful account of David and Goliath is not about facing your giants of worry or financial trouble, or facing your giants of depression with positive thinking. No, the account of David and Goliath is about why David was qualified to be king and Saul was not, and it came down to this: David was consumed with zeal for God's name. Saul was self-protective and thus cowardly, David was filled with love for God and thus courageous.

As we study this story, which we're all familiar with, we learn a lot more than being bold, or how a simple sling can overcome great odds. No, what we need to learn is how a burning zeal for God's name is what will make us willing to face opposition, take risks for God, perhaps be harmed, hurt, arrested, persecuted, because we love something, and believe in someone more than the shallow comforts of this life.

Perhaps we can see this account in three chapters: A Proud and Provocative Pagan, A Shocked and Zealous Shepherd, and A Daring Defence of the Name.

### **I. A Proud and Provocative Pagan**

For the sake of time, we have already read the first thirty verses of this long chapter. The battle itself took place in a valley, called the Valley of Elah. You can imagine the two hills on either side of a valley about a mile wide, with a small river running through it. The Israelites had gathered their army on the eastern hill, the Philistines on the west. It's a significant aggressive move by the Philistines because this is clearly the Philistines moving deeper into Israel, seeking to conquer.

The Philistines themselves were actually a sea-faring people, rather like ancient Vikings, that's why their chief god was Dagon, a shark god. The Philistines had mostly set up cities in the coastal plain of Israel, which is the low lying strip of land which runs along Israel's coast. The five main Philistine cities, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron, were all in the coastal plain. As you move inland, the country rises, and becomes the hill country. That's where the Israelites lived. Here, the Philistines set up a challenge in this valley which is really where the hill country of Judah begins. The Philistines might be capitalising on the madness of Saul, and pushing inland.

But on this day, the Philistines are practising what is known as representative warfare. Instead of the complete bloodshed of two armies attacking each other, each army gambles on just one man. If their man wins, they claim victory, and the other side must surrender and accept terms of defeat – which usually meant slavery. It's a big gamble, but usually when it came to two armies, the biggest and best soldier of one army would be only slightly better than the biggest and best of another army, so it's a reasonable contest. It is likely that Saul had no more intention of submitting to the Philistines than they Saul, had either side won.

The problem for Israel, on this day, was that the biggest and best of the Philistines was not just marginally better than the best of Israel. Indeed, we know who the tallest man in Israel was: King Saul. Saul was the man who was supposed to meet any challenge. But the Philistine champion was

more than just a bit taller than Saul. According to the text, Goliath was between 9' 6" and 9' 9", which is between 290 and 297 centimetres tall. His armour alone weighed around 56 kilograms; his spear weighed 7 kilograms. He was so large that he had a separate shield bearer: a man carrying a man sized shield, that ran ahead of him. Covered in bronze armour, he must have been a fearsome sight to behold.

Actually, he was also a bit of a cheat by the Philistines. Although Goliath was a Philistine citizen, living among Philistines in Gath, we know that he was not entirely ethnically a Philistine. We read about giants dwelling on Earth before the Flood, the offspring of fallen angels and human women. They were called Nephilim. They died during the Flood, but it appears that in the time after that, and perhaps during Israel's 430 years in Egypt, some of them reappear in the land of Canaan. When Joshua sends spies into the land, they again find giants there, and we read in Numbers 13:33 that these giants, the descendants of Anak, are actually descended from Nephilim. When Joshua drives out these Anakim, we then find an interesting clue about where they went: 22 None of the Anakim were left in the land of the children of Israel; they remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod. (Jos. 11:22)

In other words, Goliath of Gath was one of the Anakim living with and among the Philistines. Second Samuel records some later battles with the sons of Goliath, each of whom had six fingers and six toes. Goliath was no mere large fellow. Goliath was demonic offspring. But the Philistines were only too happy to host these Nephilim among them, and only too happy to challenge to race their Anakim Ferrari against the Israelite Toyota.

So twice a day, this demonic hybrid with Philistine citizenship would, morning and evening, present himself to Israel and throw down the challenge. This had gone on for forty days, while Saul and his army quailed at the sight of this man. They could not, with honour, simply refuse the challenge. But who would take it up?

## **II. A Shocked and Zealous Shepherd**

In the meantime, the three oldest sons of Jesse were part of those men quaking in their boots at Goliath. In ancient times, few nations had professional standing armies, so the soldiers often needed to provide their own food, or be supplied by their families or nearby towns. So Jesse, being too old to go himself, sends his youngest son, David to send them some food, see how they are, and bring back word. David arrives, quickly takes the food to the army rations official, and then finds his brothers.

But as he talks with them, his talk is interrupted by the twice-daily challenge by Goliath. David listens to Goliath's words and he is amazed. He is shocked. But he is the one man in Israel amazed for a different reason. He is not amazed by the size of the man or his armour or his weapons. David is amazed that he has been allowed to keep talking for so long, and no one has done anything about it! David is shocked by Israel's cowardice. He is, frankly, scandalised.

26 Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, "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?" (1 Sam. 17:26)

The men see bronze armour and 9' 6" in height; David sees an enemy of God, an affront to Yahweh. The men of Israel see Philistine vs Saul's men; David sees the unsaved versus God's people. David immediately sees through the situation to its real meaning.

The men explain to David that Saul had devised an incentive plan for killing the giant. Of course, that only highlighted the problem: there was only one man in Israel, from a physical point of view, tall enough to face Goliath, and it was Saul. But Saul was a coward, one who walked by sight and trusted in the flesh.

The incentive plan was that the one who would take Saul's place and fight the giant would receive wealth, tax exemption and Saul's daughter in marriage. Now Saul's daughter Michal was unfortunately not much of a prize, as we'll find out in later chapters. In fact, she seemed to carry Goliath's motto into marriage: "Give me a man that we may fight together". But wealth and permanent tax exemption, that was not bad.

But David was not a mercenary, seeking money out of battle. He was genuinely perplexed as to why no one in Israel had finished off this God-blaspheming giant, especially since they were God's people, with God's promises.

Unfortunately, as Jesus promised, "[A] man's foes shall be they of his own household," and that was true of David. No sooner is David asking about the battle, than his older brother Eliab is there to scold him. First he accuses David of simply having a perverse desire to see action and battle. Then he accuses David of having a conceited and proud heart, as if he, a fifteen-year old boy could hold his own with the soldiers of Israel. And then he twists the knife and asks why David is neglecting his shepherding duties, and with whom he left those few sheep in the wilderness.

Perhaps Eliab is feeling annoyed and irritated by the zeal and spiritual willingness of David. You'll find the cowardly and the cynical are often simultaneously convicted and irritated by those with spiritual zeal and initiative, because it shows them up.

But David knows with whom to fight, and this day, it is not with his older brother. He simply replies, "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" And then he ignores him, and asks someone else.

Eventually, David's zealous inquiries make their way to the king.

31 Now when the words which David spoke were heard, they reported *them* to Saul; and he sent for him.

32 Then David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

It's quite rebuke to an army of men to have a fifteen-year old say, "Don't be scared. I'll take care of the problem." And it would be easy to dismiss David as just youthful impulsiveness. So Saul tries that;

33 And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you *are* a youth, and he a man of war from his youth."

But David wants Saul to understand the two reasons why he can fight this Philistine. First, a very practical reason:

34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, 35 I went out after it and struck it, and delivered *the lamb* from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught *it* by its beard, and struck and killed it. 36 "Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God."

David has faced deadly enemies before. He has experience. Lions and bears are serious dangers, and David says he has experience in killing them. David has thrown himself into harm's way before, he has risked danger and death, and survived.

Second, a spiritual reason.

37 Moreover David said, "The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

David reminds Saul of who saves: Yahweh. If Yahweh, the God of Israel could save him from bears and lions, how much more can He save David from one of Yahweh's enemies, this blasphemous Philistine.

What a sad indictment on Saul and all the professional soldiers standing there. David had not faced a single day's combat: he was too young for the army. Saul had been fighting Philistines for 27 years by this time. Many of the men in the army had seen combat. But with all their experience, with all their armour, they lacked the most important thing: zeal for God's name. They lacked faith: the faith, that even if it is as small as a mustard seed, when placed in Yahweh, can move mountains, and topple giants. They could see only with the sight of their eyes, not with spiritual eyes.

But when you see like David does, you see that what God has equipped you with is enough to perform what He has required of you. David could see that it was required that this Philistine be put to death. David knew he had killed beasts strong and ferocious before. It simply made sense: obey God – do what you can to honour God's name, even if it is a great risk.

Well, all Saul can manage is a hypocritical response: And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"

Saul then tries to get David to rely on the armour that Saul had but wouldn't use.

38 So Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail. 39 David fastened his sword to his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested *them*. And David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested *them*." So David took them off. (1 Sam. 17:31-39)

David is stiff and bulky in this ill-fitting armour.

David knows that when you are carrying out God's will, it is best to stick with what God has equipped you with, rather than trying to be someone else. David does not need to be Saul; the Saul on the battlefield right now is a hopeless failure. David has all the spiritual armour he needs. We already know who the real king on this battlefield is. That leads us to the main moment.

### **III. A Daring Defence of the Name**

40 Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine. (1 Sam. 17:40)

David takes his staff, evidently as a decoy. He wants Goliath to think that he is going to use his wooden cudgel against Goliath's sword. But he hides his sling in his hand, and chooses five stones. Maybe one stone for each of the five Philistine cities, or maybe because we later find out that Goliath had four sons, or maybe because he just wanted five stones. The stones would have been between a golf ball and a tennis ball size, anything smaller would not have crushed the skull.

You might remember that the book of Judges mentions left-handed sling stone experts from the tribe of Benjamin who could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. So accurate were slingers that later on the Roman army had medical tongs designed specifically for removing the stones or lead bullets shot by sling to penetrate a soldier's body. In fact, some slingshot stones has been found to have similar momentum to some modern firearms.

Goliath is apparently sitting down, and when he sees the challenger from Israel, he gets up with his shield-bearer and approaches so his eyes can focus.

41 So the Philistine came, and began drawing near to David, and the man who bore the shield *went* before him. 42 And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him; for he was *only* a youth, ruddy and good-looking. 43 So 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 And the Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!" (1 Sam. 17:41-44)

When Goliath sees that his challenger is a fresh-faced teenager with a stick, he is insulted and revolted. The Jewish writer Josephus adds this gloss to the narrative "Dost thou take me not for a man, but a dog?" To which David replied, "No, not for a dog, but for a creature worse than a dog.

Goliath invokes a religious curse upon David, and promises to feed his flesh to the creatures in that valley. David's response is the climax of this chapter, and it is the reason he is the true king of Israel.

45 Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, 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 and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. 47 "Then all this assembly shall 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." (1 Sam. 17:45-47)

David is not coming in Saul's armour, nor in dependence upon height or physical prowess. David comes on behalf of, and in full dependence upon Yahweh, the God of Israel. David comes so that the whole earth may know that Israel's God is the true God. David comes so that Israel will know that God does not save by matching worldly strength with worldly strength, but by complete dependence upon Him.

There is one man in Israel who cares more about the name of Yahweh than his own safety, and that is David. That's why he is the king, for the king is the defender of the faith, the defender of God's name and God's worship.

In the Chronicles of Narnia, in the book *The Horse and His Boy*, one of the kings, the good king Lune teaches his son this about being a king. He says, "'For this is what it means to be a king: to be first in every desperate attack and last in every desperate retreat'".

David prefigures his descendant, the final King. He cares about God's name so much that He will give up His own safety and comfort and life. He will face down not a giant, but the very wrath of God on the Cross, take death and Hell by the beard and slay them. The Lord Jesus, first in every desperate attack, last in every desperate retreat. The Lord Jesus facing down death itself, Satan, the world, God's judgement, so that God's name would be honoured and yet a people graciously saved.

48 So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hastened and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. 49 Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone; and he slung *it* and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. (1 Sam. 17:48-49)

David runs to make sure he is at the exact distance he needs to be for when Goliath approaches. And then, before Goliath can react, or duck, one, two, three swings is enough to release the stone with enough force and accuracy to penetrate the forehead. The unerring accuracy he perfected with hours and hours of practice, now comes to the fore in battle. The giant falls ingloriously forward on his face, perhaps dead, or nearly dead.

Goliath met his fate according to Jewish law: ‘Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.’ (Leviticus 24:16)

50 So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. But *there was* no sword in the hand of David. 51 Therefore David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it. And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. (1 Sam. 17:50-51)

To make absolutely sure, and to have a trophy of God's destruction of this demonic hybrid, David uses Goliath's sword to cut off his head, so both armies know without doubt who has won. With that, the Philistine army breaks their end of the bargain, and instead of submitting, flees back to their cities.

52 Now the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted, and pursued the Philistines as far as the entrance of the valley and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell along the road to Shaaraim, even as far as Gath and Ekron. 53 Then the children of Israel returned from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their tents. (1 Sam. 17:52-53)

I have always found that the people who you think are shy and retiring can be as hard as nails and as ferocious as fire when defending something they really care about. And that's what it really comes down to. It's not who among us is brave and powerful. That's thinking like Saul. It's not who has enough wealth, political clout, eloquence, social standing to face the coming onslaught of persecution. It's about, who loves God's name more than personal comfort? Who is possessed of zeal for God's glory and the true Gospel more than personal protection and an undisturbed life? This is part of being a man or woman after God's own heart.