

David

Conflict with Goliath

Following a disjunctive section, explaining David's early relationship with King Saul, 1 Samuel covers the conflict with Goliath and the Philistines, in some detail, chapter 17:1-58.

The long paragraph about King Saul and David's early relationship seems to be out of order with the rest of the chronology of the text. This paragraph, 16:14-23, should probably be placed chronologically somewhere after 18:1. There are, however, a number of questions about the chronology of this. The disjunctive placement of this short section stands out and emphasizes a dramatic turn in the narrative story of 1 Samuel. Up to this point Samuel and Saul both occupy the focus of the text, after this it is David, his life and reign over the people of God.

Chapter 17 begins by setting the scene for the conflict between David and Goliath, a conflict that has now become an idiom for conflict between the strong and the weak. As we all take the position of weakness before our sin and inability to be righteousness before God, and deal with crises in life, we would do well to pay attention to this story and how it was resolved. For *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*.¹ The weak, in this case is the young anointed next king of Israel and the strong is a large and skilled champion warrior, Goliath of the Philistines, the arch enemies of Israel at this time. The scene is a confrontation between the armies of Israel and the Philistines, it occurs between Bethlehem, the home of David's family of the tribe of Benjamin, and the Philistine border to the west. The armies were gathered in Israeli territory so this represented an invasion by the Philistines, a compelling if not dominant force in the region. As Israel was camped in the valley, the two armies would stand on high ground on either side as preparation for battle.

As the two sides gathered on opposite sides of the Valley of Elah, between Socoh and Azekah, Goliath would come out and taunt the Israeli army and throw out a challenge for King Saul and his army to send a warrior to face him. The fate of the two armies would be decided by combat between the two champion warriors in the challenge. After a detailed description of the large Philistine and his tools of war, the Philistine said, "*I defy the ranks of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together.*"² At this loud cry King Saul and the army of Israel *were dismayed and greatly afraid*.³ Later, the text says, *When all the men of Israel saw the man, they*

¹ [*New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update*](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Heb 13:8. All scripture quotations are from this source, unless otherwise indicated.

² Ibid., 1 Sa 17:10.

³ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:11.

*fled from him and were greatly afraid.*⁴ The Philistine champion would come forward and taunted the army of Israel twice a day, morning and evening, for forty days.

At this point the text inserts a long aside in the action that explains who David was and how he came to be present in the valley of Elah for this drama (17:12-23). He was the youngest son of Jesse from Bethlehem in Judah whose three oldest sons were in the army of Israel, following King Saul. David would go back and forth between tending his father's sheep and the battle scene to see how his brothers were faring. He would leave the sheep with a caretaker and go to the battle scene.

It happened on a particular occasion that Jesse tasked David with taking some food to his brothers and a gift to their commander, *"For Saul and they and all the men of Israel are in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines."*⁵ At least that is what he thought they were doing. Actually, of course, they would go out and line up for battle, bravely "shouting the war cry" until Goliath would come out and taunt them. Then, *When all the men of Israel saw the man, they fled from him and were greatly afraid.*⁶

Neither Jesse nor David, his youngest son, knew all this was happening. *So David arose early in the morning and left the flock with a keeper and took the supplies and went as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the circle of the camp while the army was going out in battle array shouting the war cry.*²¹ *Israel and the Philistines drew up in battle array, army against army.*²² *Then David left his baggage in the care of the baggage keeper, and ran to the battle line and entered in order to greet his brothers.*²³ *As he was talking with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine from Gath named Goliath, was coming up from the army of the Philistines, and he spoke these same words; and David heard them.*⁷ That was Goliath's fatal mistake, *David heard them.* David heard him taunting the army of God. His response to the Philistine champion is defiant, in contrast to the army of Israel, *"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?"*⁸

After the text explains the reward offered by Saul, in verse 25, it is reiterated in 26-27, *"the people"* referring to the same words by back reflecting to 25. At this, older brother, Eliab, took offense, probably being a little sensitive at the attention his youngest brother was getting and being somewhat defensive about the intimating situation. David deflects Eliab's anger, turning away, and displays some political deftness by appealing, again, to the larger crowd in the area. Leaving behind the disjunctive comments of 17:12-30, the words of David soon came to the ears of King Saul, who sent for him.

⁴ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:24.

⁵ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:19.

⁶ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:24.

⁷ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:20-23.

⁸ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:26.

The conversation begins with David saying that he would fight the Philistine, Goliath. Saul protested a little, making the obvious point of David's youthfulness, which was a supposed problem at his anointing, also. Saul added that Goliath had been a soldier, "*from his youth.*" These were obvious points but Saul was undoubtedly relieved to have a volunteer and didn't argue about it too persuasively. He certainly didn't volunteer to go himself instead of this God fearing young man. After all, he was just the king! David explained, to reassure Saul, that, in the course of caring for the family sheep, he had fought to protect them from wild beasts. He named a lion and a bear, though it could have been more than one of each (the use of the article indicates this, making the references generic, referring to the animals as a class, not as individuals).

David explained, "*Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God.*" And 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.*"⁹

King Saul was converted and said to David, "*Go, and may the Lord be with you.*"

Saul tried to get David to use his equipment of traditional war but David was not a traditional guy and refused the unwieldy and untested equipment in favor of his familiar sling. He took his stick, presumably a walking stick or staff, and selected his ammunition from the brook running through the valley, that probably watered both camps. After selecting 5 smooth stones and depositing them in his bag, "*he approached the Philistine.*"

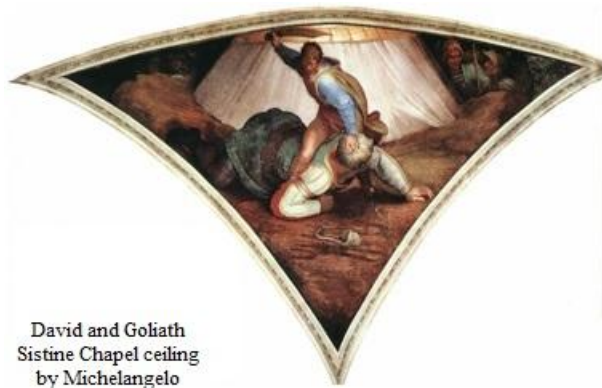
Goliath himself came forward saw the young David. He ridiculed him for his youth and his appearance and cursed him by the Philistine gods and said, "*Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field.*"¹⁰

David replied, "*You come to me with a sword, a spear, and 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 taunted.*"⁴⁶ "*This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and 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 does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD's and He will give you into our hands.***"¹¹

⁹ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:36–37.

¹⁰ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:44.

¹¹ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:45–47.



David and Goliath
Sistine Chapel ceiling
by Michelangelo

As the Philistine approached David, the text says, *that David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.*¹² There was no hesitation on David's part, so important for victory in military conflict. No this young man of God, filled with faith, was eager for battle, fully confident that the Lord would fight for him and Israel. He knew that, *the battle is the LORD'S* so there was no fear, replaced by the fear of the Lord. The stone from his sling was

so ferociously slung *that the stone sank into his forehead, so that he fell on his face to the ground.*¹³ After forty days of taunting, it was all over in a matter of seconds. All that was left was to remove the head of the Philistine champion with his own sword. Upon doing this the Philistine army turned tail and ran, pursued by the now courageous army of Israel, the army of the living God, as portrayed by the faithful future king of Israel. There was a great victory that day as *the slain Philistines lay along the way.*¹⁴ David's faith had inspired the entire army of Israel.

The text makes the lesson clear for us (for us, because, *they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come*¹⁵ . . .), stating twice that our Lord does not depend on human means to work on behalf of His people. *Thus David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and he struck the Philistine and killed him; but there was no sword in David's hand.*¹⁶ Also, *that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD'S and He will give you into our hands.*¹⁷

This section of scripture finishes the account by saying the men of the army plundered the abandoned camp of the Philistines showing there are riches and blessing for all when we stand firm in the battles we fight. *For the battle is the Lord's.* David, however, enjoyed his own spoils of the victory God had won, taking Goliath's head to Jerusalem, his weapons for himself and marrying King Saul's daughter, Michal (1 Sam 18:27).

We will do well not to look for reasons why we cannot prevail in our battles but to remember that in Christ we cannot fail. For still, as in David's day, *the battle is the Lord's.* Paul reminds us that, *If God is for us, who is against us?*¹⁸ This is in the passage in Romans 8 that ends with the wonderful fact of grace that nothing can separate us from the love of God. In fact, Paul tells us,

¹² Ibid., 1 Sa 17:48.

¹³ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:49.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:52.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1 Co 10:11.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:50.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:47.

¹⁸ Ibid., Ro 8:31.

that God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,²⁹ so that no man may boast before God.³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,³¹ so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”¹⁹ Again, Paul says, when I am weak, then I am strong.²⁰ The living God had said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”²¹

When we feel weak, we are only acknowledging the truth but let us remember Paul, weak but strong, and David, the inexperienced youth, who, ran quickly toward the battle line.²² Don’t run from giants, run toward them. *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*²³ “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel.”²⁴ As for us, *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*¹³ *Therefore, take up the full armor of God.*²⁵

*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*²⁶

¹⁹ Ibid., 1 Co 1:27–31.

²⁰ Ibid., 2 Co 12:10.

²¹ Ibid., 2 Co 12:9.

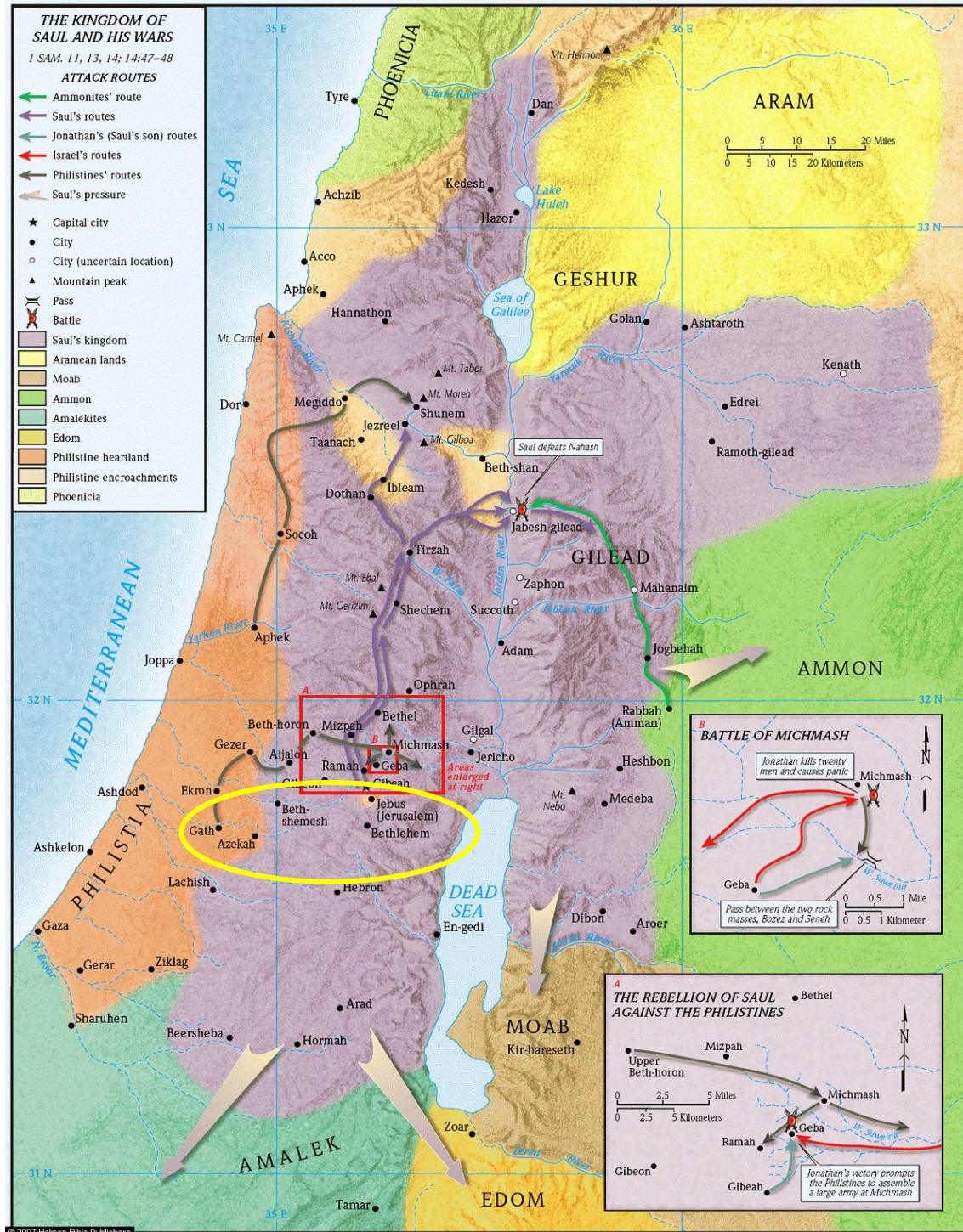
²² Ibid., 1 Sa 17:48.

²³ Ibid., Php 4:13.

²⁴ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:45.

²⁵ Ibid., Eph 6:12–13.

²⁶ Ibid., 2 Pe 3:18.

Exhibit A - Scene of the Conflict, Valley of Elah, between Socoh and Azekah²⁷

²⁷ Ibid., 1 Sa 17:1.

THE HILL COUNTRY OF JUDAH



MAP 7

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