

BEHIND THE SCENES IN THE VALLEY OF ELAH (I Sam. 17)

One of the greatest stories in the Bible is the account of David and Goliath. Goliath, of course, was the champion of the Philistines, the archenemies of the children of Israel. They had their origins away back in Ham, one of the three sons of Noah. Ham became ‘the black sheep of the family’ when he incurred the wrath of his sleeping father after having ‘seen his father’s nakedness’ (Gen. 9:22,23; cf. Lev. 18) ... When Noah found out, [Gen. 9:25](#) he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

Under this curse were *all* of Ham’s sons, [Gen. 10:6](#) Cush, and Mizraim, and Phut, and Canaan. They migrated south and settled in Egypt, which was known to the Hebrews as Mizraim (Gen. 50:11). A few verses later we discover one of Mizraim’s seven sons was called Caphtorim (v.14). Caphtorim left Egypt and emigrated to a place known as Caphtor. Then, Amos refers to them as having left Caphtor and settled along the southern coast of Canaan where they were known as the Philistines (Amos 9:7). ... There they established themselves in Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath.

They were a constant annoyance to the Israelites, as this incident in the valley of Elah indicates. They had travelled in from the coast to the territory belonging to the tribe of Judah intending to conquer and eliminate the Israelites. Along the middle of the valley of Elah was a stream, and on either side were two hills, - one occupied by the Philistines, and the other by the Israelites.

Each morning for forty days a large burly man came out of the camp of the Philistines and bellowed in his deep and formidable voice, a challenge to the army of Israel to send out their best combatant to fight with him. The deal was ... if the Israelite managed to defeat him, he and the Philistines would become the servants of Israel. However, if the Philistine defeated the Israelite, - which was *more* likely, - the Israelites would become servants of the Philistines.

It was a challenge none of the Israelites rushed forward to accept. No wonder, for this giant of a man, - Goliath, - belonged to a well-known *family* of giants.

... David, on the other hand, was neither a giant nor a soldier. He was simply a young shepherd delivering food to his older brothers in Saul’s army (v.12). After handing over the food, he was returning home when he saw Goliath and heard his threats (v.16). ... David went on home and made sure someone was

looking after his sheep (v.20) and then he returned to the valley of Elah and surprised everyone by announcing he was going to ‘face’ the giant.

At first his enthusiasm was met with his brother’s scorn, ³⁸ 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. ... But David wasn’t ‘put off’. He persisted and Saul heard about and called for him. The shepherd boy told the king, ³⁹ Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. Saul wasn’t convinced, ³⁸ And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. ³⁴ And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: ³⁵ And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. ³⁶ Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. ³⁷ David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.

So, they dressed David in a soldier’s outfit for they reckoned to defeat the enemy you have to dress like him, ³⁸ And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. ³⁹ And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. ... But David refused. He set aside the armour and took up his staff, - *Ps. 38:4* I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; *thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.* ... and in the Lord’s strength he went down to the brook ... and the Israelite soldiers watched him, as would the Philistines, and he bent down at the stream and lifted out five smooth stones. He walked over towards Goliath, who was laughing at him, but David told him, ⁴⁵ Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. ⁴⁶ This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls 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 all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for *the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands* ... and that’s what happened.

As well as David and Goliath in this story, there are two other groups which don’t usually get a mention.

Firstly, there was the army of the Philistines. If the Goliath's plan worked, - and there was no reason why it shouldn't, - the Israelites would admit defeat without any battle taking place. So, apart from Goliath and his armour-bearer (v.7), there was no other Philistines on the battlefield. They remained in the camp for they believed they wouldn't be needed ... Goliath would frighten Israel into surrendering. The only time the Philistine army would advance was to 'herd up' the humiliated Israelites after Goliath had done his work. ... That was how the enemy was thinking, ... the Israelites would be defeated.

The enemy often has an inflated opinion of itself. He is often deluded by his own grandeur thinking he possesses a power he does not have. As far as the Philistines were concerned, David was no threat to Goliath for all they saw was a young insignificant boy with nothing more than a sling. However, David was more than that for he was a young boy with a sling who had *God* on his side!

The enemy of the Lord Jesus is under the misapprehension he will be the victor, for as he looks out on the battlefield and sees Christians hiding, and in disarray, he believes he is undefeatable. The Church is weak, and victory over them is inevitable. ... These are godless times when God is being mocked, and nothing seems to be able to slow down the march of the anti-God rhetoric and behaviour ... and the 'Goliaths' consider themselves unstoppable.

The Philistines had great confidence in Goliath and his family. Even after Goliath was killed, his family would continue to challenge the Israelites ... and it did not stop them when time and again they suffered defeat, *II Sam. 21:18* ... there was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob; then Sibbechai the Hushathite slew *Saph, which was of the sons of the giant.* ¹⁹ And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaareoregim, a Bethlehemite, slew *the brother of Goliath the Gittite*, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. ²⁰ And there was yet a battle in Gath, where was *a man of great stature, that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number; and he also was born to the giant.* ²¹ And when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea the brother of David slew him. ²² These four were born to the giant in Gath, and fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.

The name 'Goliath' means 'splendour', and this fearsome giant had a name and a reputation to live up to, but *God* brought him down!" There he stood, over eight feet tall, with a brass helmet on his head, a heavy coat of mail covering his chest, armour protecting his legs, and carrying the most awesome javelin. ... *Pure aggression!*

It was misplaced though for the Philistines and their giant were defeated by a sling-wielding youngster who everyone looked down on but whose confidence was in God who had often saved him from danger, v.37 (“How I’ve proved Him o’er and o’er”) ... and the Lord rewarded David with victory over his enemy.

That’s the first group who don’t usually get a mention, - the Philistines in the background, behind their champion, Goliath ... The second group was *hiding*. Look at them ... Morning and evening for forty days (v.16), - for over a month, - Goliath taunted the army of Israel, ⁸ 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 ... ¹⁰ I *defy* the armies of Israel this day ... And each time Goliath jibed and jeered at them, ¹¹ they were dismayed *terrified*, and greatly afraid *absolutely petrified* ... shivering wrecks, hiding behind the rocks (v.11)! Spineless cowards! ... What kind of an army is afraid to fight?! What kind of a soldier runs from the enemy?! ... But also, what kind of soldier discourages those who are willing to fight? ... That is what David’s eldest brother Eliab did when David said he was going to face Goliath (v.28). Eliab and everyone else told David he was spouting absolute nonsense (v.30)!

It is sad and disappointing when those in the Lord’s army are not encouraged to face the enemy. They ‘wear the uniform’, they have ‘made an oath’ to the King, they have ‘completed their training’ but when it comes to confronting the enemy ... many hide ‘behind the rocks’ and the enemy is allowed to advance freely!

When the battle was over and Saul heard what had been done to Goliath, he called for David and he asked him, ⁵⁸ Whose son art thou, thou young man *Ina’ar, boy?* ... In this chapter David is introduced as the child sent to bring food to his brothers (v.17,18) ... and then he became a silly young fool who thought he could defeat an undefeatable giant (v.28,30) ... they couldn’t get a suit of armour to fit him (v.39) ... and then he *did* defeat Goliath. ... God took him from being a ‘stripling’ (v.56, *elem*, from a word which means to ‘keep out of sight’) and made him into a respected ‘young man’ (v.58). ... And when Saul asked who he was, David did not even say his own name, instead he humbly replied using his father’s name, ⁵⁸ I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite. ... I’m my father’s son. David, who was to become the greatest king Israel ever had ... and he lifted up the name of his father.

That is how we close our study. There is nothing about us to win the battles surrounding us today *except this*, ... we lift up the Name of *our* Father in Whom we are promised the victory when we take Him at His word, for the battle is the LORD'S (v.47) ...

Unworthy am I of the grace that He gave,
Unworthy to hold to His hand;
Amazed that a King would reach down to a slave ...
I thrill just to know that He loved me so,
A pauper, I walk with the King.