

Old Testament Reading

1 Samuel 17:1-51 (from *The Message Bible* paraphrase)

The Philistines drew up their troops for battle. They deployed them at Socoh in Judah, and set up camp between Socoh and Azekah at Ephes Dammim. Saul and the Israelites came together, camped at Oak Valley, and spread out their troops in battle readiness for the Philistines. The Philistines were on one hill, the Israelites on the opposing hill, with the valley between them.

A giant nearly ten feet tall stepped out from the Philistine line into the open, Goliath from Gath. He had a bronze helmet on his head and was dressed in armor—58 kilograms of it! He wore bronze shin guards and carried a bronze sword. His spear was like a fence rail—the spear tip alone weighed almost 8 kilos. His shield bearer walked ahead of him.

Goliath stood there and called out to the Israelite troops, “Why bother using your whole army? Am I not Philistine enough for you? And you’re all committed to Saul, aren’t you? So pick your best fighter and pit him against me. If he gets the upper hand and kills me, the Philistines will all become your slaves. But if I get the upper hand and kill him, you’ll all become our slaves and serve us. I challenge the troops of Israel this day. Give me a man. Let us fight it out together!”

When Saul and his troops heard the Philistine’s challenge, they were terrified and lost all hope. Enter David. He was the son of Jesse the Ephrathite from Bethlehem in Judah. . . . David was the youngest son. While his three oldest brothers went to war with Saul, David went back and forth from attending to Saul to tending his father’s sheep in Bethlehem.

Each morning and evening for forty days, Goliath took his stand and made his speech. One day, Jesse told David his son, “Take this sack of cracked wheat and these ten loaves of bread and run them down to your brothers in the camp. And take these ten wedges of cheese to the captain of their division. Check in on your brothers to see whether they are getting along all right, and let me know how they’re doing—Saul and your brothers, and all the Israelites in their war with the Philistines in the Oak Valley.”

David was up at the crack of dawn and, having arranged for someone to tend his flock, took the food and was on his way just as Jesse had directed him. He arrived at the camp just as the army was moving into battle formation, shouting the war cry. Israel and the Philistines moved into position, facing each other, battle-ready. David left his bundles of food in the care of a sentry, ran to the troops who were deployed, and greeted his brothers. While they were talking together, the Philistine champion, Goliath of Gath, stepped out from the front lines of the Philistines, and gave his usual challenge. David heard him.

The Israelites, to a man, fell back the moment they saw the giant—totally frightened. The talk among the troops was, “Have you ever seen anything like this, this man openly and defiantly challenging Israel? The man who kills the giant will have it made. The king will give him a huge reward, offer his daughter as a bride, and give his entire family a free ride.”

David, who was talking to the men standing around him, asked, “What’s in it for the man who kills that Philistine and gets rid of this ugly blot on Israel’s honor? Who does he think he is, anyway, this uncircumcised Philistine, taunting the armies of God-Alive?”

They told him what everyone was saying about what the king would do for the man who killed the Philistine. Eliab, his older brother, heard David fraternizing with the men and lost his temper: “What are you doing here! Why aren’t you minding your own business, tending that scrawny flock of sheep? I know what you’re up to. You’ve come down here to see the sights, hoping for a ringside seat at a bloody battle!”

“What is it with you?” replied David. “All I did was ask a question.” Ignoring his brother, he turned to someone else, asked the same question, and got the same answer as before. The things David was saying were picked up and reported to Saul. Saul sent for him.

“Master,” said David, “don’t give up hope. I’m ready to go and fight this Philistine.” Saul answered David, “You can’t go and fight this Philistine. You’re too young and inexperienced — and he’s been at this fighting business since before you were born.”

David said, “I’ve been a shepherd, tending sheep for my father. Whenever a lion or bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I’d go after it, knock it down, and rescue the lamb. If it turned on me, I’d grab it by the throat, wring its neck, and kill it. Lion or bear, it made no difference—I killed it. And I’ll do the same to this Philistine pig who is taunting the troops of God-Alive. God, who delivered me from the teeth of the lion and the claws of the bear, will deliver me from this Philistine.”

Saul said, “Go. And God help you!”

Then Saul outfitted David as a soldier in armor. He put his bronze helmet on his head and belted his sword on him over the armor. David tried to walk but he could hardly budge. David told Saul, “I can’t even move with all this stuff on me. I’m not used to this.” And he took it all off. Then David took his shepherd’s staff, selected five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the pocket of his shepherd’s pack, and with his sling in his hand approached Goliath.

As the Philistine paced back and forth, his shield bearer in front of him, he noticed David. He took one look down on him and sneered—a mere youngster, apple-cheeked and peach-fuzzed.

The Philistine ridiculed David. “Am I a dog that you come after me with a stick?” And he cursed him by his gods.

“Come on,” said the Philistine. “I’ll make roadkill of you for the buzzards. I’ll turn you into a tasty morsel for the field mice.”

David answered, “You come at me with sword and spear and battle-ax. I come at you in the name of God-of-the-Angel-Armies, the God of Israel’s troops, whom you curse and mock. This very day God is handing you over to me. I’m about to kill you, cut off your head, and serve up your body and the bodies of your Philistine buddies to the crows and coyotes. The whole earth will know that there’s an extraordinary God in Israel. And everyone gathered here will learn that God doesn’t save by means of sword or spear. The battle belongs to God—he’s handing you to us on a platter!”

That roused the Philistine, and he started toward David. David took off from the front line, running toward the Philistine. David reached into his pocket for a stone, slung it, and hit the Philistine hard in the forehead, embedding the stone deeply. The Philistine crashed, facedown in the dirt.

That's how David beat the Philistine—with a sling and a stone. He hit him and killed him. No sword for David!

Then David ran up to the Philistine and stood over him, pulled the giant's sword from its sheath, and finished the job by cutting off his head. When the Philistines saw that their great champion was dead, they scattered, running for their lives.