

Chapter 17

'GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH ... ONE LOUD METALLIC CRASH!'¹

INTRODUCTION

The main problem we face in studying the story of David and Goliath (together with several others, such as 'Daniel in the lion's den' and 'Jonah and the great fish') is that we assume we are familiar with it – that we think that know it well, when in reality we don't. No doubt David's victory over Goliath represents the most famous and well-known exploit David ever accomplished. And yet, in over 40 years of Christian life, I have never heard anybody attempt to expound the passage seriously.²

War between the Philistines and Israel put David centre stage and attracted the eyes of all God's people to him. To that extent David's encounter with the Philistine champion was David's first big step to kingship. Nothing would ever be the same again for David. How could it? At the end of chapter 16, David was the harp-player, 16.23; whereas in chapter 17 he becomes the 'giant-slayer'. At the end of chapter 16 he 'played with his hand', 16.23; in chapter 17 he 'prevailed ... with a sling and a stone', 17.50.

Just as Saul's anointing by Samuel in chapter 10 had been followed by Saul's victory over Nahash and the Ammonites in chapter 11, so David's anointing by Samuel in chapter 16 is followed by David's victory over Goliath and the Philistines. The impression in both cases is that the victories were achieved fairly soon after the anointings and thereby demonstrated the courage and capability of the newly anointed leaders.

Our chapter brings David into contact with three main characters, Eliab, Saul and Goliath – in that order. And, interestingly, each of the three was tall – and each was taller than the one before him : (a) Samuel 'looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him. But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not ... on the height of his stature', 16.6-7; (b) 'from his shoulders and upward he (Saul) was higher than any of the people', 9.2; and (c) 'Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span', 17.4.

CHAPTER DIVISION³

Verses 1-3	The setting – the battle-scene
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EXPOSITION

Verses 1-3 The setting – the battle-scene

Verse 1. '*Now the Philistines*'. The Philistines appear to have come to Palestine from Crete (the Old Testament 'Caphtor'). See, 'Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith the Lord. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? and *the Philistines from Caphtor*', Amos 9.7.

Possibly the Philistines had heard of the rift between Samuel and Saul and/or Saul's acute depression and 'spirit' problem, and saw this as a suitable opportunity to avenge themselves upon Israel for the thrashing they suffered in chapter 14, triggered by Jonathan's heroism. It is clear that, for whatever reason, it was the Philistines who took the initiative in this confrontation.

Indeed, it is by no means certain that Saul ever personally took any initiative against the Philistines in spite of God's word to Samuel, 'I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him *to be* captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines', 9.16. Although that may be the implication of, 'Saul ... fought against all his enemies on every side, against ... the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed (routed) them', 14.47.

Shocoh and Azekah. The Philistines gathered their forces between Shocoh (better, 'Socoh') and Azekah, two towns in the western foothills of Judah, Josh. 15.20, 33, 35. Azekah was later distinguished as being one of the last two towns to fall to Nebuchadnezzar before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.⁴ The Philistines clearly planned to enter Israel through the valley (the 'ravine', the stream-bed) of Elah, the natural approach to the mountains of Judea.

'*Ephes-dammim*'.⁵ The name probably signifies 'the boundary of blood'; in all likelihood because there was regular fighting on the border.

Verses 2-3. '*The valley of Elah*'. The two armies squared off approximately 15 miles southwest of Jerusalem, setting up camp and digging in on mountains on opposite sides of the Elah valley, with the Philistines on the southern slope and Israel on the northern slope. The lengthy stand-off between the two armies probably resulted from a mutual reluctance to engage in actual army-to-army fighting.

From Israel's point of view, they were probably outnumbered and relatively poorly equipped – among other factors, the Philistines used iron as well as bronze for their weapons. The Philistines also had many chariots available. (Compare, 'the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude', 13.5.) The prospects for Israel didn't look at all good. But, for their part, the Philistines knew that chariots were designed for battles fought on relatively level ground – not on mountain slopes. And, even though the Philistines were clearly confident that they would win the battle (remember that it was the Philistines who had initiated the conflict, v.1), they knew that there would be many casualties on their side as well as on Israel's. Hence their proposed alternative way of settling the issue – the one-to-one combat offered by Goliath, vv.4, 8-10.

Verses 4-11 Enter the Philistine champion 'If I prevail'

Verse 4. '*There went out a champion*'. 'A champion' translates a two-word hyphenated expression in Hebrew, meaning 'the man between two', 'the middle-man'. He was a representative who entered the space between two opposing armies to decide the outcome of the battle by means of a single one-to-one combat.⁶ If it worked, this was clearly a good idea. By means of such a contest between 'champions', only one life was lost in deciding which was the victorious army. Such combats were not uncommon in ancient times.⁷ The 'champion' – the 'middle-man' – didn't fight on the front lines; he fought alone. Given his prodigious size it is likely that Goliath was well accustomed to playing this role – he was built for it!

'*Whose height was six cubits and a span*'. We note that, not only was his height six cubits, but Goliath had six pieces of armour and a spear's head weighing six hundred shekels of iron. He was one of several enemies of God in scripture who were marked by the number six; compare Nebuchadnezzar, with his image which was sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, Dan. 3.1, and 'the Beast', whose 'number is six hundred and sixty-six', Rev.13.18.

A 'cubit' was the measurement from a man's elbow to the extremity of middle finger. It is generally taken to be between 18-20 inches. A 'span' was the distance between the extremities of the thumb and little finger of a man's outstretched hand – being regarded as half a cubit. That is, Goliath stood between 9 feet 9 inches and 10 foot 10 inches tall. He was a colossus.

The only remotely comparable heights recorded in scripture are those of: (a) an Egyptian warrior killed by one of David's mighty men, 'Benaiah the son of Jehoiada ... slew an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits high; and in the Egyptian's hand was a spear like a weaver's beam; and he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear', 1 Chron. 11.22-23, and (b) Og, the king of Bashan, 'only Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of giants; behold, his bedstead (or, possibly, 'his sarcophagus'⁸) was a bedstead of iron ... nine cubits was the length thereof, and four cubits the breadth of it', Deut. 3.11. (Og's own size isn't specified but his bed/sarcophagus was more than thirteen feet long!)

Other examples of men of great height in the ancient world come from (i) Josephus, who wrote of 'a Jew' who was seven cubits tall⁹, and (ii) Pliny, who wrote of 'Gabbara', an Arabian who was nine feet high, and of Pusio and Secundilla who were nine feet six inches.¹⁰ In more recent times, there is the documented case of Robert Wadlow, who was eight feet eleven inches tall at the time of his death.¹¹

The biblical data suggests that Goliath was one of the descendants of the Anakim, some of whom were spotted by the spies sent by Moses to survey the land of Canaan. The evidence is as follows:

(a) The book of Numbers speaks of 'the giants, the sons of Anak' - 'they (the spies) brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw *the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants*: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight', 13.32-33.

(b) The book of Joshua speaks of the Anakim being 'cut off' from the land of Israel – but with pockets left in only three Philistine cities, including Gath! – 'At that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities. There was *none of the Anakims left* in the land of the children of Israel: *only* in Gaza, *in Gath*, and in Ashdod, there remained', 11.21, 22.

(c) Our chapter, quite incidentally and without attempting any connections with the books of Numbers and Joshua, identifies the monstrous Philistine champion as having come from *Gath*, 1 Sam. 17.4.

Although the conquest reported in Josh. 11 took place some 400 years before the events of 1 Sam. 17, it is not unlikely that the men of unusually large size coming from the city of Gath¹² were descended from the Anakim. How wonderfully does the text of scripture hang together – a testimony to the working of its one true Author.

Verse 5. This physical description of Goliath, his armour and his weaponry is one of the longest and most detailed in the whole of the Bible – if not *the* longest and most detailed! The Philistine 'middle-man' was built and equipped like a human tank – a truly awesome 'man of bronze'.

'*An helmet of brass (bronze) upon his head ... was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass (bronze)*'. Goliath's defensive armor was made of bronze {an alloy of copper and tin – or, just possibly, made of copper} and not of brass (an alloy of copper and zinc, which alloy was unknown to the ancients).

'*A coat of mail*'. This was constructed of several hundred overlapping small bronze plates, resembling fish scales in appearance.¹³ This 'coat of mail', which covered Goliath's chest, back and the lower part of his body, weighed 125 pounds and gave him both protection and freedom of movement.

Verse 6. The bronze 'greaves' were leg harnesses which protected the legs down to the heels, and served as glorified shin-guards. I guess they would probably have been as much as Zacchaeus would ever have seen of Goliath! The word translated 'target' signifies a javelin or spear.¹⁴ In that Goliath had a separate 'spear', v.7 (different word), it was almost certainly a javelin slung across Goliath's shoulders. In ancient warfare, javelins were used to fend off opponents as well as for hurling.

Verse 7. Goliath's hefty 'spear' seems to have been his most formidable offensive weapon. (Even though Goliath carried a sword, vv.45, 51, the fact that Ahimelech later offered it to David – who gladly accepted and took it away with him, 21.9 – shows that it was not as monstrous as Goliath's other weapons.)

The shaft of his spear was 'like a weaver's beam'¹⁵ – probably the block of wood separating the threads of the warp to offer passage for the threads of the woof – with a loop and a cord wound around it so that the spear could be hurled over a great distance with great stability 'by virtue of the resultant spin'.¹⁶

The head (the point – probably related to a word meaning 'flame', a reference to its shape) of Goliath's spear weighed 15 pounds – about the weight of a standard shot put. Clearly the spear was 'a weighty consideration' for any opponent!

'One bearing a shield went before him'. This was a large shield¹⁷, capable of protecting the whole of Goliath's body – and there was a lot of it! Although its main use was to protect the face – the head being covered with a brass helmet, v.5. The shield-bearer was probably a person of high rank, as shield-bearers in Egypt are known to have been. And he was presumably reasonably strong!

Dressed and armed as he was, Goliath's movements must have been slow. He wouldn't have been able to run to save his life – not that David gave him half a chance. But then he had no reason to run. He was built like a castle and must have felt – as he certainly must have appeared – totally invincible.

The Spirit of God clearly wants to impress us as readers with the Philistine champion's awesome fighting power and seeming invulnerability – so that we will marvel at 'God's strength in David's weakness' which conquered him – and have reinforced God's earlier word to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature ... the Lord sees not as man sees', 16.7.

Verse 8. 'He stood and cried unto the armies of Israel. Goliath hurled – neither his spear nor his javelin – but his defiant challenge into the teeth of the Israelite army – his booming voice echoing across the ravine.

'Am not I a Philistine'. Literally, 'Am not I the Philistine!' 'The Philistine', mark you - *the* 'middle-man' chosen to represent the Philistine nation - *the* famous Philistine warrior of whom everyone must have heard! Yes, his name 'Goliath' had been supplied when he first made his appearance in the story, v.4, but, somewhat remarkably, apart from an echo of v.4 in v.23, we find no further mention of his name. He is spoken of consistently only as 'the Philistine' throughout the chapter – 28 times in all starting in v.8.¹⁸

'And ye servants to Saul'. Goliath addresses the Israelites as Saul's 'servants', probably here in the sense of 'subjects' – note his words 'our servants' followed by 'serve us', v.9.

Verse 9. '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'. Seemingly, winner takes all! The single combat would decide the outcome of the conflict, and would result in the suppression of either Israel or the Philistines. But it is at least possible that this was never meant as a serious proposition and that the outcome of the challenge – and of any combat which follow – would simply give a psychological edge to one of the sides in the ensuing battle. This was in fact very much how things turned out in the end of this incident; see v.52. Certainly, for Goliath's proposition to work, it was necessary for the men of both warring nations to be men of honour – men who, having staked all on a single man-to-man combat, would abide by the outcome.

'If I prevail against him'. The AV provides a wonderful contrast in v.50; 'So David prevailed over the Philistine!'

Verse 10. 'The Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day'. Goliath was rubbing it in – taunting Israel – throwing down his gauntlet in an attempt to goad them into some kind of action.

'I defy.' This is probably the key word of the whole chapter – the word 'hārap' – meaning 'to reproach, defy, taunt, scorn, scoff, deride'.¹⁹ This verb is found in five times in the chapter; vv.10, 25, 26, 36, 45, translated 'defy'. The noun form is also found in v.26, translated 'reproach'. In many ways the word focuses our minds on the central issue of the chapter. 'Goliath is not merely the big goon from Philistia; Goliath's blabbering dishonours Israel's God', Dale Ralph Davis.²⁰

'Give me a man' – compare 'choose you a man', v.8. Has Israel been stripped of its manhood? Is there not one man in all Israel who will rise to take up the challenge? Not even Abner? – remember David's call to him, 'Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel?', 26.15 lit.

Verse 11. 'Saul and all Israel ... were dismayed, and greatly afraid'. Not surprisingly, there was no queue of men ready to pick up the gauntlet. The sight of this mountain of armoured muscle was enough to keep the bravest of men cowering inside his tent. You might not get any medals by keeping your head down, but at least you kept your head! And so Saul and his troops were as depressed as they were impressed – 'dismayed and greatly afraid'.²¹ Saul had every reason to be afraid. Goliath was a giant of a man, and guess who stood shoulders taller than any other man in Israel! Saul was therefore the obvious candidate – the natural and logical choice – to face the Philistine champion. And I suspect he felt very uncomfortable about it, well aware that others were expecting him to take up the challenge.

How different things were now to Saul's first action as the anointed king back in chapter 11, 'Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel ... And, behold, Saul came after the herd out of the field; and Saul said, What aileth the people that they weep? And they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh. And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled (burned) greatly', 11.2-6. Then he had been fired by

concern for the people who had been '*reproached*' – effectively the same word as 'defy' in v.10, 'I *defy* the armies of Israel'. Could Saul hear the echo?

Ah, but now no Spirit of God came upon him to empower him! Apart from which, in many ways, Saul's refusal to fight Goliath is perfectly understandable. He had been told by Samuel plainly that his kingdom was as good as finished, 13.13-14; 15.23. Why then set himself up to be pulverized by 'the giant of Gath'? And so, as at least on two occasions before since chapter 11, the king prefers to stay very much in the background when he should have been leading the people.²²

Presumably, if after the set time – in all likelihood 40 days, v.16 – no Israelite took up the challenge, the victory would either go to Goliath by default, and the Philistines would become Israel's masters, or, possibly, the outcome of the battle would be settled in the conventional way of a clash between the two assembled armies – see vv.20-21 and, in particular v.28 (where, with the arrival of the 40th day, vv.16, 23, Eliab clearly expected 'battle' soon to be joined).

Verses 12-30²³ Enter David arrives - right on cue (v.23)

Verse 12. David, Goliath's opponent-to-be, is re-introduced to us in verses 12-15 by a very different description to that given of Goliath. Nothing is said here about David's stature, his strength, or his weapons. We are simply told that he is the youngest of eight sons of Jesse, the Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah.²⁴

Verses 13-15. '*The three eldest sons of Jesse went and followed Saul ... David went and returned from Saul*'. Jesse's three oldest sons 'followed' (literally '*walked [after]*') Saul to the battle, vv. 13-14. By contrast David 'went and returned' (literally '*was walking and returning*') from Saul, v.15.

'*To feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem*'. There are two possible reasons for David's return to 'his father's sheep'. First, he may have been retained at Saul's court only when Saul was being afflicted by the distressing spirit. If Saul's condition had improved and become more stable, David would have been allowed to return home. (In support of this explanation, see the later contrast, 'Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house', 18.2. Second, Saul was now no longer at his court, and David's services – particularly his musical ability – were not required on a battlefield. Elah was a place for weapons not harps.

(True, he was one of Saul's 'armour-bearers', 16.21, but, in that Joab had ten armour-bearers, 2 Sam. 18.15, king Saul would probably have had far more – many of whom, if not all of whom, would have been older men than David, with considerable more experience.)

David's somewhat privileged position in Saul's court hadn't spoiled him in any way for humbler service! He was content to 'return' from Saul's court to Jesse's flock – in a sense, from the palace to the pasture!

Verse 16. '*The Philistine drew near ... and presented himself forty days*'. Twice each day for forty successive days, while the opposing armies stood glaring at each other, Goliath repeated his defiant challenge. The number 40 often represents a period of testing and/or probation in the Bible – compare the Israelites being tested in the wilderness for 40 years and Jesus being tested in a wilderness for 40 days, etc. This was a period of similar testing for Israel; would they trust in the arm of the flesh or in the power of God?

'*Presented himself forty days*'. Interestingly, the expression 'presented himself' translates the same word rendered 'set themselves' in Psalm 2; 'The kings of the earth *set themselves*, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed', v.2. And here, in the valley of Elah, where Goliath and the Philistines set themselves against the Lord and his anointed (David), before the day is out – as in Psalm 2 – 'He that sits in the heavens' will have very much the last laugh, v.4!

'*Forty days*'. At the end of which, it seems to me, the outcome of the confrontation would be settled – either by default, or in conventional army-to-army fighting. See the notes on vv.9, 11, 20-21, 28.

Verses 17-19. '*Jesse said unto David his son, Take now ...*'. God was at work behind the scenes, over-ruling events so that David would be at the battlefield to hear the blasphemies of Goliath for himself.²⁵

Note that only Saul's oldest three sons were there – '*the three eldest sons of Jesse went and followed Saul to the battle*', v.13. The other four sons weren't with Saul. Which makes the working of God's providence the more striking in that Jesse sent his youngest son, from his duties with the sheep, to the battlefield. Let us learn that God can open doors for us as and when it pleases Him. Our responsibility is often to do no more than to keep at our present God-given task and to trust Him and to wait for Him.

Note the urgency of Jesse's command – '*Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren*', v.17. It is interesting to note the several references to David's youthful eagerness and energy throughout the chapter: 'David left his carriage in the hand of the keeper of the carriage, and *ran* into the army, and came and saluted his brethren', v.22; 'when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David *hasted*, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine', v.48; and 'David *ran*, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword', v.51. Compare also the words of David to Jonathan, 'If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might *run* to Bethlehem his city: for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family', 20.6.

David was given a threefold remit by Jesse : (1) to take provisions to his brothers and their unit commander, (2) to find out how his brothers were getting along,²⁶ and (3) to bring back a 'pledge' (some token – the equivalent, I guess, of a letter to home) of their welfare. In the event, David fulfilled the first and second tasks immediately on his arrival at the camp of Israel – but presumably it fell to his three older brothers to later inform Jesse themselves of their welfare – and of David's then famous exploit.²⁷ Jesse had wanted to receive settling news about David's brothers from David; he little expected to receive stunning (!²⁸) news about David from his brothers!

Verses 20-21. *'David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him'*. David promptly followed his father's instructions, conscientiously leaving the sheep with a keeper,²⁹ to travel to the battle lines – a distance of some 15 miles due west.

'He came to the trench'. The word translated 'trench', v.20, is a rare word (*ma`gal*; found elsewhere with the same meaning only in 26.5, 7). It means literally 'the wagon-wheel track'.³⁰ It probably refers either (i) to the 'tracks' made by the supply wagons, and which served to outline the perimeter of the camp, or (ii) the barrier and protection formed by the baggage wagons themselves around the camp – similar to the cowboy 'wagon train' formation.

'As the host ... shouted for the battle. For Israel and the Philistines had put the battle in array, army against army'. It may be that, as the forty day 'one-to-one combat' offer was about to expire, both sides were now preparing to settle the conflict in the conventional way. In typical ancient and Oriental fashion, Israel raised their shout of defiance – in effect, their war-cry; cf. 'shouted', v.52. Compare the command of Gideon some time before, 'When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, *and say, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon*', Judg. 7.18.

Verse 22. *'David left his carriage'*. That is, his 'baggage' - 'that which was carried'.³¹

'Ran into the army'. That is, the 'ranks' – the places where troops were drawn up.

'Saluted his brethren'. Literally, 'asked concerning [their] *shalom* - their welfare/well-being'.³²

Verse 23. *'As he talked with them, behold, the champion'*. What perfect timing. Had David arrived just a few minutes earlier, everything would probably have turned out very different.³³ He would have found his brothers still at their camp, where he might have simply handed them the supplies Jesse sent, asked about their well-being, and then set out for home before his three brothers set out to join the 'ranks', v.22 – the battle line. As it was, he arrived just as the Israelite soldiers were leaving their camp and rushing toward the battle line – 'going forth to the fight', v.20.

He *'spake according to the same words'*. Goliath had nothing different - or more - to say than before. He simply repeating his monotonous challenge. But this time something was different. This time 'David heard' him!

Verse 24. Again, 'the men of Israel ... fled from him', in marked contrast to the later action of David, who 'ran ... to meet him', v.48.

Verse 25. *'The men of Israel said'*. Again providentially, some of the Israelite soldiers spoke out - either to David, or, at least, to each other within his hearing. 'Everything seemed to be casual, yet those things which seemed most casual were really links in a providential chain leading to the gravest issues', W G Blaikie, The Expositor's Bible.

'Have ye seen ... ?' They must have been kidding! How could anyone have failed to spot him! It would have been well nigh impossible to miss seeing a walking, bellowing, shining bronze object 10 feet high.

Verses 26-27. *'David spake to the men that stood by him'*. This is the first time we read of something which David said. Up to this point, although David has featured at several points in the narratives of chapters 16 and 17, we have not heard him say anything. But his first recorded words reveal to us the secret of his strength and courage. Everything was down to how David viewed the situation.

It is important to note carefully the marked contrast between David's penetrating and spiritual assessment in v.26 and the men of Israel's superficial and natural assessment in v.25.

In more detail:

The men of Israel	David
'this man'	'this uncircumcised Philistine' ³⁴
'defy Israel'	'defy the armies of the living God'
'the man who killeth him'	'the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel'

'Defy the armies of the living God'. That was how David viewed Israel. Note that it is David who introduces the word 'God' into the narrative. To David there was only one true and living God – over against the lifeless idols of the heathen, including the Philistine's own 'god', Dagon. Eight times we later read of David saying, 'As the Lord liveth'.³⁵ Here we have David's *first* recorded words; among his very *last* words was the confession, 'the Lord liveth and blessed be my Rock', 2 Sam 22.47. To David the living God was a glorious reality – and this made all the difference! (If others were able to listen into *our* thoughts and words when we face danger and/or trouble, would they ever guess that *we* had a living God?)

As 'the armies of the living God', they belonged to *Him*. This was a view of Israel which Saul never really accepted³⁶ and which represented the key difference between his heart and that of David, and therefore of his failure and David's success.

The men of Israel saw only with their natural eyes – they looked at the situation from man's perspective. David saw with the eyes of faith – he looked at the situation from the Lord's perspective. The men of Israel saw an invulnerable fortress of bronze who had the unquestioned ability to reproach Israel. David saw an uncircumcised Philistine who has the profound audacity to reproach the armies of the living God! When David voiced his view of the situation, you could start digging Goliath's grave!

'The king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter'. To give one's daughter in marriage as an inducement to fight wasn't unprecedented in Israel; compare Caleb's offer, 'He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. And Othniel ... took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife', Josh. 15.16-17.³⁷

'And make his father's house free in Israel'. Probably to exempt his family from any taxes and personal services to the king which were generally required; see 8.11-17.

Verse 28. *'Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said ...'* David's own brother Eliab expressed contempt for David before Goliath ever had the opportunity to do so, vv.42-44!

'Why camest thou down hither?' 'Down' because Bethlehem stood on higher ground. To Eliab's mind, David's real motive in coming to the field of battle was to watch the now-imminent fighting – although, if Eliab had thought about it dispassionately, I guess he would have realised that deliberately staying around to observe the actual battle would in itself have been a rather dangerous and foolhardy thing to do.

*'With whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness?'*³⁸ The word 'few' was clearly intended to belittle David and to 'put him in his place!' He was making it clear to David that, in his eyes, David's occupation as a shepherd was not merely menial – it was trivial. But by the end of the chapter it must have been Eliab who was feeling a bit *sheepish!*

Eliab's words sound rather strange given that he knew that David had been called to Saul's court and appointed an armour-bearer to the king himself – even if he had not grasped the full significance of David's anointing. But then Eliab was very angry! And it is not impossible that Jesse's firstborn son still nursed some resentment at the 'snub' he may have felt at the sacrificial meal, 16.6-13. For our part, we now understand in part why God had so quickly passed over Eliab, 16.6-7.

Verse 29. *'David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?'* If we adopt the rendering in the AV, we may remind ourselves of some words of the Lord Jesus; 'Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for *this cause* came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth', John 18.37. Yes, there was certainly a 'cause' for His coming into the world!

But our text should probably be rendered, 'What have I done now? *Was it not only a word?*'.³⁹ That is, "I was only asking a question". It seems that David's 'soft answer' was intended to calm Eliab down. We can learn from David here. It was his son who later gave us, 'A soft (gentle, tender) answer turneth away wrath', Prov. 15.1. (Alas, some of us rather resemble 'leviathan', concerning whom the Lord asks rhetorically, 'will he speak soft words to thee?', Job 41.3 {40.27 in the Hebrew text}).

Verses 31-39 David gets clearance to go

Verse 31. *'When the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed them before Saul'.* It is hardly surprising in the circumstances (of no great rush for anyone to take up Goliath's repeated challenge) that David's words were reported to Saul, but here is yet another essential link in the chain of God's providence.

'He sent for him'. As king, Saul's consent was necessary before David was authorized, as Israel's champion, to face Goliath.

Verse 32. *'Let no man's heart fail because of him'.* It is almost as if David was saying, "All right everyone, calm down, there's no need for panic. Everything is under control". From where did such confidence come? From faith in God's power and trust in God's word!

David had long meditated in God's law. He would undoubtedly have been familiar with Deut. 20.1-4; 'When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest ... a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee ... and it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall ... speak unto the people, and shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel ... let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; for the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you'.⁴⁰ David needed no priest to tell him not to fear, tremble or be terrified! It is worth noting that, only a few verses later in Deuteronomy 20, God instructed the Israelites to identify anyone who was fainthearted and to send him away so that he would not undermine the faith and confidence of others, v.8. I guess that Saul's own dismay and fear did nothing for the faith and courage of others, v.11! What of me? Does my example encourage or discourage others?

Verse 33. *'Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth'.* In Saul's reckoning, David was disqualified by his age. I think it fair to read an element of kindness into Saul's words to David when he attempted to talk him out of fighting Goliath. Saul didn't say that David was too small to fight Goliath, but that he was too young and therefore inexperienced. The king gave David every opportunity to excuse himself and go back home to his father and his sheep without any feelings of guilt or shame.

Verse 34-35. David's response was to assure Saul that he had already proved God in secret, far away from any human crowds.

'There came a lion'. These were days before the forests of southern Palestine had been cleared. Lions roamed quite freely, and to successfully tackle a lion at close quarters was no mean achievement! One of the proverbs speaks of 'a lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any', Prov. 30.30.

'I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth'. David's claim to have rescued a lamb from the lion's mouth meant that he had fared much better than many other shepherds in similar circumstances; 'As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear', Amos 3.12! (We may wonder why the shepherd of Amos 3 bothered! The reason lay in the law of God, which required a shepherd to produce the remains of an animal killed while in his care as proof that he hadn't stolen it, Exod. 22.13.)

David himself later wrote of 'a lion that is greedy of his prey', Psa.17.12. As often, he wrote then from personal experience. He knew all about lions 'greedy of their prey' – he had met at least one. And he had then successfully removed its 'prey' from its very mouth.

'*And a bear*'. It is clear that, in terms of tackling one, there wasn't much to choose between a lion and a bear. Jeremiah coupled together 'a bear lying in wait' and 'a lion in secret places', Lam. 3.10. Solomon did similarly; 'As a roaring lion, and a ranging (a charging) bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people', Prov. 28.15. And I guess that in many ways it wouldn't have been inappropriate to compare Goliath with 'a roaring lion' and 'a charging bear'! The Philistine's 'roar' had certainly put the wind up 'all Israel', vv.10-11 – although it did nothing to frighten David, vv.24-26. David had heard similar 'roaring' before, except that then it had been the roar of a lion! In one sense, Goliath's 'hand' reminded David very much of the 'paw' of a wild beast; '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 (the same word as translated 'paw') of this Philistine', v.37! When these mighty predators turned to attack him, David 'smote ... and slew' them, v.35. Soon he 'smote ... and slew' another 'predator' – the notorious Goliath, v.50.

Apparently the Syrian bear was especially ferocious – if anything, more to be feared even than a lion. Note the words of the Lord through Amos, 'Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! ... The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him', Amos 5.18-19.⁴¹ The context suggests that refers, not so much to a case of 'jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire', as to a case of choosing to exchange one thing for something else – only to discover that the latter proved to be far worse than the former. (Given the people's appalling spiritual condition, 'the day of the Lord' would prove far worse for them than their present affliction. It follows that a bear must have been more feared by Amos and his contemporaries than was a lion. But, leaving to one side the context, had David been aware of the words of Amos, he would have been able to say in all honesty that, though the prophet spoke of a man 'fleeing' from lions and bears, he never fled when the lives of his father's lambs were at stake.

We need to remind ourselves that David no Samson! Recall what happened when 'Samson (came) down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath'; how 'a young lion roared against him. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand', Judg. 14.5-6. David had no such 'supernatural' strength. David was not even a Benaiah, who 'slew two lion-like men of Moab' and 'went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow', 2 Sam. 23.20. David was a young shepherd lad – who had no exceptional physical strength – but who did have faith in a great God!

'*I caught him by his beard*'. The Hebrew text means just that, 'by his beard'. The Septuagint, with no justification of which I am aware, interprets it as 'his throat'. For his part, Josephus couldn't resist the temptation to embellish the story a little at this point, expanding David's words to read, 'I once pursued after and caught a lion that assaulted my flocks, and took away a lamb from them; and I snatched the lamb out of the wild beast's mouth, and when he leaped upon me with violence, *I took him by the tail*, and dashed him against the ground!' Now, that is a rather far-fetched 'tail/tale' if ever I heard one!

The one thing which is clear is that, whether by the beard or chin, David tackled these savage beasts at close quarters – not at some safe distance with the use of his sling and stones!

Verse 36. '*Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear*'. I understand that the Hebrew text of vv.34-36 indicates that David killed lions and bears – that is, in the plural – rather than a single lion and a single bear. That is, that whenever lions or bears snatched lambs from his father's flock, David customarily pursued them and rescued the lambs. Note the translation of this section in the English Standard Version, '*When there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him ... if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears*', vv.34-36; compare RSV and NRSV. Note that, each time David speaks about taking Goliath on, he becomes more definite. First he hinted that *somebody* ought to go and fight the defiant Philistine, v.26. Then he had said that *he* was ready to go and fight the Philistine himself, v.32. Now he asserts that he has no doubt whatever about the outcome of the fight – that he will slay the Philistine – just as he had slain lions and bears.

'*And this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God*'. In describing what he had done to the beasts of prey in vv.35-36, David uses the verb 'to smite' (to strike down) three times (wrongly translated 'slew' in the AV of v.36). 'Saul, you tell me that I can't go to fight with the Philistine because I am too young. Don't be misled by my age. I am not inexperienced when it comes to fighting. Smiting enemies has always been part of my job – it's just that until now they have been ferocious beasts rather than some loud-mouthed Philistine. Make no mistake. By heaping reproach on the armies of God⁴² – and thereby on God Himself⁴³ – this uncircumcised Philistine has consigned himself to the lion-and-bear heap'.

Verse 37. '*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*'. David freely acknowledged that, just as he had '*delivered*' lambs from wild animals, v.35, so God had '*delivered*' him from the same wild animals. He insists that as '*I ... delivered it out of his mouth*', v.35, so '*the Lord ... delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear*'. And David was convinced that what God had done in the wilderness of Judah, he would do in the valley of Elah!

This is the reasoning of faith. What God has done before, He is able to do again. Compare Paul's confidence, 'We trust not in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who *delivered* us from so great a death, and *doth deliver* in whom we trust that he *will yet deliver* us', 2 Cor. 1.9-10. And the apostle's confidence held out to the end of his days, '*I was delivered* out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord *shall deliver* me from every evil work', 2 Tim. 4.17-18. We should learn from David and Paul. Our own past experiences of God's proven goodness, faithfulness and provision should sustain and buttress our faith both in the present and for the future. But does it?

'*And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee*'. In some ways it seems amazing that Saul should stake the honour and well-being of Israel for the foreseeable future on the military performance of an untrained and inexperienced shepherd lad of not yet 20 years of age. But by now Saul was desperate. His back was to the wall. Both he and his people were thoroughly discouraged and despondent. And possibly the outcome of the 'battle' with

the Philistines was about to go in the Philistines favour by default – in which case, he had absolutely nothing to lose.⁴⁴ Saul was in no position to refuse any volunteer who was willing to confront the foe.

Verse 38. *'Saul armed David with his armour'*. The word translated 'armour' can be used to describe any kind of garment, tunic or clothing.⁴⁵ Here, however, linked with helmet and coat of mail, it signifies either 'tunic' or 'armour'.⁴⁶

Whereas, as he had made clear to Saul, David's confidence lay wholly in the Lord and His power, Saul's only confidence lay in the conventional weapons and equipment of war. (Not that it is wrong, of course, for the man of faith to act sensibly, to take reasonable precautions, and to make use of available means; cf. Acts 23.11-17.)

'With his armour'. Did Saul give David his own personal military clothing and equipment? We read, with reference to Saul, not only of 'his armour', v.38, but of 'his sword', v.39 (where it is clearly Saul's sword, not David's). But it seems highly unlikely to me that this clothing and equipment was Saul's own personal clothing and equipment. Apart from any other considerations, it is most unlikely that the king would have stripped himself of his own armour on the field of battle. Again, Saul, as a man who 'from his shoulders and upward' was 'higher than any of the people, 9.2, would have known that his own armour and weapons would have been far too big to be of any use to 'a youth', v.33, like David – who, by reason of his age, was clearly much smaller than Eliab and his other brothers (see End-note 21 to 1 Sam. 16). Yet again, when declining to take the proffered items, David made no reference to any of them being too big for him – only that he wasn't used to them, v.39. I think it far more likely that the military clothing and equipment came from Saul's armoury – and that in that sense it was spoken of as 'his'.

But in whichever way we understand the words 'his armour' and his sword', it is clear that Saul stood only to gain by providing David with his equipment for the combat. Apart from, in Saul's carnal assessment of the situation, significantly increasing David's prospects of victory, this would have publicly associated him with the young shepherd lad and would therefore have enabled the king to claim at least some credit for any victory. (Remember his concern to be honoured 'before Israel', 15.30.) But even that 'privilege' was denied him, v.39.

Verse 39. *'He assayed to go ... and David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these for I have not proved them'*. Saul had said 'Go', v.37. But, having tried 'to go', v.39, David had to insist that he couldn't 'go' (the same Hebrew verb on each occasion) while wearing Saul's equipment because he hadn't 'proved' (tested) it. Not being accustomed to it, it would have been only an encumbrance to him - it would only have weighed and slowed him down - proving more of a burden than a benefit to David – more of a hindrance than a help.

And so David, in effect, refused to play the role of a 'miniature Goliath' – equipped with the same kind of armour as the Philistine ('an helmet of bronze' and 'a coat of mail', vv. 5,38). David may have been *Saul's armour-bearer*, 16.21, but he would not be *Saul's armour wearer!*

And yet, the very fact that David was willing to put on Saul's equipment at all suggests that, at this point, he had no clear idea how he would defeat the Philistine. He had no doubt whatever that the Lord would vindicate His name and deliver Goliath into his hand, v.36 – but as yet he had no idea how He would do this.

Additionally, David must have realized that his refusal to arm himself with Saul's sword meant that he was going down into battle against Goliath *with no means of killing him*; see the Holy Spirit's comment later, 'there was no sword in the hand of David', v.50. He would soon promise Goliath, 'I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee', v. 46, knowing that he carried no weapon capable of doing that!

David declined both Saul's defensive (the 'coat of mail') and offensive (the 'sword') weaponry. The only 'armour' he took with him was his faith in the mighty power of God! But then that was infinitely better 'armour' than either Saul or Goliath possessed! He was 'strong in the Lord not in Himself; armed not with steel but with faith', Augustine, Sermon 32.⁴⁷

Verses 40-51 Exit the Philistine champion 'So David prevailed'

Verse 40. *'He took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand'*. The God who had first put it into David's heart to fight the Philistine, now put into his head which weapons to take with him. David had come straight from the flock, v. 20, and so still carried his shepherd's 'staff'. We note that the very fact that he took the staff – which, as events proved, he had no occasion to use – was further evidence that David had no clear ideas about what he was going to do or what he was going to need when he faced the Philistine. But, even more to the point, as events proved, having come straight from the flock, he had 'his sling'!⁴⁸

It is interesting to note that the men of *Benjamin* were famous for their skill with the sling; 'there were seven hundred chosen men left-handed; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss', Judg. 20.16. That is some shooting! But Saul, the royal Benjamite, 9.1, clearly had nursed no ambition to try his own skill against the Philistine!

The brook supplied David with his ammunition. David took with him what was familiar and readily available. I guess that David collected five stones rather than just one because he had no guarantee that his first shot would find its mark. Having strong faith doesn't mean you take silly risks!⁴⁹

The slinging of stones was common in ancient warfare; for example, 'Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the host shields, and spears, and helmets, and habergeons, and bows, and *slings to cast stones*', 2 Chron. 26.14. Pictures of slings and stones from Old Testament times show the stones typically being from two to three inches in diameter. There are several such sling stones on public display in the Lachish Room of the British Museum in London.

But it is not likely that David 'chose' stones of that size. Apart from the fact that he could hardly afford half an hour looking for stones of the right size, he took five stones! And he put them all in his shepherd's bag!

But he did 'choose' his stones - presumably for their roundness and smoothness.⁵⁰ Had they been rough or angular, they would neither have been dispatched so easily from his sling nor travelled so fast or so straight. *'He drew near to the Philistine'*. It was sometime around now that the king asked Abner, 'Whose son is this youth?', v.55; see the comment on vv.55-58.

Verse 41. *'And the Philistine'*. Possibly Goliath had retired back to the ranks of the Philistines, satisfied that, as on all previous occasions, his challenge had gone unanswered. But, if so, news soon reached him that Israel had finally come up with a champion ready for the fray.

Goliath takes centre stage again in verses 41-44 – as he had in vv.4-10. Five times the writer mentions *'the Philistine'* – 'And the Philistine came', v.41, ' And ... the Philistine looked about', v.42, ' And the Philistine said', v.43, ' And the Philistine cursed', v.43, 'And the Philistine said' again, v.44.

Verse 42. *'The Philistine looked about'*. It may be that, at first, he couldn't actually see David. And when he did spot him, he could hardly believe his eyes. He looked at David with utter contempt – clearly feeling insulted that he had been sent such an inapt opponent.

Verse 43. *'Am I a dog?'* In the ancient world, dogs were held in contempt among all nations. See, for example, 'thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or *the price of a dog*, into the house of the Lord thy God for any vow: for even both these *are* abomination unto the Lord thy God', Deut. 23.18; 'After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? *after a dead dog ... ?*', 1 Sam. 24.14 (compare the same expression in 2 Sam. 9.8; 16.9); 'Then was Abner very wroth for the words of Ishbosheth, and said, Am I a *dog's* head', 2 Sam. 3.8. For Goliath's actual words, note the reaction of Hazael to the message of Elijah; Elijah 'answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?', 2 Kings 8.12-13. Perhaps the expression 'Am I a dog' was reasonably common in the ancient world.

'Staves'. The shepherd's 'staff', v.40 (the same Hebrew word), may have been used, among other things, for correcting and directing a shepherd's dogs. Certainly such an idiotic 'weapon' would, to Goliath's mind, have been better suited to beating a dog. But why 'staves' in the plural, seeing that David only carried a single staff? Possibly at a distance the sling which was hanging down from David's hand, v.40, appeared to Goliath as a stick or second staff.⁵¹

Verse 44. *'I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field'*. The imagery of feeding the dead body of an enemy to the birds and the beasts was common; see, for example, 'The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies ... and thy carcass shall be meat unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth', Deut. 28.25-26. About 50 miles north of Ur was the early Sumerian city of Lagash. The Stele of Vultures was found there, which depicts a battle scene at which vultures bear away the heads and limbs of the dead from the field of battle.⁵²

Verse 45. *'Then said David to the Philistine'*. But if David hadn't been intimidated by Goliath's big physique, big armour and big weapons, he certainly wasn't going to be intimidated by Goliath's big mouth.

Note how much space is devoted to David's speech, vv.45-47, in contrast to the record of the actual combat itself, vv.48-49. In fact, David's speech comprises 63 Hebrew words over against just 36 used to describe the spectacular 'knock-out! And note that David's harangue begins and ends with reference to the ineffectiveness and irrelevance of 'sword and spear', vv.45, 47, and is filled with references to 'the Lord' and 'God' – six references in just three verses.

Yes, it was indeed true that the Philistine was armed, not only a sword and a spear, but a large shield – on which he apparently laid great store, vv.7, 41, 45. But so what? David also had a shield – a far better shield – invisible to human eye and far more effective than Goliath's impressive shield proved! David later wrote, 'Thou, O Lord, art a shield for (around) me', Psa. 3.3.⁵³ Yes, it was indeed true that the Philistine had, not only a shield, but a shield-bearer, vv.7,41. But so what? David also had a Shield-bearer – a far better 'Shield-bearer'! David later wrote, 'My defence is of God', Psa. 7.10 – literally, 'My shield is on God'. (That is, 'God is my shield-bearer', He is the One who carries my shield for me'.) God was all the protection David wanted or needed! And is He not my shield too? *'But I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts'*. David came in the name, that is, as representative,⁵⁴ of 'the Lord of hosts'.⁵⁵ This seems to have been God's royal title, expressing His rule and reign over innumerable hosts – perhaps including the stellar heavens but certainly embracing the angelic 'hosts'; 'Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength ... Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts ...that do his pleasure', Psa. 103.20 - 21. 'The Lord of hosts', in whose name David faced Goliath, had all the forces of heaven at His disposal. Then what price an uncircumcised Philistine!⁵⁶ Goliath had made the big mistake of defying the armies of the One who had much greater armies than that of Israel at His disposal!

David would have readily signed up to Paul's confident claim, 'Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: for *the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God* to the pulling down of strong holds', 2 Cor. 10.3-4.

Verse 46. *'This day the Lord will deliver thee into mine hand'*. It was one thing for David to tell Saul that he would slay Goliath, v.36; it was another matter to tell Goliath that he would slay Goliath!

'I will ... take thine head from thee'. David put Goliath on notice that his head was soon to roll.

'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'. There really was no need for Goliath to worry himself about food for the birds and the beasts of prey, v.44. They would not starve. David would provide them with far more carrion than they would ever have picked off the bones of some good-looking shepherd lad!

'That all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel'. That when today's score is in tomorrow morning's paper, the whole world will know that Israel has a God worthy of the name.

Note that, throughout, David's eye was on God's glory and not his own. His great concern was that all the credit should go to the Lord for what was about to happen – hence his word to Goliath, *'the Lord will deliver thee into mine hand'*. Note the careful way in which Paul and Barnabas expressed themselves at the Report Meeting at Antioch, *'When they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles'*, Acts 14. 27. Both Old and New Testaments provide us then with examples of great men of God who were determined to see that the glory for what God did through them went where it ought – to Him and not to them.

Ultimately, therefore, the spotlight of our chapter isn't on David – on his great faith, his great courage, his great humility – or anything else of David. The spotlight of the chapter is really on the might and power of God – on His working – through David's evident weakness and insufficiency – to uphold His own honour. The chapter is principally about the glory of God – not the glory of David.⁵⁷

Verse 47. *'And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear'*. But it wasn't enough for 'all the earth' – all the surrounding gentile nations – to know that there was a God in Israel. *Israel* needed to know that there was a God in Israel! And Israel also needed to know – which it should never have forgotten – that *'the Lord saveth not with sword and spear'*.

'The battle is the Lord's'. David may well have had in mind what Moses said to the people at Pi-hahiroth, *'Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord ... The Lord shall fight for you'*, Exod. 14.14. David shared Moses' confidence in God, and believed, as he expressed it in one of his psalms, that the Lord is *'mighty in battle'*, Psa. 24.8.

I am fascinated by the way in which each of David's great expressions of faith in vv.45-47 find their echo in the histories and experiences of the later kings of Judah – on the lips of David's descendants:

(a) *'I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts'*, v.45. I think of the words of King Asa when confronted by the Ethiopians (with an army perhaps a million strong); *'Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude'*, 2 Chron. 14.11.

(b) *'That all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel'*, v.46. I think of the words of King Hezekiah when confronted by the Assyrians; *'O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all kingdoms of the earth may know thou art the Lord'*, Isa. 37.20.

(c) *'The battle is the Lord's'*, v.47. I think of the words of Jahaziel to King Jehoshaphat when he was confronted by the Moabites and Ammonites, *'Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's'*, 2 Chron. 20.15.

And all of this was compressed into these words of David to Goliath.

'The Lord ... will give you into our hands'. David had begun his speech with singular pronouns – *'I'* and *'thee'*, v.45 – reflecting Goliath's earlier assertion, *'I will give thy flesh'*, v.44. But David concludes by warning Goliath that God would give *'you'* (plural) into *'our'* (plural) hands. He is in effect reminding Goliath of the rules of the game – reminding him of his own stated terms – that their one-to-one combat was *'representative warfare'*, with long-term consequences for both the Philistines and the Israelites as a whole, vv.8-9.

Verse 48. *'When the Philistine arose'*. Apparently Goliath had been seated - as I guess would usually have been the case with troops not engaged in actual conflict – thereby conserving their energies. And, in Goliath's case in particular, his bronze armour was rather heavy!

'David hasted, and ran'. So no doubt would most of us – although not in the direction which David did! He *'ran toward the army to meet the Philistine'*. And it seems that David could run fast when he wanted to. He later testified, *'He maketh my feet like hinds' feet'*, Psa.18.33.

Verse 49. *'Slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead'*. Saul – and everyone else – had clearly thought, *'Goliath is so big that there's no chance of beating him'*. David apparently thought, *'Goliath is so big that there's no chance of missing him. Yes, he's big but the bigger they are, the harder they fall'*.

But wasn't Goliath's forehead protected by his helmet? Wasn't it fitted with some form of visor? Apparently not. I have been unable to find any evidence that protective visors had yet been invented. Certainly the Philistine helmets which have been found don't boast visors.⁵⁸

Well, why then didn't Goliath protect his face with his shield? – which was presumably its main function. From what we can tell he had one of his hands free. We know that, when the stone hit him, his sword was still in its scabbard, v.51. And as far as we know his javelin was still strung across his shoulders, v.6. Goliath seems to have been carrying only his colossal spear. It is possible of course that Goliath was holding his shield but that David's sudden spurt so took him by surprise that, caught completely off guard, he simply didn't have time to raise his shield. After all the stone was really moving! Indeed, it has been estimated that a smooth stone, slung by an accomplished warrior⁵⁹, could travel at the incredible speed of up to 200 feet per second, carrying the force of a 45-calibre bullet⁶⁰.

But it is equally possible that Goliath didn't have his shield to hand at the time. Note the difference between v.41, *'the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him'*, and v.48, *'the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David'*. Had Goliath perhaps decided that he would have no need for his shield? After all, he was protected by a bronze wall over eight feet in height. A puny Hebrew youth would have needed to stand on a chair to reach his head! A high-speed pebble was the last thing Goliath expected.

Goliath had defied, and spoken arrogantly against, the Lord of hosts, v.45. According to the Old Testament, stoning was the punishment in Israel for blasphemy; see the instructions of Jezebel concerning Naboth, *'Set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry*

him out, and stone him, that he may die', 1 Kings 21.10. David was satisfied to use just one of his five stones for the purpose!

'The stone sunk into his forehead'. David's aim was unerring.⁶¹ Not that I – any more than David – would wish to deny God the glory of having directed the stone in its flight.⁶²

I can imagine that there must have been one agonizing moment – when Goliath stopped in his tracks, standing motionless like some enormous bronze statue – when the whole world seemed to stand still – when two whole armies held their breath. Though ever so brief, it must have been a 'deafening silence'. But it was rapidly followed by noise enough – by a 'deafening clang' of heavy armour on the ground.⁶³

'He fell upon his face to the earth'. Goliath was too solid to be knocked over backwards by a mere pebble - even travelling at enormous velocity. Which is why people don't necessarily – or usually – fall backwards when shot from the front by a bullet. The weight of the Philistine's frontal armor, coupled with the momentum of his onward movement, was enough to cause him to fall forwards rather than backwards.

David's stone sank deeply into the skull of Goliath and brought him down like a falling tree. Or, perhaps I should say, like a falling idol! For, some eighty years before, the Philistine chief god Dagon had fallen on his face before the Lord; 'when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, *Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground* before the ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him', 5. 4! In similar manner, the Philistine champion, presumably a worshipper of Dagon⁶⁴, also 'fell upon his face to the earth' before the power of the God he had so arrogantly defied. And, just as *Dagon's head* had been 'cut off', 5.4, so soon would be *his worshipper's head*, v.51 (the same Hebrew word)!

And so, after a lengthy build-up, the knock-out blow had come very quickly – the Philistine contender had hardly got out of his corner! The army of Israel must have exploded with joy – and apparently no-one rejoicing more than King Saul, 19.5.

Verse 50. *'So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him'*. As I understand it, this verse functions as a synopsis - summarising the details of the blow-by-blow account given in vv.49 and 51.⁶⁵ Verse 49 reported a 'stunning victory', but, as I see it, Goliath was not yet dead.

In this connection, note the second 'slew him' in v.51 – which JND translates, 'killed him completely', and which he points out in a footnote renders 'an intensive form of the verb'.⁶⁶

Also note the structural similarity with v.35. Verse 35 reads 'And I went out after him ... when he arose against me, I caught (literally '*prevailed*', 'was strong over') him by his beard, *and smote him, and slew him*'. Verse 50 reads, 'So David *prevailed* (literally, 'was strong') over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, *and smote the Philistine, and slew him*'. It seems to me that in these cases both the catching by the beard and the stunning with the stone preceded the smiting and slaying.

Finally, this was how Josephus understood it: 'This stone fell upon his forehead, and sank into his brain, insomuch that Goliath was stunned, and fell upon his face. So David ran, and stood upon his adversary as he lay down, and cut off his head with his own sword'.⁶⁷

'So David prevailed'. And this was certainly no mean feat! Yet how much greater was the victory accomplished by the Lord Jesus – One so much greater than David of whom it is said, 'Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath *prevailed*', Rev.5. 5. 'Worthy the Lamb', we cry!

'There was no sword in the hand of David'. Something similar had once been said of Samson when he slew a lion, 'he had nothing in his hand', Judg. 14.5-6. David too had once been a lion-slayer (and a bear-slayer). And now the Philistine was 'as one of them', 1 Sam. 17.36.

Verse 51. *'David ran'*. There was no time to lose. David wanted to finish the job and to kill Goliath before the Philistine champion regained consciousness. The first priority was to ensure that he was well and truly dead.⁶⁸

'Stood upon the Philistine'. Better, 'stood by (or over) the Philistine'.

'Took his sword'. Goliath had someone else to carry his shield down into the valley for him; so why shouldn't David have someone else to carry his sword for him!

'Slew him'.⁶⁹ 'It wouldn't be wise to be dogmatic on the matter but the text suggests to me that David first dispatched Goliath with his own sword and then hacked off his head with it - rather than that he killed Goliath by beheading him. That is, that Goliath's death preceded his beheading, as was the case later with Saul, 31.4,9.

'Cut off his head'. Goliath for the chop! Just as David had promised Goliath he would do, v.46. The head was probably cut off simply as a trophy, vv.54, 57; compare 31.9-10 – rather than a means of ensuring death.

'Their champion'. Not the same word as vv. 4, 13; there the 'middle-man'. In context, the word here (gibbôr) indicates a hero, someone who accomplishes great feats – possibly their 'big shot' (see End-note 57 to chapter 16).

'Was dead'. The removal of Goliath's head left the Philistines in no doubt on that score!

'They fled'. After possibly a moment of paralysis, the Philistines took off on the run. With the defeat and loss of their champion, totally unprepared for what had happened, unable to take it in, all courage and will to fight were gone.

We know that David's remarkable victory over Goliath inspired at least one later generation faced by military invasion. 1 Machabees 4 tells how Judas Machabeus⁷⁰ routed the army of Antiochus Epiphanes under Lysias. The narrative says that Lysias commanded 60,000 footmen and 5,000 horsemen, against which Judas had only 10,000 men. When the Jews saw that the opposing army 'was strong', Judas prayed, 'Blessed art thou, O Saviour of Israel, who didst break the violence of the mighty by the hand of thy servant David, and didst deliver up the camp of the strangers into the hands of Jonathan the son of Saul, and of his armour bearer. Shut up this army in the hands of thy people Israel, and let them be confounded in their host and their horsemen'. The narrative continues, 'they joined battle: and there fell of the army of Lysias five thousand men. And when Lysias saw that his men were put to flight ...', 1 Macc. 4.30-34! May it inspire us to do exploits for God too!

But, more important theologically, David's great victory propelled him into public view and formed an essential stage in his preparation to become Israel's next king – which ultimately paved the way for the coming of One much greater – the Messiah – who would 'destroy' (i.e. render ineffective, put out of commission) a far more formidable foe than Goliath – and that with the enemy's own weapon – and thereby liberate His people from a fear far greater than that which had gripped Israel; 'that *through death* he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, *the devil*; and deliver them who through *fear of death* were all their lifetime subject to bondage', Heb. 2.14-15. It would be difficult therefore to over-estimate the significance of David's victory at Elah. And we really must not forget the remarkable chain of circumstances which the Lord used to get the right man to the right place at the right time!⁷¹

Verses 52-58 The sequel – the head of the Philistine

Verses 52-53. *'The men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines'*. According to the Philistines own terms, the outcome of the one-to-one combat between Goliath and David should have settled the outcome of the confrontation between them, vv.8-9. But when Goliath made his challenge, the Philistines confidently expected any such combat to go in their favour. Now that the unthinkable had happened, and Israel was victorious in that combat, there was no saying whether the Philistines would abide by the outcome. In such circumstances, Israel were taking no chances and pressed home their advantage over the Philistines. Seizing the opportunity provided by the defeat of Goliath, they took off after the retreating enemy. There was no better place to fight a foe than from behind, and so, as David had foretold, 'the host of the Philistines' became bird food; see v.46! *'And shouted'*. Their 'war cry'. See the note at vv.20-21.

Verse 54. *'The head of the Philistine ... to Jerusalem'*. It seems clear from the words of 2 Sam. 5.6-7 ('the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land ... David took the strong hold of Zion') that 'Jerusalem' was not yet fully under Israelite control. It is possible, however, that it was only the *citadel of Jebus* on Mount Zion which remained in the hands of the Jebusites, and that the *city* of Jerusalem was already in the hands of Israel. I note the wording of earlier narratives; 'As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out: but *the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day*', Josh. 15.63; and, 'Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and *had taken it*, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire', Judg. 1.8.

David may indeed have chosen to take the head of Goliath to Jerusalem and to affix the gory trophy to the wall there (compare 1 Sam. 31.10) as a signal to the Jebusites in the citadel that their fall in Goliath-like fashion was only a matter of time.

Alternatively, v.54 may mean that David brought Goliath's head (or skull) to Jerusalem as a trophy when all of Jerusalem finally fell to him and he established it as his capital. It has even been suggested that 'David had the head pickled and hung it in his banqueting hall after he had captured Jerusalem'.⁷² (I don't think it would have done anything for my appetite if I had been invited to a meal there!)

'His armour in his tent'. It seems unlikely that David, who had been a mere visitor to the battlefield, vv.17-22, would have had his own tent there. It has been suggested that possibly '*his tent*' refers to the tent of Goliath – which would probably have become David's possession as part of his share of the Philistine spoil.⁷³ It is also possible that the conquering hero was in any case now given a tent of his own at the scene of the battle. Again, it is just possible that '*his tent*' is used in the sense of '*his dwelling-place*', namely Bethlehem. In any case, David's possession of Goliath's armour explains how it is we know do much about its weight, vv.5 - 7.

Verses 55-58. *'When Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said unto Abner ... Abner, whose son is this youth?'* Saul's question takes us back to the time when Saul saw David go out against Goliath – that is, to around the time of v.40.

But why, we may wonder, if Saul had been specifically told that the young man who subsequently spend some time with him – both as musician and armour-bearer – was 'the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite', 16.18, 21, should Saul now ask Abner whose son he was?

I don't know. But I note several points :

(a) Throughout the section vv.55-58, Saul's only question concerns '*whose son*' David is – a question asked three times. That is, Saul didn't ask, 'Who is this young man?' but 'Who is this young man's father?' Saul may have had in his mind the promise which he had made about exempting 'his father's house' from taxes and personal services, v.25.

(b) It is by no means impossible that Saul might have forgotten the name of David's father in the unspecified interval between 16.18 and the events of chapter 17. Although the name 'Jesse' certainly had formed part of the information he had originally been given, 16.18, Saul's mind at the time had been heavily focused on obtaining a suitable musician to alleviate his 'trouble'. There was no reason for him to have been sufficiently interested in the candidate's family connections to have memorised his father's name. We should also note that Jesse was elderly, 17.12, and probably unable to travel – hence David being sent on his behalf to inquire about the welfare of his three sons, 17.17-18 – and it is unlikely therefore that Saul had ever had any direct contact with Jesse – to impress his name on his memory.

(c) Although it is said that 'Saul' had sent messengers to Jesse, 16.19, it is highly likely that it was in fact the bureaucrats at his court who had actually taken care of all the details for him and who sent the communication on his behalf. Again, there was no reason for Saul to have paid any particular attention to the name of David's father.

(d) It is possible that Saul hadn't recognised David himself. We must remember that David had not spent all the intervening time with Saul. He had gone home to tend his father's sheep, quite likely for extended periods when

Saul's condition was improved, 17.15. As a growing young man, David's appearance may have changed sufficiently during his last absence for Saul not to immediately recognise him.

(e) Following on from the last point, we should note that Saul's previous interest in young David had been as a musician, while in chapter 17 he saw him only as a potential warrior.

(f) Saul's mind and memory may not have been perfectly clear during the events of chapter 17. David had not been present, v.15, to 'refresh' Saul if the 'spirit of distress' had continued to trouble him; cf. 16.23.

In the end, we simply do not know enough to be sure why Saul asked what he did. Neither do we know why Abner was unaware of the name of the young man's father's name, v.55. (Although, as commander of the army, there was no reason why Abner should have been personally involved in the affairs of 16.15-23. He may never have come across David in his earlier roles – either as court musician or as one of Saul's many armour-bearers.)

'The king said, Enquire thou whose son the stripling is'. Saul's command to Abner suggests that he (Saul) never expected David to return alive from the combat, for him to ask David the question face to face – which, in the event, he did, v.58! If this was so, David's faith rose far above such pessimism; 'The Lord ... will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine'. Events had now proved which of the two men had been right!

Ah, what would we give to possess a psalm composed by 'the sweet psalmist of Israel' himself to commemorate the 'downfall' of Goliath and the rout of the Philistines! But we don't! And we must wait until the next chapter to see the far-reaching effects of the one song which was composed to celebrate Israel's victory that day.

End-notes

¹ Suggested by the heading given for 1 Sam. 17 by Dale Raph Davis – 'Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth ... thud'. See note 56 below.

² I have read of one Sunday School teacher who asked her pupils, 'What do we learn from the story of David and Goliath?'. She received the reply from one young lad, 'Please, Miss, sometimes you need to duck!' But this chapter has more to teach us than that.

³ T.A. Boogaart, 'History and Drama in the Story of David and Goliath', *Reformed Review* 38 [1985]: 205 suggests that vv.1-54 constitute a three-fold cycle of confrontation-challenge-consternation, as follows:

1. *Goliath's Challenge – Issued* (vv.1-11)
 - A. Confrontation: Philistines and Israelites Face Each Other; Goliath Appears (vv.1-7)
 - B. Challenge: Goliath Defies the Ranks of Israel (vv.8-10)
 - C. Consternation: Saul and Israel Are Dismayed and Terrified (v.11)
2. *Goliath's Challenge – Heard* (vv.12-39)
 - A. Confrontation: David Appears in the Israelite Camp; Philistines and Israelites Face Each Other (vv.12-22)
 - B. Challenge: David Hears Goliath Defying the Ranks of Israel (v.23)
 - C. Consternation: David Converses With the Fearful Israelites, His Angry Brother, and an Indecisive Saul (vv.24-39)
3. *Goliath's Challenge – Met* (vv.40-54)
 - A. Confrontation: David and Goliath Face Each Other (vv.40-41)
 - B. Challenge: David and Goliath Summon Each Other; David Kills Goliath (vv.42-51a)
 - C. Consternation: Philistines Flee From Israelites (vv.51b-54)

⁴ 'When the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem, and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish, and against Azekah: for these defenced cities remained of the cities of Judah', Jer 34.7; also Lachish letter 4:10-13. (The Lachish Letters were found on 29 January 1935 'in the debris of the gate tower of the city', Sir Charles Marston, 'The Bible Comes Alive', 1937.)

⁵ Compare 'Pas-dammim', 1 Chron. 11.13.

⁶ It is not accurate to describe such a combat as a 'duel'. A 'duel' was the means used to settle a quarrel or difference between two individuals. That is, the two combatants were there in a personal capacity and not as representing groups.

⁷ Compare the famous combat between Menelaus and Paris, Homer's Iliad, book 3. But see also End-note 19.

⁸ '... it may have been a sarcophagus which was large not because Og was a giant but because other objects would have been buried with him', editorial note by R. Laird Harris in TWOT, Vol.2, page 859. But the reference may be to a kingly iron bed – it is questionable whether a sarcophagus would be made of iron (a construction of basalt would be more likely). The Hebrew word is used elsewhere in the Old Testament only of a bed or couch.

⁹ 'When Tiberius had heard of these things, he desired to have a league of friendship made between him and Artabanus; and when, upon this invitation, he received the proposal kindly, Artabanus and Vitellius went to Euphrates, and as a bridge was laid over the river, they each of them came with their guards about them, and met one another on the midst of the bridge. And when they had agreed upon the terms of peace Herod, the tetrarch erected a rich tent on the midst of the passage, and made them a feast there. Artabanus also, not long afterward, sent his son Darius as an hostage, with many presents, among which there was a man seven cubits tall, a Jew he was by birth, and his name was Eleazar, who, for his tallness, was called a giant', Josephus, Ant. XVIII, 4, 5.

¹⁰ 'The tallest man that hath been seen in our age, was one named *Gabbara*, who in the days of prince *Claudius* late Emperor, was brought out of Arabia; nine foot high was he, and as many inches. There were in the time of Augustus Cæsar two others, named *Pusio* and *Secu[n]dilla*, higher than *Gabbara* by half a foot, whose bodies were preserved and kept for a wonder in a charnell house or sepulchre within the gardens of the Salustians', Pliny, Natural History, VII, chapter 16. [Pliny's Natural History is available on the internet at :<http://penelope.uchicago.edu/holland/pliny7.html#12>.]

¹¹ Robert Pershing Wadlow was eight feet eleven inches tall (and weighed 490 pounds) at the time of his death on July 15, 1940, at the age of twenty-two. (His memorial statue is located on College Avenue in Alton, Illinois. Mr Wadlow was born as a normal sized baby but grew at an astounding rate and was six feet two inches (weighing 195 pounds) by the time he was eight years old. When he died (of an infected foot blister), his 1,000-pound casket required a dozen pallbearers, assisted by eight other men. According to the Guinness Book of Records his height of 8' 11.1" qualifies him as the tallest person in history – but then the compilers of the GBR are probably not strong on either biblical or ancient history.

¹² See, 'yet again there was war at Gath, where was a man of great stature, whose fingers and toes were four and twenty, six on each hand, and six on each foot: and he also was the son of the giant', 1 Chron. 20.6 – another enemy of God marked by the number six; see the exposition of 17.4. Note that those listed in 1 Chron. 20.4-8 are said to be 'born unto the giant (Hebrew, 'râphâh') in Gath', 1 Chron. 20.8; compare 2 Sam. 21.18-22. The Rephaim may well have been the Transjordanian equivalent of the Anakim; see NIDOTTE, Vol.4, pages 676-678 and Youngblood on 2 Sam. 21.15-22 in the Expositors Bible Commentary.

¹³ The Hebrew masculine plural word translated 'mail' is used in its feminine singular form to describe fish scales; for example, 'These shall ye eat of all that are in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and *scales*', Lev 11.9-10, 12; compare Deut 14.9-10.

¹⁴ This is the word translated 'shield' in v.45 AV, where, in company with 'sword' and 'spear, it clearly signifies an offensive weapon. It is rendered 'spear' in Josh. 8; 'the Lord said unto Joshua, Stretch out the spear that is in thy hand toward Ai; for I will give it into thine hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city', Josh. 8.18; compare Job 41. 29. The AV translation 'target' (signifying a round shield) is based upon the rendering in the Septuagint.

¹⁵ Compare 2 Sam 21.19 = 1 Chronicles 20.5; 11.23.

¹⁶ Yadin, *The Art of Warfare*, pages 354-55 – quoted by Youngblood.

¹⁷ As in 1 Kings 10.16//2 Chronicles 9.15.

¹⁸ The title 'the Philistine' was given to only one other man – and that only once. This was Ishbi-Benob; 'And Ishbi-benob, which was of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of brass in weight, he being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain David. But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured him, and smote *the Philistine*, and killed him', 2 Sam. 21.16-17.

¹⁹ See NIDOTTE, Vol. 2, pages 280-282.

²⁰ Goliath made it clear he was reproaching the ranks of Israel, v.10. Israel's troops acknowledged that he was doing just that, v.25. David was concerned to turn away this reproach because he recognized that to reproach Israel was to reproach Israel's God, v.26 – and pressed home this point with both Saul, v.36, and Goliath himself, v.45.

²¹ The two Hebrew words are often paired together, though sometimes separated by a word or two and usually reversed in order; Deut. 1.21; 31.8; Josh. 8.1; 10.25; 1 Chron. 22.13; 28.20; 2 Chron. 20.15, 17; 32.7; Jer. 23.4; 30.10; 46.27; Ezek 2.6; 3.9.

²² 'Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that *was* in Geba, and the Philistines heard *of it*. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear', 13.3, and 'Jonathan the son of Saul said unto the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over to the Philistines' garrison, that *is* on the other side ... And Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which *is* in Migron', 14.1-2.

²³ The Septuagint omits the whole section from v.12 to v.32.

²⁴ Ephrath was the old name for Bethlehem, Gen. 35.19.

²⁵ See the comment on v.23, and the last comment on v.51.

²⁶ Compare, 'Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I. And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again', Gen. 37.13-14.

²⁷ It is possible that David did not in fact return home to Bethlehem after the victory over the Philistines. Compare, 'Saul ... would let him go no more home to his father's house', 18.2 – although perhaps we ought not to understand this as meaning that David wasn't even permitted to make a visit there.

²⁸ '*Stunning*' news about how David had *knocked* the Philistine champion *senseless!*

²⁹ Compare Eliab's later sneer, 'with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness?', v.28.

³⁰ David used the word metaphorically in his great 'Shepherd Psalm' - '*the paths* of righteousness', Psa. 23.3.

³¹ This is translated 'stuff' in 10.22; 25.13; 30.24.

³² Compare, 'David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name', 25.5 – literally, 'ask him ... of peace'. It probably meant much the same as our, 'How are you?'

³³ See the last comment on v.51.

³⁴ Only the Philistines are described as 'uncircumcised' from the beginning of the book of Joshua to the end of the Old Testament history books. It seems that circumcision was practised by the Egyptians, Ethiopians, Phoenicians and Syrians; so Herodotus II, 104. (Although see footnote 19 to Kittel's TDNT, VI, 75.) The Philistine nation were no doubt proud of their uncircumcised status. Hence the ingenuity of Saul's ploy of requiring from David a dowry of 100 foreskins of the Philistines, 18.25. But the status of being 'uncircumcised' was certainly not confined to the Philistines. See the tactic adopted by the sons of Jacob on some Canaanites, Gen. 34.13-17, 25-29.

³⁵ 1 Sam. 20.3; 25.34; 26.10, 16; 2 Sam. 4.9; 12.5; 14.11; 1 Kings 1.29. Also 'The Lord liveth', 2 Sam. 22.47//Psa. 18.46.

³⁶ See Saul's words to Samuel about 'the elders of *my* people', 15.30.

³⁷ Where, as in 1 Sam. 17, the foe may well have consisted of men of unusually tall stature; compare Josh. 15.13-14 and Num. 13.32-33; Deut. 1.28; 2.10, 21; 9.2.

³⁸ A 'wilderness' was not necessarily a barren area. It was simply some wide open tract of land used for pasture, in distinction from arable land. Hence, 'what man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine *in the wilderness*, and go after that which is lost ...?', Luke 15.4.

³⁹ It is the same word translated 'manner' twice in v.30.

⁴⁰ Compare Joshua's reference – probably looking back to Deut. 20 – 'One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you', Josh. 23.10.

⁴¹ My vivid imagination pictures some hapless character in the days of Amos being hotly pursued by a hungry lion – who turns a corner only to see an angry bear charging towards him in the other direction. I hardly know what caption to write over my mental picture – perhaps '*I knew I should have stayed in bed!*' or just plain, '*M-a-a-m-m-y!*'

⁴² See God's purpose for a coming day; 'He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke (reproach) of his people shall he take away from off all the earth', Isa. 25.8.

⁴³ See 'the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied', v.45.

⁴⁴ But see End-note 19.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, its use for the 'garment' of a priest, Lev. 6.10, and 'clothes' which could be rent, 1 Sam. 4.12.

⁴⁶ It is translated 'garments' and associated with weapons of war in the next chapter; 'And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his *garments*, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle', 18.4.

⁴⁷ Compare Paul's injunction, 'Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand', Eph. 6.10-11.

⁴⁸ This consisted of two long cords with a pocket in the centre. The slinger placed his stone in the pocket, grasped the ends of the cords, whirled the sling about him, and shot the stone by releasing one of the cords.

⁴⁹ Personally I see no connection with the five chief cities and 'lords' of the Philistines, nor with Goliath's four brothers – if that is what 2 Sam. 21.15-22 is saying!

⁵⁰ I once heard an old evangelist tell a group of children that David took only *smooth* stones - and not sharp stones - because 'he didn't want to hurt Goliath when the stone hit him – he only wanted the giant dead'!

⁵¹ The Septuagint reports Goliath as speaking of 'a staff and stones'. Apart from the distance, the Philistine would have needed x-ray eyes to see the stones – by then safely stored in David's shepherd-bag! Goliath clearly hadn't 'looked about' and spotted David until after David had collected the stones and put them safely away, vv.40-42.

⁵² 'The Biblical World, A Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology', Baker Book House, 1979, pages 349-350.

⁵³ Compare, 'thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield (the same word as in 1 Sam. 17.45)', Psa. 5.12.

⁵⁴ 1 Sam. 25.5, 9; 2 Sam. 6.18; Exod. 5.23; Deut. 10.8; 2 Chron.14.11.

⁵⁵ David had his eyes firmly fixed on the Lord's glory. Are ours? What situations are we aware of where we can clearly see that God's honour is at stake? Does this matter to us more than our own advantage or reputation?

⁵⁶ Compare the words of Hezekiah to his people when facing Sennacherib and the might of Assyria, 'Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah', 2 Chronicles 32.7-8.

⁵⁷ David was jealous and zealous for the reputation of God, vv.46-47, and not his own glory or prestige – which preoccupied Saul, 'honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel', 15.30.

⁵⁸ The Septuagint claims that the stone went through Goliath's (bronze) helmet!

⁵⁹ The Assyrian relief-panels in the Lachish Room of the British Museum depict Sennacherib's stone-slingers behind his archers. That is, the stones would reach further than the arrows.

⁶⁰ See sermon by David H. Roper at 'pbc.org/dp/roper/kings/pdf/3055.pdf'.

⁶¹ Did David propel the stone while still running?

⁶² God is on record as having directed a piece of a millstone, a spear, and an arrow - and also as directing the lighting-strike. See 'And a certain woman cast a *piece of a millstone* upon Abimelech's head, and all to brake his skull', Judg. 9.53; a *stone* here in 1 Sam. 17.49; 'Saul cast the javelin (*spear*); for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice', 18.10 (cf. 19.10); 'And a *certain* man drew a bow at a venture (in his simplicity), and smote the king of Israel (Ahab - with an *arrow*) between the joints of the harness', 2 Chron. 18.33; and, 'His hands he covers with *lightning*, and commandeth it where it is to strike', Job 36.32 JND.

⁶³ Dale Ralph Davis heads his exposition of this chapter brilliantly, 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth – Thud!' Although I suspect it was more of a resounding metallic crash than it was a 'thud'.

⁶⁴ Remember how he had cursed David by 'his gods', 17. 43.

⁶⁵ To interrupt the flow of an account to provide a thumbnail summary is a common narrative style. See for example 2 Sam. 17.17-21.

⁶⁶ 'The Pilel, an intensive form of the verb'; footnote to 1 Sam. 17.51 JND (Publisher : G. Morris).

⁶⁷ Antiquities, Book VI, Chapter IX, para 5.

⁶⁸ I enjoy the story of the two hunters who are out in the woods when one of them collapses. He doesn't seem to be breathing and his eyes are glazed. The other man whips out his mobile phone and calls the emergency services. He gasps: 'My friend is dead! My friend is dead! What can I do?' The operator says: 'Calm down. Now calm down. I can help. But first, make sure that he *is* dead'. There is a silence, then the operator hears a gunshot. Back on the phone, the hunter says: 'OK, now what?' David's number one priority as far as Goliath was concerned was certainly to 'make sure he is dead'.

⁶⁹ The Hebrew text of 2 Sam. 21.19 reads, 'there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan, the son of Jaare-oregim ... slew Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam'. That is, it credits Elhanan with the slaying of Goliath. Yet the parallel account in 1 Chron. 20.5 reads, 'there was war again with the Philistines; and Elhanan the son of Jair slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, whose spear staff was like a weaver's beam'.

The problem in 2 Sam. 21.19 is clearly one of textual transmission. 'The name of Elhanan's father should not contain the word '*oregim*' which is obviously a copyist's error resulting from the appearance of the word, meaning "beam" or "shuttle", at the end of the verse. (The father's name was simply 'Jair' – as seen from 1 Chron. 20.5.) Furthermore the accusative participle ... should read 'the brother of' as in Chronicles. The correct text (of 2 Sam. 21,19) would read, "and Elhanan, the son of Jairi the Bethlehemite, slew the brother of Goliath"', R.K. Harrison, 'Introduction to the OT', Tyndale Press, page 704.

⁷⁰ The name Machabeus most probably derives from the Aramaic *maqqaba* ('hammer'), and therefore means 'hammerer' or 'hammer-like'.

⁷¹ See the comments on vv.17-19, 23, 25, 31.

⁷² H.L.Ellison, 'Scripture Union Bible Study Books: Joshua-2 Samuel', Eerdmans, 1966.

⁷³ James K. Hoffmeier, 'The Aftermath of David's Triumph Over Goliath: 1 Samuel 17.54 in Light of Near Eastern Parallels', *Archaeology in the Biblical World* 1, 1 [1991]: 18-19.