

I Samuel

Lesson 29 - Chapter 17

We'll pick up our study today in 1st Samuel chapter 17, which is essentially the world's most famous story of the shepherd boy David fighting and defeating the giant Philistine warrior Goliath. And while the story itself is so memorable, legendary, and universal (and even the term "a battle of David and Goliath" has been borrowed and used to mean a confrontation between a heavy underdog against a seemingly invincible opponent), we need to stay focused and continue to examine this story in the proper spiritual context. And that context is that the first king of Israel, Saul, has been deposed by God and a new king, David, has been anointed. Saul no longer has the Holy Spirit available to him and in fact is now permanently infected with a spirit that causes evil. David, however, has been given the Holy Spirit (that at one time fell upon Saul) and so is now flush with God's immutable power, wisdom, and enlightenment. The question for the interested reader is: will David follow the spirit and submit to God's authority; or will he do as Saul and succumb to temptation and attempt to rule under a different authority.

While David versus Goliath is a battle of God's people against heathen gentiles it's not the only battle that this section of 1st Samuel is dealing with. David versus Saul is another pivotal confrontation and it concerns the matter of God's righteous king versus the Anti-King who (as of now) is illegitimately occupying the throne and is attempting to hang on to it against God's will in order to rule over God's Kingdom. And so we can make an important (and perhaps surprising) observation from this scenario: King Sha'ul shows us that the person who displays the spirit of the Anti-King is not necessarily limited to ethnic gentiles. And this is something we need to keep in mind as we muse and speculate in our modern era about just who the Anti-King (the Anti-Christ) that is soon to appear on the world stage will turn out to be. Let that sink in a bit as we move on.

To set the stage for today's lesson we need to recognize that from a historical and spiritual perspective God has, all along, been preparing His people for a king. Man's nature is such that we cannot live righteous and moral lives without a king. Humans need a strong and authoritative hand to guide us as individuals and as nations. The Bible shows us that we'll still need that strong hand, totally intolerant of rebellion, even into the 1000 year Reign of Messiah. If we but lived in proper spiritual harmony with the Father, the Heavenly King, we wouldn't require an earthly one as His agent; but that is not nearly the case, is it?

As with all things, God's will **and** timing **MUST** rein supreme otherwise something that on the surface seems right and good to our minds becomes sin. It was God's will for Israel to eventually have a king; but it was not God's **timing** for Israel to have a king at that moment when the leaders of Israel demanded that the great Judge and Prophet Samuel step down and turn his God-ordained leadership over to a monarch that they found suitable. The time for a king was indeed coming (and with God's blessing), but that time was not yet. It was not the divine timing when Samuel was confronted with these rebels. But the people weren't seeking

the Lord's timing, were they? They were impatient and wanted a king NOW! And they wanted a king that fit **their** notion of an earthly king: tall, handsome, charismatic, physically strong, and self-willed; the kind of king that generally ruled over all the gentile nations of the earth. The Lord gave Israel's leaders the desire of their hearts not as a blessing but a curse; God gave them Saul of Benjamin as their premature king. It was because the people had the wrong attitude that they would wind up with the wrong man at the wrong time; a man with the wrong attributes and even from the wrong tribe.

But in 1st Samuel 17 a corner has been turned; in Bethlehem of Judah a new king was anointed. David possessed the attributes that God demanded of a righteous king. This new king was anointed in God's timing; he was the right king, at the right time, with the right character traits, possessing the right attitude towards the Lord and he was from the right tribe (Judah). After Saul was used by the Lord to demonstrate what the wrong king for God's Kingdom looked like, He would now give them the right king so that they (and we) could see the stark difference and learn from it.

There are so many lessons in this for us to heed. One is that history progresses and that this progression is God's will. Times, circumstances, and cultures change and evolve, adhering to a never ending pattern; but God never goes backwards. God did not decide (with David) to undo the administration of His Kingdom by means of a monarchy and go back to an administration of His Kingdom by means of Judges. He did not try to role back time and reinstitute older and more primitive ways of civilization (which is what Islam is forever trying to do) because even as time moves forward and societies change and advance, God's laws and principles stand immutable and immovable. Our obligation, then, is as Solomon stated in the Book of Ecclesiastes

: ^V Ecclesiastes 12:13 *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*

It matters not what age we live in, or what particular spot on this earth we reside; as His redeemed it is only for us to scrupulously follow the ancient written Word of God, as led by the timeless Holy Spirit of God, in order to properly apply these God-principles to whatever contemporary stage of history that we occupy.

From David's day forward, as ordained by divine fiat, Israel was to be ruled by a king. Our own eternal future is as members of a Kingdom where God is the ultimate Monarch. It will be a spiritual kingdom, retaining some semblance of physical attributes, ruled over by the resurrected and soon-to-return God/Man, King Yeshua (as a mysterious combination of God and God's agent). Yet this tangible and real Kingdom of Perfection and Wholeness will exist on planet earth. David is the precursor of the type of righteous King who will rule over us (the Lord's Saved) forever.

Let's continue with our story of David and Goliath.

RE-READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 17: 17 – end

The giant Philistine warrior Goliath challenged the terrified Israelites to single combat, day after day, for 40 days. But not one of Israel's fighters had the courage to face his fears and take up the cause of God's Kingdom. The 40 days is not only a literal number, it is a consistent Biblical pattern that speaks of a time of trial or testing that is invariably followed by either divine chastisement or deliverance. This is our clue that what is transpiring here is not simply another of the endless battles between the armies of men, but rather is a God-ordained, God-orchestrated event with a Godly purpose.

The Philistines were attempting to control the natural superhighway of the Valley of Elah that connected Philistia with the hill country of Judah. If they succeeded they would have an easy flow of troops and supplies that would enable them to subdue the southern region of the Promised Land. Sha'ul watched from a safe distance, his top general Avner directing the Hebrew troops that were comprised of a militia of men contributed by each of the Israelite tribes. Jesse of Bethlehem, father of David, had sent his 3 oldest sons to join the war effort as representatives of his family. But after all this time had passed, he was now getting concerned for his sons and so decided to send David to gather a report.

Verse 16 once again explains that David was the family shepherd (a vocation that apparently suited him). So when David's father decides to send him to inquire about his brothers, David first has to put one of his helper's in charge of the flock. In a hindsight that can only be obtained after the coming of Messiah, we now can see this wonderful prophetic picture here of a faithful son (who was the earthly king) watching over not his but his father's sheep. But because another battle has to be fought and won, the shepherd must leave for a time but not without equipping and entrusting a faithful helper to care for the sheep.

David loads up with food to take with him. Because Israel had no standing professional army, and thus no armory or military infrastructure, each soldier was charged with bringing his own weapons and supplying his own food. Verse 20 says he "got up early in the morning" to set out for the Valley of Elah. When this rather innocuous phrase "got up early in the morning" is used in the Bible, it is not to add color to the story; rather it is a means to show that the person was anxious to obey and get on with the assigned task.

David arrives just as the Israelite troops were again taking up their posts for another day of what had become a stand-off between the opposing armies. After checking in with the soldiers in charge of the equipment, David runs to check on his brothers' welfare. And as he is talking with them out comes Goliath to shout his insults and challenge to the Israeli army. David watches with interest as the men of Israel don't move a muscle to respond. But he also overhears a discussion whereby the men are saying that King Saul will greatly reward the man who kills Goliath by giving that man his daughter and by exempting that man's entire family from ever again having to pay taxes or supplying labor or materials to the Kingdom. David can hardly believe his ears; all someone has to do is kill this ONE man and that man will marry into the royal family AND his entire family will have no more burdensome financial or military obligations to the monarchy. By now he's wondering why men aren't lining up to take advantage of this incredible offer! In his youthful exuberance he asks, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine anyway....?" Uncircumcised is meant to be an insulting epithet. He is essentially calling him a gentile. But the point is that this Philistine was NOT one of God's

people; Goliath was not of the chosen race and here he was challenging God's army. This was incomprehensible to David that such a man would be allowed to babble on like this in such a blasphemous manner, and not one Israelite would lift a finger to stop it.

So when David keeps on asking questions about this situation it starts to annoy his oldest brother, Eliav. David is a mere youth, a shepherd of all things, and has only just arrived with supplies for the soldiers. He hasn't been stuck out here for the past several weeks. He bears no sword or spear; he hasn't been assigned to do battle. Eliav responds to David's bravado the way most older brothers would; he more or less tells him to shut up because he has no idea what he's talking about. Eliav tells him that it's one thing to come and be a spectator and quite another to participate in the battle and put your life on the line. But this doesn't deter David; he merely goes on and asks someone else about what King Saul promised, obviously trying to verify if this is just a soldier's rumor or the offer is real.

When it was becoming clear that David was seriously contemplating going out to fight Goliath, an unidentified person went to Sha'ul and told him about it. Sha'ul summoned David and David told the king that it was making no sense for this thing to go on and on, day after day, and that David intended to face this giant warrior himself and put an end to it. One can only imagine King Saul's impulsive amusement at such a thought. David was young and had spent his short life as a shepherd. He was standing there before the King in his shepherd's garments. To go out and confront this enormous Philistine, who had been trained up as a warrior since he was a child, was foolhardy to the extreme.

Saul wasn't worried that some shepherd boy might get himself killed; Saul was concerned that he would look foolish by sending out this fellow who obviously wasn't a trained soldier. Besides the way this thing worked was that it was the King that decided who he would send as Israel's representative warrior because the consequences of that decision were immense. Recall that the deal Goliath proposed was that if the King of Israel agreed to settle this matter by means of single combat, then the losing side would simply lay down their arms and submit to the victor. If Goliath won (an outcome that seemed certain) then King Saul and all his men would be agreeing to become voluntary vassals of the Philistines (which is what the Philistines had wanted all along). The upside (however unlikely) was that if a man from Israel happened to win, the Philistines would submit to Israel and Saul's reputation as a great warrior/king would spread all over the region. One battle between two men for all the marbles.

When Saul said that David had no experience in combat, David responded that he had fought off lions and bears many times. That as a shepherd it was his job to put his life on the line for his sheep and to protect them from whatever fierce creature might assume to come and prey on the flock. By the way, lions and bears were common in that day in Canaan. This has been validated in the region not only in written inscriptions but in hundreds of pictographs of men hunting bears and killing lions.

One can almost see the gears turning in Saul's mind and he and David conversed. Saul was caught in a vise. Things were not going well. At his calling the militia had been mustered to this spot to face the Philistines, yet not an arrow had been shot in anger in the month and a half or more since the men had arrived. It was a deadlock. And while the professional and well-

supplied Philistine army could be forced to remain there indefinitely, Saul's militia could not. Soon the men would grow weary of this and leave. The Hebrews had herds to maintain, fields and crops to attend. They had trades to ply and grapevines to prune. To simply sit there (day without end) in the hills above the valley plain and listen to Goliath yelling insults at them had its limits. Saul knew this.

It was painfully obvious by now that none of the men who had come ostensibly to fight were ever going to lay their life on the line for the sake of King and Kingdom by facing Goliath. Those who had experience in battle determined that they had no chance and weren't about to waste their life for nothing. But there in the language of youthful naivety was a kind of reminder of another time. A voice of strength was coming from that shepherd who stood before the King of Israel; a voice that was based on simple faith and not the bitter pragmatism that has come with the disappointments of life and from the sadness of a failed leadership and from being abandoned by the God of Israel. Hope; it was hope that Saul was hearing (and feeling) and he had not experienced that emotion in a very long time.

Besides, says David, this isn't about the two biggest kids on the block having a disagreement. This is about some pagan gentiles with their false gods daring to challenge God's army and by extension, God. This can't be allowed to stand and if Saul will but respond this will be over in a heartbeat. What David actually says is that Israel's army is the hosts of **Elohim Chayyim** (the hosts of the Living God). While we today hear the term "Living God" and think of it mostly as but one of many poetic but properly pious titles for the Lord, in fact to the Hebrew it had a very important meaning. It meant that (as compared to the other gods) Yehoveh was an active participant in the lives of men. He directed the affairs of humans. The Lord determined outcomes and personally balanced the scales of justice according to His will.

Saul, knowing that from a rational point of view there really is no other choice, agrees to allow David to go forth as Israel's Champion and battle Goliath. But of course, since Saul's throne and kingdom were on the line, Saul wanted David to have whatever advantage might be available, so he offered to dress David in his personal armor (which, let's face it, was just gathering dust anyway!) At least David would go into combat wearing regal armor and thus provide a more suitable (and less embarrassing) appearance that both sides expected to see.

David reluctantly puts on the king's bronze paraphernalia but it doesn't feel right; it's so cumbersome he can't move in it. "I'm not used to them", he says. David isn't really speaking in lofty or veiled spiritual terms; what he was saying was literally so. Saul, recall, was a very tall man and David was but an average-sized Hebrew so it didn't fit. And armor was heavy and cumbersome and it only helped if the battle tactics one used were designed to be used with armor. But unknown to David at the time he was demonstrating and speaking a God-principle with a deeply rich lesson for God's Church as a whole, and for individual Believers, to hear and obey. And I think that Alfred Edersheim, that great Messianic Jew who lived and wrote one and half centuries ago, said it so eloquently: "The first demand upon us is to be spiritual; the next is to be genuine and true, without seeking to clothe ourselves in the armor of another".

Let me paraphrase his marvelous statement: why would the Redeemed of God employ the strength of the world in a spiritual battle? Why would a Believer, or the institution that purports

to be the earthly authority and organization of the Kingdom of God, rely on the methods and means that the world relies upon to conduct its business? Why would God's righteous king don the armor of the Anti-King? It's not that David was about to enter battle unarmed; it's just that his weapon was to be what he knew how to use, that also reflected who he was. His was the standard weapon of a shepherd (which he was), not of a warrior-king (which he wasn't, at least not yet). Messiah reflected this same God-principle when He came to us first as a shepherd and so he used the means of a shepherd (self sacrifice) to accomplish the Father's redemptive will. He will come later as a warrior-king and at that time use the means of a warrior-king (armed destruction with an army) to further accomplish the Father's redemptive will.

The story moves quickly now. David takes off the armor, picks up his shepherd's staff (here called a stick), and in the river bed that runs through the Elah Valley floor picks up 5 smooth stones to use with his sling. Note that this sling is no child's toy; it was a respected weapon. Armies of this era often employed entire divisions of stone-slingers as a deadly and effective tactic. According to Judges 20:16 there was a division of 700 left-handed stone-slingers from the tribe of Benjamin "each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not miss."

Goliath was out in the open when he spied David walking briskly towards him, shepherd's weapon in hand. Whereas King Saul was immediately amused at the sight of David, Goliath was incredulous. What was this: a joke? Goliath looks David over and sees a youth (in Hebrew **na'ar**) with fine youthful features. Goliath had expected a grizzled and scarred warrior to fight him. It is said that David had ruddy cheeks, red hair, and good looks. Interestingly David had a similar hair color and skin tone as Esau (which is why Esau was given the nickname of Edom, which means red). This was not common; the average Hebrew typically bore olive skin and dark brown or ink black hair. So even though he was not physically imposing, he was boyishly handsome in a refined kind of way.

Goliath was insulted and infuriated; this boy did not represent an honorable challenge. He cursed David, invoking his god, and promised to feed him to the birds. In other words he wouldn't allow David a proper burial (this was a great horror to the ancient world's mindset). Just as we have been given a sharp contrast between the old king, Saul, the Anti-King; and the new king, David, the righteous king, so now we have another contrast between the means of war between Goliath and David. David says YOU come at me with typical weapons, but I come at you in the name of Yehoveh. Goliath came dressed for an earthly battle; he didn't realize that he wasn't properly attired for a spiritual confrontation with God. And then David further aggravates the great Philistine giant by saying that in a few moments David will attack him, cut his head off, and give the dead bodies of the Philistine army to those same birds Goliath threatened to feed David.

David shows that his main concern is for YHWH's reputation. Thus when this youngish, small Hebrew shepherd kills this giant enemy warrior, everyone present will know without doubt that the God of Israel is present and powerful. Stop there for a moment. While we take this passage to mean that there actually IS a God of Israel named Yehoveh, that is NOT what this meant to David or to Goliath. In other words, while in a modern world where atheism and secular humanism are sweeping the globe, it might appear to us that the issue in this passage is whether or not there is such a thing as "God". But here it has to do with the territoriality

traditions concerning gods.

Throughout the Biblical era (and especially so the Old Testament) pagans and Hebrews alike believed that there were many gods. The Hebrews were not really monotheistic; rather they believed that while other nations had their gods and goddesses (usually, several gods and goddesses), Israel had only one God, Yehoveh. In some ways this made Israel a laughingstock; they were seen by the gentiles as such a poor and lowly people that only ONE God would have them, when all the other nations had as many as a dozen or more gods. Since each nation had their own gods, it was believed that the gods were bound by that nation's territory. If one god was more powerful than another, then perhaps that god's people could drive another people out of their own territory; and thus the victorious god would take over some of another god's territory. That is what was going on here.

Recall that this battle is taking place in Canaan, in Judah's territory. One would expect the God of Israel to be firmly entrenched in His territory, Judah. But since the Philistines were here, and since they were definitely seen as the more powerful force, the Hebrew soldiers were not at all sure that Yehoveh was still there, while the Philistines were quite sure that Dagan had usurped Yehoveh, God of Israel. Thus we're about to get a familiar demonstration that will set the record straight, says David.

David loads a stone into his sling, gives it a couple of swings to gain acceleration and zips the small projectile towards the only unprotected part of Goliath's body: his face. It strikes him in the forehead, knocking him unconscious, and Goliath falls with a mighty thud. For some reason we're given the information that Goliath fell "face down" (before David). Let me explain the significance of that.

What we have is a pattern and this event corresponds to a much earlier one. Turn your bibles to 1st Samuel 5:1 -4

READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 5:1 – 4

Note how the statue of Dagan, the Philistine god, falls face down before the presence of Yehoveh (the Ark of the Covenant), and then its head falls off. Here in Chapter 17 we have Dagan's great Philistine warrior, Goliath, fall face down before the presence of Yehoveh (the Holy Spirit upon David, and David as God's earthly agent), and then Goliath's head is removed.

Falling face down is to fall prostrate; it is the position of submission. The idol of Dagan fell face down in submission to the God of Israel and now the giant Goliath falls face down in submission to the God of Israel. This meaning was not at all lost on either side. The Philistines panicked because their god couldn't save them, and the Hebrews now knew (as David told Goliath they would learn in verses 46 and 47) that Israel's God is still here and active and fighting for His people.

Now I find it interesting that we're told that the Philistines fled. Why is that so interesting? Because that wasn't the deal that their great Champion Goliath had proposed. The deal was

that whichever side lost would throw down their weapons and submit to the winning side. Instead the Philistines reneged and took off for home. They ran for Gath and Ekron, two cities of the Philistine Pentapolis. Many Philistine soldiers were chased down and killed and when the Israelites had ventured far enough into Philistine territory to accomplish the slaughter and make their point, they returned and plundered the camping area of the Philistine army at the Valley of Elah.

David took Goliath's head and armor as a prize. We're told that he put Goliath's armor in his tent. But we need to understand that the term "tent" didn't mean an animal skin shelter there at Elah. Rather "tent" is an often used Biblical euphemism that simply means the family abode. Then we're told that he took Goliath's head and deposited it at Jerusalem. There are all kinds of interesting issues with taking Goliath's head there that we'll examine next week.

But for now just let me end today by pointing out that modern Israel is in desperate need of a modern David. As I put this lesson together my mind overflowed with mental pictures, and my eyes filled with tears, as I thought about how Israel of today is behaving and thinking exactly as Saul and his militia. And how the Palestinians (Greek for Philistines) is acting in concert with their Arab and Muslim neighbors (and now Western Europe and to some degree the new United States Government) as Goliath who stands arrogantly and fearlessly to threaten God's people.

Hundreds of millions, perhaps even a billion people, are ready to dismantle Israel and annihilate the Jewish people. Do as we say, give up land, or be wiped out. Together the combined armies and treasuries of these gentile nations are overwhelming. And the Israeli government, and much if not most of the Jewish population, looks upon those gentile governments and forces and thinks what earthly possibility is there to stand up against them, let alone to defeat them. And they are correct; there is none.

But what neither Israel nor these gentile nations understand is that this only appears to be a human geo-political confrontation. Rather, like it was in the Valley of Elah, this is a spiritual battle and Yehoveh is present. It is His war. It is His land. It is His people.

I don't know if another human David will appear or not; I don't believe so. Rather I think the deliverer of Israel, the offspring of David, the Son of God, the Messiah, will be the next "David" to slay this modern Goliath. When all the world's armies gather in the Valley of Jezreel at the battlefield called Armageddon; and when the nations boast that their advanced weapons and overwhelming numbers will make short work of tiny intransigent Israel, Messiah will appear and swiftly fell Goliath face down, in submission, to the Father. And in this way Israel, and all who are joined to her by faith, will be saved. May it be today.