



Community Group Discussion Guide

January 5, 2025

1 Samuel 17:1-58 | The Battle Belongs to the LORD

MOTIVATE

- ⇒ **Starter question: What do you know about the story of David and Goliath? Why do you think it's such a well-known story?**

DISCUSS

In 1 Samuel 16, God told Samuel that David would be Israel's replacement for Saul. God's selection of David was not based on his outward appearance but on his heart. Although anointed as the next king of Israel, David remained a shepherd boy. 1 Samuel 17:1-58 presents the imminent threat of the Philistines, including the giant Goliath, creating a situation where David's courage and faith were tested. For the rest of 1 Samuel, Saul's disobedient leadership is contrasted with David's obedient faithfulness. David began to prosper as he demonstrated what it meant to be a leader after God's own heart.¹

- ⇒ **What do you know about David's life up to this point?**
⇒ **How has God been preparing David for the events that unfold in this chapter?**

1 Samuel 17:1-3 Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. And they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. **2** And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines. **3** And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them.

In the final years of the Old Testament judges' period, the Philistines were Israel's greatest military threat. Defeating them was the principal reason for Israel's request for a king. As 1 Samuel 17 opens, the Philistines had assembled their army on the western frontier of Judah, near Bethlehem and Gath--one of five principal Philistine cities.

The Philistines had already come up the Aijalon Valley, and if they got much farther, they could come up the ridge route into the hill country and threaten Bethlehem, Hebron, and Saul's capital, Gibeah. This was a desperate situation for Israel. In response to the Philistine invasion, Saul's army assembled in the Valley of Elah directly opposite the Philistine camp. The two armies were separated geographically by a dry riverbed called a "wadi."

- ⇒ **What were Saul's choices at this point?**
⇒ **Describe what you think might have been going on in the two camps.**

1 Samuel 17:4-7 And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. **5** He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. **6** And he had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. **7** The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. And his shield-bearer went before him.

In that dry plain between the two armies, a champion named Goliath from Gath emerged from the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall, wearing combat attire that appeared indomitable. At a time when most Israelite soldiers wore only basic clothing in battle, Goliath was clothed in metal. His head was covered with a helmet of bronze. His trunk was protected by a "a coat of mail" weighing

¹ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). 1, 2 Samuel (Vol. 6, pp. 113-115). Holman Reference

approximately 126 pounds. A coat of mail was typically made of small metal rings interlocked together, providing protection against swords and arrows. Goliath even had bronze armor on his legs.

He carried a javelin of bronze and a spear with an iron head that weighed about fifteen pounds. Iron was the preferred metal for implements of warfare because it was strong, nonmalleable, and could retain a sharp edge better than bronze. A weapon of this massive weight, while intimidating in appearance, would have been quite awkward to use. It was apparently designed mainly to intimidate.

In addition to all of this, Goliath had a “shield bearer” who went before him. This passage presents the longest description of military attire in the Old Testament. Goliath’s physical stature, armor, weaponry, and shield bearer must have made him appear invincible.

- ⇒ **Why do you think the writer included so many details about Goliath’s appearance and armor?**
- ⇒ **Do you have a tendency to focus on the size of “the giant” in your life? Why are you prone to do this?**

1 Samuel 17:8-11 He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, “Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me. **9** If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.” **10** And the Philistine said, “I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together.” **11** When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

Confident in the superiority of his equipment, as well as in his great natural strength, Goliath stepped forth between the two armies and spoke defiantly to the Israelites. So certain was Goliath of winning the fight that he committed his fellow countrymen to slavery if he failed.

Goliath challenged Israel to send out their “champion” to do battle with him. One-on-one combat as a substitute for combat between two full armies apparently was not regularly practiced in Semitic societies. It may have been more commonly used by the Philistines. The sight of Goliath with his height, armor, and weapons was certainly frightening, but when Saul and the Israelites heard his words, they were dismayed and terrified.

- ⇒ **How does the story show the dangers of trusting in one’s own strength?**
- ⇒ **What does their response to Goliath indicate about the Israelites’ faith in God?**

1 Samuel 17:12-19 Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul, the man was already old and advanced in years. **13** The three oldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. **14** David was the youngest. The three eldest followed Saul, **15** but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem. **16** For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening. **17** And Jesse said to David his son, “Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain, and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers. **18** Also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See if your brothers are well and bring some token from them.” **19** Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.

In contrast to Israel’s response to the Philistine threat, the focus turns to David, the eighth and youngest son of Jesse, an Ephrathite from the tribe of Judah. Jesse’s three oldest sons had gone to war with Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul and the army to bring food and rations while also helping to tend his father’s sheep in Bethlehem.

- ⇒ **Why is it important to note David’s lineage throughout his story?**

The standoff between the Israelites and the Philistines had lasted forty days. At the beginning and end of each day, Goliath would come forth, taunt Saul, and defy the Israelite army. The length of the

hostilities meant that David's brothers would soon run out of provisions. Since each family was expected to supply the needed rations for their sons in service, Jesse sent David to resupply his brothers. This errand took David to the front line and introduced him to the Philistine challenger.

⇒ **Why do you think Jesse sent David and not a servant to bring the food?**

1 Samuel 17:20-27 And David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went, as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the encampment as the host was going out to the battle line, shouting the war cry. **21** And Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. **22** And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers. **23** As he talked with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him. **24** All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid. **25** And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. And the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel." **26** And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" **27** And the people answered him in the same way, "So shall it be done to the man who kills him."

After leaving his father's flock with another shepherd, David reached the Israelite camp just in time to see them draw up in battle lines opposite the Philistines. As David began interacting with his brothers, Goliath came out and shouted his usual defiance. David watched his fellow Israelites run in great fear. Since Saul was afraid to fight Goliath, he did a predictable and desperate thing—he offered a big reward to anyone who would. Saul promised great wealth, marriage into his family, and exemption from taxes.

⇒ **What does Saul's offer of a reward indicate about his faith in God?**

The close-up view of Goliath caused panic among Israel's troops, but David was indignant that anyone, no matter how frightening or powerful, should presume to insult the people of Israel and "defy the armies of the living God." To David this was equal to defying the living God Himself.

⇒ **How did David's reaction and words show him to be "a man after God's own heart?"**

1 Samuel 17:28-32: Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men. And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle." **29** And David said, "What have I done now? Was it not but a word?" **30** And he turned away from him toward another, and spoke in the same way, and the people answered him again as before. **31** When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him. **32** And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

David appears to have caused quite a stir with his questioning. Eliab, David's oldest brother, accused him of leaving their father's flock in the desert because David had an evil heart. He assumed that David only wanted to come and watch the battle.

⇒ **How do you interpret Eliab's anger toward David?**

⇒ **What does David's response to Eliab's criticism teach us about handling this type of negativity?**

⇒ **Why is it important not to let others' doubts discourage us?**

David's outrage at the blasphemies of Goliath did not go unnoticed and was reported to Saul. David reassured Saul that Israel need not lose heart because of this Philistine. Instead, David astonished everyone by declaring that he himself would go and fight Goliath.

⇒ **Why is this such a great moment in Scripture?**

1 Samuel 17:33-37 And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth." **34** But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, **35** I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. **36** Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God" **37** And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"

Saul first rejected David's offer to fight Goliath because David was still a boy and Goliath was a giant. However, David rejected this line of reasoning, protesting that he had had sufficient experience in battling the lion and the bear. David was certain that just as the Lord had delivered him from the paws of powerful animals, He would also deliver him from the hand of this Philistine.

⇒ **To whom did David credit his past victories? How did this affect his trust in God in this moment?**

⇒ **How does reviewing our past with God give us faith for today and hope for tomorrow?**

1 Samuel 17:38-40 Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, **39** and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." So, David put them off. **40** Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.

David was outfitted in Saul's own armor, a bronze helmet, and a coat of mail. David fastened on Saul's sword and tried to walk around in all this military gear, realizing quickly it would be a detriment to him. Instead, David picked up his familiar staff and chose five smooth stones from the wadi. Typical sling stones were about the size of tennis balls and weighed about a pound apiece. Taking his sling, David approached Goliath.

⇒ **How does David balance preparation (choosing his sling and stones) with trust in God?**

⇒ **What can this teach us about combining practical action with spiritual faith?**

1 Samuel 17:41-47 And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. **42** And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. **43** And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. **44** The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field." **45** Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. **46** This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, **47** and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand."

The initial confrontation between David and Goliath consisted of words. Goliath noted that David was only a boy, ruddy and handsome. This infuriated Goliath, and he let loose with insults and curses

designed to demoralize his unlikely opponent. David responded to Goliath's threats by speaking the truth. David was not intimidated by Goliath's insults but completely trusted the battle to God. David came toward Goliath "in the name of the LORD God of Heaven."

- ⇒ **What qualities of David stand out in this story?**
- ⇒ **What characteristics of God are revealed in this story?**

1 Samuel 17:48-51 When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. **49** And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. **50** So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone and struck the Philistine and killed him. There was no sword in the hand of David. **51** Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.

The words stopped and the conflict escalated rapidly. The giant moved toward David and David ran quickly to meet Goliath. The giant was felled by David's one stone, slung with such deadly accuracy that it penetrated the one vulnerable spot in Goliath's elaborate armor. The impact was strong enough to sink the stone into the Philistine's brow, and he fell face down on the ground. David ran to Goliath, taking the Philistine's own sword and cutting off his head. When the Philistines saw what had happened to Goliath, they turned and ran.

- ⇒ **What kind of faith was David demonstrating by running quickly toward a nine foot, militarily experienced giant?**
- ⇒ **How did David's faith increase Israel's faith? What application can you make from this?**

1 Samuel 17:52-58 And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron. **53** And the people of Israel came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp. **54** And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent. **55** As soon as Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is this youth?" And Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know." **56** And the king said, "Inquire whose son the boy is." **57** And as soon as David returned from the striking down of the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. **58** And Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" And David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

Giving the battle cry, the Israelites pursued the Philistines up to Gath, Goliath's hometown. The Israelites plundered the Philistine camp and David put Goliath's armor in his tent. In spite of this, David was still so insignificant that neither Saul nor Abner, Saul's top commander, knew who he was. After the battle, Abner brought David to the king, and Saul repeated his question, "Whose son are you?" David identified himself as the son of "your servant, Jesse, of Bethlehem." The proof of David's success was the head of Goliath in his hand. David had trusted God and God had given him a magnificent victory.

- ⇒ **Discuss this quote: David with no armor, no shield, and no sword defeated Goliath. God gave David a stunning victory with a sling and a stone.**
- ⇒ **Do you have a "sling and a stone" victory story to tell?**

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: Christian believers must be zealous for the honor of God and His Son, our Savior. This is especially true of Christian leaders, who must not shrink before the challenges of God's enemies. We cannot afford to ignore their threats and be silent before their lies and half-truths.

- ⇒ **How does this story remind you of God's faithfulness to His people?**
- ⇒ **In what ways has God helped you overcome obstacles in your own life?**

- ⇒ **How does David's courage inspire you to act boldly in your faith?**
- ⇒ **What role does prayer and knowing God's character play in building this confidence?**

2. Pray: Pray that the familiarity of this passage doesn't cause you to miss how God is working in your life today. Praise God for being a "giant killer." Ask Him to reveal where you need courage to stand against the giants in your life.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

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- *Biblehub.com, John Gil's Exposition, 1 Samuel 17, 12-14-2024.*