

LifeWay Family Bible Series for Jan. 11: Courage plus faith produces incredible results_122203

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Courage plus faith produces incredible results

- ◆ *1 Samuel 17:1-58*

By David Jenkins

New Hope Baptist Church, Big Sandy

On a visit to the Valley of Elah in Israel, the traditional site of the contest between David and Goliath, an Israeli friend accompanying us had brought along a slingshot fashioned like those used in ancient times. It was made of two strips of leather attached to either side of a small leather cup in which the stone was placed. The two strips were held in the hand and swung overhead. At the proper moment, one strip was released, and the stone was flung from the cup toward the target. My Israeli friend demonstrated the procedure for me, and expertly caused the stone to sail across the small valley. He invited me to try it. My effort was a total disaster. I learned he had developed his skill with the slingshot through practice since he was a

child.

Likewise David, no doubt, had spent the long days alone in the fields with his sheep practicing with his slingshot. Yet more important than his skill in using that primitive weapon was his faith in God's presence with him. His boldness was not presumption but reliance on God's power.

Goliath's challenge

The story of David and Goliath is so familiar it is used to describe any conflict in which a considerable inequity exists between the combatants. We often hear such conflicts, whether between athletes, companies or nations, referred to as "David-and-Goliath" situations. The event has a special appeal not only to children who delight in hearing and retelling the story, but also to adults who are faced often with the giants of the world. We find courage and inspiration in the simple faith of David.



The Philistines had been enemies of God's people from ancient times. They had a highly trained military organization, equipped with horses, chariots, numerous foot soldiers and archers (1 Samuel 13:5; 31:3). The armor of Philistine soldiers included bronze helmets, coats of mail, leg protectors, spears and shields.

This particular skirmish with the Philistines was one of many during King Saul's reign. Once again the two armies faced each other in this particular valley. On this occasion, the Philistines used a unique ploy. Among their troops was a giant of a man who was a frightening spectacle to the Israelites. This giant Goliath was more than nine feet tall. His armor and weapons were formidable indeed. Furthermore, he was quite the actor, and his brazen taunts had terrified Saul's army.

An unexpected response

With verse 12, the scene changes from the encampment of the Israelite and Philistine armies to David's home in Bethlehem. Jesse, David's father, was an old man. Three of his eight sons had enlisted in Saul's army and were engaged in the confrontation with the Philistines in the Valley of Elah.

David, the youngest son, was responsible for keeping his father's sheep. David learned early the art of shepherding, which prepared him for the awesome task of shepherding a nation as their king. Moses had 40 years' experience shepherding his father-in-law's sheep before God sent him to Egypt to deliver his people and "shepherd" them through 40 years of wilderness wandering.

Jesse's concern for his older sons in Saul's army was reflected in the assignment given David. He was to take food for his brothers and the commander, find out how his brothers were faring and bring back a report to his father. David arrived at the front in time to hear Goliath's daily challenge. David could not believe Saul's army trembled in fear because of Goliath. He considered their cowardice a disgrace, because they were the "armies of the living God" (v. 26).

David's oldest brother, Eliab, was embarrassed because of David's boldness, rebuked and chided him, and demanded he go home. He refused, and eventually secured Saul's permission to accept Goliath's challenge. After refusing to wear Saul's armor, David took his shepherd's staff, "five smooth stones" which he had retrieved from the bed of the brook, and with his slingshot in his hand, he approached Goliath.

Claiming victory for the Lord

Goliath was livid with anger when he saw David representing the army of Saul. David's reply to the Philistine's curses was that he had come only "in

the name of the Lord." When the enraged Goliath rushed to meet David, David ran toward him, put one of the stones in his sling and struck Goliath in the forehead. The Philistine fell on his face. David ran to the giant, took his sword from its sheath, and cut off his head. The army of the Philistines suddenly lost their courage and fled, for their champion was dead.

The army of the Israelites then pursued the Philistines, killing and wounding many of them. It is important to note that David countered Goliath's speech not with a threat, but with an announcement. David emphasized the difference between their armor. David came "in the name of the Lord" and not with weapons of warfare. Most important of all, David vowed that because of the outcome of their contest, everyone would know that there "is a God in Israel" (v. 46).

Question for discussion

- ◆ How has God enabled you to overcome a difficult situation and brought honor to his name?

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