

# Explore the Bible: Delivered!

July 6, 2016

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for July 24 focuses on 1 Samuel 17.*

## **The High Ground (1 Samuel 17:1-11)**

The narratives of Scripture often move at a seemingly breathless pace. Moments of great import for individuals and the nation of Israel as a whole are described with an economy of words and sometimes with little explanation. Then the narrative sweeps along to the next dramatic event. Yet sometimes, the story pauses at key moments, and a wealth of detail emerges. 1 Samuel 17 is such a place. The scene is carefully set in 1 Samuel 17:1-3 in detail we obviously are meant to visualize. The Philistines are back in force. But this time, there appears a champion named Goliath. The narrator helps us see through the eyes of the frightened armies of Israel—first his incredible height (the tallest man to live in the modern era was Robert Wadlow, who measured 8 foot 11 inches), then the catalogue of armor a combatant would have to penetrate, then the enormous weapons this potential giant-killer would have to brave.

Goliath's challenge was not likely intended to be binding. It was trash talk, and it had its desired effect. Goliath was the Philistines' advantage, and his personal challenge was meant to force Israel to try and answer in kind. There was one man in Israel who would have been the most likely candidate to take up the Philistine's challenge, one man who was more qualified by physicality and by role. Saul was "a head taller" than everyone else in Israel (1 Samuel 10:23), the one chosen to fulfill the people's desires to "go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Samuel 8:20). This challenge is his responsibility to take on, no matter the outcome. Instead, Saul is gripped with the same fear that grips his army. Saul is a battle-hardened leader, and his men are not novices. The Philistine, though, is too much for

them to contemplate.

### **Fortune and Faith (1 Samuel 17:20-31)**

The standoff between the Philistines and Israelites drags on for 40 days, and so David is sent to resupply his brothers and their commanders. As in his introduction in the previous chapter, David's action is rapid obedience to his father. At the sound of the war cry, however, he runs to the battle line and hears Goliath's daily taunt (1 Samuel 17:22-24). As the men discuss the ongoing situation, we discover Saul has not been completely inactive. He has promised wealth, his daughter in marriage and tax exemption for the family of the man who kills Goliath. Instead of taking on the challenge himself, Saul is using the trappings of the monarchy to sway one of his men to take action. The man who achieves this will become wealthy, will become part of the king's family, and will bless his own family in the process.

In this context, we encounter David's first words in Scripture, "What will be done for the man kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel?" David's first actions have been one of faithful obedience to his family and to his king (the curiously placed story of David playing the harp for Saul in 1 Samuel 16:14-22). His first words are about reward. "What do I get if I kill the giant?" Of course, the question itself is couched in terms that portray the deed as one done for others. David's question is phrased as, "What do I get if I provide this service to the community?" In his second recorded sentence, David becomes the first character in this chapter to mention God. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

David is introduced in speech for the first time as a man seeking fortune, yet also a man of faith. He did not manufacture the circumstances that would bring him prosperity, but it is of great importance to him. He asks about the reward again in 1 Samuel 17:30 for further verification. His

brother accuses him of conceit, and of being a voyeur of battle. The latter charge is clearly wrong. David has no interest in living vicariously. He is going to be involved. David always tends to say the right thing in public, things that focus on Israel as a whole and on Israel's God as a power to be reckoned with. Yet he is introduced by his speech to the other men as one whose motivations are mingled. As the narrative continues to recount story after story of David's prospering, the question of what motivates him continues to lie just below the surface.

### **Prior Experience (1 Samuel 17:32-37)**

David's interview with Saul presents his longest speech thus far, and it reframes the picture of David shepherding his father's flocks. Instead of the idyllic picture of a young shepherd playing the harp to sooth the sheep in quiet fields beside peaceful streams, we are presented with a young man who chased down lions and bears, grabbed them by hand and killed them to save stolen sheep. David the shepherd is more Masai warrior than Little Bo Peep.

He tells Saul he plans to do something similar to Goliath. Although his narration has been about himself on the offensive, he gives all credit to Yahweh for defense. It is the LORD who delivered David from lion and bear, and it is the LORD who will deliver him from the Philistine. At this statement, Saul now names Yahweh for the first time in the chapter, as he gives David the charge to go to battle.

Why would Saul let him go? Was Saul so convinced by David's stories and conviction of deliverance he truly believed it was possible for the young man to defeat Goliath? Or, like his offer of wealth, marriage into the king's family and tax exemption, was this a plan to rouse other more capable fighters from among his men? Would the sight of a young man not old enough to soldier marching out into the valley shame his warriors into taking up arms? Would the martyrdom of David spark the whole army to

battle to avenge him? The question is open to interpretation.

### **Showdown (1 Samuel 17:40-51)**

Goliath the professional soldier is singularly unimpressed with the champion the Israelites have to offer. We see from Goliath's perspective they have sent a ruddy, handsome boy with a stick to challenge him. The Israelites have lost their minds and sent a child beauty pageant contestant to challenge him, but Goliath has no qualms about killing him.

David's answer to Goliath's boast is a sermon on the power of Yahweh. Goliath is in big trouble because he has defied the armies of Israel and the God who empowers them. The name of Yahweh Almighty is David's banner and his weapon. The result will be that those gathered will know that Yahweh saves, and the whole world will know there is a God in Israel.

The action then moves quickly—the stone, the sling, Goliath face down on the ground, and then David killing and beheading him with his own sword. At David's anointing, he remained quiet before his family and Samuel. Now, before his brothers, the army, Saul and Goliath, David has proved by action and in speech this his and Yahweh's story now. By action and speech, the two must be considered together.

Can this be said about our lives? What if we spoke and acted so that what we did and said was inseparably connected to what God wants to do and to say?