

# 1 SAMUEL—WEEK 12

## FAITH AND COURAGE



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is David and Goliath by Titian (1487–1576)  
On display in the church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, Italy*

Chapter 17 of 1 Samuel is the battle between David and Goliath. It's a striking illustration of how faith looks like courage. David knows he has nothing to fear. To everyone around him, it looks like he has conquered his fear.

But that's not it.

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! Samuel, Week 12 — Faith and Courage  
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1 1 Samuel 17:1–11

*Now the Philistines gathered their armies together to battle, and were gathered at Sochoh, which belongs to Judah; they encamped between Sochoh and Azekah, in Ephes Dammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and they encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array against the Philistines. The Philistines stood on a mountain on one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side, with a valley between them.*

*And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. And he had bronze armor on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders. Now the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his iron spearhead weighed six hundred shekels; and a shield-bearer went before him. Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel, and said to them, "Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. 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." And the Philistine said, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together." When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.*

Goliath's defiant challenge is not normally how armies fight. "Champion warfare" is a common theme in fiction in everything from the *Iliad* to episodes of *Star Trek*. But it's virtually unheard of in the real world.

The problem is that the battle between the champions doesn't resolve the issue. The armies end up fighting anyway, instead of honoring the champion warfare "contract." That's what will ultimately happen here too.

Not surprisingly, the Philistines are afraid to go to war with Israel.

We can't be sure exactly how tall Goliath is, but he's clearly larger than anyone else of that time. His *coat of mail* works out to be well over a hundred pounds—and that's not counting the rest of his armor.

He's an imposing sight. You could hit him with almost anything you've got, and he'd just laugh at you (or so everyone thought).

But *Saul and all Israel* shouldn't be afraid of this guy. When the twelve spies scouted out the promised land back in Numbers 13, they thought everyone was this big. Except for Joshua and Caleb, they were all terrified of them.

Their fear was a lack of faith then, and it's a lack of faith now.

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So, the whole place is just crawling with faithless cowards. Goliath is the only one who isn't afraid.

So, "the fields are ripe" for David to come strolling into the picture.

2 1 Samuel 17:12–23

*Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, whose name was Jesse, and who had eight sons. And the man was old, advanced in years, in the days of Saul. The three oldest sons of Jesse had gone to follow Saul to the battle. The names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. David was the youngest. And the three oldest followed Saul. But David occasionally went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.*

*And the Philistine drew near and presented himself forty days, morning and evening.*

*Then Jesse said to his son David, "Take now for your brothers an ephah of this dried grain and these ten loaves, and run to your brothers at the camp. And carry these ten cheeses to the captain of their thousand, and see how your brothers fare, and bring back news of them." Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.*

*So David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, and took the things and went as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the camp as the army was going out to the fight and shouting for the battle. For Israel and the Philistines had drawn up in battle array, army against army. And David left his supplies in the hand of the supply keeper, ran to the army, and came and greeted his brothers. Then as he talked with them, there was the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, coming up from the armies of the Philistines; and he spoke according to the same words. So David heard them.*

This section sets the stage for David's epic battle with Goliath. There are a couple of details in the wording that are important to how this will play out.

First, it says that Goliath *presented himself forty days, morning and evening*. It most definitely does not say "from" morning "until" evening. Goliath did not stand out there in the hot sun all day. In fact, he didn't stand out there in the hot sun at all. The Hebrew word translated as morning (הַשְּׁקָמָה, ha-shkame) isn't the normal word for morning (בֹּקֶר, bo-qer). Ha-shkame literally means "the early."

Goliath is avoiding the heat of the day. He comes out twice a day and challenges the Israelites. Then seeing no response, he returns. Thus, his stamina is untested. His actual fighting skill is unknown too.

Second, notice the word *keeper* appearing twice in the last paragraph of today's text. Samuel makes a point of noting that David was not being irresponsible, first with the sheep and then with his supplies. This highlights that there was nothing unusual or extreme in David's behavior.

David is just being a good kid when he stumbles on the scene.

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As we'll see, David is the right person to fight Goliath. Here, he's in the right place at the right time to hear Goliath's challenge. All the pieces of God's plan are converging.

God's providential hand in events is rarely just last minute intervention.

3 1 Samuel 17:24–30

*And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were dreadfully afraid. So the men of Israel said, “Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel; and it shall be that the man who kills him the king will enrich with great riches, will give him his daughter, and give his father’s house exemption from taxes in Israel.”*

*Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, “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?”*

*And the people answered him in this manner, saying, “So shall it be done for the man who kills him.”*

*Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab’s anger was aroused against David, and he said, “Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle.”*

*And David said, “What have I done now? Is there not a cause?” Then he turned from him toward another and said the same thing; and these people answered him as the first ones did.*

Notice how different David’s thinking is from everyone else’s. To David, Goliath is an *uncircumcised Philistine*, who is so stupid *that he should defy the armies of the living God*. Victory over him is good, not because of the rewards Saul is offering but because it *takes away the reproach from Israel*.

Contrast that with what all the others are talking about. We don’t hear directly from Saul, *what shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine*. Instead we hear the chatter around the camp.

And the reward is the big three for guys—money, women, and a tax cut.

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Not surprisingly, David showing up trips his oldest brother’s wire. Eliab is Jesse’s firstborn. Seeing David anointed by Samuel must have been especially tough on him. He’s still the firstborn, but that’s nothing compared to being king. Eliab isn’t top dog anymore, and he’s bound to be a bit testy about it.

So, Eliab snaps at David. *“I know your pride and the insolence of your heart.”* Pot, meet kettle.

And David’s comeback line, *“What have I done now?”* hints at long-term friction with Eliab.

But David’s next line is the key—*“Is there not a cause?”*

Of course there’s a cause. According to Goliath’s challenge, the freedom of everyone in Israel is at stake.

David’s thinking is, yet again, different. Everyone is sitting around doing nothing. David shows up and acts like he’s going to do something, and Eliab assumes he’s not serious—David’s just “strutting.”

But he is serious. This won’t make sense to anyone else until after Goliath is dead.

4 1 Samuel 17:31–39

*Now when the words which David spoke were heard, they reported them to Saul; and he sent for him. Then David said to Saul, “Let no man’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.”*

*And Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.”*

*But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.” Moreover David said, “The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”*

*And Saul said to David, “Go, and the LORD be with you!”*

*So Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail. David fastened his sword to his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. And David said to Saul, “I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them.” So David took them off.*

David’s experience with lions and bears is crucial here. No one thinks of David as a warrior, but he’s actually quite battle-hardened. His fights have come repeatedly and without warning.

Lions and bears are formidable adversaries. Asiatic black bears can run about as fast as Usain Bolt’s world record top speed of 27.5 mph—and lions can run *twice* as fast.

They’re big. They’re fast. They have sharp teeth and claws, and they have the element of surprise when they attack.

David winning those fights is impressive. David being used to winning them is super impressive. A sling in the hands of a skilled shepherd is a powerful weapon.

Combine that with David’s faith, and you’ve got a fighting machine unlike anything Saul has ever seen.

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So, Saul doesn’t understand what he’s looking at. He thinks his armor will help David.

It doesn’t. David sloughs it off in favor of what he’s used to. The shepherd’s garb might seem horribly inadequate for a fight to the death, but David has won a bunch of them already (against arguably tougher opponents) wearing exactly the same thing. He’s comfortable in this outfit, and he’s comfortable with the task before him.

To David, this fight looks like just another day at the office.

5 1 Samuel 17:38–49

*Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine. So the Philistine came, and began drawing near to David, and the man who bore the shield went before him. And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him; for he was only a youth, ruddy and good-looking. So the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!"*

*Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, 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. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's, and He will give you into our hands."*

*So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone; and he slung it and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth.*

Trick question—What was the distance between David and Goliath when he fired that river rock at him?

Trick answer—Whatever David wanted it to be.

David had an absolute mobility advantage over Goliath. David could sprint about 20mph; Goliath would be lucky to get up to 10. Frankly, killing him quickly was merciful. David could have enticed Goliath into chasing him all over *the Valley of Elah* until the overloaded oaf keeled over from heat stroke.

A slinger can launch a stone at over 100mph. Add 20 more because David was running at him and the stone hit Goliath's forehead at 120+. A major league fastball can kill you at 100mph, and a baseball isn't as hard as a river rock.

So Goliath goes down like the Titanic.

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David's defeat of Goliath isn't a miracle in the most literal sense of the word, but the hand of God is all over this encounter. The "lucky shot" David gets off is, of course, anything but luck. The timing of David's visit, and what he hears while he's there, is just as "lucky."

But the biggest "lucky thing" is the lions and bears that God sent to get David ready.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What's the greatest act of courage you've seen?
2. When have you providentially been in the right place at the right time?
3. Have you ever seen someone's motives misread?
4. When have you seen someone do something you thought impossible?
5. Have you ever felt that God was preparing you for a trial?

*Items for prayer:*