

## Defend God's Honour

### 1Samuel 17

July 18, 2010

For many, the account of David confronting Goliath is a familiar one. Yet, while details of the actual confrontation are familiar to us, the details that lead us up to this epic battle are probably a bit sketchy.

How did it come to pass that a shepherd boy, rather than an Israelite soldier, would be commissioned to fight Goliath?

And what was it that motivated David to fight Goliath?

First, let us look at the context. Chapter 17 begins with these words, **“the Philistines gathered their armies for battle . . . And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered . . . and drew up in battle array to encounter the Philistines”** (17:1, 2).

This is not the first confrontation between the Israelites and the Philistines. Chapters 4 through 7 of 1Samuel recount the various battles between these two groups.

By the time we get to chapter 17, the animosity has reached a high point, and so they stand on the verge of war.

Coming forward from the Philistines side was a giant of a man, a champion, named Goliath. Goliath comes forth taunting and defying the Israelite army and, in response to this challenge we read, **“When**

**Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid” (17:11).**

We are told a few verses later that this taunting by Goliath became a daily routine; we are told that **“the Philistine came forward morning and evening for forty days, and took his stand” (17:16).**

We are also told that Jesse, the father of David, is now advanced in years (17:12), and that his three oldest sons have been enlisted in Saul’s army to fight the Philistines (17:13).

David is identified as the youngest of his sons and is commissioned to act as a delivery boy for his brothers. Jesse instructs David to bring his brothers some roasted grain, ten loaves, and ten cuts of cheese (17:17, 18).

As we examine how Saul and the Israelite army respond to Goliath’s challenge, we find that a variety of approaches are employed, but none of them bring about a positive outcome.

The first thing we find is a lot of *shouting*. The text says that **“David arose early in the morning . . . (with) the supplies . . . And he came to the circle of the camp while the army was going out in battle array *shouting* the war cry” (17:20).**

I’m not at all certain what kind of things are shouted in a “war cry”. The best comparison I can imagine is the type of cheering a football team does while running on to the field before a big game.

My guess is that this shouting of the Israelite army was tantamount to *cheerleading*. The idea is that if we shout enough positive things, we will be more inclined to believe in ourselves, hence improving our chances for a positive outcome.

Unfortunately, all of the shouting and cheerleading had no measurable affect on the behaviour of the Israelite army.

When Goliath came forward, as had become his daily custom, we are told that the Israelite army “**fled from him and were greatly afraid**” (17:24).

What’s this? Had they not seen Goliath before? He had been doing this every day for forty days! You would think the Israelites might get used to him. It’s not as if he was actually *doing* anything when he came forward; he was just shouting.

So, for all of their *cheerleading*, for all of their *shouting*, the Israelites had made absolutely no progress in their conflict with the Philistines.

And, what typically follows a total lack of progress is that cheerleading often descends into *arguing*.

Young David had inquired of the army, “**who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?**” (17:26).

David's oldest brother, Eliab, did not take kindly to this inquiry. The text says that his "**anger burned against David**", and he rebuked David for coming to the battle line (17:28).

You can almost hear the condescension in Eliab's voice as he asks David, "**with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness?**" (17:28).

Those of you who are older brothers can imagine the deriding manner in which Eliab likely raised his voice so that everyone in the vicinity would hear that the young boy in their presence was merely a sheep-herder.

Eliab goes on to accuse David of being ill motivated in wanting to come and "**see the battle**" (17:28).

"**See the battle**"? What battle? Every morning for forty days, the Israelite army had been marching around, they had been sounding the war cry, but they never actually mustered enough courage to engage the Philistines in any sort of battle.

Whatever it was that motivated the Israelites to assemble for war; they evidently lacked sufficient motivation to engage in any meaningful action.

Eventually, young David's boldness in speaking to the soldiers created an opportunity for him to meet with King Saul, and he uses this opportunity to volunteer to go and fight the Philistine (17:32).

By this time, the *shouting* of the war cry had subsided, and the *argument* between David and Eliab had ceased. David volunteering to fight Goliath was the closest thing to progress any of the Israelites had seen in more than forty days.

Nevertheless, Saul is intent on *reasoning* with young David. Saul reasons that David, by virtue of his age, is not capable of defeating Goliath.

Saul makes a reasonable argument. By all appearances, David, the young, ruddy-faced, shepherd boy, has no business engaging a giant in battle.

But, thankfully, David does not limit his perspective to what is reasonable.

David does not allow himself to get discouraged by his argumentative, faultfinding, brother.

Nor does David allow the hoopla of the war cries to superficially prop up his courage.

No. David is clearly governed by something more substantial; *David is governed by his faith in the living God, and he is motivated by an abiding concern for God's glory.*

In David's appeal to Saul, we clearly see that David trusted in the Lord with all his heart, and that he did not lean on his own understanding. David says to Saul, **"Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them . . . 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"** (17:36, 37).

While Saul and the Israelites were busy *shouting, arguing,* and *reasoning,* a ruddy-faced young boy was able to do abundantly more by simply *trusting* in the Lord.

We can imagine the conversation David would have when he returned home to his father Jesse. We can imagine Jesse asking, 'Son, what took you so long? I send you out with some cheese and with some loaves, and it takes you hours to make a simple delivery?'

I wonder what David's response would be: 'My apologies father. When I arrived at the battlefield, having dropped off the supplies, I got a bit distracted by an uncircumcised Philistine who was intent on defying the living God. O, father, you should have seen him; he was a giant of a man, but someone had to dispose of him and so I knocked him down with a stone and lopped his head off.'

Surely we can identify many differences between David's perspective and the perspective of the Israelite army, but perhaps the most critical distinction may be found in their respective motivations.

We get a glimpse of the Israelites motivation to oppose Goliath in verse 25, **“the men of Israel were saying . . . ‘Surely (Goliath) is coming up to defy Israel’”** (17:25).

Contrast that perspective with David’s words to Goliath, **“I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts . . . and I will strike you down . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel”** (17:45, 46).

Do you see the difference? All of the *shouting, arguing,* and *reasoning* of the Israelite army was in vain because it came from a skewed perspective; it came from a concern for their own predicament and reputation.

By contrast, *David’s motivation for fighting Goliath was born out of a genuine concern for God and His glory.*

As we seek to apply this passage within our own context it should not be difficult to draw comparisons between the Israelite army and the modern church.

While we would prefer to limit our comparisons to David, it is likely the case that we have more in common with the Israelite army than we would like to admit.

We begin with the principle of *shouting*, which is tantamount to cheerleading. While cheerleading is an important aspect of church ministry, a church cannot move forward on cheerleading alone.

Ministers of the gospel are often guilty of this; we stand up Sunday after Sunday sounding the war cry against our culture, sounding the war cry against the devil, and we shout our cheers to our people, 'You can do it! You can do it! You can, you can.'

The problem with this approach is that we often fail to properly frame our exhortations. If pulpit preaching aims to merely improve the life of the hearer; if pulpit preaching merely aims at increasing our earthly comforts, it falls dreadfully short of our Divine mandate.

If our pulpit cheers are to be of any long-term benefit to our people, they must be born out of a genuine concern for God and His glory; which is a concern that will ultimately lead us into action.

The second approach was to descend into *arguing*. Eliab was, no doubt, very frustrated by his army's lack of progress, but instead of *doing* something about it he picked a fight with his youngest brother.

I suspect we have little difficulty bringing to mind occasions when church members, neutralized by frustration, descend into arguing and faultfinding. It is hardly necessary for me to say more than that, but it is important that we all engage in self-examination and see if there be any of the spirit of Eliab in us.

The third approach was to depend upon *reasoning*.

I call this 'the Presbyterian approach'. Saul's words of caution made sense; his statements were quite reasonable. David *was* too young.



David had no training as a soldier. But, if Saul had insisted on what was reasonable; if Saul had insisted on what made sense, the Israelite army would have likely continued, indefinitely, paralyzed by fear.

My observation is that far too many congregations, in their sincere desire to always do what seems reasonable, have stunted forward progress by failing to apply the principle of trusting the Lord with all their heart, and not leaning on their own understanding (Prov. 3:5, 6).

As we seek to apply this passage to our lives and to this congregation, we also need to be aware that there is a way to misapply this text. *We misapply this text if we think that we can be David apart from sharing his concern for God and His glory.*

The story of David and Goliath would not be a good illustration for a self-help book, because David did not seek to improve his own predicament. David did not act for his own benefit, or even for the benefit of his family, but he acted *in defense of God's honour.*

Friends, as we seek to obey God according to what He has said in His Word, may our motivation be the same as David's. May we be moved to action, out of a genuine concern for God and His glory.

