

speech"! The AV gives a pretty close approximation of what the Hebrew literally says, and it does not seem to make a huge amount of sense ("send . . . by the hand You will send"; "of the one whom" is most likely implied, as similarly in the AV). Even though the phrasing is clumsy and inarticulate, the meaning and implication of the phrase seems clear enough, and might be paraphrased idiomatically as follows: "Lord, send the hand of somebody-or-other", implying, "I don't care who but please don't let it be me!"

5. **v. 14. Aaron the Levite.** This is the first mention of Aaron.
6. **v. 16. instead of God.** The Hebrew preposition used here is *l*, so that the phrase reads *l'elohim*. Prepositions never precisely correspond across languages, so it is difficult to put forward one

'absolute' translation. The 'usual' meaning of *l* is 'to' (in the sense of direction, 'towards', or possession, 'belonging to'), or 'for' (or 'with reference to'). The idea seems to be that Moses operates on God's behalf—for God, in respect of Him. In this sense the AV's translation 'instead of' is appropriate. One might also go for 'in the place of', or 'as', or even, more periphrastically, 'representing'. Particularly interesting is the Septuagint's translation of the phrase, *pros ton theon*, which is the exact phrase used to describe the relationship of the Word to God in John 1:1,2, and translated "with God" in the AV. Indeed, this passage in Exodus may lie behind the usage in John 1, the relationship between God and Moses helping to illustrate or define the relationship between God and the Word.

David and Goliath (1)

Geoff Henstock

IN 1 SAMUEL 16 David is anointed as successor to Saul. The same chapter sees Saul plunging into depression, which remains a feature of the record for the rest of his life. The fine warrior who promised so much becomes a pathetic shadow of a king.

Chapter 17 opens with what might be a consequence of Saul's emotional incapacity: the Philistines invade Israel. Perhaps Saul's tragic and obsessive condition robbed the nation of the leadership needed to keep the Philistines at bay.

The scene of the battle

In verses 1 and 2 considerable geographical detail is provided, enabling us to pinpoint the site of the drama. The Philistines camped at Shochoh, on one side of the valley of Elah, whilst the Israelites were almost opposite them on the other side of the valley, which at this point is about sixteen miles southwest of Jerusalem. The Philistines commanded the way to the west, whilst the Israelites commanded the eastern approach, two armies arraigned against each other at the border between their nations.

That this point marked the border may be inferred from the name given to the spot, Ephes-dammim, meaning 'boundary of blood'. Verses 1 and 2 present a picture of two armies facing one another in stalemate. Both occupied

strong defensive positions, and for the present neither side was willing to risk an attack on the other.¹

The name 'Elah' signifies a large tree, possibly a type of oak. Its use to name the valley might indicate that the area was once heavily forested. The word for 'valley' in verse 2 is *emek*, meaning a broad depression between higher ground on either side.

That is significant, because in verse 3 a different word is translated as valley, *gai*, which signifies a narrow gorge having lofty sides. It would appear that at the bottom of the valley there was a small ravine-like stream bed. Colonel Conder describes the scene:

"In the middle of the broad open valley we found a deep trench with vertical sides, impassable except at certain places—a valley in a valley, and a natural barrier between the two hosts . . . Here then we may picture to ourselves the two hosts, covering the low rocky hills opposite to each other, and half hidden among the lentisk bushes; between them was the rich expanse of ripening barley

1. G. A. Smith describes the site in *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, pp. 161-2, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1966.

and the red banks of the torrent with its white shingly bed".²

The giant and his armour

It was to the edge of this small ravine that the Philistine champion came to challenge the Israelites (v. 4). The word translated "champion" is used only twice in Scripture; the other is in verse 23. It is the plural form of a word meaning an interval, or a space between. In this context it seems to indicate that Goliath was the man who dominated the 'no man's land' between the two armies—the only man brave enough to stride into this open territory.

Goliath was from Gath. This is significant, because it is recorded that the Israelites had not managed to dislodge all the Anakim when they invaded under Joshua; some remained in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod (Josh. 11:21-23). Israel's failure 400 years previously now returns to trouble them. There is a powerful spiritual lesson in this for us. Any element of the old man that we fail to eliminate will inevitably plague our future walk.

The Anakim were men of considerable stature (Num. 13:32), and Goliath was a giant, six cubits and a span tall. If a cubit is eighteen inches and a span nine inches, Goliath was nine and a half feet tall. A few commentators believe he might have been even taller. Some critics have tried to explain away his height by claiming he suffered from multiple endocrine neoplasia, a condition that results in extreme height. This is unlikely, however, because sufferers of this condition are often ungainly and appear clumsy, whereas Goliath was a formidable warrior. Probably his extreme height was a consequence of descent from the Anakim.

Goliath was both tall and strong. His armour, described in verses 5-7, was impressive. The coat of mail alone weighed 5,000 shekels. The NIV margin suggests that this was 125 pounds, others have suggested weights from 112 pounds³ to 157 pounds.⁴ The term "coat of mail" in verse 5 is translated by Rotherham as "a scaly coat of mail", while the NIV speaks of "a coat of scale armour". The word rendered "mail" in the AV is used eight times in Scripture. The seven other occurrences all relate to the scales of fish (for example, Lev. 11:9-12). The armour appears, therefore, to have consisted of overlapping scales of metal. The overlapping nature of the scales would facilitate movement.

The device might also have been chosen for religious reasons. Dagon, a Philistine god, was

represented as half man and half fish. Was Goliath, appearing with the arms and head of a man and the body of a fish, seeking to represent Dagon on the battlefield? It seems possible, especially in view of the way in which David interpreted his taunts (1 Sam. 17:26), and the way in which he invoked his gods when confronting David (v. 43).

Greaves were armour plates for the legs, and a target was a javelin-like weapon, apparently strapped to Goliath's back (v. 6). In addition to the target, Goliath was armed with a spear. This was of extraordinary proportions, the head alone weighing between thirteen and nineteen pounds. Over and above all this weaponry and armour, Goliath was accompanied by a shield-bearer. This was not indicative of a lack of confidence on the part of Goliath; rather it marks him out as a man of high rank.

In verses 8-10 Goliath issues a haughty challenge to the Israelite army. The word used by Goliath for "armies" is not that used in verse 1, which is *machaneh* (also translated "the camp" in verse 4). In verse 8 the word is *maarakah*, meaning 'disposing', 'ranging in order'. It highlights the inactivity in this standoff. Goliath was not addressing a fighting machine; he was challenging an inert arrangement of men, apparently paralysed with fear. An appreciation of this fact perhaps helps to explain the extreme contempt in the taunt.

The concept of a war between nations being decided by one-to-one combat between two individuals might seem odd, but it was not unknown in ancient times.⁵ The Jewish Targum inserts in verses 8-10 a lengthy speech by Goliath in which the challenge is directed to Saul in particular, and to any other warrior in general. Saul was the obvious man to accept the challenge. He was literally "head and shoulders" above any other Israelite (9:2), yet he makes no move to silence Goliath. In fact, Saul is specifically mentioned as cowering before the taunts of Goliath, thus making a mockery of the desire expressed by the people when they demanded

2. *Tent Work in Palestine*, Volume 2, p. 161. Quoted in *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, 1 Samuel*, p. 153, Cambridge, 1911.

3. H. A. Whittaker, *Enjoying the Bible*, p. 217, The Christadelphian, Birmingham, 1973.

4. *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, ibid.*, p. 154.

5. Homer, *Iliad*, III, 86ff.

that Samuel appoint a king for Israel (8:19,20). Day after day the Israelites witnessed this humiliating challenge but failed to respond. Clearly they had no faith in God to deliver them. They looked to the flesh for their strength, and on this basis there was no Israelite equal to the task.

David arrives at the camp

Jesse sent David to the Israelite camp to minister to his brothers. He arrived to find a cowering army and was amazed at their response. Why was David back with Jesse and not at the palace or with the army? 17:14,15 suggests that when Saul went to war against the Philistines he had no further need for David's services, so he was sent home. The older brothers, however, were expected to serve in the army.

Verse 16 indicates that the stalemate lasted at least forty days. The battleground was only twelve miles from Bethlehem, so forty days would be a long time for Jesse to wait for news of the outcome. Naturally Jesse grew concerned about the fate of his sons, so he sent David with supplies and to inquire about their welfare. The phrase "take their pledge" in verse 18 indicates that David was to return with a token confirming their wellbeing. In verse 20 David travels to the battle front, arriving as the two armies assume their usual positions, "going forth to the battle array" (AV margin) or "going out to its battle positions" (NIV). The stalemate would drag on for another day.

David leaves the supplies in the camp and goes in verse 22 to see his brothers at the front. He is not simply curious, but rather he is fulfilling his mission from his father. At the front he witnesses the daily taunt of Goliath and the cowardice of the Israelite forces. Verse 24 is emphatic; all Israel were afraid of Goliath. That they appreciated what was at stake is clear from verse 25, for they plainly stated the gravity of Goliath's taunt and the wonderful reward promised to the man who could defeat Goliath.

Saul's army was comprised of the cream of Israel's manhood (14:52). As an example of the calibre of Saul's soldiers, we have in 16:6,7 a description of Eliab, one of David's brothers, which implies he was tall, strong and robust. The description of David himself in verse 18 implies that, although the youngest in the family, he was strong and courageous. It seems reasonable to conclude that his brothers who were serving in Saul's army might have had similar characteristics. From these references we must

conclude that Saul's army was an elite fighting unit, yet in spite of the reward no man felt able to take up the challenge.

The faith of David

The response of Saul's men astounded David. His indignant response in 17:26 to the implied blasphemy in Goliath's taunt demonstrates a commitment to God and a robust faith that God would deliver His people. David's words go straight to the heart of the issue. He uses the title "living God" to describe the Deity. This title is frequently used in direct contrast to lifeless idols.

In Joshua 3:10 "the living God" is invoked as the power Who would defeat Israel's enemies, implicitly making the point that the gods in whom the tribes inhabiting Canaan trusted were mere lifeless idols. When the Assyrians invaded the land the title "living God" is invoked when Hezekiah asked Isaiah to intercede with God to deliver the nation (2 Kgs. 19:3,4). In this case the religious nature of the contest is very clear. Rabshakeh openly blasphemed God by comparing him to a range of lifeless deities that had failed other peoples conquered by the Assyrians, and claimed Israel's God would likewise be unable to deliver Judah from the might of the Assyrians and their gods (18:33-35).

Daniel was thrown into a den of lions because his unswerving faithfulness to God prevented him from acknowledging any other authority as god. Darius, when he went to see whether Daniel had survived, expressed his hope that Daniel's God, "the living God", had delivered him from the lions (Dan. 6:19,20). Daniel knew that the living God could deliver him from a foe no man could otherwise overcome. In Revelation 7:2,3 the living God again is associated with deliverance from an idolatrous system.

It was the same living God that David knew would deliver Israel from the threat posed by Goliath and the Philistines. But David's faith was not shared by all of his family; Eliab his older brother felt personally slighted by David's bold statement. Eliab's outburst in 1 Samuel 17:28 is without any foundation, evidence of the rage he must have felt. David had come down at the express instruction of his father and had ensured that the sheep were looked after before he left (v. 20). He had not, therefore, come down merely to satisfy youthful curiosity about the battle. David was not intimidated by his brother: "What have I done now?" said David; 'I merely asked a question'" (v. 29, Moffatt). David is described as "pru-

dent in speech" (16:18, AV mg.). His words were blunt but fair. Although Eliab was his older brother, David could not allow his enraged outburst to go unchallenged.

In 17:31 David's confident words are relayed to the king, and he is summoned to Saul's presence. The young man, perhaps about sixteen to eighteen,⁶ confidently addresses the king: "Let not my lord's heart fail because of him [Goliath]" (v. 32, LXX). He offered to fight Goliath. Saul was amazed; after forty days a man finally volunteers to engage the giant in battle! Perhaps stung by David's bold acknowledgment of the king's fear, he expresses incredulity that David could meet the challenge (v. 33).

In verse 33 two different words are translated 'youth'. The first denotes a young male between birth and about twenty years of age. It has connotations of servanthip and inexperience, making it highly appropriate to describe David. In contrast, Goliath is said to have been "a man of war from his youth". On this occasion the word used means a young man. The NEB captures the distinction well: "you are only a lad, and he has been a fighting man all his life". There is no suggestion in this verse that David was a mere juvenile with no fighting skills. In 16:18 he had been described as "a man of war". The issue is that he lacked the experience of Goliath.

To counter Saul's reservations about his ability David recounted an incident in which he had fought and overcome two ferocious wild beasts. As he had delivered his sheep from those threats, so the shepherd would deliver the flock of Israel from this enemy, implying that Goliath was no more than a wild animal. That this was David's meaning is clear from verse 37, where the Hebrew word used for the "paw" of the lion and of the bear is the same word used for the "hand" of Goliath.

David is careful to state that it is not through his own prowess that deliverance would come. In verse 36 Goliath is said to have "defied the armies of the living God" (does the plural suggest both the army of Saul and the angels?). In verse 37 David counters this by proclaiming that Yahweh, the living God, would deliver His servant. Saul, to his credit, does not react negatively

to David's expression of faith in God's saving arm as Eliab had in verse 28 when David invoked "the living God". On the contrary, he supports David in his boldness.

David and Saul's armour

Saul in verse 38 offers David his armour. Although the AV uses the term "coat of mail", as in verse 5 with reference to Goliath, the Hebrew is not exactly the same. On this occasion there is no reference to the 'scales' of armour. This "coat of mail" was just a form of body armour.

Sometimes we are tempted to think of this offer as foolish. Some picture books present images of David as a scrawny boy, and it seems ridiculous that a large man like Saul would try to put his armour on such a youth. But, as we have seen, there is good reason to assume David was a well-built, imposing man. Saul was not a fool; he would not offer his armour to David, and David would not try it on, if it were likely to be an impediment to him.

But there is more to this verse. It is a cameo of the future. In this act Saul implicitly acknowledges David as better than himself. The armour of a king when the army is on the battlefield constitutes his robes of office. There is an echo here of 1 Samuel 15:28. David did not think Saul's offer odd. He girded himself with the armour but found it unsuitable. According to Girdlestone, the Hebrew word *yaal*, translated "assayed" in 17:39, indicates volition, an expression of free will. "David was on the verge of starting off [Vulgate, he began to step out] in Saul's armour but [he put them off, for] he had not proved them".⁷ David tried to use Saul's armour, but found it awkward and unnecessary. "He desired to go forth to the battle in the lightest possible armour: strong in the Lord not in himself: armed not with steel but with faith".⁸

(To be concluded)

6. H. A. Whittaker, *Samuel, Saul and David*, p. 80, McDonald Publishing Services, Chino, 1984.

7. Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, p. 71, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1981.

8. Augustine, *Sermon XXXII*. Quoted in *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, *ibid.*, p. 160.

Correction

The address for obtaining copies of *A Third Collection of Poems* (Aug. 2001, p. 304) should read 5 Piltown Road, not as stated; it is possible that requests have not been passed on. It is also requested that cheques be made payable to 'Watford Christadelphians'.