

1st Samuel

Lesson 36

(i) Saul's Love for David (16:21)

With the donkey loaded down, David approached the camp of Saul. We wish the writer could have told us all that was going through David's mind, but he did not. Be that as it may, we come to see Saul's love for David. Verse 21.

"Then David came to Saul and attended him; and Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor bearer." (16:21)

The writer does not tell us that Saul immediately loved David. He tells us that David attended Saul and that had to be for some period of time. Yet, in that short time, Saul came to love and trust David. His musicianship must have hit the spot when the evil spirit troubled Saul. But notice that Saul made David his "armor bearer." We have talked about this before with Saul's son Jonathan. An armor bearer was in almost all cases the most trusted friend and servant of the noble. The same would be true with David and Saul. Saul trusted David enough to allow David to be closer to him than even some of his children and wives, let alone his generals. As the armor bearer, David basically was Saul's butler, dresser, scribe, food taster, etc. David won Saul's heart, at least when he was in his right mind, but that will certainly change as the story progresses.

(ii) Saul's Desire for David (16:22)

David won Saul's heart and that caused Saul's desire for David. What did Saul do then? Verse 22.

"Saul sent to Jesse, saying, 'Let David now stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight.'" (16:22)

The message to Jesse asks that David be allowed to "stand before me." We would say it in a different way. We would say, "Let David now remain in my service, for he had found favor in my sight." Why did Saul ask this of Jesse? It was because David was underage. It took the permission of Jesse to allow David to stay permanently with Saul. But an affirmative answer to this request gave benefits to David. He would be entering into a formal education into the life of a king, the court of a king, and the opportunity to rise in the ranks of the mighty men of valor with the king.

(b) David Attended (16:23)

Evidently Jesse said yes because David attended Saul. Verse 23.

"So it came about whenever the evil spirit from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him." (16:23)

We have all been around people who seem to have an evil spirit coming and going from them, yes, even in our day there are such people. Today, people cause the evil to come upon them by their own doings, by drugs (legal or illegal) or strong drink. But those are not the kind of people we are talking about. As in the case of Saul, the people we are talking about have all sorts of bouts with all sorts of emotional things and those things manifest into evil moods and characteristics of behavior such as depression, obsession, trepidation, apprehension, dejection, consternation, and the more. As we will see, all of these moods and thoughts for Saul were in his personal tribulation. Yet, David's harp music eased and calmed Saul. David must have always had his harp within reach when he was around Saul.

Chapter 17

3. The Story of the Conqueror of the Philistine Giant

a) The Camp of the Philistines (17:1-3)

Once again, this new writer in the book of 1st Samuel, be it Gad or Nathan, does not tell us how long the period was between David joining Saul as his armor-bearer and musician and the appearance of the story of the conqueror of the Philistine Giant and the camp of the Philistines. The last time we heard of Saul, he was at Gilgal where Samuel left him. More than likely, he was at his home in Gibeah when David was anointed and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David and left Saul. With the Spirit leaving Saul, an evil spirit was allowed by the LORD to trouble Saul. But now, we find Saul down in the tribal area of Judah in a standoff with the Philistines and their giant warrior. Chapter 17, verse 1.

“Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; and they were gathered at Socoh which belongs to Judah, and they camped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. ² Saul and the men of Israel were gathered and camped in the valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array to encounter the Philistines. ³ The Philistines stood on the mountain on one side while Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with the valley between them.” (17:1-3)

If you will remember, in chapter 5, the Philistines were still in control of Israel after the death of Samson. His death did not end the domination of the Philistines over Israel, his death just slowed the Philistines down when he killed all of the leaders and lords with their spouses. The Philistines organized anew continuing to extract taxes and goods from Israel until Samuel brought that to an end at Ebenezer. We do not think of Samson being a failure as a judge of Israel, but he did fail. He was the only judge chosen by the LORD who failed, unless you want to include the judge Barak who acquiesced his duties to Deborah. Nevertheless, Deborah was a success. Deborah was the wife of Lappidoth (Judges 4:4). Some scholars believe that Lappidoth was a nickname for her husband, Barak. Lappidoth means *woman of torches (a fiery woman)*. It may be possible the Barak had that nickname because of the strength of his wife, Deborah. Some argue that this may be true because Deborah is introduced in the role of a wife but is not presented in the role of a wife but rather a fiery woman. Nevertheless, Deborah gained the glory of the victory as the Scripture promised Barak.

Samuel was not a failure. If you will remember in chapter 4, the Philistines captured the Ark at Ebenezer and took it back to their camp and then back to their tribal area where it gave them all sorts of fits and illnesses. They returned the Ark to Israel where it was stored for twenty years. After returning the Ark, the Philistines met Israel back in battle at Ebenezer where they were defeated under the leadership of Samuel. After the victory, Samuel set a stone and said, *“So the Philistines were subdued and they did not come anymore within the border of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. The cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even to Gath; and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines.”*⁴

How do we reconcile the entry in chapter 7 with this entry in chapter 17? In the entry of chapter 7, the Philistines gave up all they dominated in Israel when they were defeated. From the borders of the Philistine tribal area at Ekron and Gath, which were essentially cities on the original border between the Philistines and the Promised Land, the Philistines returned to Israel all they were in control of and were taxing. One note here, the Gaza Strip, as we know it today, was never part of the Promised Land. Joshua did not take any of the Philistine land in the campaign for the Promised Land; he took only Canaanite land. The Gaza Strip today is essentially the same tribal land that the Philistines have controlled since they moved into the land long after the Canaanites and the Egyptians controlled the land. The only loss and gain of land in the Gaza Strip has been with Egypt,

⁴ *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Edition: Paragraph Version* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), 1 Sa 7:13–14.

not Israel. The Wadi Egypt has been the boundary between the Philistines and Egypt since the time the Philistines captured that land having come from Caphtor near Greece. At that time, they were sea people. That information will become important when we hear the name Goliath in the following verses, but for now, the important point is that later in time, a Caesar will mispronounce the Philistine name and call them Palestinians. The name will stick because Caesar called them Palestinians. Today, the Palestinians claim that Israel is on their land. That is not true. The Palestinians only own the Gaza Strip that Joshua did not take away from them.

When the writer says, "*So the Philistines were subdued and they did not come anymore within the border of Israel*" and then tells us that the Philistines restored all the land back to Israel that they were dominating, it is a statement that says the Philistines did not come to the land and dominated it any longer, or as long as Samuel was alive. Surely, the Philistines tried to dominate the land as they will try to do in our current passage, but they will not be successful as long as Samuel is alive. In fact, as we will see, the Philistines did not enter Israel for this battle for they were camped on their side of the boundary line.

It is also interesting that we were told that once the Ark was returned it was stored for twenty years. In 2nd Samuel, we are told that at the end of the twenty years, King David moved the Ark to Jerusalem. Backtracking the timeline means that the Ark was taken in the twenty-seventh year of Saul's reign as king. Yet, Saul had nothing to do with the battle at Ebenezer where Samuel led the victory and set the stone. Why? It was because prior to the capturing of the Ark, Samuel had already left Saul at Gilgal for the last time and never saw him again. It is possible, although we are not told, that it was Saul who called for the Ark to be brought into battle at Ebenezer where it was captured by the Philistines. Then, a little more than seven months later, Samuel led the charge against the Philistines and ousted them from the land, but Saul was not involved. By that time, David had already been anointed the next king and Samuel decided not to record the name of Saul in the battle he did not attend. Remember, Samuel's testimony is found in chapters 1 through 7, but either Gad or Nathan picked up the pen in chapter 8 to record Samuel's story.

For now, Samuel is out of the picture. He will not return to the story until chapter 19:18 when David had to run to him for safety from King Saul. Saul is alone with his army down in the tribal area of Judah, stationed on one hill with the Philistines stationed across the valley on another hill. The Philistines are intent on taking Israel back, but Samuel is still alive, so we know they will fail.

The Philistines gathered at Socoh but then camped at Ephes-dammim. Ephes-dammim is a boundary line between the Philistine tribal land and the Judah tribal land. The name Ephes-dammim means *the boundary of blood*. If you look at a map you will see that Azekah is in the Philistine area and Socoh is in the Judean area. Azekah sits on a mountain rise, Socoh sits east across a tributary on a rise in Judah's land. The tributary runs almost east to west from Socoh to the city of Gath, one of the major cities in the Philistine area. All of it sits in the Valley of Elah. Ephes-dammim is the boundary of blood between the two locations. The Philistines were right on their boundary.

The camp of Israel with Saul was in Socoh on their side of the boundary line of blood. Why was it called that nickname? Much blood was spilt there in many battles. Even today, the name is appropriate because much blood is still being spilt in the Philistine conflict with Israel. But in the conflict in our passage, the blood of one Philistine will be spilt first and then the blood of many Philistines will be spilt from the brook to the gates of Ekron and Gath.

b) The Champion of the Philistines

(1) Goliath's Height (17:4)

In the standoff at the boundary of blood, the champion of the Philistines is presented. His name is Goliath. Our writer goes to great length to describe this man. He starts with Goliath's height. Verse 4.

“Then a champion came out from the armies of the Philistines named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.” (17:4)

A cubit is the length from the tip of the middle finger back to the elbow. This length differs from individual to individual. For instance, if you use my arm as an example, a cubit will be 19 ½ inches. If you used my wife’s arm, a cubit will be 18 inches. Thus, we come to a problem when we are trying to identify exactly the height of Goliath. But Goliath’s height also included a span. A span is the distance from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger when the fingers are expanded as wide as you can stretch them. For my hand, the span is 9 ½ inches. For my wife, her span is 8 inches. If we use my measurements, Goliath was $(6 \times 19 \frac{1}{2}) + 9 \frac{1}{2} = 126 \frac{1}{2}$ inches tall or 10 ½ feet tall. However, if you use my wife’s measurements, Goliath was $(6 \times 18) + 8 = 116$ inches tall or a little more than 9 ½ feet tall. Goliath was a big and tall man, truly a giant of a man.

With the length of a cubit being different between individuals, how was a building, such as the Temple, built with such accuracy that a hair could not be inserted between the stones? Here is the way a cubit was set for building projects. The plans were drawn and a cubit scale was set on the drawings. All the lines on the drawing were based on that line. Then, at the build site, the superintendent would mark the length of the cubit of his arm and every worker would take a stick and cut it to the length of the superintendents’ cubit mark. From that, the workers could mark on their sticks a half cubit, quarter cubit, etc. The superintendents’ mark became the “rule” for the build. The sticks used by each worker were called “rulers” because they were used to transfer the measurements from the drawing to the material so all would be uniform.

Many scholars tell us that the Israelites were small people and their cubit may have been on average 17 inches with a span of 6 inches. Even with those measurements, Goliath would still be 9 feet tall.