

1st Samuel

Lesson 37

(2) Goliath's Armor (17:5-6)

From Goliath's height we come to Goliath's armor. Verse 5.

"He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was clothed with scale-armor which weighed five thousand shekels of bronze. ⁶He also had bronze greaves on his legs and a bronze javelin slung between his shoulders." (17:5-6)

First, you might ask how the writer new how much Goliath's armor weighed? We will find that after David killed Goliath, Goliath and the armor were in possession of Israel.

Other translations properly call Goliath's armor a "chain armor" or a "coat of mail." Little circle plates of bronze wire were linked together to form a bronze cloth that looked like the scales on a fish. Bronze is a heavy material. A common bronze shekel contained $\frac{1}{4}$ ounce of material. If the scales were the size of the bronze shekels that we have discovered, his armor weighed about 78 pounds. For a man Goliath's size, he could easily handle that weight. However, if it was not made of rings of metal wire but was circles of metal that had the likeness of small scales, the size of today's nickels would have five thousand attached. This seems illogical to me. I would think that the size of the scale was closer to today's half dollar which would have meant about five hundred pieces, each weighing 10 ounces which would be sewn together to make the armor. This seems more plausible to me.

A bronze greave is made by hammering the metal flat and forming it around the leg from the ankle to the knee. This protected the lower leg from being cut off. The word "greave" comes from the French word meaning "the shin." We do not know how much each greave weighed.

The bronze javelin was more like a sharp knife attached to a long wooden handle. They were also called a "lance." It was probably about six feet long, bronze head and wooden handle. They were used for throwing.

(3) Goliath's Weapons (17:7)

The writer continued with Goliath's weapons, verse 7.

"The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and the head of his spear weighed six hundred shekels of iron; his shield-carrier also walked before him." (17:7)

A javelin was used for throwing; a spear was used in hand-to-hand combat. While it was similar to the javelin in looks, the weight of its head was used to inflict great injuries whether it was thrust into a person or animal, or swung side to side to cut its opponent. Goliath's spear weighed about 600 shekels of iron, not bronze. Bronze is a soft metal, iron is not. The head of the iron spear alone, without the handle weighed 600 shekels of iron. We have iron shekels for this time in museums. At 600 shekels of iron, the head alone weighed 19 pounds. Its weight alone could do much damage. But, it, too, was sharp. It could cut through with the great weight of the material it contained.

Notice that the great Goliath did not come to fight alone. He had a man carrying his shield in front of him to protect him. The whole sight must have been daunting to all of Israel.

(4) Goliath's Taunt (17:8-11)

Finally, the writer tells of Goliath's taunt. Verse 8.

"He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel and said to them, "Why do you come out to draw up in battle array? Am I not the Philistine and you servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me. ⁹If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will become your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall become our servants and serve us." ¹⁰Again the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this

day; give me a man that we may fight together.”¹¹ When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.” (17:8-11)

The Philistines had changed their tactic. They wanted to control Israel again as they did from before Samson was born until they lost the battle at Ebenezer after they captured and returned the Ark. Samuel was still alive and the Philistines probably had heard that the LORD had decreed that as long as Samuel was alive, the Philistines could not be victorious over Israel in army combat. So, the tactic changed. The Philistines offered one of their great warriors to fight one of Israel’s great warriors and the one that won, his nation would control the other. In this conflict, only one person would die, but the fate of a whole nation was at stake. But who would Saul send? Saul was the only man in Israel anywhere near the height of Goliath for Saul was head and shoulders taller than any other man in Israel. But even at that, Saul was probably close to three feet shorter than Goliath. Soon we will see that Israel had to endure this taunt for forty days in a row.

c) The Conqueror of the Philistines

(a) David’s Brothers in Battle (17:12-14)

The writer now turns from describing the champion of the Philistines to describing the conqueror of the Philistines. We come to David’s father and David’s brothers in battle. Verse 12.

“Now David was the son of the Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, whose name was Jesse, and he had eight sons. And Jesse was old in the days of Saul, advanced in years among men.¹³ The three older sons of Jesse had gone after Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and the second to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah.¹⁴ David was the youngest. Now the three oldest followed Saul,” (17:12-14)

“Ephrath” was the original name of the village of Bethlehem. In Moses’ record of the death of Rachel in Genesis 35:19 and Genesis 48:7, Moses stated that “... *Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath – that is, Bethlehem.*” She was not buried in Ephrath, but on the way to Ephrath. She died and was buried in Ramah, just a short distance from Ephrath or Bethlehem. By the time of Moses, Ephrath had already been given the Hebrew nickname Bethlehem that remains throughout the rest of the Bible. *Beth* means *the house*; *lehem* means *bread*. Bethlehem means the *house of bread*.

The village of Ephrath is mentioned in Ruth 4:11. Just east of the village, in the tribal area of Judah (not Benjamin where Ephrath is located) is a field where the story of Ruth and Boaz takes place. It is where Ruth gleaned the grain to make bread. Our quandary at this point is how did Moses know that Ephrath was Bethlehem years before the story that gave the village that name? The answer is Moses did not know that name. It was added later to the Genesis text by Joshua, Samuel, Gad, Nathan, or perhaps another early Jewish priest in charge of the care of the ancient scrolls stored in the Ark.

Of the eight sons of Jesse, three were with Saul at the battle line – the oldest three. Where were the other four besides David? We do not know and we are not told.

(b) David’s Place at Home (17:15-16)

With the background of the three sons of Jesse, we come to David’s place at home. Verse 15.

“but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father’s flock at Bethlehem.¹⁶ The Philistine came forward morning and evening for forty days and took his stand.” (17:15-16)

Surely, the sons of Jesse took turns tending the flocks. With the three sons with Saul, the family was shorthanded in tending the flocks. Here, the writer tells us that David did not shirk his responsibility in tending the family flocks for his father. Fortunately, a well-traveled road ran from Socoh east to Bethlehem about eight miles away.

Unfortunately, for forty days, Goliath taunted the army and Saul.

(c) David’s Instruction from Jesse (17:17-19)

David was at home taking his turn tending the flocks as Goliath was taunting the Israelites. We come to David’s instruction from Jesse. Verse 17.

“Then Jesse said to David his son, ‘Take now for your brothers an ephah of this roasted grain and these ten loaves and run to the camp to your brothers. ¹⁸ Bring also these ten cuts of cheese to the commander of their thousand, and look into the welfare of your brothers, and bring back news of them. ¹⁹ For Saul and they and all the men of Israel are in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.’” (17:17-19)

We have already come across the word “ephah” many times in the Scripture before this point in the whole story of the Bible. The “ephah” is one of the most common measurements used in the Scripture. It is a dry weight measurement for grain or crushed grain that is called “four.” Ezekiel tells us that the capacity of the ephah is equal to the capacity of the liquid measurement “bath” (Ezek 45:11, 14).⁵ The “ephah” and the “bath” are equivalent to 1/10th homer, which in turn equates to 3/8th to 2/3rds of a bushel. The word “bath” means *daughter*. Its name was used to indicate the amount of water a daughter could carry from the well on her head. It was used for other liquids too. An “ephah” was the amount of grain that could fill the pot that carried the bath of water, wine, or oil. Obviously, the grain weighed much less than the liquid.

Parched or roasted grain was a staple in those days. It was simple to fix. Once it was cooked, it could be stored in a dry place almost indefinitely. It was known in those days as what we would call a quick snack food, but it could be also boiled up as a vegetable with other ingredients. To make poached or roasted grain, the grain was allowed to dry in the sun until all the moisture was gone. This step was very important. Any moisture in the grain would be trapped in the next step and cause the finished product to mold. After the grain was totally dry, wheat, barley, corn, maze, etc., it was place in a skillet with oil and cooked very slowly on low heat. If it was cooked on high heat, it would swell and pop like popcorn. On low heat, the dry grain would soak up the oil and begin to swell and became soft. It would puff a little as the outer shell began to crack as the inner part cooked. Spices would be added to give it a flavor. When it was done, it was allowed to cool and then could be stored in jars, sacks, or even baskets; however, it had to be kept away from the insects because they were as fond of the treat as humans.

Ten loaves of bread were added to the load. In the Old Testament, bread was made from wheat or barley. The wealthy folks had wheat bread; the poor folks had barley bread. Barley was much cheaper than wheat if you had to purchase it. Also, barley was grown all across Egypt and all of the Promised Land. It was harvested in the spring around Passover. There were several kinds of wheat grown in the Promised Land which each would yield a harvest at different times through the year. Wheat became one of the largest exported products from Israel, the product that brought the most money to the country. Therefore, exporting wheat was more important than feeding it to the locals. Such is the reason the wealthy could afford wheat and the commoner and poorer person ate the barley; barley was not a desirable import to other nations. Fine flour was made from wheat; coarse flour was made from barley. Thus, the softer breads were made from wheat and the harder breads were made from barley. Other breads were made by the Israelites from dried millet, spelt, beans, and lentils (Ezekiel 4:9-12). In any case, the ground grains were mixed with water and a little yeast (leaven) was added. The dough would be allowed to rise, then small amounts were made into biscuit size lumps and cooked in an oven, in a covered pan, or on a griddle. Yeast was not used when the time was rushed. Without the yeast, the dough might rise a little because of the natural yeast in the air, but that was never assured. Dough with no yeast was cooked flat in a pan or on a griddle like our tortillas today. With all the breads, oils were used in the cooking and other things such as honey, raisins, and grapes were also added. We do not know about these ten loaves of bread for the three sons. We do not know how special they were made. We do not know their ingredients. No less, the three sons probably welcomed them.

⁵ Norwood E. Thames III, “Weights and Measures,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

As far as the ten cuts of cheese, that is a different subject. The cheese was not made up in haste. Cheese takes time to prepare and cure. Remember, no refrigeration was in place in those days. Cheese had to be cured in such a way that it could last in the normal outside climate of the surroundings. It was a staple food of Israel for all year round. According to ancient Jewish writers in the Mishna, cheese made outside of Israel by foreigners, was not allowed to be purchased or eaten by Jews. Why? It was because no one could assure them that the cheese was not made from milk of an animal that was offered to idols. To send ten cuts of cheese to the commander was a big gift that effected the livelihood of the family.

But it was family that Jesse wanted to know about. He specifically asked David to bring a report on his brother's welfare. By his words, Jesse thought his sons were in battle with the Philistines. He did not know that the two sides were in a stalemate in the Valley of Elah.

(d) David's Arrival at the Camp (17:20-21)

David's arrival at the camp occurred as the men were going out to form the battle line. Verse 20.

"So David arose early in the morning and left the flock with a keeper and took the supplies and went as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the circle of the camp while the army was going out in battle array shouting the war cry. ²¹ Israel and the Philistines drew up in battle array, army against army." (17:20-21)

Early in the morning, David left the flock in the care of a keeper to run the errand for his father. Notice that he left the flock in the care of a keeper. Flocks were never left to their own doings. Every hour of every day, the flocks had a caretaker with them. Unlike today, there were no fences and the flocks would have simply wandered off. Winter, spring, summer, and fall, all flocks and herds had caretakers with them.

As David arrived at the camp, he saw the men going out to form their battle array on their side of the stream. The Philistines did the same thing on the other side. We know the plan was not to fight army against army, but they could not be sure of that point. Yes, they heard the taunt of Goliath, but how could they be sure that he was the only one that was going to fight in this conflict.

(i) What David Did (17:22)

We come to what David did. Verse 22.

"Then David left his baggage in the care of the baggage keeper, and ran to the battle line and entered in order to greet his brothers." (17:22)

We find an interesting tidbit of information here that we might look over in most cases. Saul's army had a "baggage keeper." It is another insight into the organization of an Israelite army. The last time we saw something like this was in 14:16 when we learned that Saul's army had watchmen. Before that, in Judges 20:10, we learned how the armies of Israel were fed. Ten percent of the army was tasked with the duty of gathering food supplies for the ninety percent who were active in the hand-to-hand combat. In the Judges passage, we learned that it took ten men to gather food supplies for one hundred men in the army.

The word "baggage" in many English translations is properly rendered *carriage*. Think of a *carriage* as a cart with wheels. The baggage of all the warriors were kept on carriages. As the warriors moved in battle from place to place, each warrior would carry his weapons. However, each warrior had a need for other things each day to survive. They needed their tent, bedding, cooking tools, etc. These were all kept on wheeled carriages (carts) that would follow behind the army as they marched from place to place. Each cart had a *keeper*. His whole task was to guard and transport the belongings of the warriors. The *keepers* were warriors too, yet, they were assigned to the carts. We will learn more about this assignment when we reach chapter 30. There, David has led the men in a battle and taken great spoils. The spoils would be divided among the warriors. In chapter 30, the warriors who fought the battle will not want to share the spoils with the warriors who were assigned to watch their baggage (the baggage keepers). Because of the greediness of those who do not want to share the

spoils with the baggage keepers, David will make an ordinance for Israel stating that spoils will always be shared, share and share alike, by all members of the army organization. No one will ever take more than an equal share of the spoils of war. David was not the king at that point, when he made that decision, but he will become king within a few days with the death of Saul.

In our passage, David left his baggage with the baggage keeper on the cart and ran to the front line where Israel was arrayed on one side of the stream and the Philistines were arrayed on the other side of the stream. It was at the front line that David expected to find his brothers.

(ii) What David Heard (17:23)

David found his brothers at the line, but he was interrupted by a Philistine voice. We come to what David heard. Verse 23.

“As he was talking with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine from Gath named Goliath, was coming up from the army of the Philistines, and he spoke these same words; and David heard them.” (17:23)

We have already been told what Goliath said each day for forty days to the Israelite army. Here are his words again as a reminder.

Why do you come out to draw up in battle array? Am I not the Philistine and you servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me.⁹ If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will become your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall become our servants and serve us. ... I defy the ranks of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together.