

Believers Bible Commentary-18

1 Samuel 17-20

C. Defeating Goliath (Chap. 17)

17:1–11 **The Philistines gathered their armies for battle** near **the Valley of Elah**, southwest of Jerusalem and not far **from Gath**. **Saul and his army** assembled nearby, with **the Valley of Elah** between them. **A champion** by the name of **Goliath** came out of the Philistine camp daily for forty days, defying **the armies of Israel** to send him a worthy opponent. There were no volunteers. This giant was about nine feet nine inches tall and wore at least 175 pounds of armor. **His iron spearhead** alone weighed over fifteen pounds. The heavy weapons were no problem for Goliath, since he himself must have weighed somewhere between 600 and 750 pounds (possibly more, depending on his build). This gave him many times the strength of a normal man.

17:12–30 On one occasion, when **David** was bringing supplies to his three oldest **brothers at the** battlefield, he heard the taunts of the giant and saw the fear on the faces of the Hebrew soldiers. He asked **what would be done for the man who** silenced this swaggering brute. **Eliab, his oldest brother**, rebuked him, probably to mask his own cowardice, but David persisted in checking into the prizes that awaited **the man who** would kill the giant.

17:31–40 **Saul** soon got word that a young man had been found to fight for Israel, and **David** was brought before him. When Saul saw David, he had understandable doubts about the lad's ability. But David had known the power of God working through him when he defended his flock against the **lion** and the **bear**. He had proved God in private; now he could rely on God in public. Seeing his courage and determination, **Saul** gave him **his own armor**, but **David** discarded it because it was a hindrance to him. Instead, he went forth armed with **five smooth stones**, a **sling**, a **staff**, and the power of **the living God!**

17:41–54 When Goliath saw **David**, who was probably around twenty at this time, he was incensed that Israel should insult him by sending out what in his eyes was a mere child to fight him. But David had no trace of fear as he responded to the giant's curses. He had complete faith that the Lord would give him the victory. As Goliath moved toward him, **David ... slung the first stone**, hitting him **in his forehead**. The giant **fell forward on his face**. David then used the Philistine's own **sword** to kill him and **cut off his head**. **When the Philistines saw this, they fled**, with **Israel** in hot pursuit.

17:55–58 These verses¹⁶ seem to present a problem: It is strange that Saul did not recognize David when he had already appointed him as his armorbearer (16:21). However, it should be noted that it does not say that Saul did not know who this young hero *was*; it simply says that he asked, **“Whose son is this?”** Saul could have easily forgotten David's family background. Williams comments: Saul, having promised exemption of taxation to the family of the victor, and the hand of his daughter in marriage with a handsome dowry, naturally asks Abner for information respecting David's father and his position in society ...¹⁷

This seems to be confirmed by the fact that David later expressed his unworthiness to be the king's son-in-law (18:18). Michael Griffiths makes a good application:

Both Jonathan (chap. 14) and David initiated action on a small front just where they were, but what they did led to great victories. There is a need for us alike to take the field locally. We cannot hope to take on the whole of the enemy force, but we do not have to do so. There is a work for Jesus ready at your “front.” We are called to be bold and to take the initiative where we are. God will take care of the rest when, as a result of our action, the battle spreads along the whole front.¹⁸

D. Marrying Michal (Chap. 18)

18:1–5 A deep and lasting friendship sprang up between **Jonathan** and **David**. They were kindred souls, each possessing that rare quality of true courage. **Jonathan** was the legitimate successor to his

¹⁶ (17:55–58) The Septuagint omits these verses.

¹⁷ (17:55–58) Williams, *Student's Commentary*, p. 152.

¹⁸ (17:55–58) Michael Griffiths, *Take My Life*, p. 128.

father's throne, but in giving **his robe ... to David** he indicated that he was willing to forgo his right in order to see David crowned instead.

18:6–16 As **David** continued to win battle after battle, **Saul** became extremely jealous. When he heard the songs of **the women** ascribing to **David** greater exploits than to himself, he became livid with rage. God sometimes uses evil to chastise evil; that is why he allowed Saul to be tormented by **a distressing spirit** (v. 10). **Twice** the king tried to personally kill **David**, **but** both times **David escaped**. Then Saul **made him ... captain over a thousand** soldiers, perhaps hoping that David would be killed while fighting the Philistines. (It appears that he had formerly held a larger command.) But **the LORD was with** David, and his exploits attracted the attention of **all Israel**.

18:17–30 The king's **daughter** had been promised to the man who would kill the Philistine giant, so **Merab**, Saul's **older daughter**, was offered to David. However, more victories would have to be won first. **Saul** hoped David would be killed in the process. When David expressed his social unworthiness to be a **son-in-law to the king**, **Merab ... was given to** another man, which was perhaps Saul's way of trying to humiliate David. But **Saul's younger daughter, Michal, loved David**, and **Saul** agreed to give her to him, provided he produced a **dowry of one hundred** Philistine **foreskins**. Again Saul hoped to kill **David by the hand of the Philistines**. But David was not to be eliminated so easily. He returned with the bizarre **dowry** in double measure and won **Michal** as his bride. As continual military success made it clear that **the LORD was with David**, Saul's hatred and fear of him continued to grow.

Saul's Pursuit of David

1. David flees Gibeah to Samuel at Ramah (1 Sam. 19:18)
2. David travels to Nob (1 Sam. 21:1–9)
3. David goes to Gath (1 Sam. 21:10)
4. David flees Philistines to Adullam (1 Sam. 22:1)
5. David takes his family to safety in Moab (1 Sam. 22:3)
6. David goes to Moab (1 Sam. 22:4)
7. David moves to the Forest of Hereth (1 Sam. 22:5)
8. David and his men attack Philistines plundering Keilah (1 Sam. 23:5)
9. David retreats to the Wilderness of Ziph (1 Sam. 22:5)
10. David withdraws to the Wilderness of Maon (1 Sam. 23:24)
11. Saul's pursuit drives David to Engedi (1 Sam. 23:29)
12. Sparing Saul's life, David returns to Moab (1 Sam. 24:22)
13. David returns to Carmel Maon, marries Abigail (1 Sam. 25)
14. Sparing Saul's life again, David returns to Gath (1 Sam. 26:1–27:2)
15. David is given Ziklag by Achish, Philistine King of Gath (1 Sam. 27)
16. David and his men go to Aphek, joining Philistine forces (1 Sam. 29:1–3)
17. Opposition to David from Philistine commanders forces his return to Ziklag (1 Sam. 30)
18. After Saul's death, David returns to Hebron, where he is crowned King (2 Sam 1–2)

E. Fleeing from Saul (Chaps. 19–26)

1. Jonathan's Loyalty (Chaps. 19, 20)

19:1–7 When **Jonathan** realized that his **father** intended to murder David, he advised David to **hide ... in the field** while he sought to pacify the king. In reasoning with **Saul** about **David**, **Jonathan** reminded him of David's bravery, loyalty, and success against Israel's enemy. He had done nothing worthy of death. Saul was temporarily conciliated and David was restored to his position in the royal court.

19:8–10 But when **war** broke out again, **David** once more distinguished himself, and Saul's jealousy was kindled afresh. **The distressing spirit** returned and **Saul sought to pin David to the wall with his spear**. This was the third time Saul missed. **David** barely **escaped** with his life.

19:11–17 That same night King Saul **sent messengers to kill** David at his **house**. **Michal** knew of the plot and helped him escape by putting the household **image in his bed**. (The idol probably belonged to her, since David was never an idolater.) **When Saul sent** the men **to seize David**, her subterfuge was discovered.

19:18–23 But by then **David** had **escaped**. He **fled** to **Ramah** to see **Samuel**. Men of God go to other men of God in time of trouble. Three times Saul’s **messengers** failed to catch David because, **when they** came near the **prophets** who were with **Samuel**, **they** themselves began to prophesy under the control of **the Spirit of God**. Later, when Saul himself **went** after **David**, he too was gripped by the power of God. This divine overpowering, however, was not the same thing as conversion.

19:24 Once again the people repeated the proverb about **Saul** being **among the prophets** (10:11, 12). His fluctuating behavior must have been puzzling to them. The word “**naked**” does not mean absolutely nude. It simply means that Saul took off his outer garments, the symbol of his royalty. While **God** held Saul prostrate on the ground **all that day and all that night**, David escaped (20:1).

Verse 24 does not contradict 15:34, 35, which says, “Samuel came no more to see Saul.” Here it was *Saul who came to the prophet*, and that unintentionally and quite unexpectedly.

20:1–3 After leaving **Naioth**, **David** came to **Jonathan** and tried to find out why Saul was so intent on his destruction. Apparently Jonathan knew nothing of his father’s continued attempts on David’s life. David explained that the king would not share his plans with Jonathan because of the friendship that existed between him and David.

20:4–9 A test was proposed that would make it plain whether **David** was in danger or not. Instead of taking his place at the royal table for the monthly feast, David would remain absent. If Saul inquired as to his absence, **Jonathan** would explain that he had gone to the **yearly sacrifice** at **Bethlehem**. (This might have been true, even though the trip is not recorded in Scripture. If it was a lie, it is simply recorded as a fact that is not approved by God.) **If** Saul didn’t object, this would show that David was **safe**; **but if** the king became **angry** because David had once again slipped out of his hands, then Jonathan would know that David was in grave peril.

20:10–17 **Jonathan** promised to **go ... into the field** on **the third day** and let **David** know how things had gone by means of a prearranged sign. Perhaps sensing what the outcome would be, Jonathan asked David to **show** the loyal love of **the LORD** to him and to his **house** when he rose to power. It is clear from verses 14–17 that Jonathan believed that David would yet be king; but he reaffirmed his love to David even though he realized the throne rights, vested in him, would be David’s. What unselfish devotion!

20:18–23 These verses detail the sign by which David would be notified as to the king’s attitude. **Jonathan** would come to the field and **shoot** some **arrows** near a rock where **David** would be hiding. The directions he called **to the lad** who would fetch the **arrows** would tell David to flee for his life or to return to the court in **safety**. We might wonder why Jonathan arranged all this play-acting to communicate with David when he later went and talked with David directly anyway. At this time, however, he might not have known that he would be able to contact David without being seen.

20:24–34 On the first night of **the feast**, **Saul** said nothing about David’s absence, reasoning to himself that David was probably ceremonially **unclean**. But on **the second day**, when he quizzed **Jonathan** about David’s whereabouts and found that he had gone to **Bethlehem**, Saul flew into a rage, accusing Jonathan of befriending the man who would rob him and his mother of honor. His language was rough and his manner even rougher as he tried to pin his own son to the wall, transferring his hatred for David momentarily to Jonathan.

20:35–42 On **the morning** of the third day, the appropriate sign was given and David’s fears were confirmed. The men **wept** in each other’s arms; they must now travel separate paths, no longer to enjoy each other’s companionship. David went into hiding, a necessary part of God’s plan to prepare him for the throne. **Jonathan** **went** back to the royal court, remaining loyal to his father, yet knowing deep inside that he would not be Israel’s next king. Should he have gone with David? Was he right in remaining loyal to his father, even though the Lord had rejected Saul from being king?¹

¹MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. (1997, c1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (1 Sa 17:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.