



In The Time Of Shaul

Shmuel 1: 17

Ha'Elah Valley

Soon after Shaul becomes the first king of Israel, he has to face invading enemy nations that are trying to infiltrate and settle the territory of the Israelite tribes. One of these clashes takes place in the Ha'Elah Valley, which is situated at the crossroads that connects the Judean Hills with the Coastal Plain and the Mediterranean Coast.

Shaul's army positions itself on the hills north of the valley. The mighty armies of the Philistines are camping to the south.

As the battle is set to begin, suddenly a shockwave overcomes the camp of Israel. A man of huge proportions emerges and his appearance causes deep fear amongst the army of Israel.

And there went out a champion from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gat, whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had a helmet of copper upon his head, and he was clad with a coat of armor. The weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. He had shields of copper upon his legs and a javelin of copper between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam. His spear's head weighed six hundred

shekels of iron. His shield-bearer went before him.

Goliath paces with confidence across the battlefield without fear and his voice thunders across the camp of Israel.

He stood and cried to the armies of Israel, and said to them: "Why do you come out to set your battle in array? Am I not a Philistine, and you servants to Shaul? Choose a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me, and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then you will be our servants, and serve us."

For 40 days, Goliath mocks the Israelites. In the morning and in the evening, while the Israelites recite their prayer of *Shema Yisrael*, the prayer that declares the oneness of God, Goliath curses the God of Israel.

The Philistine said: "I do taunt the armies of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together."

And when Shaul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid.

King Shaul offers his daughter in marriage and the cancellation of taxes to the family of any man of the Israelite soldiers that will fight Goliath. But no man is prepared to face the Philistine giant.

It happens that a young boy arrives at the camp of Israel with provisions for his brothers as Goliath begins another one of his tirades.

David, the youngest son of Yishai of Beit Lechem (Bethlehem), hears the words of Goliath, words that mock and taunt Israel and their God.

"Who will battle this evil one?" asks little David.

"No one," answer the Israelite soldiers. "Everyone is afraid."

"I'll go," says David. "I'll fight him."

Those around him try to discourage him. "You are only a boy," they tell him, "and Goliath is a man of war."

Quite hard to understand how, but David convinces the soldiers that he can challenge Goliath. So the soldiers bring

David before Shaul, whose first reaction is to doubt that the young boy can face the giant and save Israel.

And Shaul said to David: "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him for you are but a youth and he a man of war from his youth."

Amazingly, David manages to convince the king that he can do the job.

And David said to Shaul: "Your servant kept his father's sheep. When there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth. When he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

"Your servant smote both the lion and the bear. This uncircumcised Philistine will be as one of them, seeing he has taunted the armies of the living God."

David said: "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."

And Shaul said to David: "Go, and the Lord will be with you."

Shaul even offers David his own battle gear. David says no. He has his own weapon – five stones from the River of Nachal.

And that is how David is able to go out to meet Goliath. When Goliath sees Israel's "warrior", he is outraged.

When the Philistine looked and saw David, he detested him for he was only a youth, and ruddy, and with a fair countenance.

The Philistine said to David: "Am I a dog, that you come to me with staves?"

The Philistine cursed David by his god.

The Philistine said to David: "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the field."

David's response to Goliath has become a battle cry for the armies of Israel throughout time.

"You come to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a javelin. I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted."

And then as swift as lightning...

David put his hand in his bag and took from there a stone and slung it and smote the Philistine in his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead and he fell upon his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone and smote the Philistine and slew him, but there was no sword in the hand of David.

While we can only imagine the roar of excitement and joy of the Israelite soldiers as they cheered for the young hero, it is quite hard to comprehend the response of King Shaul!

When Shaul saw David go against the Philistine, he said to Avner, his captain: "Avner, whose son is this youth?"

Avner said: "As your soul lives, O king, I cannot tell."

The king said: "Inquire whose son he is."

The Talmud (*Yevamot, p76*) gives us a very special look into the mind of King Shaul, who instead of joining the happiness in the victory of Israel, is busy with a question about David's father.

The Talmud asks how King Shaul does not know David's father, Yishai, who is the head of the *Sanhedrin*, the supreme court of Israel. The Talmud explains that Shaul is actually wondering about another father of David, the father of the house of Yehuda.

The house of Yehuda was built from Zerach and Peretz, the twins of Tamar, who is the daughter-in-law of Yehuda. Zerach would be known as a father of people who would be important, but Peretz would be known as a father of people who would be kings.

Shaul is very concerned because the behavior of David, since the very first moment he met him, strikes him as royal.

...The way he walks...The way he speaks...His confidence. The way David manages to kill Goliath raises the question of whether David is related to Peretz.

Shaul wants to know whether David comes from the house of Peretz or from the house of Zerach. If he comes from Zerach, he has been granted to be a great man, but no more. And that's fine in the eyes of Shaul. But, if he comes from Peretz, clearly David is a threat to Shaul's throne. That is what is bothering Shaul and is the reason that he did not celebrate with Israel.

In order to address this question, Avner has to go to the house of study to figure out the answer. But another advisor to Shaul, Doeg HaEdomi, turns to the king and says, "You are busy with the question about his father, but first you should ask a more important question – Is David a Jew?" Doeg knows that David's great grandmother is Ruth the Moabite, so he thinks that he had found a loophole to prevent David from becoming King.

It is said in the Torah (*Ki Tetze*, 23:4) that...

An Ammonite or Moabite will not enter the congregation of God."

So the scholars in the house of study had to examine whether this question referred to men and women or to men only.

To understand this question, we have to go back to the time of the Exodus from Egypt. The Talmud explains that when the Israelites were traveling in the desert after the leaving Egypt, they needed to cross the land of Moab on their way to the Land of Israel. But the Moabites refused to let them cross and did not provide them with bread and water.

So the Talmud concludes that since men are responsible for hosting guests, only men are included in the prohibition.

From this discussion we know that David is a true son

of Israel, as he was the descendant of a Moabite woman that became Jewish, and also a descendant of Peretz.

As time goes by, David becomes a successful officer in the army of Shaul and gains popularity. At the same time, King Shaul continues to see David as a possible usurper of his throne.

The daughters of Israel sing the song "Shaul has fought thousands, and David tens of thousands." This brings out Shaul's hatred and jealousy toward David, so much so that it causes him to seek out David to kill him.

So now we understand how Shaul's hatred for David is sparked, a hatred that plagues David until Shaul's death.

The mighty battle between David and Goliath is not simply a confrontation on the battlefield, but an encounter with a deeper meaning. It can be revealed by looking at the ancestry of these two men.

David is the great grandson of Ruth the Moabite, the daughter of Eglon, who is the King of Moab. Ruth's sister is Orpah. The two sisters are married to Machlon and Kielyon, the sons of Elimelech, who is the husband of Naomi.

In the story from Megilat Ruth, it is told that after the death of Elimelech and the death of his sons, Naomi is left alone

with her daughters-in-law. Naomi decides to return to the land of Yehuda. She pleads with the sisters to return to the house of their father, a royal house in Moab. But Ruth clings to Naomi, and becomes a Jew, whereas Orpah returns to Moab, to her idol-worshipping father.

While it is clear that David is a descendent of Ruth, we learn from the Talmud that Goliath is a descendant of Orpah – David's great aunt. So on a different level, it turns out that the battle between Goliath and David is also a battle between two cousins, between two philosophies, between two beliefs. (*Sota 42*)

Each one represents a separate spiritual world, a legacy passed on by the choices of their foremothers. Goliath represents idol worship. David represents the belief in One God. And the description in the Tanach reflects this.

This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand. I will kill you, and take your head off from you. I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day to the fowls of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

It is interesting to note that at the same time that the battle is about to start, another event takes place that is going to affect David's life later.

Goliath has a special soldier who carries his shield, which is large and heavy. Only a strong warrior can carry it.

His shield-bearer went before him.

The Zohar (c206, s1) reveals that before the battle begins, David makes an offer to the man who carries the shield of Goliath, saying, "If you will be on my side in the battle against Goliath and become a Jew, I will give you one of the daughters of Israel." As a result of the battle, the shield-bearer becomes a Jew, recognizing that God is the true God of Israel. And later he marries Bat Sheva. The shield-bearer is none other than Uriah the Hittite.

The Zohar explains that God punishes David for treating the daughters of Israel so cheaply, by offering them to strangers – offering something that is not his. Therefore God takes the woman who was originally meant to be for David and gives her instead, to Uriah as his wife.

Only afterwards, with a lot of pain and sorrow, Bat Sheva becomes David's wife. She is the mother of Shlomo, who builds the First Temple of God in Jerusalem. The story of how Bat Sheva becomes David's wife is told in Shmuel 2, chapter 11.