

## PROLOGUE— DAVID AND GOLIATH REDUX

It might seem odd that *Genesis Decompressed* begins by discussing an event recorded in SAMUEL I, the eighth book of the Old Testament but that story admirably illustrates why Scripture can only be understood if one reads it in its original Hebrew and is familiar with the history and culture from which it emerged. When David's confrontation with Goliath is so perceived, the conventional view of a heroic underdog besting a bully is very different from what the text recounts. Malcolm Gladwell, in his *David and Goliath*, claims the shepherd lad had the advantage! Gladwell was right but for the wrong reasons and drew lessons which may be sound but are not what Scripture conveyed. Nevertheless, some of his observations are useful.

It seems the Philistines and Israelites, who had been warring for some time, stood facing each other on opposite ridges overlooking a valley, neither side keen to initiate hostilities. Out stepped a Philistine "champion". Standing 6' 9", clad in a bronze helmet and heavy armor, Goliath wielded a javelin, a spear and a sword. Attended by a shield-bearer, he strode into the valley and hurled a challenge: Israel was to send a man to meet him in a fight to the death. If Goliath wins, Israel will serve the Philistines; should their man prevail, the Philistines will return the favor. He delivered his oration twice a day for forty consecutive days but no Israelite stepped forward.

Meanwhile, David, youngest of eight brothers, was home tending his family's flock of sheep. His three oldest brothers had joined the army of Saul, Israel's first king. One day, Jesse, David's father, sent him to their camp with some provisions. He arrived just in time to catch Goliath's act - and was aghast; not only did this thug revile Israel's king and army, he insulted the Almighty! David boldly offered his services to Saul, who firmly discouraged him, pointing out that he had no chance against such an experienced warrior. David countered that he had dispatched a huge bear and a ferocious lion who attacked his sheep - and walked away without a scratch. Saul was convinced, accepting David's offer and even giving him his own armor. Now Saul was a big man, too (SAMUEL I 9:2), towering over David, who found the royal panoply cumbersome and unwieldy. Sloughing it off, he reverted to his shepherd's garb, seized his staff and descended into the valley.

An astounded Goliath reviled this "challenger", threatening to feed him to "the birds in the sky and the beasts of the field" (SAMUEL I 17:44). But he was rudely surprised; his armor and weapons proved useless when a rock slammed into his forehead. David used a slinger, a sleeve-like device with a pouch at one end, to propel a stone that struck with lethal impact. Goliath was a sitting duck, avers Gladwell, for he had a debilitating condition, with impaired sight and arthritis that made every move agony; yet he was so arrogant, he believed he could overcome his infirmities. When his shield-bearer would tell him his adversary was within range, Goliath would strike; surely one of his swings would connect - if his opponent played by the rules. But David did not do that, asserts Gladwell; he relied on intuition instead of blindly follow protocol, turning Goliath's handicap into his own advantage. No longer a story of divine help for His "faithful", it presents a new mantra: Trust your instincts.

Gladwell's theory rests on the premise that single surrogate contests were common in ancient warfare; his proof is a report by Quintus Quadrigarius of such a showdown in the first century BCE, a millennium after the events in our story - and that was a duel, very different from combat by proxies. The few singular encounters are in works of fiction; the real number of such incidents, other than the David- Goliath meeting, is zero! [*Whether the bout between Paris and Menelaus took place on a battlefield or in Homer's imagination is debated. Regardless, it came after the Trojans and Achaeans had fought to exhaustion and morale on both sides hit rock bottom. Richard the Lionheart threw out such an invitation to the Saracens but he probably knew Saladin was not in the vicinity - and no one would make a move in his absence. Nor was there a major issue; the prize was Jerusalem, not capitulation. Charles V did offer to face Francis I to spare their armies [16th century] but that was not to be a fight to the death; it was a joust between dynasts over territories not even central to their areas of hegemony {Francis demurred}*]. Scripture itself belies this idea. If it was normal protocol, Goliath had no need to spell it out; he had

but to issue a demand and the Israelites would be bound to comply. Nor were the Philistines on the same page; when their hero fell, they did not proffer their services but turned and fled. And if these engagements were truly routine, why did the Israelites not resort to it a few years earlier when Samson was around (JUDGES 13-16)?

The second plank in Gladwell's platform is Goliath's illness. Textual "clues" suggest Goliath had acromegaly, accounting for his size [excess growth hormone] and impaired movement and vision. If the Israelites were aware of it (*Saul, when dissuading David from facing Goliath, did not sound like he thought the chap had health problems*), why fear him? Saul's own tribe of Benjamin had hundreds of expert slingers (JUDGES 20:16) who could easily have taken him out. If they did not know, Gladwell's theory makes no sense - David could only take advantage of this if he knew of it! Did Goliath know he was sick? Yes, maintains Gladwell, for the shield-bearer served as his "eyes", toting protection to divert "incoming"; but as David approached, let fly the stone, ran up to a prostrate Goliath, drew his sword and severed his head, this trusty aide, who we are twice told "walked before" Goliath with this screen, disappeared. Gladwell makes much of the "staves" Goliath saw instead of the single one David held - the guy had double-vision, a symptom of acromegaly. But if he saw two staves, he should also have seen two lads! Gladwell's version is obviously flawed but traditional ones are also defective, so we must review the text more carefully.

Chapter 17 (SAMUEL I) has ten PAR-SHAS (paragraphs), the first being verses 1-11. (*Chapters in standard translations do not conform to the sections in the Hebrew text – see Introduction.*) Verses 1-3 set the stage for the coming battle. Four verses are then devoted to Goliath's fearsome appearance, his terms set forth in the next two and his insult in a third. The last verse describes the Israelites' consternation. Careful reading reveals a very different narrative.

Verse 1 tells us the Philistines, whom Gladwell brands "battle-hardened, ... sworn enemies of Israel", started this tiff by invading the territory of the tribe of Judah. In actuality, the Israelites had a more fluid relationship with them. Both were relative newcomers to the region, competing for land and enjoying a few centuries of conquest. The books of JOSHUA and JUDGES record ups and downs in their dealings. The Philistines had a monopoly on iron tools (only Saul and his son Jonathan had iron swords - SAMUEL I 13:22) but had no problem providing Israel with iron agricultural implements (SAMUEL I 13:19-21), hardly acts of "sworn enemies". Nor were they upset when Samson took up with Philistine girls. David himself briefly lived among them as vassal to the king of Gath (SAMUEL I 27).

This spat began when the Philistines saw Israel's tribes coalescing into a monarchy, a step the Philistines had yet to take. (*In GENESIS [20, 21], Canaanites ruled by a king were called Philistines because they inhabited the region that later became Philistia. The king of Gath [SAMUEL I 21:11] has that title to accentuate the status of his treaty with David. Each Philistine city was ruled by a קֶרֶן SEH-REN [JOSHUA 13:3], cognate to the Greek "tyrannos" {"tyrant"}, originally a non-hereditary chieftain.*) The fledgling King Saul had a series of victories, unnerving the Philistines; they invaded Judah's territory [*Saul's tribe, Benjamin, was the smallest and normally aligned with Judah, as their territories adjoined*] to test the viability of this new kingdom, for the other tribes did not always see eye-to-eye with Judah. Saul and the "men of Israel" (v. 2) assembled to meet the challenge. The Philistines had iron weapons but Israel had beaten them in recent skirmishes wielding bronze armaments. They also deployed those deadly slingers - and they had momentum.

Translations putting them on opposite hills overlooking a valley are faulty. Verse 3 does not begin וְהִפְלִישְׁתִּים V'HA-P'LISH-TIM (AND THE PHILISTINES) but וּפְלִישְׁתִּים U-PH'LISH-TIM (AND [SOME] PHILISTINES). The next word is not עֹמְדֵי O-M'DOO (THEY STOOD - combat ready) nor יַעֲמְדוּ YA-A-M'DOO (THEY WOULD STAND - in formation); the present tense עֹמְדִים OH-M'DIM (ARE STANDING) with the preposition EL (TOWARD), rather than the expected AHL (ON - cf. SAMUEL II 2:14), tells us they stationed troops in a file extending to the mountain. The Israelites mirrored this, stretching a line from their camp. The "Heh" definite article prefix to הַר HAHR (MOUNTAIN) restricts it - there was only one mountain (*מִזֶּה MEE-ZEH [FROM THIS] indicates flanking objects, not ones facing each other {cf. EXODUS 17:12, EZEKIEL 47:12}*) from which both sides aligned defensive lines making an obtuse angle and separated by a gulch. As the

armies warily eyed each other, Goliath sallied forth. The King James Bible calls him a “champion”, a relic of England's chivalric legacy [*more appropriate for גבורים GEE-BOH-RAHM - v. 51*] and supporting the notion that Goliath's proposal was a norm. He was אִישׁ־הַבֵּינַיִם ISH HA-BEI-NA-YIM (THE MAN BETWEEN [THEM]), the plural construct of BEIN [BETWEEN] - cf. GENESIS 9:12; EXODUS 31:17; KINGS I 15:29), an envoy. He trudged out to where both lines abutted the mountain and delivered a message.

“Shield-bearer” (v. 7) is also wrong (“shield” is מָגֵן MAH-GEIN - GENESIS 15:1); he was נוֹשֵׂא הַצִּנְדָּה NOH-SEI HA-TZEE-NAH (CANOPY HOLDER). These are not synonyms (cf. EZEKIEL 23:24; PSALMS 35:2). Translators resorted to tortuous interpretations, one positing TZEE-NAH to be a large shield and MAH-GEIN a small model. Multiple names are used for variants of the same military ware in martial societies, like Sparta and Rome, not in Scripture. TZEE-NAH, cognate to Tzadiq-Lamed [“shade”], is an “overhang” (cf. JONAH 4:5; PROVERBS 25:13). A shield wards off blows - a canopy deflects projectiles (*both can be seen in ancient reliefs*). We are twice told (v. 41) this fellow preceded Goliath carrying this visor - strange in that Goliath only put on his act early mornings and late evenings (v. 16).

Goliath was from Gath, originally a city of עֲנָקִים ANAQIM (GIANTS). Joshua drove them out of all but three towns, one of those being Gath (JOSHUA 11:21-22). Their remnants now served the Philistines; Goliath was such a mercenary, as deduced from his Canaanite name (*Talmudic lore [Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 42b] made him a Moabite*). As this was not the first time these nations clashed, the Israelites had certainly run into him; he may have been huge but nothing they had not successfully dealt with. *When Saul tried to dissuade David from fighting him, he did not argue that Goliath was enormous but that he was a seasoned warrior (v. 33); Saul clearly knew him. Why did the text embellish rather than just identify him as an Anaq? Another perplexity missed by the pundits is what reaction he expected; if confident of victory, he would try to evoke a positive response, much more likely elicited by an unintimidating courier.*

First asking the Israelites why they had massed, Goliath proposed an alternative to wanton bloodshed. His true intent is discerned from the superfluous הָלוֹא אֲנֹכִי הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי וְאַתֶּם עֲבָדִים לְשָׂאוֹל HA-LOH A-NOH-KHEE HA-P'LISH-TEE V'AH-TEM A-BHA-DIM L'SHA-OOL (v. 8). “I am a Philistine and you are Saul's servants” is imprecise; it is “Am I not the Philistine and (are) you (not) servants to Saul?”. The declarative HA-LOH draws attention to what listeners are presumed to know or should know (cf. NUMBERS 22:30, DEUTERONOMY 11: 30, SAMUEL 1 20:37). The “Heh” definite article prefix puzzled many. [“I am a Philistine” is wrong.] AH-NOH-KHEE, the formal first-person pronoun (not the familiar AH-NEE), traces the contours of the relationship. Goliath announced that he was the warrior they had seen or heard about. *Single letters can convey multiple meanings, as this “Heh” prefix does. A courier would not come so bedecked just to deliver a message; Goliath made sure they knew he was talking about himself, the very one their representative would face in mortal combat.*

Commentators interpret “servants of Saul” as his mocking the Israelites but that is אֲבָדִי שְׂאוֹל A-BH'DEI SHA-OOL (the possessive construct - cf. GENESIS 26: 32, NUMBERS 14: 24, JOSHUA 1:2). Goliath addressed them as עֲבָדִים לְשָׂאוֹל A-BHA-DIM L'SHA-OOL (SERVANTS TO SAUL{the dative “Lamed” indicates behavior, not status} - cf. GENESIS 44: 9, 15, 17 and note both constructions in LEVITICUS 25:55). They are not servants but men who put themselves in subordinate positions, often voluntarily (like royal subjects). The Philistines were concerned lest the Israelites form a unified monarchy that would challenge them, so Goliath planted doubt. “Are you risking your lives for Israel or for your king's glory? Does he have the courage to face me?” He did not insult them - he baited them to abandon Saul.

Verse 10 begins “And the Philistine said”; in biblical syntax, this phrase inserted within his oration changes the focus or party addressed. Goliath was no longer lecturing the Israelites, for he related how he “shamed the ranks of Israel”, (third person. *Translations of חִבַּרְתִּי CHEI-RAPH-TEE, “I defied/denigrated/embarrassed” and the like, are better served with נִאֲצַתִּי NEE-AHTZ-TEE [TAUNTED - cf. SAMUEL II 12:14], בִּזְתִּי BA-ZEE-THEE [HUMILIATED - cf. NEHEMIAH 3:36], מִאֲחִסְתִּי MA-AHST-TEE [DESPISED - cf. PSALMS 78:67] or גִּדַּפְתִּי GEE-DAPH-TEE [DEFAMED - cf. EZEKIEL 20:27] but still do not capture what he said.) This was*

unjustified. Soldiers challenged, in lieu of battle, to elect one to fight the heavyweight boxing champion would scoff; an army fights collectively and would be foolish to accept such an absurd offer. “Shall reproach” comes close (Institute for Scriptural Research, South Africa) but gets the tense wrong {the word is in the past} - cf. GENESIS 30:23, 34:14. הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה HA-YOHHM HA-ZEH (THIS DAY) indicates he made this claim but once (cf. GENESIS 7:13; EXODUS 12:17; JOSHUA 5:11), justifying himself to his superiors, who were flabbergasted when they heard this. They knew this enemy was no pushover. Was this not a huge risk? How did he set them at ease? Both sides gathered intelligence. The Philistines knew the prophet Samuel, displeased with Saul, was sitting this one out. This may not have affected Saul's confidence but surely concerned some of the men. Goliath assured the brass that Saul would not initiate hostilities. He could not postpone them indefinitely without attrition in his ranks, which Goliath tried to foment, but he would not go into combat without Samuel's blessing. How could he keep his army intact and supplied in the meantime? Saul, theorized Goliath, would look for an out - and Goliath would hand him one. He proposed a one-on-one contest! No way would anyone meeting him win; it gave Saul a way to “save face”. The Philistines would avoid an all-out war, the Israelites would resume paying tribute and Saul would soon be deposed because he could not survive the shame of not taking the field himself.

Verse 11 notes that Saul and all Israel “heard these words”, presumed to be Goliath's challenge; that would be simply דְּבַרֵי הַפִּלִשְׁתִּי DI-BH'REI HA-P'LISH-TEE (THE WORDS OF THE PHILISTINE - v. 11). The added qualifier הַאֵלֶּה HA-EI-LEH (THESE) points to the last statement in a sequence (cf. DEUTERONOMY 5:19, SAMUEL I 24:17; ESTHER 9:20). Goliath's challenge did not alarm Saul and his men; nothing compelled them to pay attention. They had fought Anaqim before and could just double-team this guy. The disclosure of what he told his commanders - that bothered them. וַיִּשְׁמָע VA-YISH-MA (HE HEARD) should be וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ VA-YISH-M'OO (THEY HEARD - cf. GENESIS 3:8; EXODUS 4:31; JOSHUA 7:9). The singular verb for multiple subjects means each heard the content at different times or places (cf. JOSHUA 22:30; JEREMIAH 38:1; NEHEMIAH 2:10, 19) or reacted differently (cf. KINGS I 1:41; JEREMIAH 26:21; HAGGAI 1:12). HA-EI-LEH are the last of Goliath's words, expressed to his commanders but which found their way to Saul and his men, who reacted with יִרְאָה YIR-AH (FEAR) and חִתָּה CHI-TAH (TERROR). YIR-AH, fear of consequences (cf. EXODUS 9:20) elicits protective measures. CHI-TAH (“apprehension” - cf. GENESIS 35:5) inhibits response. When paired, YIR-AH is first (cf. JOSHUA 1:9, where Joshua is told not to fear the possibility of failure [that comes with any new undertaking] and, once he begins, not to be dismayed if things seem headed for derailment); verse 11 reverses this order because the project was already underway. Saul was apprehensive, frustrated at being unable to act. He knew he should ignore Goliath and just attack but could not do that yet - he feared that Samuel had forsaken him and began to harbor misgivings about holding onto his throne. His soldiers were dismayed by this indecisiveness and began to fear their demand for a monarch had been ill-advised.

The next paragraph (v. 12 - 16) shifts to David and his family, known from the previous chapter which recorded David's anointment as Saul's successor. Samuel did this not to seat David on the throne but to consecrate him (SAMUEL I 16:3) and imbue him with divine guidance and favor (SAMUEL I 16:13). (*David's accession required two other anointments, one when he was chosen to rule over his tribe [SAMUEL II 2:4] and again when he was accepted by the others [SAMUEL II 5:3]*). It was therefore performed בְּקִרְבֵּי B'QEH-REBH EH-CHAV, usually translated “among his brothers” but that would be לִפְנֵי אֶחָיו LI-PH'NEI EH-CHAV (BEFORE HIS BROTHERS - cf. LEVITICUS 16:7, NUMBERS 33:7; NEHEMIAH 3:34) or נֶגַד אֶחָיו NE-GED EH-CHAV (FACING HIS BROTHERS - cf. GENESIS 31: 32, EXODUS 19: 2). Nor did the text use the more accurate בְּתוֹךְ אֶחָיו B'THOHKH EH-CHAV (IN THE MIDST OF HIS BROTHERS - cf. GENESIS 23: 6, 42: 5, Kings II 4:13). B'QEH-REBH is restrictive (cf. GENESIS 24:3, EXODUS 31: 14) - “within” [i. e. secretly].

Soon thereafter, David was recommended as a singer to relieve Saul's melancholia, not by Saul's servants, but “one of the young men” who lauded David as if he was being considered for the king's staff. David, claimed his sponsor, was גִּבּוֹר הַחַיִל GEE-BOHR CHA-YIL (WEALTHY - not “mighty of valor”; that is גִּבּוֹר הַחַיִל GEE-BOHR HEH-CHA-YIL [cf.

JOSHUA 1:14; JUDGES 6:12; KINGS II 15:20). When Naomi called Boaz (RUTH 2:1) a GEE-BOHR CHA-YIL, she meant he was a man of means), אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה ISH MIL-CHA-MAH (MAN OF WAR), נְבוֹן דָּבָר N'BOHN DA-BHAR (UNDERSTANDING), אִישׁ תְּאוֹר ISH TOH-AR (A GOOD-LOOKING MAN) - and had the divine immanence "with him". Considering Saul only needed some cheering up, David seemed slightly overqualified. Were these claims even true? Was he wealthy? In the next verse, Saul calls him a shepherd. He had no military exploits (*Saul was not aware of any when he warned him against taking on Goliath [ISH MIL- CHA-MAH refers to military combat, not fighting animals]*). He was too short to be physically imposing. And one with religious proclivities would be known (cf. SAMUEL I 9:10-11). So why the "pitch"? This nascent talent scout was more astute than Saul's servants, for it would not do to let the camp know of Saul's depression. David was passed off as qualified to be an advisor, one of Saul's נוֹעַם כְּלָיִם NOH-SEI KHEI-LIM (SAMUEL I 16:21), usually translated "armor bearer" but generic for any attendant [cf. JUDGES 9:54; ISAIAH 52:11; CHRONICLES I 11:39]. That justified his frequent presence in the king's quarters; his private performances were not talked about.

David, his father and brothers are presented again. *Jesse was not among the elders greeting Samuel (SAMUEL I 16:4) but became "in the days of Saul" an "elder come into the company of men" [זָקֵן] ZA-KEIN here is not "aged" but "elder" (cf. EXODUS 4:29; DEUTERONOMY 29:9; RUTH 4:11), a tribal leader. We are then told thrice (v. 13-14) of his sons in Saul's army. They followed אַחֲרֵי־שָׂאֵל לְמִלְחָמָה A-CHA-REI SHA- OOL LA-MIL-CHA-MAH (BEHIND SAUL TO THE BATTLE). Individually, הֹלְכוּ בְּמִלְחָמָה HO- L'KHOO BA-MIL-CHA-MAH (THEY HAD GONE INTO BATTLE - the verb in the completed past) - they had already fought alongside him. The seemingly redundant (v. 14) הֹלְכוּ אַחֲרֵי־שָׂאֵל HO-L'KHOO A-CAH-REI SHA-OOL (THEY FOLLOWED SAUL) omits any mention of war but puts this paragraph into perspective. David's father and brothers were privy to a fact no one else was - he was anointed to be Israel's next king. It would be understandable if they pulled back from Saul, especially given how disappointed Samuel was with him, and muted support, anticipating his failure. Instead, they bolstered him. David would not come to the throne at the expense of Saul or his family; nothing must detract from the king's majesty or their loyalty. Jesse advocated Saul's cause in the council of Ephrata; his oldest sons joined the army. This is what these passages proclaim, the last one stressing their succor for Saul personally. David did his part surreptitiously, attending the king (v. 14), with intermittent trips home. (*Shepherding was not now his principal occupation; in biblical style, the dominant theme heads any sequence, the successive phrases modifiers or qualifiers. His "going and coming" from Saul was his primary activity; this is supported by the punctuation, which separates these two phrases into two activities, the first one primary.*)*

Verse 16 seems out of place; details of Goliath's daily declamation and how long he had been at it belong at the end of the last paragraph (v. 11). Here, it reinforces the fact that Jesse and his family supported the monarch and forestalls an obvious question that eluded all commentators: how was it David knew nothing of this? It is clear he became aware of Goliath (v. 23) when he came to check on his brothers. Goliath took two curtain calls a day and had a forty-day run. He must have been the topic of discussion in camp; surely someone at headquarters mentioned it. And how strange the armies stared at each other for forty days, not at all typical of ancient warfare.

Goliath had a הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ HASH-KEIM V'HA-A-REBH routine (v. 16 - literally "rise early and make evening"), delivering his oration before dawn and after sunset - and always preceded by the fellow with the parasol. He was not out at high noon - why the shade? He spoke to those within hearing distance, knowing it would get back to camp. He also knew no one was going to take him up on his offer and did not care; he would rub it in until they got rid of Saul or deserted him. But he had identified himself as a combatant, losing a neutral's protection; he knew no one would take him on but a slinger firing deadly projectiles was a threat he appreciated. He therefore only came out when visibility was poorest - and still hid behind a screen. David had not heard his speech because he was never near this formation; he did not wander far from Saul's tent, his "treatments" kept under wraps.

Appraisals of a tense impasse and that "something had to give" between the belligerents stemmed from unfamiliarity with ancient warfare. The Philistines invaded Israel's territory, daring Saul to dislodge them; Goliath was inciting them to dump Saul but did not want to provoke hostilities. Philistine advantages in weaponry were

marginal and their chariots useless in the rocky, hilly terrain. Goliath was content to continue taunting as long as it took to undermine Saul and convinced his bosses his ploy would work. Saul was in no hurry, either. Samuel's absence bothered him and may have made the men anxious, but they could bide their time, waiting for Samuel to yet show up. Goliath sounded menacing but the Israelites knew he would not be the deciding factor in combat. Nothing compelled either side to immediate action.

Verses 17-19 seem to innocuously advance the plot. To place David near the "action", it needed a few words about dad sending him with provisions. Jesse did much more, bidding him (v. 17) וְהָרַץ הַמְחַנֶּה לְאֶחָיו V'HA-REITZ HA-MA-CHA-NEH L'A-CHEH-KHA, rendered "run quickly to your brothers in the camp". These were not their first rations - why the rush? And it should be רוּץ ROOTZ {RUN - cf. SAMUEL I 20:36; KINGS II 4:26; ZECHARIAH 2:8; better is מָהַר MA-HEIR (HURRY - cf. GENESIS 19:22, EXODUS 32:8; ESTHER 6:20)}. HA-REITZ is "run through" (persistently - cf. הֵרַע HEI-RA [HE INFLICTED TROUBLE - EXODUS 5:23]) while the inverted order {L'A- CHEH-KHA (TO YOUR BROTHERS) should precede HA-MA-CHA-NEH (THE CAMP)} told David to make a "production", publicizing their support.

The next paragraph (v. 20-25) begins with David approaching הַמְעֵגָלָה HA-MA-A-GA-LAH (THE CIRCUMFERENCE - not HA-MA-CHA-NEH [THE CAMP]) and bumping into a troop heading out for sentry duty (v. 20 - the "Vav" ["and"] prefix to הַחֵיָל HA-CHA-YIL (THE TROOPS) makes them distinct from the main body). וְהֵרִיעוּ בַּמִּלְחָמָה V'HEI-REI-OO BA-MIL-CHA-MAH as "they shouted a battle cry" requires הֵרִיעוּ HA-REE-OO (cf. v. 52; JOEL 2:1) with no "Vav". No battle was imminent, no reason for this. The verb's root, "Resh-Ayin" ("companion/intimate" - cf. SAMUEL I 20:41; ISAIAH 41:6; ESTHER 9:22) applies to pickets closely coordinating movements. The next verse explicitly records their reacting to Philistine maneuvers, as the order, Israel and Philistines, is reversed from that in verse 3. This deployment made David curious - and anxious when he heard his brothers were out in this line. He immediately placed his entire load in storage (v. 22) and ran to find them. From there to the end of the paragraph, expositors see a condensed repetition of Goliath's tirade and Israelite reaction but that could not have taken place during David's visit. The Israelites are portrayed standing in awe before this colossus and scattering when he starts bellowing. It is a stretch to say this happened eighty times. Soldiers would either go AWOL or get used to it. We can also posit that David was ignorant of Goliath's challenge but if Saul had already offered his rewards, David had to know of this given his presence at headquarters - and would be recorded after verse 11! Verse 26 makes it clear he heard it now for the first time. *[If this section was inserted to explain David's impending involvement, there would be no separation between the paragraphs.]*

As David spoke with his brothers, וְהָיָה אִישׁ הַבְּנָיִם עוֹלֶה V'HEE-NEI ISH HA-BEI-NA-YIM OH-LEH (AND LO THE COURIER ASCENDS). V'HEE-NEI signals the unexpected [see Genesis 1:29]. Since the phrase telling us David was talking to his brothers opens this verse (it should end the previous one), Goliath showing up now was unanticipated (see v. 16). The second surprise is OH-LEH (HE ASCENDS); it should be יָרַד YAH-RAHD (CAME DOWN). To the Israelites' amazement, he crossed the wadi and moved up toward them! He had performed twice daily for forty days and was frustrated that his words were falling on deaf ears - Saul's army was still intact. *[This refutes the idea that Israel would default if they sent no one to engage him.]* That prompted this move the day David was there, except that he now emerged sans armor, sans weapons and sans aide. As a courier, he was in no danger, hence the change of designation - "Goliath the Philistine" from the Gath contingent, representing that corps but not as a combatant. When he first surfaced (*and presumably thereafter*), וַיִּקְרָא VA-YIQ-RA (HE CALLED - v. 8) - he had to shout. Now, וַיְדַבֵּר VA-Y'DA-BEIR (HE SPOKE - v. 23), he was close enough for normal speech - and not his usual harangue (דְּבָרָיו D'BHA-RAV [HIS WORDS]) but כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה KA-D'BHA-RIM HA-EI-LEH ("as these words"). The comparative Kaph prefix and pronoun HA-EI-LEH reference the phrase in verse 10, the rationale he gave his superiors! This he now presented to Israel - with implied rebuke: "Why are you still here? Don't you realize your king will not attack? His prophet abandoned him. Your cause is lost. Go back to your homes!"

Saul waited to see if Goliath would persist. After forty days, he realized this guy was not about to stop - nor would Samuel relent. From the prophet's last words to him, he knew victory was not in the cards for him or his son. But a son-in-law, not subject to Divine sanction, could preserve the throne for the family. Protocol prevented his placing another at the helm now - that would be an abdication - but why not take a chance on a volunteer? After all, the Anaqim had been thrashed before... but how to broach the subject?

The Israelite response was unlike David's; he heard (v. 23), they beheld, the man. וַיִּנְסוּ VA-YA-NOO-SOO is not וַיִּבְרְחוּ VA-YIBH-R'CHOO (AND THEY FLED {headlong} - cf. GENESIS 16:8; EXODUS 14:5; JEREMIAH 4:29); it is more moderate flight (cf. GENESIS 19:20; EXODUS 4:3; NUMBERS 35:6). Here it means "retreated" (New American Bible, American Bible Society) - they recoiled at his suggestion. Unlike VA-YI-R'OO ("they feared") in verse 11, which has one "Yud", the one in verse 24 has two [the intense form] but it makes no sense to postulate their fear had increased, for Goliath now posed no threat {and they would be inured to it by now}. The initial fear was apprehension of consequences; this one was a visceral reaction to an imminent peril - as determined as any one of them was to remain loyal to Saul, his fellows may waver. This was an opportune setting for Saul's spokesman to present the king's offer - וַיִּשְׂרְאֵל VA-YOH-MER ISH YIS-RA-EL (AND AN ISRAELITE MAN SAID - v. 25; if the Israelites were talking among themselves, it would be וַיִּשְׂרְאוּ VA-YOH-M'ROO ISH EL A-CHEEV [cf. GENESIS 37:19; EXODUS 16:15; NUMBERS 14:4]). "If anyone takes on this guy, the king will reward him generously, even giving his daughter in marriage"!

The next verse flows from the last one but starts a new paragraph. David questioned "the men standing with him", although he was speaking with his brothers before Goliath intruded (the text has men "with" him, not "near" him, as some translate it, a crucial difference). He heard what everyone else did, both from Goliath and Saul's agent; what more did he need to know? And why insert a religious dimension (v. 26)? [Commentators erroneously cast this story as a clash of ideologies; early readers would not have identified with this, for Goliath's impulse was purely nationalistic.] Perhaps this prompted Eliab's dressing him down, though David parried with a cavalier remark and carried on as if their conversation never took place. The popular conjecture that Eliab echoed the jealousy of Joseph's brothers (GENESIS Ch. 37) is unsustainable. Joseph's pretensions appeared to his brothers as fabrications of his imagination; David exhibited no such bent. Joseph's father exhibited overt favoritism (GENESIS 37:3); David's father did not even consider him until Samuel asked if there was another son he neglected to mention (SAMUEL I 16:11). David's brothers were all present at his induction by Samuel; none objected then, after Samuel departed or later when David was promoted to Saul's "staff". Furthermore, sibling rivalry is a motif of the Joseph story; this conversation was incidental, with no effect on the plot or outcome. Inserting a gratuitous scene is bad form and inconsistent with biblical style. The alternatives, that Eliab accused David of trying to instigate action or suspected he was prematurely pushing himself to the fore, also do not hold up. Eliab first asked why David came and with whom he left the sheep, incomprehensible queries - David certainly told his brothers he came at his father's behest. Eliab's second objection is even harder to fathom; battle spectators characterized later periods, not the biblical era. David's reply was given various readings. One has him trivializing his remarks, that הֲלוֹא דְבָרָהּ הִיא HA-LOH DA-BHAR HOO (v. 29) means "they are but words/I was only talking"; that is דְּבוּרָהּ DEE-BOOR, not DA-BHAR (cf. DEUTERONOMY 33:3; JEREMIAH 5:13; SONG OF SONGS 8:8). Others opine he downplayed the incident; that is לֹא דְבָרָהּ LOH DA-BHAR (NOTHING - cf. NUMBERS 20:19; SAMUEL I 20:21) or רַק דְּבָרָהּ RAQ DA-BHAR (A MERE THING - cf. DEUTERONOMY 32:47; KINGS I 15:5). HA-LOH indicates significance (cf. GENESIS 29:25; EXODUS 4:14; DEUTERONOMY 3:11); he might have kept on questioning (v. 30) to show up Eliab, but his repetitiveness indicates he really sought answers, although it is hard to see what he did not already know.

David's remarks open a paragraph because he was no longer near his brothers, for his questions could be answered only by those unaware he was Saul's anointed successor. Nor was he inquiring about the reward. He asked מַה יַעֲשֶׂה MAH YEI-AH-SEH (WHAT OUGHT TO BE DONE - cf. EXODUS 2:4; NUMBERS 15:34; ESTHER 6: 11) to the

man who toppled this nemesis; would the army's allegiance swing to him? David needed to know before he acted. He found the responses reassuring - the victor should receive כְּדָבָר הַזֶּה KA-DA-BHAR HA-ZEH (AS THIS THING - v. 27), what Saul's agent promised. There was no hint of toppling the king - to David's relief.

The text (v. 28) should tell us that Eliab שָׁמַע ("had heard"); the past imperfect וַיִּשְׁמַע VA-YISH-MA ("listened") indicates he actively sought to find out what his little brother was up to. His brothers heard that David was asking trenchant questions among the ranks. Was he taking matters into his own hands now that Saul abnegated his responsibility? When Eliab inquired of those whom David asked [per biblical style, the possessive pronoun suffix of דָּבָרוֹ ("in his speaking") modifies the last noun in the text, "Eliab his older brother"], his suspicions were confirmed - David was maneuvering for the crown, violating his family's resolution that no steps be taken to dethrone Saul.

His first questions were for public consumption: "Why did you come and with whom did you leave the small flock?", declaring that David was needed at home and should banish delusions of grandeur, for he is but a poor shepherd; his objective was to draw David aside to upbraid him, claiming to know אֶת־זִדְוֹנָךְ וְאֵת־לִבְבְּךָ ETH Z'DOH-N'KHA V'ETH ROH-A L'BHA-BHEH-KHA. Z'DOH-N'KHA here is "ambition" (cf. JEREMIAH 49:16; EZEKIEL 7:10; PROVERBS 11:2), while ROH-A L'BHA-BHEH-KHA ("badness of heart") is deviousness (cf. PSALMS 112:7; PROVERBS 6:14). His next words, לְמַעַן רְאוּת הַמִּלְחָמָה L'MA- AN R'OHTH HA-MIL-CHA-MA, seem incongruous: "so you may see the battle" requires the direct object indicator ETH and "Lamed" prefix creating an infinitive - and has him playing hooky. He actually said (with definite article and participle) that David came "to size up the conflict" - to see if he could insinuate himself into it. He chastised him for abandoning the unassuming role the family agreed he was to take and charged that he came to spur his ascension to the throne. His implied reprimand was that, as Saul was remiss in acting hastily (SAMUEL I 12:9- 14), so he should wait for the prophet's charge.

David refuted him - מָה עָשִׂיתִי עַתָּה MEH A-SEE-THEE A-TAH (WHAT HAVE I DONE NOW?) - he did not contribute to this state of affairs. His next words did not deflect his brother's comments, as they are typically understood; they rebutted them. הֲלוֹא דָבָר הוּא HA-LOH DA-BHAR HOO is correctly translated in the King James Bible: "Is there not cause?" (literally "Is this not something [of significance]?"); despite the family's resolve, the current situation demanded a response. David feared attrition in the ranks and his being "anointed" called for him to prevent this by redressing Goliath's "desecration". Turning away from Eliab, he completed his survey of the troops to make sure the sentiment against insurrection was universal. This also brought him to the attention of the king's agents, although it begs the question: Why not approach Saul himself?

That was out of the question; he could hear the response: "Don't even think about it! And say not a word to anyone." Saul was not about to risk losing the most comforting thing he had, his musical Prozac. David was brought to him by agents who had no idea he performed for him; that was known but to a handful. It would be catastrophic if word got out that Saul needed regular concerts to dispel depression. David and Saul acted like strangers, a charade continued even after David's triumph (SAMUEL I 17: 55-58 - *some see Saul's question to Abner as a standard inquiry about a prospective son-in-law. This would already be done for anyone on his "staff" but it was not general knowledge. Saul pointedly asks Abner to investigate the young man's background pending an appointment to a responsible position, hence his reference to David as an עֶלְמָה EH-LEM, a mature young man, maintaining the pretense of not knowing him*). This was not what Saul hoped for but he had to play along, starting with an attempt to dissuade David from this suicide mission.

The next paragraph (v. 34-36) contains David's riposte. He is no slouch - he killed a bear and a lion with his bare hands. *Had he been proficient with a slinger, he would have used that rather than risk close combat with beasts; deploying one against Goliath had not yet occurred to him.* He could have curtly said that, while tending the family flock, he single-handedly dispatched these mighty beasts, all he needed to make his case - and which should be appended to the last paragraph. Identifying Goliath with predatory animals is also unwarranted. They were stalking prey; he was



trying to convince his opponents to defect. Nor did comparing motivations bolster David's claim that he would prevail - that depended on the respective skills of the contestants. *(Biblical language is considered baroque, rife with redundancies; this is due to translators' inability to recognize subtle phrasing variances. Even poetic parallelisms close in meaning have distinct connotations lost in translation, especially to non-Semitic languages.)*

David's discourse in a separate paragraph tells us it was not a counter to Saul's argument but a parable with a message for him in his persona as king. רֹעֵה הִיָּה עֲבָדְךָ לְאָבִיו בְּצֹאן ROH-EH HA-YAH ABH-D'KHA L'A-BHEEV BA-TZOHN (YOUR SERVANT WAS A SHEPHERD FOR HIS FATHER AMONG THE SHEEP) should be עֲבָדְךָ הִיָּה רֹעֵה אֶת צֹאן אָבִיו ABH-D'KHA HA-YAH ROH-EH ETH TZOHN A-BHEEV (YOUR SERVANT WAS SHEPHERDING HIS FATHER'S FLOCK - cf. EXODUS 3:1). By opening with a predicate noun rather than a verb, attaching it to the past perfect "was", putting "father" in the dative with the "Lamed" prefix and modifying "flock" with a "Beth" preposition instead of the direct object indicator ETH, David converted his statement into a metaphor. The "father" charged the "shepherd" with the safety and well-being of His "flock"; if "predators" snatch "sheep", he must pursue (v. 35) and rescue. Should a marauder turn on him, he grasps his "beard" and slays him. Verse 36 clinches it: This human predator is like those animals, not כְּהֵם KA-HEIM (LIKE THEM) but כְּאַחַד מֵהֵם K'A-CHAD MEI-HEM (AS ONE OF THEM - cf. GENESIS 49:16; JUDGES 16:7; SAMUEL II 2:18) because he insulted the Most High, David again implanting a religious motif heretofore absent (v. 32). As His representative, the King/Shepherd must repel threats or entrust another to do so, a challenge Saul could not brush aside. He was loath to send his beloved songster into harm's way but could not object, for he himself seeded the idea - and David was the only volunteer. He could not go back on his word nor divulge their relationship. The youth was not a soldier but his stories evidenced courage and fighting prowess. Still, Saul held back, skeptical that David could pull this off - and fell silent. David's next words, introduced with "And David said", are in a stand-alone paragraph containing only the first part of verse 37 (David breached protocol by speaking again before Saul replied); the second part, with Saul's response, begins a new paragraph.

David knew he would vanquish Goliath - his anointment guaranteed that. *{Clerics who spin sermons about David's victory deriving from a "faith" not shared by others completely miss this.}* He alerted Saul with subtle changes, no longer talking of avenging insults or vanquishing predators but invoking Y-H-W-H to יִצִּיל YA-TZIL, not "protect" but "rescue" *(the wrong supplication, for David was placing himself in danger - cf. GENESIS 32:11, EXODUS 2:19; PSALMS 72:12)*. Saul noticed the austere E-LO-HIM replaced by the affable Y-H-W-H (see 2:1 for the significance of these names). His spiritual antenna was attuned to the possibility of David being his successor but his inner turmoil held him back *(there is a space before the next paragraph - it begins in the middle of the verse)*; after a pause, he intones a terse "Go and Y-H-W-H be with you".

David then girded חָרְבּוֹ CHAR-BOH (HIS SWORD - v. 39) which was *not his!* The text twice states he was not נִסָּה NEE-SAH ("practiced") with it. After swinging it, he realized this would not work and proceeded to remove all his armor, which no doubt astonished everyone, although readers should be struck by a more salient point: when Goliath first appeared (v. 4), he slung a bronze spear between his shoulders, made necessary by his carrying an enormous javelin with both hands - no mention of a sword! David likely knew Goliath had one and early readers must have intuited this, else how would they explain David's requesting a weapon not suitable against a spear or javelin? (Some render one of these, כִּידוֹן KEE-DOHN ["javelin"] or חַנִּית CHA-NEETH ["spear"], as "sword" but that is untenable; Scripture does not use synonyms, plus David himself mentioned all three [v. 45]).

To the Philistines, steeped in the Greek martial ethos, individual combat, with strict propriety and fairness, epitomized valor. *Hurling projectiles was cowardly, a conviction that so imbued European knights they were appalled by such innovations as the Chinese rapid firing crossbows or firearms and artillery in Western theaters. This attitude among Japanese Samurai prevailed into the 19th century, while it was not uncommon in both the 20th century world wars that snipers that were captured, by all combatants, were not treated as prisoners of war but summarily executed.* It demanded arms parity, which Goliath knew was impossible - Israel had no iron weapons (except Saul and Jonathan - SAMUEL I 13:22). How were they expected to

take him up on his offer? A sword was part of his standard garb (which early readers knew) but not intended for this encounter - the weapons he carried were (v. 6-7). He gave his opponent a choice: spear or javelin. The Israelites' bronze weapons made a spear a possibility. If it was to be the wooden-shafted javelin, the iron head on Goliath's was not determinative, for with this club, it was speed that mattered, like a baseball bat or golf club whose velocity contributes more to a struck ball's momentum and energy than its mass.

David was determined to confront Goliath with a sword (v. 39), hence he requested *his* sword - Saul's (the subject in verse 38). But if it and the armor hampered his mobility, וַיֹּאֵל VA-YOH-EL should be חָשַׁח CHA-SAHKH (HELD BACK - SAMUEL II 18:16), נִמְנַע NIM-NA (CHECKED - EZEKIEL 31:15), נִצְחָז NEH-EH-CHAHZ (CAUGHT - GENESIS 22:13) or נִצְצָר NEH-TZAR (RESTRAINED - cf. GENESIS 16:2). The Septuagint transposed it to וַיִּלְאֵה VA-YIL-AH on the assumption our text was a scribal error but that verb implies exhaustion, not restraint; with its "Yud" prefix, it is not reflexive but active (the passive form takes a "Nun" prefix - cf. ISAIAH 1:14) with the actor the implied object (cf. GENESIS 19:11, which the King James correctly has as "they wearied themselves to find the door"). The emendation is unnecessary; failing to find an adequate interpretation, translators rendered this phrase exactly like its successor in the second half of the verse, making one of them superfluous - precisely what should not be done in biblical exposition. VA-YOH-EL is "disposed/inclined" (cf. EXODUS 2:21; JUDGES 17:11) - David was looking forward to this fight! The stated reason, he was not "practiced", seems counterintuitive but was exactly what he had in mind. He would use a sword *because* he had no expertise with it; there was no way he would beat this guy without overt divine help - and that would make headlines - but then he grasped the import of Goliath's challenge. The giant's discarding his sword seemed egalitarian but was also a rebuke to Saul, who had an iron sword yet would not face Goliath (*The Philistines had no monarch; one warrior was as good as another*); David's miraculous victory might prompt the army to depose Saul - a chance David could not take. What was his alternative, a slinger? That was exactly what that wily warrior had taken precautions against, what he feared most. But if David could find a way, he could still use divine help but it would not be obvious, for his lack of skill with slingers was not public knowledge.

וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־שָׂאוּל VA-YOH-MER DA-VID EL SHA-OOL (AND DAVID SAID TO SAUL - v. 39) needed only VA-YOH-MER (HE SAID); the full phrase shows he now spoke *only to Saul*. David would discard the sword and armor, evidenced by בְּאֵלֶּהּ BA-EI-LEH (WITH THESE) instead of the expected כֵּן KA-KHA (THUS - cf. EXODUS 12:11; DEUTERONOMY 25:8; ESTHER 6:9). We are not told his plans but Saul was - and went along, for when David reverted to shepherd's garb, he took his staff (v. 40), which means Saul surreptitiously sent someone to retrieve it (v. 22). David then headed out, concealing his intentions from everyone else. Why did Saul let him go? Neither side took Goliath's "offer" seriously, so if he won and presented his bill, Saul had a response: "Would I send out a kid to face you? Never! This boy had a history of mental instability. A 'voice' told him to go - he ran out before we could stop him. You think I would send him out without weapons or armor?" On the other hand, David just might pull it off.

וַיִּבְחַר־לוֹ חֲמִשָּׁה חֲלָקִים אֲבָנִים מִן־הַנָּחַל VA-YIBH-CHAR LOH CHA-MEE-SHAH CHA-LOO-KEI A-BHA-NIM MIN HA-NA-CHAL (v. 40) is usually rendered "And he chose five smooth stones from the stream". NA-CHAL is a wadi, a seasonally dry bed in the vale Goliath had to cross to get to the Israelite side so he could be heard. To go into it, David had to get behind Goliath. A shepherd ostensibly on his way home, he made his way to a distant point and descended. The translators had him pick up five stones but no expositors explained why; if he missed with the first, by the time he got the next one off, Goliath would join his buddy behind their bulwark. As for choosing stones, the many experts in camp with stocks of them could not be consulted without giving the game away. The text does not say VA-YIBH-CHAR (HE CHOSE) but VA-YIBH-CHAR לָוֹה (HE CHOSE FOR HIMSELF), while "smooth stones" is אֲבָנִים חֲלָקִים A-BHA-NIM CHA-LA-QIM (cf. PROVERBS 2:16; DANIEL 11:32). Some translate it "stone fragments"; that is חֲלָקִים אֲבָנִים CHEL-QEI EH-BHEN (cf. ISAIAH 57:6; ECCLESIASTES 2:10). CHA-LOO-QEI is the construct of חֲלָקָה CHA-LOO-QAH ("partition" - cf. CHRONICLES II 35:5). He selected five *types* of stones to put into two satchels (*those having him*

carrying one bag got this wrong too), the smaller stones in the shepherd's pouch and the larger ones in a YAL-QOOT ("rucksack"). He loaded up because he did not know how many or what kinds he would need. Goliath may have spotted a figure in the distance but it was only a shepherd, recognizable by his staff. He paid him scant attention, for he was busy delivering his lines. David took advantage of this to clandestinely collect the stones as he slowly advanced (וַיִּגַּשׁ VA-YEE-GASH indicates purposeful approach - cf. GENESIS 44:18; KINGS I 18:21; ISAIAH 50:8).

Finally, the approaching stripling's purposeful strides told an astonished Goliath this was his opponent. Affronted by Saul's sending a puny youth, he hurled insults (v. 24) until he heard the response and realized David's strategy. That is why he said "staffs", not because he was seeing double - he thought they were his adversary's choice of arms, an attempt to neutralize Goliath's weapons advantage. This was the furthest thing from David's mind. While he was more agile and may have had a chance with kendo (if that Japanese martial art had made its way to the Levant), the only sure thing was the slinger. Unfortunately, that vexing fellow kept positioning the metal hood in front of Goliath, who was not likely to step from behind it until David was too close to use the slinger. But David's bringing a staff was a stroke of genius. Goliath had standard weaponry but now needed a shepherd's staff; the only way to avoid a humiliating retreat was to send his aide to fetch one - handing David a tactical coup.

How can we know this? We infer it from Goliath's curse (v. 43), which should open his outburst or end it; its being in the middle tells us what he meant. לְקַלֵּל L'QA-LEIL (TO CURSE) is to imprecate following an injury or offense (cf. GENESIS 27: 12; SAMUEL II 16:5); other curses are anticipatory. *Balaq, the Moabite king, uses three such (NUMBERS 22-24) but not once does he use QA-LEIL. Similarly, when the ground is "cursed" (GENESIS 3: 17), it is A-ROO-RAH, a prelude to man's new station in life but when He promises never again to impose a global sanction for sins committed (GENESIS 8:21), the text uses L'QA-LEIL.* Goliath reacted to David's behavior. Translators also misconstrued בְּאֵלֹהָיו BEI-LOH-HAV, presuming Goliath invoked his own deity. In biblical syntax, possessive nouns reference the last preceding noun; Goliath cursed by David's god (confirmed in verse 45, where David contrasts his trust in Y-H-W-H with Goliath's reliance on his own prowess and arms - no mention of his god) and did so as people do today, out of the frustration brought on by David's forcing his hand, depriving him of his weapons and forcing him to send his aide-de-camp to fetch a wooden club - the only way to explain the disappearance of the one whose main job was to protect the boss and whose presence had been constant.

Then Goliath קָם QAHM (AROSE - v. 48), problematic for many but easily explained - he sat to remove his armor. Fairness demanded this and he needed more flexibility now but still puzzling is the מַעְרָכָה MA- A-RA-KHA (ARRAY) to which David sprinted. Most take it as the Philistine "line" but Goliath was near the Israelites - why would David run to the other side? Some saw it as the "battle line" between them, a reading without basis in the story. That leaves the Israelite line but running toward it would be a retreat. He actually ran diagonally "to meet the Philistine". While Goliath scanned the hill behind him for his delivery. David positioned himself in front of the Israelites, so Goliath had to turn completely around whenever he looked back and each time, David searched through his stones for the one that would inflict the most damage and which he would have to propel before the other guy returned. After one of Goliath's turns, David launched his missile; when Goliath turned back, it was in flight, quickly reaching its mark. The most difficult object for a target to pick up visually is one headed straight toward him - Goliath was a sitting duck. David's breach of battlefield etiquette should have outraged the Philistines but they held back. They saw Goliath struck in the face but fall forward (not backwards, as depicted in paintings and sculptures), noted by a handful of Hebrew scholars (v. 49). וַיִּפֹּל VA-YEE-POHL (AND HE FELL) can connote demise (cf. EXODUS 32:28; JUDGES 4:16; SAMUEL I 4:10) but when accompanied by עַל-פָּנָיו AL PA-NAHV (ON HIS FACE - cf. GENESIS 17:3, 17; SAMUEL II 9:6; KINGS I 18:7) or אֶרְצָה AR-TZAH (TO GROUND - cf. JOSHUA 5:14; SAMUEL I 20:41; JOB 1:20), and especially if, as here, by both, the collapse is due to physical or psychological enervation (cf. NUMBERS 16:4; JOSHUA 7:6; SAMUEL I 28:20) - Goliath pitched forward to his hands and knees, not prone. He was still alive and the Philistines, not knowing how badly wounded he was, waited for him to get up.

If verse 50 begins “And David triumphed over the Philistine”, it should be על הפלשתי ודוד גבר V’DA-VID GA-BHAR AL HA-P’LISH-TEE (cf. ISAIAH 42:13; PSALMS 117:2; LAMENTATIONS 1:16) or ויכבוש דוד את הפלשתי VA-YIKH-BOHSH DA-VID ETH HA-P’LISH-TEE (cf. SAMUEL II 8:11; JEREMIAH 34:16; NEHEMIAH 5:5). The intransitive וַיִּהְיוּק VA-YEH-CHEH-ZAQ (cf. GENESIS 41:56; EXODUS 7:13; SAMUEL II 18:9) and comparative מן MIN make this “And David proved mightier than the Philistine” (cf. SAMUEL II 13:14 מִמֶּנָּה וַיִּהְיוּק VA-YEH-CHEH-ZAQ MI-MEH-NAH - “he overpowered her”) - but had not killed him! {Young’s “is stronger” comes closer but its present tense is inexplicable.} His triumph emerged from the fortunes of war, not an overt miracle (he did get divine help but Goliath was not dead when he hit the ground). The text continues: וַבְּאֶבֶן בַּקֶּלֶעַ וּבְאֶבֶן BA-QEH-LA U-BHA-EH-BHEN (WITH SLING AND STONE) does not reprise his first blow; that would be וַיִּמַּת דָּוִד אֶת גִּלְיָת בַּקֶּלֶעַ וּבְאֶבֶן VA-YA-METH DA-VID ETH GOL-YATH B’QEH-LA V’EH-BHEN (cf. JUDGES 20:16; ZACHARIA 9:15; JOB 41:20). David propelled another stone and had to strike with yet a third, adduced from these words joined by a “Vav” (both have “Beth” prepositional prefixes, indicating distinct acts). וְחַרְבֵי אֵין בְּיַד־דָּוִד V’CHE-REBH EIN B’YAD DA-VID (A SWORD [WAS] NOT IN DAVID’S HAND) would be a fitting coda had he been deprived of one but he elected to discard it; the clause explains why he had to resort to grabbing Goliath’s. וַיִּמָּתְהוּ VA-Y’MOH-TH’THEI-HOO (v. 51), with doubled “Taph”, is not “and he slew him”; that is וַיִּמָּתְהוּ VA-Y’MEE-THEI-HOO (cf. GENESIS 38:7; KINGS I 2:34 and already stated in the previous verse). The text emphasizes that it was not the hurled stones that killed Goliath but the hands of David, a public execution (cf. JUDGES 9:54; SAMUEL II 1:9; CHRONICLES II 22:11) by decapitation in full view of the Philistines. Goliath had breached decorum; he did not issue a challenge, warrior to warrior, but fomented rebellion against a sovereign, a lese majesty which demanded formal retaliation.

*Malbim [R. M. Weisser, 19th century Lithuania/Romania] observed that David’s flouting the rules of engagement exempted the Philistines from their duty under the terms of Goliath’s offer but their flight should not be misconstrued. It was a reaction to the local god acting on behalf of his faithful in this region, a central feature of pagan belief systems (cf. SAMUEL I 5:2-7; CHRONICLES I 10:10); David’s victory was attributed to this intervention, not his own might. Any impression he made was not permanent, as seen from later interactions (SAMUEL I Ch. 23, 28-31; SAMUEL II Ch. 5, 21, 23; KINGS I Ch. 15- 16; KINGS II Ch. 18; JEREMIAH Ch. 47; ZACHERIAH 9:6; CHRONICLES II 28:18); indeed, David himself later offered his services to the ruler of Goliath’s city (cf. SAMUEL I 21:11-13, 27:2).*

This saga was not about an underdog overcoming tremendous odds but about preserving a king’s honor. Respect for a sovereign office transcending its occupant was a radical idea in an era when supreme authority was vested in a personality who was often a god or avatar. [Allegiance to an institution emerged in ancient Sparta, a militarist society in which such an ethos was critical for continuity and success. Sporadically tried by the Romans, its effectiveness, especially in the Imperial period, was marginal. It became the dominant model in the modern era but the old one persisted, witness the tragic results in the 20th century when the German military took personal oaths to the Fuehrer.] It was not because David wanted to make sure this respect was extended to him when he was king nor due to his own reverence for the throne (evidenced by his treatment of Saul after their falling out or after Saul’s death, for David thought nothing of executing the one who dared lay a hand on “His anointed” [SAMUEL II 1:16] even when that had been Saul’s directive and resulted in David’s succession). Veneration of the crown is the theme of this story because it is an essential part of the Old Testament Weltanschauung.

A thorough familiarity with Scripture’s original language, culture and historical background is indispensable for its interpretation; translations must be based on proper identifications of word roots, their grammar and syntax, not on preconceptions. Loose ends, contradictions and anomalies cannot be brushed aside’ if an interpretation does not assimilate these, one that does must be found (as physicist Richard Feynman said, “Regardless of how beautiful and elegant the hypothesis, if contravened by facts, it must be discarded”). Biblical accounts are not myth or legend that must be recast into “realistic” mold to make them believable or palatable; as quality literature, their components must be meaningful and consistent and sometimes, as with all sophisticated literature, requires “reading between the lines”; in other words, they have to make sense - and would have had to make sense to their earliest readers. Anything other than that, regardless of how revered, authoritative or expert the proponents of any interpretation, sprouted from preconceived ideas, many of them from alien sources, that must be rejected.