

Valley of Elah

Having a Heart Like David's

David is Israel's most beloved son, and it is easy to understand why. Before serving as King, we know of his heroics in defeating the Philistine giant, Goliath, in the Valley of Elah. There is such spiritual wisdom to be gleaned from that victory as David relied upon the Holy Spirit, which made him a man after God's own heart.



The Philistines are first mentioned in Judges 3 as one of several people groups left in the land to test Israel. The five lords of the Philistines (mentioned there) are now cities in or near the Palestinian-occupied Gaza Strip: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron, Ashdod and Goliath's hometown of Gath.

Philistine actually means "invader" and they arrived from the Greek isles to the Mediterranean shores of the Promised Land around the same time Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land near Jericho, to the east. Canaanites who occupied the land prior to the arrival of Israelites and Philistines were an evil people group that would make today's most vile terrorists proud. They burned babies on the altar of Molech, men of all ages raped young girls (often in rites of passage), and idol worship was rampant.

It was an abomination to a holy God and He commanded His people to conquer the Promised Land by leaving no one alive. It was God's plan to wipe out such vile and evil idolaters, yet Israel did not do so. Thus began Israel's eternal earthly battles against occupying enemies.

What about you? Is there "territory" God is calling you to conquer? Are you facing strong opposition? If so, be reminded of the apostle Paul's encouragement:

³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39)

Interestingly, the Philistines brought iron-age technology to a bronze-age region, and they used it to their advantage. Weapons of iron were far more effective than weapons of bronze, and the Philistines made sure not to sell their weapons to the Israelites. However, they would sell harvesting instruments, which needed sharpening from time-to-time. So where must the Israelites go to sharpen their instruments? To the Philistines! It was quite profitable for them!

God knew what the Israelites would encounter when they entered the Promised Land, and if they did not kill their enemies, their enemies would kill them, whether physically, mentally or spiritually. By controlling the people and sending a giant out as their champion, the Philistines worked to keep the upper hand. Yet the children of Israel were not to be like everyone else. Their weapons of battle were not tied to the superior equipment of a strong king. God promised protection, and Jesus was their King.

But that means standing alone. From a human perspective, that's hard! The Israelites longed for an earthly conquering king who would put their enemies in their place. Other nations had kings, and they just wanted to be like everyone else.

¹⁹ Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No, but we will have a king over us, ²⁰ that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." (1 Samuel 8:19-20)

Unfortunately, embedded in each of us is a desire to live after the flesh, chasing what the world has to offer. How much are we in love with this world and the things of it? No wonder God warns us not to conform to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind! We need a transformed heart and a renewed mind! (Romans 12:2)

Based on 1 Samuel 9:2, the Israelites set a pretty low bar in selecting a king. Though Saul was tall and the most handsome man around, he only rarely seemed to want to do the right thing, and he knew nothing of the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead, he relied upon gathering the strongest, bravest, most valiant men he could find. (1 Samuel 14:52) Nothing wrong with having a strong military, except when you come to depend and rely upon it rather than God! David aptly said:

*⁷ Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. (Psalm 20:7)*

Trusting in our own "armies" will lead us to defeat! When we trust in the name of the Lord our God, we also seek His wisdom and guidance in the battles we face. Are we in prayer and in His Word seeking the battle plan? How can we know God's will if we don't consult Him?

In 1 Samuel 15, Saul tried to get by without guidance from above! In trying to "do the right thing," he offered a sacrifice, to which the prophet Samuel responded:

*²² So Samuel said:
"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
As in obeying the voice of the Lord?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
And to heed than the fat of rams.
²³ For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft,
And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,
He also has rejected you from being king."
(1 Samuel 15:22-23)*

Those are pretty harsh words, but it gives us a glimpse of how adamant God is about obedience. "Trying hard" to do good, but walking in disobedience draws the ire of a holy and just God. He is after obedience, not religiosity.

Samuel, having said the difficult thing often required of prophets, mourned the fact he had anointed Saul as king. However, God's response was "Get over it! I'm sending you to anoint the right king!" (1 Samuel 16:1-3) Samuel thought it surely must be the strong, capable Eliab, but God told Samuel:

⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

After several more swings and misses (all of David’s older brothers), David was finally brought before Samuel.

*¹² So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking. And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!” ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and **the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.** (1 Samuel 16:12-13, emphasis mine)*

Israel finally got her king and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. But as we learned at Ein Gedi, it would take time for David to ascend the throne! In fact, David had a giant to slay! The ongoing war with the Philistines was coming to a head and decisive actions were needed. In a “winner take all” showdown, the Philistines sent out their giant, and the lowly shepherd boy, David, went out to meet him.

David had come to the battlefield to bring food to his brothers, but God had a mission for him. 1 Samuel 17 recounts the familiar narrative. With a sling and a stone, David popped the giant right between the eyes, dropping him like a boulder. Yet, it wasn’t the stone that killed him. David drew Goliath’s own giant-sized sword and cut off the head of the giant.

How could it be? The Spirit of the Lord that came upon David at his anointing proved Himself strong on David’s and Israel’s behalf! Despite Saul gathering the strongest, bravest, most fierce fighters in Israel, it was Spirit-filled David who conquered the giant.

Today’s giants are mean and evil, and God is looking for those who are spirit-filled and committed to His call to slay the beasts. David was offered Saul’s armor, but it just wouldn’t work for him. Instead, he clothed himself in Holy Spirit courage and boldness! He never once thought he would lose that battle.

⁴⁵ Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand (1 Samuel 17:45-46)

David was more than a conqueror, and when filled with the Holy Spirit, we are too! Even after he ascended the throne and succumbed to sin, his humility brought him back into fellowship with God. Holy Spirit power and the humility of David will cause us to be men and women after God’s own heart!

Be like David. Walk in His ways, stay in His word, and long for His presence.