

# Finishing Well

Lesson #11

Valley of Elah

March 30, 2022

The Valley of Elah, named after the terebinth tree, is a triangle-shaped long, shallow, flat valley located in the West Bank on the western edge of the Judah low hills. This valley was an important corridor and major travel route from the coastal cities along the Mediterranean to the interior cities of Bethlehem, Hebron and Jerusalem, the heartland of Judah.

The Elah Valley connects the Philistine city of Gath, Goliath's [type of Satan] hometown, with the Judahite city of Bethlehem, David's [type of Jesus Christ] hometown.

- Mediterranean Coast To Valley of Elah ~20 miles
- Gath to Valley of Elah ~ 8 miles
- Valley of Elah to Bethlehem ~ 12 miles

One of the most famous battles in Israel's history took place in the Valley of Elah.

## Historical Background

Philistines were a Canaanite people who inhabited Israel before they entered the Promised land. Although there had been battles between them on a regular basis, Israel had been unable to conquer and fully drive out the Philistines who worshiped many false gods including the worship of Baal.

The powerful Philistines were the high-tech people of the day who possessed the latest weapons of iron and chariots of iron.

They did all they could to prohibit Israel from gaining iron and access to their technology.

I Sam. 13:5-7 Now the Philistines assembled to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance; and they came up and camped in Michmash, east of Beth-aven. When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard-pressed), then the people kept themselves hidden in caves, in crevices, in cliffs, in crypts, and in pits. And some of the Hebrews crossed the Jordan into the land of Gad and Gilead. But as for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him, trembling.

What made this situation so terrifying that most of Saul's soldiers deserted?

I Sam. 13:19-22 Now no blacksmith could be found in all the land of Israel, because the Philistines said, "Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears." So all Israel went down to the Philistines, each to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, and his hoe. <sup>21</sup> The charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to fix the cattle goads. <sup>22</sup> So it came about on the day of battle that neither sword nor spear was found in the hands of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan, but they were found with Saul and his son Jonathan.

We can assume all the Israelite blacksmiths were either killed, captured, or forced to stop practicing their trade.

On the day of battle, there were only two swords in the entire Israelite army.

They must have been armed with only shepherd's staffs, clubs, maybe some bows and arrows. No wonder they were terrified. By human standards they didn't stand a chance against the well-armed Philistines

From the famous poem by Longfellow entitled "The Village Blacksmith;"

"Under the spreading chestnut tree the village smithy stands; The smith, a mighty man is he, with large and sinewy hands; and the muscles of his brawny arms are strong as iron bands."

The blacksmith profession was a centerpiece of life in every American town. Transportation depended upon the blacksmith's custom-made horseshoes, farmers depended upon his carefully designed plows, lumberjacks depended upon his axes and saws, and builders depended upon a variety of his hand tools.

The blacksmith worked behind the scenes, pounding away on his anvil, sweating from the heat of the forge and the strain of the labor. But his diligent, careful work behind the scenes provided services which enabled others to do their work more efficiently.

The same was true in ancient Israel. The blacksmith's role was even more important because he provided not only essential tools but also the weapons of war — swords and spears.

There were no blacksmiths in Israel. They were the unheralded servants who worked behind the scenes in hot, sweaty, dirty, tiring jobs. Yet without their services, the army of God was poorly equipped for battle.

The "army of God" still needs blacksmiths today.

Those who serve on the front lines of the church's army constantly depend upon the supportive ministry of those who serve behind the scenes. In every congregation there are countless difficult and sometimes thankless jobs which must be done. These jobs aren't as noticeable as preaching a sermon, singing a solo, playing in the praise band, or teaching a Sunday school class. But if those jobs aren't done, the impact is dramatic. These jobs: cleaning the church, mowing the yard, picking up trash, weeding the flower beds, painting walls, waxing floors, setting up tables and chairs, taking them back down later, preparing communion trays, decorating areas for special occasions, keeping classrooms stocked with supplies, staffing the nursery, etc.

There are behind-the-scenes jobs done in the community: visiting the elderly or the sick; taking food to families in need or during times of grief; providing transportation to the doctor; performing household jobs (plumbing, carpentry, electrical, or yardwork) for free; donating to those who have suffered from a fire or flood.

The list of such behind-the-scenes ministries is long and multi-faceted.

Rom. 15:4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have HOPE.

Luke 24:27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself.

The Old Testament is a book of history which reveals to us the great seed plots of God's plan of redemption for the human race.

In I Samuel, God is transitioning His people from rule by chieftains to rule by kings.

He is raising up a monarch with whom He will make an eternal covenant [II Sam. 7].

Because that covenant line spills over outside of II Samuel, our interpretation should probably follow suit as we look for the monarch God is raising up.

Goliath comes from *galah* meaning to uncover or remove, but it also means to lead away into exile. It is first used in:

Gen. 9:6: "Then he drank of the wine and was drunk and became uncovered in his tent."

- It is used often in Leviticus and Deuteronomy when speaking of uncovering the nakedness of another. Goliath = the Uncoverer or Exposer.

The secondary meaning of "exile" is tied in with this because when one is exiled, he is left open and exposed in that state. The primary meaning of "Exposer" carries the weight of the meaning of his name. He is the one who intends to expose the weakness of Israel.

The account of David and Goliath illustrates the battle between good and evil.

- Battle is unto death. Either you destroy the evil or it will destroy you.
- Goliath is the abomination, who profanes the name of God.
- David, a type of Jesus Christ, defends God's honor.
- Goliath's zeal to profane the name of God is just as great as David's zeal to defend the God of Israel.

David, a shepherd boy despised by his brethren, is trying to save Israel at a time of dire physical suffering and spiritual apostasy.

Study the confrontation between David and Goliath as a prophetic metaphor of the struggle between Christ and Satan.

#### THE SHEPHELAH [humble, lowly] FOOTHILLS

- The Israelites dominated the Hill Country of Judea.
- The Philistines controlled the coastal plain.
- The buffer between these enemies was the Shephelah— "foothills" or "lowland."
- The valleys of the Shephelah separated the Hill Country and the coastal area.
- Five valleys cut in an east-west direction through the Shephelah and offered convenient passages from the Philistine Plain to the Hill Country of Judea.  
So convenient, in fact, they had to be guarded vigilantly.
- Judah's control of the Shephelah at any given point served as a barometer of Israel's strength.

The Philistine confederation was a pentapolis comprising the five city-states of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath.

- The Philistines who occupied the lowlands were attempting to push up and move inland to conquer more of the Israelites' land through the Valley of Elah towards the heart of Judah.
- The Elah Valley offered a backdoor entrance to the Hill Country via Bethlehem.
- How ironic that the two men who faced each other in the middle ground came from two towns at either end of it. The valley begins just east of Gath and ends near Bethlehem.
- Valley of Elah is the battle line. King Saul and his army are endeavoring to hold the lines.

## The Battlefield Described

The Philistines are eager to not only regain the military dominance they once held over Israel, but also their sense of pride. The two armies square off approximately 15 miles southwest of Jerusalem, digging in and setting up camp on the sides of 2 mountains on opposite sides of the Elah valley.

There were several sites around the valley where the camps of the Israelites and the Philistines were located to watch the battle.

I Sam. 17:1-2 Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; and they were gathered at Socoh which belongs to Judah, and they camped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim.

➤ Ephes-dammim = border of blood

Saul and the men of Israel were assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah, and they drew up in battle formation to confront the Philistines.

I Sam. 17:3 And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and there was a valley between them.

The Elah Valley connects the Philistine city of Gath, Goliath's hometown, with the Judahite city of Bethlehem, David's hometown. It is a rare example of a wide-open valley, not a narrow meandering canyon, as many of the other wadis are.

It also has "stadium seating" on both sides because it is surrounded by hills.

Each side slopes down to the valley with a brook running between [I Sam. 17:40.]

Neither side seems to want to fight. The Philistines' reluctance > "They employ steel as well as bronze in their implements of war. They have chariots, [I Sam. 13:5], but these are designed for relatively level ground, not mountain slopes -- these are not "all-terrain vehicles."

Neither is it easy for a heavily protected soldier like Goliath to fight with agility and ease while struggling to keep his footing on a mountain slope.

## The Opponents Described

I Sam. 17:4-7 Then a champion came forward from the army encampment of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath. [= winepress] His height was six cubits and a span [almost 10']. And he had a bronze helmet on his head, and he wore scale-armor [coat of mail] which weighed five thousand shekels of bronze [125 pounds]. He also had bronze greaves on his legs and a bronze saber slung between his shoulders.

The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and the head of his spear weighed six hundred shekels of iron [15 lbs.]; and his shield-carrier walked in front of him.

A Champion = "a man between the two camps:" one who did not fight in the ranks like an ordinary soldier, but he enters the space between the hostile camps to challenge the mightiest man of his enemies to come and fight him.

➤ The contest is decided by a single contest. [like a duel]

Goliath expected the Israelites to be led into battle by a great warrior, their champion.

Note: I Sam. 17:12-15 Nothing is mentioned regarding David's stature, strength or weapons.

- It emphasizes David's family.
- He is the youngest of eight sons of Jesse, the Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah...
  1. The one who will be the champion for Israel [God's people] is a type of Jesus Christ.
  2. For David to be recognized as the one whose offspring will someday be the Messiah, he must be of the tribe of Judah [Gen. 49:8-12], and a Bethlehemite [Micah 5:2].

The champion is a substitute who battles on behalf of his people.

- Champion does what the people cannot do.
- David, as a type of Christ, stands between his people and their enemies and strikes the decisive blow.
- David's victory is a foreshadowing of David's greater Son, the true substitute who stands-in-between on our behalf, securing a greater victory.

Goliath: Scale Armor = "clothed in a shirt of scales;" a corselet made of metal scales sewn on cloth so as to overlap one another. It was flexible and protected the back and sides.

In the Philistine context this recalls Dagon, their "merman" god who is half fish, half man.

Genesis 3:15 is termed the protoevangelium ["proto" means "first"], the first announcement of the gospel of Jesus. God providing HOPE.

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

The seed of the serpent, those who persecute the seed of the woman, is depicted in numerous ways throughout Bible. involving the head--that clearly reflects a connection to God's Gospel promise of Genesis 3:15: "He will strike your head."

I Sam. 5:1-5 And the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod.

<sup>2</sup> When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. <sup>3</sup> And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon and set him in his place again. <sup>4</sup> And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him.

<sup>5</sup>Therefore, neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.

Remind you of anything? "He will strike your head." Dagon and the Philistines [perennial enemies & persecutors of Israel] are portrayed as the seed of the serpent. [Scales; head crushed]

Consider: By mercilessly waging war against the people of God, Goliath and the Philistines have aligned themselves against the Creator and His purposes.

- Question: Do you see a link to the serpent of Genesis 3?

Goliath becomes a part of the serpent's warfare against God's purposes and people. He is dressed in scales, trespasses into the Promised Land and defies Israel's God and His people. But he faces a seed of the woman, young David, who earlier had been anointed as future king [I Sam. 16].

As a result of a stone slung to his forehead, the giant Goliath also falls on his face down to the ground. David then proceeded to cut off his head. Clearly, this is an echo to the fate of Dagon and the seed of the serpent: "He will strike your head."

- Goliath is depicted as a seed of the serpent.

Side Note: I & II Samuel are filled with head wounds. Even those who escape beheadings get their hair or beard caught on their way to their demise.

Interesting Side Note: Saul of Tarsus started out persecuting Christians with murderous intentions [Acts 9:1]. But due his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus, [Acts 9], he was radically transformed.

- "Scales" fell from his blind eyes after his conversion.
- He was unaffected by the serpent's bite in Acts 28 while on the island of Malta.

### The Battle Terms Defined

I Sam. 17:8-10 He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel and said to them, "Why do you come out to draw up in battle formation? Am I not the Philistine, and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for you and have him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. Then the Philistine said, "I have defied the ranks of Israel this day! Give me a man, so that we may fight together."

He was irrepressible in his arrogance and in his sheer defiance of the people of God. Goliath proposed the ancient tradition of single combat. A little game of one-on-one, winner take all." With all of his strength, protection, offensive weapons, and secondary assistance, Goliath, the Exposer, is ready to challenge the enemy to battle.

- What will he uncover concerning the state of Israel?... concerning me?

I Sam. 17:11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and very fearful. [terrified]

*Why? Without the Spirit of the Lord, Saul has nothing with which to face the giant.*

I Sam. 16:4 But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.

It is interesting to note that the people of God in Samuel's time and David's time, were led at the moment by a man who through his disobedience had forfeited the Spirit of God.

Saul had lost contact with the source of all spiritual authority.

Consequently, the people were like that, and they could only fear a powerful enemy.

- The people aren't just discouraged, they are greatly afraid  
*vayekhathu vayiru meod:* The word *khathath*, or discouraged = to be shattered, dismayed, beaten down, affrighted, etc.

- It has been used 5 times since the first mention in:

Deut. 1:21 "Look, the Lord your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the Lord God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged."

Deut. 3:18 "And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed." [Moses speaking to Joshua]

Joshua 1:1-2 Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.

Joshua 1:9 "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

- The LORD speaking to Joshua after the death of Moses

Joshua 8:1 "Now the LORD said to Joshua: 'Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.'"

- The Lord speaking to Joshua after Israel resolved the matter of Achan

Joshua 10:25 "Then Joshua said to them, 'Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; be strong and of good courage, for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight.'"

- Joshua encouraging Israel after the defeat of the five kings.

In all five examples,

- the LORD is the One who is shown to provide the victory if the people will simply trust Him and follow His lead.
- All 5 instances were recorded in Israel's history.
- All 5 times that word was joined to the thought of being fearful.
- Do not be afraid and do not be discouraged.

### From Gilgal To Bochim

Judges 1:1 Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?

Judges 2:1-5 And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. <sup>2</sup> And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? <sup>3</sup> Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. <sup>4</sup> And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept.

<sup>5</sup> And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the LORD.

Key point: All Israel to remember the Scriptures which were given for their admonishment. Remember is used 352 times in the Scriptures. When its variants are counted, that number increases to more than 550. The root of remember is to keep in mind or to be mindful.  
Deut. 6:12 Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.  
Consequently, they failed to trust the Lord who gave them His word and assured them they would prevail if they trusted Him.

Goliath threatened the freedom of the Israelites. "Give me a man.  
I defy the ranks of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together."  
Saul, the captain of the children of Israel, the king, had failed. Israel had failed.  
Everybody within the nation Israel had failed. Is there anyone who can defeat Goliath?