**The Forty-First Day**

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Coiled and crouched, she readied herself in stealth, intense feline eyes fixed on the straggler. Her loins were wound and coiled tightly. Muscular haunches were loaded, preparing for an impending leap. Nothing distracted this perfect predator from her task.

It was a matter of waiting, the ewe grazing in the waning sunlight at the edge of the flock. Oblivious, meandering with head down, the mutton was unaware of the imminent mortal danger. There was some consciousness of peril in the large herd, however, for the rustling of the flock had just begun. Their call and quiet bleat picked up, signaling danger.

 It struck with a violent, hammer-like thud; blood, flesh, and fur rocketing into the sky. The slingshot blow knocked the lion viciously to the ground, blood pouring from her shattered skull. She lay motionless, laboring for air, her eyes fixed on her vanquisher, resigned to her fate.

 He was on her in a flash, brandishing a small sharp blade in his shepherd’s hand. He skillfully opened the lion’s neck, pulsatile blood spurting from the wound and covering the ground. Then the shepherd used a sturdy crook to drag the dying lioness from the edge of the flock.

 He was just a boy, tall for his teenage years. Dark, curly red hair topped his ruddy, comely face. Intense, bright, intelligent eyes punctuated a beautiful countenance. Thin but blessed with a sculptured muscular physique, David, son of Jesse, turned away from his conquest. He moved quickly to the flock, replacing, as he walked, his trusty sling and blade into his rope belt.

#

It was the forty-first day of battle. The sun ascended uneasily as the two opposing military camps began to rise. To the southeast stood the hilltop Adullam, and to the north, the elevated fortress city of Khirbet Qeiyaf. These two elevations formed the valley known for the ancient terebinth tree, the Valley of Elah.

 Confidence loomed in the Philistine camp, for they were confident of their victory. They possessed a giant soldier beyond match, a brutal beast in their warring arsenal.

At the opposite end of the valley, disorder and fear reigned in the Israelite camp. Their king seemed lost, troubled, and frightened of his foe. King Saul would not rise that morning. His bivouac was dark and silent as many in the camp began to circle fearfully around the ruler’s tent.

 “Abner, son of Ner, must rouse the king,” the growing conclave decided with rumbling discontent. “Is he ill,” many wondered? “He must face the giant!” Then a tall man in military gear and armor stepped through the crowd. He parted the tent’s ingress and entered the king’s shelter.

 It was dark and cold within the royal abode as Abner moved to King Saul’s side. Abner grimaced, for there was a foul odor hanging in the air. Unlit candles encircled a large bedstead on which lay a man, covered entirely by luxurious coverlets; his head concealed and not visible.

 “My king, the enemy, has amassed again. Goliath threatens us once more. May I prepare your meal? May I assist you? What would you have your servant do?” With that, Abner gently pulled back the quilted spread, revealing the face of Israel’s king.

 Saul lay without response to the general. Longish disheveled hair wildly covered a trembling man. His eyes were tightly closed, and spittle stained an unkept twisted beard. Slowly, one eye, followed by the other, opened hesitantly to the day. The king was a frightened, despondent man, only just aware of Abner’s presence.

 “Water, I need water, “ the king said through parched lips.

 Abner raised a jeweled goblet to the king’s lips. Saul slobbered down the entire glass with difficulty, spilling more than he drank on his unruly beard.

“My king, you must rise and face the enemy.”

 “What enemy?” Saul wondered aloud, his tentative voice hoarse, barely above a whisper.

 “It is the Philistines; we have camped against them for nearly three fortnights.[[1]](#footnote-1) Recall the giant, my king. Goliath, the scourge, the beast, we must face him today or be overrun. Yesterday, you confronted him. Today he threatens your people again.”

 “Again?” The king said, his eyes staring cluelessly into space. Slowly with deliberation, he began to ramble. “That rascal jackal. That dark whispering nemesis. We fought all night. Now I must rest.” With that, the man turned over abruptly, drawing the coverlet over his face.

 “No, no, my king!” Abner slowly pulled down the quilt. “The jackal is gone, sire. He wasn’t real; you must see that. A reverie, you conjured him again; he is not real.”

 “Not real? He seemed so real. His baying, his howling bark, it is still there, Abner! Do you not hear him?” With that, the king threw back his bedsheets and jumped to his feet. He was naked, wild, ranting, and smelled of decay. He picked up a candle and dashed it to the ground. He then raced to the ingress to escape, only stopped by the firm grasp of Abner.

 Abner calmed the delusional man. He then gently guided him to his throne. Here the general began to dress the king, eventually lacing up his breastplate armor. As he did, the king’s countenance began to clear; he seemed to calm, understanding his task.

 King Saul was tall, a head taller than all the Israelites[[2]](#footnote-2). Anointed by the prophet Samuel, Saul reigned from Gibeah. A king of a victorious past, he was troubled and feeble of late. In his armor, and now with some rushed hygiene, he just began to look the part of a distinguished leader.

As he left the tent, a roar of approval rose from the surrounding crowd. Saul stood and shaded his eyes from the rising sunlight. He appeared confused after the applause, dazed perhaps, as he scanned his encouraged military. He turned quickly to return to his abode. Abner grabbed his shoulder and guided him past the cheering crowd. Saul followed, his head down; as if defeated, his eyes closed.

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The flock was silent and sleeping, darkness and fog draped over the grass-covered Bethlehem field. As was his way, David surrounded himself with his herd. He lay sleeping, a thin woolen blanket covering him.

It was early and dark when the boy arrived silently, and he quietly navigated his way through and past the flock to the shepherd.

 “David, you must wake up.”

 David turned over, at first suspicious of his early morning visitor. “Azriel, what is it?”

 The young boy kneeled beside David, dropping a cloth sack by his side. “Your father wishes you to deliver this to your brothers in the Valley of Elah. You must leave now. The boy said proudly that I, Azriel, will tend the flock.”

David sat up immediately, yawning deeply in the early morning air. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes, looking at Azriel with distrust and wondering about the boy’s story. Jesse was his father, an old man now. David was the youngest of his eight male children. Within the sack were an ephah of roasted grain[[3]](#footnote-3), ten loaves of bread, and ten kinds of cheese. David readied himself and turned to leave. He would soon be immersed in war and history.

#

Goliath from Gath was a Philistine, the colossal hulk of a man dominating the military camp. He stood six cubits and a span[[4]](#footnote-4) and wore a bronze helmet with a coat of armor weighing five thousand shekels.[[5]](#footnote-5) On his legs were bronze greaves, a bronze javelin slung on his back. His spear shaft was thick and long, its iron point weighing six hundred shekels.[[6]](#footnote-6) He bore a thick bony face and bluish-gray skin covered with mottled markings. He had rough, unruly, matted, and filthy hair, a wiry braided beard, hairy hands like a lion, and sandal-clad, monstrous knobby, hirsute feet. A foul odor of rotting flesh followed the man wherever he wished to go, for he hated to bathe. His diet was as his stature, gigantic. He consumed a man’s weight in wine daily. He was the Israelite’s nemesis, continually shouting swear words and cursing while threatening their military encampment.

“Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us.” Then the Philistine said, “This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

The Israelites gathered in the valley. Silence overwhelmed them with consuming fear evident on their faces. The group slowly parted in its center, backing away from the giant. Quietly, King Saul was left standing across from the vaunted beast. With hunched down shoulders, he looked a stature of a lesser man. Dressed in heavy armor and helmet, the articles of war were a dwarfing image on the man’s stunted frame. He possessed a visible tremor in both hands. His countenance became one of embarrassment as he dropped his bronze javelin inadvertently on the ground.

 Abner quickly stepped to the king’s side. He picked up the javelin, returning it to Saul. “My sire, Goliath, has challenged your people. You are the king and his obvious foe.”

 “HaHaHa,” Goliath roared in disdain, his deep grizzly voice echoing throughout the valley. “Is this not Saul, the son of Kish, of the family of the Matrites, an insignificant rat from the tribe of Benjamin? You are but a mite, a rascal that I will soon smite with my sandaled foot. Your God is not here today; he is not with you. You are but a withering fool. You are less than a child to me, and I will eat your brain with your own golden ladle.”

 David stood in the rear of the Israelites, his gift-loaded knapsack thrown over his shoulder. He handed the satchel to the keeper of supplies and slowly made his way through the crowd of men.

“Now the Israelites had been saying, do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his family from taxes in Israel.”

“David asked the men standing near him, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Eliab, David’s oldest brother, confronted the boy.

*“David, why are you here, he said in anger? Where is the flock? How conceited and wicked your heart is!”[[9]](#footnote-9)*

 Rumblings, through the Israelites, reported David’s presence to Saul. Abner shook his head and continued to encourage the king. Saul turned, rebuked the general with newfound energy, and thrust his javelin into the loose soil with a shout. An eerie smile broke over the king’s somber face. “Bring out our servant, Jesse’s youngest son, to me,” he said with a confident bark. The boy was at the king’s side without delay.

“David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

“Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.[[10]](#footnote-10)”

David pleaded his case. He described his victory over lions and bears.

“This uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them because he has defied the armies of the living God.[[11]](#footnote-11)”

“My sire, you cannot send him to fight the giant! David is but a boy.” Abner pleaded with the king, frantic, knowing his mental state. Saul was a fallen man. His judgment was faulty; his mind occupied with demons. He was the tallest Israelite, the king, and by right, Goliath’s challenger. Saul placed his right hand on Abner’s shoulder. Turning to David, Saul removed his armor, helmet, and sword.

“Go, and the Lord be with you.”[[12]](#footnote-12) (Abner speaking)

The king’s armor dwarfed and weighed down David. He tried to walk but did so with great difficulty. He handed the helmet to Abner and removed the bulky breastplate and tunic.

“I cannot go in these,” he said to Saul, “because I am not used to them. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.[[13]](#footnote-13)”

(Goliath speaking) “Am I a dog that you come at me with sticks?[[14]](#footnote-14)”

Goliath glared at David with contempt but with a hint of envy. The boy was full of health and handsome attributes the giant did not possess, and he despised him. “Your God is not here. What a vile specimen of humanity. What a tiny piece of filth. Your God will not help such a pitiful challenge.” Curses and blasphemy poured from his huge mouth. He rapidly spit profanities profaning Israel’s God. “You will be but fodder for the beasts that you so childishly defend.”

“David said to the Philistine, *You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of armies of Israel, whom you have defied.[[15]](#footnote-15)*

“The Lord will prevail; he will deliver you.” David began. “I will strike you down and sever your cursing head. All will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.”

With that, David quickly confronted the menacing giant, whose furor was obvious. Goliath transformed with anger; his bluish-cast skin began to darken. He spit wads of dribble, and he lifted his sword in defiance. A terrible demonic scream emanated from his enormous mouth.

David pulled a stone from his pouch, loading his sling with swift experience. He wound up and drove the rock with lightning speed, stumbling to his knees with the recoil.

The stone flew towards his foe, its flight marked by a sharp whistling sound. Striking the giant and embedding squarely in his forehead, a loud crunch echoed through the valley. Daze and surprise registered in Goliath’s eyes. He slumped to his knees with a loud thud. The giant dropped his massive sword to the ground and fell onto his face in a cloud of dust.

In a flash, David was on the giant. He lifted Goliath’s sword, its size dwarfing the boy. With his foot, the boy kicked the helmet from his foe’s head. Grabbing a mitt full of hair, he strained to drag the man’s head up off the turf. He began to saw the neck of the beast free, pulsatile blood spurting in the air. Then his two hands were required to lift the trophy and brandish the enormous severed head to the retreating Philistine horde.

Pandemonium began on the Israeli line. Cheering and shouts of victory coursed through the air. The Israelites were victorious, and David was their newfound hero.

“So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand, he struck down the Philistine and killed him.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

Author’s Notes:

 Indented texts are taken from the specified verses of the Holy Bible, New International Version. Quoted texts, not indented, are of the author’s creation.

David was the second king, ruling Israel for forty years. (1010-970 BCE) He was a man after God’s own heart, and his lineage would give rise to a true King, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

1. A fortnight is fourteen days. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A head taller than the average Israelite would place Saul’s height and over six feet tall. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. An ephah, probably some 36 pounds or about 16 kilograms. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This is about 9 feet 9 inches or about 3 meters. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is about 125 pounds or about 58 kilograms. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This about 15 pounds or about 6.9 kilograms. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 1 Samuel 17: 8-10. All verses from the Holy Bible, New International Version. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 1 Samuel 17: 25-26. Holy Bible, New International Version. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 1 Samuel 17: 28. Holy Bible, New International Version. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 1 Samuel 17: 33-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 1 Samuel 17: 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 1 Samuel 17: 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 1 Samuel 17: 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 1 Samuel 17: 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 1 Samuel 17: 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 1 Samuel 17: 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)