

Five Smooth Stones  
Lecture 9 on 1 Samuel 17 – 18  
By Dellena Ludwig

There are giants in the land! When Moses sent 12 spies into the Promised Land, ten of the twelve spread fear among the new nation of Israel. They reported, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.” [Numbers 13:32b-33] Today we will see that there were still a few of these very tall descendants of Anak remaining in Israel's vicinity. But size doesn't matter when the Lord God is fighting the battle!

Our last five lessons have had Saul as the central character. We have followed his story from his choice as Israel's king to his compromise as Israel's champion. This week we studied a new character, David and the conflict of Saul over this challenger to his throne.

Our story began with Israel's army facing a new challenge from the Philistines. Both armies opposed each other on separate hills overlooking the Valley of Elah. This was about 14 miles south west of Jerusalem and about ten miles from Bethlehem. The army of Israel had assembled about forty days ago. Among them were three sons of Jesse who now had joined Saul's army. In those days, most of the supplies for the army were provided by the families of the men. Because it had been forty days, with no word, Jesse wanted to know if his three oldest sons were OK. So, he gathered grain and bread to send to his sons. The grain was enough to last three days for ten men. He also decided to include ten cheeses for the commander of his son's unit. If everything went according to Jesse's desire, these supplies would put the well being of Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah in good standing with their commander as well as glean information about how they were doing in the war against the Philistines.

Jesse called his youngest son, David in from watching the sheep to run this errand for him because he was too young to be drafted by Saul. Jesse was too old now to be a soldier, but he didn't want his next four sons to be in as dangerous a position as their older siblings. He had no idea that his concern and choices were fulfilling God's plan for David to step into a more prominent role in Israel's future.

The “coincidence” in the timing of David's arrival was actually precisely timed by God. “Early in the morning David left the flock with a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry.” [1 Samuel 17:20] The ten mile walk probably caused him to arrive in the late afternoon. David left the supplies with the keeper of supplies, and ran behind the ranks, looking for his brothers. He wanted to confirm that his brothers were well before the battle clash began!

But to his amazement, this huge man stepped out of the ranks of the Philistine army and began to rant against Israel's army. He had to be about nine feet tall! He challenged Saul to send out one of his men as a champion to fight one on one, winner take all; but no one stepped out, not even Saul himself. So the army ran back toward their tents instead of sounding the charge of battle. And the Philistine derided their cowardice as he also followed his army back up to their tents for another evening without war.

This Philistine was from one of the fortified cities of Philistia, named Gath. In Joshua 11:21,22 Israel's conquest of the Promised Land was recorded to include the battle against the Anakites. “No Anakites were left in Israelite territory; only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive.” Later, David and his men fought several battles with other giant sized men. 1 Chronicles 20:6 recorded, “In still another battle, which took place at Gath, there was another huge man with six fingers on each hand and

six toes on each foot – twenty four in all. He also was descended from Rapha.” The word Rapha means giant. From these passages we can understand that there were giants in the land and they had a grudge against Israel. And this one was named Goliath.

David couldn't believe what he had just seen and heard! He heard the men say a reward had been offered by Saul. So, he began to ask questions from the men. “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?” [1 Samuel 17:26] Goliath had not merely mocked Israel's soldiers, he had mocked Israel's king and God! He had no reverence for any talk about some covenant Israel had with God for this land. He took their fear of him as a declaration that he was stronger than Saul. He was stronger than any of his little soldiers and certainly stronger than their god. He defied them. The Hebrew word for defy in verse 10 meant “reproach.” If Saul had no champion to take on Goliath's challenge then they were all impotent cowards and so was the god they relied on.

As David heard the discussion of this dilemma and saw the fear in the eyes of these soldiers, he knew in his heart that this challenge was aimed more against God than Israel's army. But his oldest brother found him talking and reacted in anger. “Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.” [1 Samuel 17:28b]

A few years earlier, Eliab had watched as Samuel had passed himself and his six other brothers over only to anoint David as a future king. Perhaps his jealousy could no longer be held at bay, as David seemed to be challenging his own fear. Standing at ready for war for 40 days, without going anywhere had stretched his patience thin. Yet David's answer was humble and non-confrontational with his brother.

Facing our fears is extremely humbling. Rather than admitting that he too had giant fears, Eliab exploded with unfounded anger against his baby brother. Fear is common to us all, and we can react in many different ways. Facing our “giants” may cause a reaction similar to that of Eliab. We may strike out in anger against those closest to us, rather than recognizing we need help. We sometimes try to run away from the giant we face, trying to hide rather than facing it at all. When the medical bills pile up while our income drops due to severe illness; when the new job turns out to require much more technical knowledge than we have learned; when we can't get our son or daughter to even talk to us, much less understand our point of view – do we choose “fight or flight”? Eliab chose to “fight” David, Saul chose flight to his tent, while David chose to stand up and fight! David said, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.” [1 Samuel 17:32]

So this declaration brought him to Saul's attention. At their last encounter, David had been going back and forth between Saul's home in Gibeah and his own home in Bethlehem. [1 Samuel 17:15] Because Saul's fits of the evil spirit came and went, it may have been a couple years since he had been called to serve as harpist for Saul. Now, David stood before Saul, not in the shadows of a darkened room, but directly before him in his tent of battle. Saul wanted to meet the soldier who was even talking about taking up Goliath's challenge. But when he saw this young man before him, not yet full grown, and wearing simple shepherd's garb, Saul was disappointed. He said, “You are not able to fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth.” [1 Samuel 17:33]

His own brother called him a boy who conceitedly fantasized about being a soldier. Saul called David a boy who had no experience as a soldier. How could he face this experienced warrior on behalf of all of Israel? The stakes were too high. But although David was a shepherd, not a soldier, he knew first hand that size doesn't matter, when the battle is the Lord's.

David recounted his success as a shepherd to fight a lion and a bear which had come to ravage

his flock. “Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the Living God. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” [1 Samuel 17:36, 37] We too can take courage when we have a giant to face by remembering how God has helped in our past. David did not conceitedly take credit for his exploits but acknowledged that God was the victor. That was why he was so confident that God would give the victory in this battle.

Saul saw the absolute faith of this young man. He had his doubts. But if David wanted to accept the champion's challenge, perhaps his own doubts would no longer hold back his army from battle. Jamison, Fausset and Brown commented, “The pious language of the modest but valiant youth impressed the monarch's heart. He felt that it indicated the true military confidence of Israel, and therefore, made up his mind, without any demur, to sanction a combat on which the fate of his kingdom depended and with a champion supporting his interests apparently so unequal to the task.”

He decided to try to give David a little advantage by offering his own armor. Trying on Saul's coat of armor, bronze helmet and sword girdle, David tried a few moves. But he couldn't fight with all of this unaccustomed protection. So, David took the armor off and picked up his staff and shepherd's bag and sling to go out to confront the giant Goliath. Saul sent him on with these words: “Go, and the Lord be with you.” Whether Saul could believe his own words or not, it was time for battle.

It may have been early morning by the time David marched with the army out to stage for battle. 1 Samuel 17:16 stated, “For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand.” So, since David had arrived in camp to hear Goliath's challenge the evening before, his preparation brought him to the Philistine's morning challenge. Gill's Expository suggests that, “The Jews say he took those seasons on purpose to disturb them [Israel] in reading their 'Shema,' or “Hear o Israel, the Lord our God is one God.” and saying their prayers morning and evening.” But this time, Goliath would be faced by one man ready to meet his challenge as Israel's champion; one who believed in the strength of that One God of Israel.

Let's compare David with Goliath:

- • David was a shepherd / Goliath was a warrior
- • David wore a tunic / Goliath wore a coat of scale armor, a helmet and grieves
- • David carried a staff, sling and 5 smooth stones/ Goliath carried a javelin, spear and sword
- • David ran toward Goliath/ Goliath “moved closer”, or lumbered

Now, when I first read this account, I thought that David picked five stones so that he could have back-up if the first one didn't do the job. However, the Bible's accounts of his further attacks on the Philistines revealed that Goliath may have had brothers! 1 Chronicles 20:5 revealed: “In another battle with the Philistines, Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod.” Some researchers stated that four other descendants of Rapha were actually Goliath's brothers. Therefore, David may have heard this information and was prepared to take on all of the giant's family!

Goliath sneered when he saw, not a seasoned soldier step out to challenge him, but a young, unarmed “boy” with a staff! He despised him and said, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ‘Come here ... and I'll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!’” [1 Samuel 17:43] But this trash talk did not intimidate David. He responded with a little of his own, but with a vital difference. “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 the armies of Israel, whom you have defied....and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those

gathered here will know that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give all of you into our hands." [1 Samuel 17:45-47] Goliath put down David with "trash-talk", but David put down the Philistine with a promise.

Psalms 9:9,10 were written by David. He was assured, "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you." David called on the name of the Lord as he approached this giant. In the margin of my Bible, I have written a note: "James; 7/27/12; in hospital," next to these two verses. When he was almost 30 years old, my son, James, was hospitalized due to Crohn's disease, which had caused a perforation in his bowel. He was told he may have to wear a bag after surgery removed the part of his colon that was diseased. This was my "giant" at that time. To sit beside him in the hospital and hear the words of a gastrointestineologist surgeon, who had 30 years experience reveal that he did not feel qualified to proceed in this surgery, seemed overwhelming. But like David, it was the name of the Lord that I clung to. The Lord Almighty is a stronghold and entering into His sheltering arms brings the confidence we need to face our giants. God directed us to a surgeon who was able to repair the damage and return James, without a bag, to good health today. We can face our giants assured that God will accomplish His will and keep us in His arms. David faced his giant with the full confidence that this was God's battle, because the Philistine had defamed the Lord God of Israel.

Archeologists once clocked the stones thrown from slings by Syrian shepherds at speeds between 90 and 100 mph. The Benjamite soldiers were renowned as having incredible accuracy. Judges 20:16 declares, "Among all these soldiers, there were seven hundred chosen who were left-handed, each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not miss." David hit Goliath in the only lethal place where he was not covered by armor, on the forehead. And, just as he had promised, David ran up and finished the job by using Goliath's own sword to take off his head. The Philistine army, seeing that their champion had lost the challenge, ran away rather than biding by the challenger's "winner take all" proposal. So, Israel's army shouted their victory and pursued them. David most likely joined in the pursuit, caught up in the victory, to fight beside his brothers.

Everything changed from that moment of battle. David was accepted as a fellow soldier, rather than a shepherd boy. When the soldiers returned to camp, Saul honored David's courage and bravery. In verses 55-58 there is a curious discussion between Saul and his general, Abner. Saul asked "Whose son is that young man?" Didn't Saul recognize David anymore? The commentators give two possibilities. First, perhaps Saul did know David, but, wishing to fulfill his promise of exempting his family from taxes, he needed to remember who's son he was, to record that no levies were to be taken from David's family.

Secondly, perhaps he truly didn't remember who David was. When David had been brought to soothe Saul at his home, servants had fetched him and he may have quietly entered a darkened chamber to play, and then left, without Saul learning his name. Also, it may have been a couple years since David had been called to service as harpist, and he had changed. I remember the year between my son's 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 9<sup>th</sup> grades of school. In Jr. High, James had been targeted by a bully. I tried to comfort him by the fact that he would surely grow as tall as his Dad, and one day not need to fear this bully. That summer, he grew 6 to 8 inches! One day he came home from High School and told me he had seen that "bully" in the halls of school. Alarmed, I asked if he had said anything. But James replied, "He just walked right past me and never even looked up at me. He looks so short now!" So, just as my son changed dramatically in appearance in one summer, David may have also been taller and more filled out. Perhaps he now had a beard, so that Saul did not recognize him. But whatever the cause was, David's life changed from that time on, and led to a dramatic change in Saul's life as well.

Saul first noticed the fame David would receive when his son, Jonathan made a covenant of friendship with David. This bond established a life time of loving unity, dependability and reliability between them. Ellicott described that their affinity was because, “Jonathan and David possessed one thing in common – an intense, unswerving belief in the power of Jehovah of Israel to keep and to save all who trusted in Him.” Jonathan could not have such a bond with Saul, his father. And David would soon find that this friendship was vital to David's survival as Saul began to spiral into a hatred of this young man he now honored.

Chapter 18 revealed the contrast between David's rise to fame and Saul's plunge into infamy. Saul conscripted David into the army to use his talents of courage and leadership. “Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army.” [1 Samuel 18:5] As the army marched home from this battle, the women came out to sing their praises. However, their song struck these two anointed kings differently. While David served Saul with all his dedication, Saul became jealous of him. “They have credited David with tens of thousands,” he thought, “but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?” [1 Samuel 18:8]

Saul began to fixate on this jealousy. He remembered Samuel had prophesied that the Lord would give his kingdom to another. David must be that other man! So he kept a jealous watch on David. And as he did, the evil spirit “came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp...” [1 Samuel 18:10] We have seen Saul fall into a depression due to an evil spirit. But this was so forceful that Saul moved from jealousy to fear of David and now to anger. “Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, 'I'll pin him to the wall.' But David eluded him twice.” [1 Samuel 18:11]

Now, if David was such a skilled soldier, why did he remain in such danger so Saul could try this twice? The word here translated “he hurled it” has also been translated “brandished.” Therefore, Saul was “brandishing” or threatening with his spear, and only thinking to himself that he would throw it. The word translated, “prophecy” is the Hebrew word, Hithphel which means: frenzied ecstatic speech. This particular word is never used in the Old Testament of true prophecy, which is fore-telling a message from God. So, as David played his harp, he was concerned about Saul's frantic speech and erratic behavior, but did not believe that all of this was truly targeting him, until Saul brandished his spear the second time. So David left Saul's home and kept busy with his position in the army, realizing Saul's anger was aimed at himself, but hoping he would calm down.

Although Saul did find a measure of release from the evil spirit, he continued to spiral into the fear of losing his kingdom, so that he began to plot to kill David. First, he tried using a betrothal to his eldest daughter, Merab. He thought, David had earned marriage to his daughter as a reward for killing Goliath. But if David had to fight many more battles against the Philistines to claim Merab as his reward, he might be killed in battle, to save Saul the trouble. Of course David planned to serve well as a soldier. But remembering Saul's behavior against him in his madness, David decided that gaining a royal rank by marriage would only give Saul more cause to doubt his loyalty. So he said he was of too low a position to pay the bride price for this marriage. Nothing more was said for awhile, but David was believed by most of the army to be betrothed to Saul's daughter. However, Saul insulted him by giving David's betrothed to another man, who did have the dowry price to pay for Merab. David did not react.

Secondly, Saul decided to use the “snare” of marriage to his second daughter Michal, to urge David into the danger of battle. Even though Michal loved him, David again called on the dowry price to describe his inability to accept this offer. However this time, Saul used the servants to persuade him. “The king wants no other price for the bride than a hundred Philistine foreskins, to take revenge on his enemies.” [1 Samuel 18:25] He was asking David to do more than fighting valiantly.

Saul wanted David to “circumcise” the uncircumcised Philistines. This would be a statement about God's covenant of circumcision for Israel. Circumcision made them stand apart from the heathen nations around them. David considered this as a good idea, being a man of faith! But the Philistines would consider this to be mutilation and would be even more dedicated to eliminating David than before. Saul even added a time limit to increase the danger to David.

However, Saul did not consider how strongly the Lord was with David. He not only killed the appropriate number of Philistines, but he killed and took the foreskins of twice the required number for the dowry price, “before the allotted time elapsed.” [vs. 26] Saul hoped David would die at the hand of the Philistines so that he would not be dethroned. But God helped him to succeed and win the princess, Michal, as his bride. This gave David the prestige of being part of the royal family, and a position even closer to the throne. As a consequence, “Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days.” [1 Samuel 18:29]

At every turn, Saul meant to harm David. But at every turn David prospered. The last verse of chapter 18 revealed the height of David's respect among his fellow officers. “The Philistine commanders continued to go out to battle, and as often as they did, David met with more success than the rest of Saul's officers, and his name became well known.” Although his plan did enrage the Philistines into more war, Saul's anger only hurt himself as David gained more and more respect among the people.

Saul's fevered possession of anger drug him further and further into an emotional pit for the rest of his life. We will learn more about that in future lessons. David, we will see, had no intention of claiming Saul's throne before it was vacated naturally. He knew God's plan would be accomplished in God's time. But once Saul's focus was put on anger or vengeance, it was impossible for him to see that he was the one caught in a snare.

Saul took his fear and let it simmer until it turned to anger. He let his anger boil until it led him to take action - plotting murder. The book of Romans, speaking about unbelievers, reveals how staying angry becomes a “slippery slope,” leading to further sin. “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.” Saul's chosen path seemed like a train wreck about to happen, but he was unable to stop.

What can be done when anger overwhelms us? Ephesians 4:26 instructs believers, “In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. And do not give the devil a foothold.” Holding on to anger and fantasizing about revenge gives the devil a foothold. In Ephesians, the Apostle Paul charges believers to “Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” [Ephesians 4:31,32] The cure for anger is compassion for others by way of forgiveness.

As soon as Saul realized David had the Spirit of the Lord upon him, he should have turned to the Lord so he could have God's help to forgive. Saul could have spent the remainder of his reign in training David and preparing him for his future rule, thereby leaving a noble legacy. But instead of aligning his will with God's will, Saul determined to fight against God's will for David; a losing battle at best.

It is never easy to turn around such a powerful emotion as anger. But God helps us in the most difficult of temptations. “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” [1 Corinthians 10:13] Even if we are unfaithful, God is always faithful. He experienced temptations to be angry and seek revenge. But He himself never sinned. He even forgave those who nailed him to the cross. He therefore, is able to help us turn in repentance from our anger and will draw us to forgive, and find compassion for our enemies.

David's attitude of servant-hood also gave us a sample of a “way out” of this temptation. When Saul revealed his anger against David, David could have responded in kind. But rather than falling into this trap, David turned away from anger, and turned to serve Saul as his calming harpist, as his courageous captain, and as his faithful son-in-law. Before he was able to serve Saul in compassion, David had to forgive him. Keeping his heart aligned with God's will for Israel and for his own life, David repeatedly chose to think the best of Saul. His example gave us our best armor for fighting against the temptation of anger.

David also demonstrated the character trait of humility throughout our lesson. He never claimed that he was braver than any of the other soldiers. He didn't claim that his strength was greater than that of Goliath. He refused to fall into the trap of believing his own “press.” He knew that his success was a gift from God. The Lord Almighty, the God of the army of Israel was the one who fought the battle and defeated the champion of the Philistines. David was just the arm swinging the sling. In this way David was a type of Christ.

In Philippians chapter 2 Paul challenges us, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross.” [Philippians 2:5-8] Just as Christ took on the nature of a servant, David became a servant to Saul. He lived as a servant while serving as a commander.

If we can practice to take on Christ's same attitude of humility, we too will be able to step out in battle against our giants. We are not in this battle alone. Christ has offered His two arms of grace to help us succeed: His example and His Word. But when faced with that anger and frustration which have possessed us for so long, our arms may feel too weak to even get the stone swinging, much less able to hit a knock-out blow. David did not pick up his sling for the first time on the day he faced Goliath. His story of killing the bear and lion made us realize that David had spent a lot of time practicing to throw and aim stones. We also must practice our spiritual aim. Philippians 2:1-3 explains an exercise to strengthen our aim: “Finally brothers (sisters), whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.”

What is true? Jesus is the Truth. What is noble? Jesus is the King of Kings. What is right? Jesus is the Righteous Branch. What is pure? Jesus is the holy, sinless, Son of God. What is lovely? Jesus is the Light of the World. What is admirable? Jesus is the Savior. Who is excellent? Jesus is excellent! Who is praiseworthy? Jesus is praiseworthy! - Who can help us conquer our giants? Jesus can! Think on Him.