

Message #38

I Samuel 17:12-23

David would ultimately become Israel's great king, but God did not initially put him in that position. When Samuel first anointed David, God did not instantly kill Saul and then promote David. God used a series of behind scenes events to bring David to the place He wanted him to be. What He does is lead David into a major fight.

When we looked at the text last week, we saw a Giant come out and challenge the entire Israelite army to a fight. Israel and the Philistines were on two sides of the Valley of Elah and this champion Giant walks out in the valley every day and challenges someone to come fight him.

Now the scene shifts from this valley of Elah to Bethlehem and a boy named David. David is about to take front and center stage in one of the greatest stories in the world. What we learn here is this:

WHEN ONE IS FAITHFUL TO GOD AND DOES HIS BEST IN SEEMINGLY SMALL AND INSIGNIFICANT ASSIGNMENTS, GOD WILL SOVEREIGNLY WORK AND EVENTUALLY DO GREAT THINGS WITH HIM AND FOR HIM.

This is an amazing and famous story. David's initial job is to go take some food and check up on his brothers. That is all he knows at the time this happens. When this story begins all he thinks is my job is to take some food to my brothers and see how they are doing. **When the story ends, David is the greatest military hero in the history of Israel.**

This is one important story and there are seven narrative observations brought out about it:

NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #1 – We are given data about David's father. **17:12**

David was the son of Jesse, who lived in Bethlehem. We have already been introduced to Jesse and Bethlehem because Samuel had anointed David there (I Sam. 16:1). The word "Ephrathah" is one that is derived from Hebrew radicals (letters) which refer to something very humble, such as the humility of ashes or head covering (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, pp. 72-73).

What this would indicate is that Bethlehem was not a big city by any means nor was Jesse some major family in the tribe of Judah. David is not coming from an elite, big city background. He is not some pampered boy who was expected to go into politics. He was not a boy expected to attend the great places of education of the world in 1000 B.C.. He was a small town boy who came from a humble small town.

Jesse had eight sons and he was one of the oldest men living at the time of Saul. He was "advanced in years among men." He was probably the oldest man living in Bethlehem and perhaps in all of Judah.

Now think about this. Jesse has obviously had a good prosperous life, but it is not until he is real old that he sees God do the greatest thing that he will ever do in his lifetime and he will do these things with his young teenage son.

People who give up on life are very foolish. People who give up in their old age of life are very foolish. God may be doing some of the greatest things with you and for you when you are real old. You may live to see God do some amazing things with someone from your family. Keep faithful and keep active. Keep learning and keep serving.

The greatest blessings of Abraham's life occurred when he was 100-years-old.

NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #2 – We are given data about David's brothers. **17:13-14**

David was the youngest of the eight sons of Jesse (16:10). He is probably about 16-17 years old. Those who love the Lord can accomplish great things at a young age.

John Calvin joined the Reformation at age 21 and wrote his theological Institutes at age 27.

Isaac Newton formed the basic law of gravity at age 24.

Martin Luther became a reformer at age 25 and started the Reformation at age 30.

George Whitefield was influencing students in England before he was 24.

Charles Spurgeon built Metropolitan Tabernacle at age 27.

David's three older brothers—Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah—had joined up and followed Saul into the battlefield. Those three had joined Saul's military force and were serving their country. They had followed Saul out to the Valley of Elah and they were camped on one side of the valley watching the Philistines on the other side of the valley.

We learned last time that "Saul and all Israel" were dismayed and greatly afraid (**17:11**), so we know that the three brothers of David were part of the group that was greatly afraid. We may remember that Eliab was a big, strong-looking tough guy (16:6-7), but he was just as afraid as everyone else.

The minimum age one had to be to serve in the military was 20 (Num. 1:3, 19). Here, in the United States, to join the military you must be 17-years-old. So obviously these three brothers were over 20 and the other sons were probably under 20.

We aren't sure just what the age was of the other sons, but what we do learn in **verse 14** is that David was the youngest of all the brothers. This explains why David was not out on the battlefield with Saul.

We know that David was known to be a warrior (16:18) and we also know that Saul had appointed David to be his bodyguard and musical therapy harp player (16:21, 23). This explains why David was not on the battlefield. He apparently wasn't old enough to go to war.

Now these three older brothers knew that their brother David had been anointed by Samuel to be the next King, because they were there at his anointing (I Sam. 16:13). It is possible that they were more respectful of Saul, who was in rebellion against God, than they are their own brother David, who was actually right with God.

When you are right with God, it can stir up jealousy in a family. It is not uncommon to hear well who do you think you are to talk to me, or, I am just as spiritual as you.

David was probably facing some of that.

Now since they were following Saul, we may assume that they are doing what Saul is doing, which is nothing. He is just out there watching the Philistines and listening to a 9.75 foot giant challenge them to send someone out to fight him.

NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #3 – We are given data about David’s activity. **17:15**

Jesse was old and apparently David would often travel back and forth from where Saul was to where Jesse’s sheep were. He obviously had people helping him with his flock, but he still went to tend sheep and check up on them, when he was not playing the harp for Saul (16:23). We may remember that Saul had moved David to a place near him, but apparently they had an arrangement whereby David could regularly go home to where Jesse lived. Since Saul was out on the battlefield, there was no need of David hanging around the house, so he went home to where his father was.

At this point in his life he was no longer a full-time shepherd but when he was home, he was still a responsible and helpful young man. He certainly would have taken an interest in the welfare of the flock he had watched for years. He certainly would have been a big help to Jesse by having David home. He could help him care for the sheep.

As near as we may determine, the distance between Bethlehem to where Saul was located was about 15 miles. David was obviously very active and very much in shape. He was not a teenager who was sitting around playing video games, feeding his face and getting flabby.

NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #4 – We are given data about Goliath’s daily intimidations.
17:16

Every morning and every evening for 40 straight days, Goliath would walk out into the middle of the Valley of Elah and challenge the Israeli army to a fight. Forty days is quite a while. Two times a day, for 40 days, Goliath would suit up and go out in front of the Israelites and challenge them to a fight.

All of these men in the Israeli military were gone from their homes and responsibilities and at this point they had been out there 40 days, listening to this big man shoot off his big mouth.

Goliath was an imposing man (I Sam. 17:4-7). He was 9 ¾ feet tall. He wore 125 pounds of armor. Just his spear weighed about 19 pounds. He was a formidable enemy. Every morning and every evening Goliath would go out and take a stand and challenge anyone to come fight him. Goliath would walk out in the valley and “taunt the Israelites.” Josephus says that the Israeli army would line up as if they were going to take his challenge, but they were so afraid of him that they stayed far away from where he actually was.

There is no question that enemies may be intimidating. But when we remain faithful to God, those enemies will fall. It is so true, “The bigger they are the harder they fall.”

NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #5 – We are given data about David’s specific assignment.
17:17-19

It was not uncommon at this time for families to send care packages to their sons who were in the military. They would often supply some form of food rations and drink for their relatives and others. Historians have observed that “meat” was a rarity and typically was not part of the military diet.

David’s father Jesse went to David and gave him a five-fold assignment:

(Assignment #1) - Take food to your brothers - some roasted grain and bread. **17:17a**

(Assignment #2) - Run to the camp with these things. This is a 15 mile run. **17:17b**

(Assignment #3) - Take food to the commander - 10 cuts of cheese. **17:18a**

(Assignment #4) - Check the welfare of your brothers. **17:18b**

(Assignment #5) - Bring the news about them back to me. **17:18c**

The Hebrew word “news” (arubba) is more than just a report, but it certainly would include a secure report. This was probably a form of compensation given to families who helped to underwrite some of the expenses. It was like a promissory note that was redeemable for compensation and reimbursement. It apparently was some form of pledge or security note (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, pp. 651-652). So this would be a guarantee that the food actually got to the family. This would confirm that the brothers were alive and doing well.

Now again I want to point out that his father says “run” to the camp. The camp is located on the north side of the valley of Elah (17:19). That is where Saul and David’s brothers were. The valley of Elah is about 15 miles west of Bethlehem.

Also keep in mind that he is carrying some type of bag or pannier that contains the food and he is asked to run to a camp that is 15 miles away and then run back home and tell him how things are. So the round trip is about 30 miles by foot and by jogging.

What David would not know quite yet is that this conditioning would be something that would be very beneficial for him. He would learn the country and be in shape to be able to hide in the hills and outrun just about everyone. So God was even sovereign in his physical activity and training.

Can you imagine asking a teenager to do this today? Try asking your teenage son or daughter to stop by the store and pick up a gallon of milk or bag of salt or your prescription. They are driving a car and will have to get out and walk a couple of hundred yards. For many they will make you think you have just asked them to make a great sacrifice of their own lives.

David was obviously in tremendous shape and could carry out this assignment and it is this fact that will lead him to the great blessings of his life.

NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #6 – We are given data about David’s obedience. **17:20**

The very next morning David got up early and left his flock with a keeper and headed to the military camp. That is an interesting piece of information God gives us. He didn’t just walk away from the sheep; he made sure someone was there to watch them before he took off.

At an easy 10 minute per hour jogging pace, the trip would take him about 2 hours and 30 minutes.

He must have left very early because when he reached the camp, the Israeli army was forming their morning formation. David’s submissive obedience to authority is something God will use time and time again.

It was because he obeyed his father that he got to this spot exactly when he did.

When you are given a task, get up and get at it because you don’t know where that will lead you. **Simple ordinary tasks may be the beginning of complex, extraordinary blessings.**

NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #7 – We are given data about the historical scene. **17:21-23**

When David got to the battlefield area, there were three realities that are critical to the narrative:

Reality #1 - The Israeli army and the Philistine army drew battle lines. **17:21**

David got to the camp just as the two armies were conducting their early morning military exercises. He must have heard the shouting and seen all the commotion. Israel was on the north side of the valley and the Philistines were on the south side. Every morning the armies would make some visible display of themselves to the other army.

Reality #2 - David left his baggage with the commander and ran to the battle line to see his brothers. **17:22**

He put the grain, bread and cheese in the care of the baggage supply officer and ran to see how his brothers were. He was a young boy and wanted to see the action. He has just run 15 miles and he is running again.

What irony this is. We may recall that Saul was hiding in the baggage area to get away from his assignment (10:22) and David is running from the baggage area to carry out his assignment.

Reality #3 - David is talking with his brothers when Goliath comes out and mocks Israel. **17:23**

Probably when David ran to the front lines, he was expecting to see some fighting, but instead he heard a guy shouting.

Getting there as early as David did, he was able to see Goliath come out and challenge the Israelites.

Robert Bergen, in his commentary, makes an interesting observation here. He says this is probably the first time in David's life when he heard someone ridicule the Lord (*I, II Samuel*, p. 192). As we will learn, David has more faith in God than the entire army of Israel, and he is a teenager.

Now what Goliath said he had been saying for 40 days, but on this particular day, he is saying it in front of David. This will prove to be his big downfall. He is shooting off his mouth in front of the wrong guy.

As John Woodhouse said, Israel's fortunes, Israel's history and world history is about to change (*I Samuel*, p. 319).

You have a teenager up on that mountain seeing this big-mouthed giant for the first time and that giant is about to come down.

This entire scene takes place because David was faithful to carry out a seemingly insignificant assignment: go check up on your brothers.