

TOPIC XI

THE DAVID AND GOLIATH MYTHS

It is often taught that when David killed Goliath, the Philistine warrior giant, that David was a young lad, and that his ability to ultimately kill Goliath was due to his faith in God and so on. This is often taught this way to children so they can emulate David's faith, and slay whatever "giants" they may face the teacher might describe for them. Well, this is lovely and sweet, but not based in the actual facts. The only thing remotely true was that David did have a solid faith in God, even though he was a womanizer, and committed numerous crimes and brutalities that were not pleasing to God. Let's look at the story and the facts.

I. David's age.

David is portrayed as a "youth" usually between twelve and eighteen years of age. This is assumed by the verse in I Samuel 17:33, that reads, "Then Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are *but* a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth."

The fact is that the Hebrew word for "youth" (Na-ar) does indeed mean a person of an age from infancy to young adulthood. But the term does not exclude either the use of it as an insult, or the description of a man under thirty, forty or even older or, quite often, the common use of it to compare one's man's age with another and also its use very often as simply "servant." For example, men or thirty and forty years of age are thought of as "young men" to me in my seventies.

Saul himself was thirty years old when he began to reign as king and he reigned Forty-two years in Israel. He was likely well into his sixties when the Goliath incident occurred. His son Jonathan was a commander of the army and defeated the Philistines long before he and David became friends after the Goliath encounter. We get the impression they were possibly of a similar age. Then immediately afterward, Jonathan gave David his robe and armor and Saul set David as commander over the men of war. I Samuel 18:5 tells us, "So David went out wherever Saul sent him, *and* prospered; and Saul set him over the men of war. And it was pleasing in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants."

Jonathan was Saul's firstborn son and at the time of the Goliath incident and could have been around thirty-five to forty years old in my opinion. David, then could

have been between twenty five and forty years old when he killed Goliath, and I can assure you that Jonathan did not give his robe and armor to a child, not did Saul set a child as commander over his armies. Now, to see this more clearly, let's look, for example at this exact word (na-ar) used elsewhere.

II Samuel 1:2-5,

2: On the third day, behold, a man (*ish*) came out of the camp from Saul, with his clothes torn and dust on his head. And it came about when he came to David that he fell to the ground and prostrated himself. 3: Then David said to him, "From where do you come?" And he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." 4": David said to him, "How did things go? Please tell me." And he said, "The people have fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also." 5: So David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?"

The first description of this messenger is "man", the Hebrew word "ish." It describes a male person at a mature age until his death. But the Hebrew word for "old man" is "zah-quen." The text calls the man both "ish" and "naar."

A revealing passage is Zechariah 8:4-5 and it helps us get a picture of the matter.

4: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. 5: 'And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets.'

The word for "man" is "ish." However, the word for "boy" is not "na-ar." It is "ye-led." "Ye-led" is used in 94 times in the O.T. to mean "boy" or "male child," but not once of David.

Then in II Samuel 2:14-17 we read,

14: "Then Abner said to Joab, "Now let the young men arise and hold a contest before us." And Joab said, "Let them arise." 15: So they arose and went over by count, twelve for Benjamin and Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David. 16: Each one of them seized his opponent by the head and *thrust* his sword in his opponent's side; so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim, which is in Gibeon. 17: That day the

battle was very severe, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David."

At this time, Abner and Joab were mature in years. His use of the term "young men" was in comparison to those of his own age. Abner was already captain of Saul's army when David met Goliath. This event took place some years later.

Let's look at some comments about a man called Zadok. This is a bit complex, but will clearly underscore matter. First, he is called a "young man" (na-ar) in I Chronicles 12:23-28,

23: "Now these are the numbers of the divisions equipped for war, who came to David at Hebron, to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the LORD. 24: The sons of Judah who bore shield and spear *were* 6,800, equipped for war. 25: Of the sons of Simeon, mighty men of valor for war, 7,100. 26: Of the sons of Levi 4,600. 27: Now Jehoiada was the leader of *the house of Aaron*, and with him were 3,700, 28: also Zadok, a young man mighty of valor, and of his father's house twenty-two captains. "

We'll return to this in a moment. But prior to this we see in II Samuel 8:15-18,

15: "So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and righteousness for all his people. 16: Joab the son of Zeruiah *was* over the army, and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud *was* recorder. 17: *Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar were priests*, and Seraiah *was* secretary. 18: Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were chief ministers."

According to Numbers, chapter four, a man could not become a priest until he reached the age of thirty. Levites could serve the tent of meeting from the age of 25-50, (Numbers 8:24-26) but not all Levites were priests. Still, there is evidence that priests were in service from 25 years old. Here, Zadok was a priest BEFORE he became a leader of a contingent of warriors and then called a "young man" (na-ar).

So Zadok had to be at least 25 years old to be a priest, and was older than that when he served as a commander of captains. Not only that, at this time Zadok also had a son, Ahimaaz, who is called a "man" in II Samuel 18:26, not a "young man." Further, Zadok was named as high priest during the reign of Solomon, and his descendants became priests and high priests during both the times of the kings and

the reconstruction after the Babylonian captivity. In Jesus' day the party of the Sadducees trace their lineage to Zadok and in Hebrew, their name is Zadukim, meaning "from Zadok."

So the term "young man" used of David has no relevance as to his being a teenager or a "youth" in our minds. He was likely 25-35 years old in my opinion. Perhaps even older. Now, to add more, we have a few other texts:

II. David's stature and prowess.

I Samuel 16:17-18, "So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me now a *man* who can play well and bring *him* to me." Then one of the young men said, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician, a mighty *man* of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome *man*; and the LORD is with him."

These are military terms and suggest that perhaps David took part in battles during the campaign Saul waged against the Ammonites in I Samuel 11, the Philistines in I Samuel 13 and possibly against the Amalekites in I Samuel 15. But his engagement in all of this (not a likely probability as David, as the youngest brother) was assigned as the main shepherd over his father's flocks of sheep. His older brothers, however, did engage in battle with Saul's troops.

Nevertheless, it is in I Samuel 16:12, where we first see David as he is brought to Samuel to be anointed as the next king. There it says, "So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he."

"Ruddy" means he had redness to his flesh or had red hair. We know also he had a beard (I Samuel 21:13).

David was Jesse's youngest son. This does not mean he was a boy. We also see in the passage that David is called a "man" in I Samuel 16:17-18. In fact, as a shepherd he had killed both a lion and a bear in the field. He attributed this to the delivering power of the Lord. We will see this in a moment.

In the next chapter we begin to ascertain a little more of David's inner motives and his size as he accepts the challenge to face Goliath.

In I Samuel 17 tells us that at this time Jesse, David's father, was old and advanced

in years among men. In verse 17. "...Jesse said to David his son, "Take now for your brothers an ephah of this roasted grain and these ten loaves and run to the camp to your brothers. Bring also these ten cuts of cheese to the commander of *their* thousand, and look into the welfare of your brothers, and bring back news of them. "For Saul and they and all the men of Israel are in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines."

He did so and, "...then David left his baggage in the care of the baggage keeper, and ran to the battle line and entered in order to greet his brothers." Note:

25-30: The men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who is coming up? Surely he is coming up to defy Israel. And it will be that the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel." Then David spoke to the men who were standing by him, saying, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?" The people answered him in accord with this word, saying, "Thus it will be done for the man who kills him."

"Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab's anger burned against David and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your insolence and the wickedness of your heart; for you have come down in order to see the battle." But David said, "What have I done now? Was it not just a question?" Then he turned away from him to another and said the same thing; and the people answered the same thing as before."

David heard and confirmed three times about what would be done for the one who defeated the giant. I am not convinced this would be the case with a boy.

"When the words which David spoke were heard, they told *them* to Saul, and he sent for him. David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Then Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are *but* a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued *it* from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized *him* by his beard and struck him and killed him. "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living

God." And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you." Then Saul clothed David with his garments and put a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with armor. David girded his sword over his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested *them*. So David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested *them*." And David took them off."

"*nasah*" - put to the test, try them out, venture. Not that they didn't fit because they were too big. This tells us that David himself was a large man able to wear the armor and helmet of a man head and shoulders in height over the men in the nation. So says I Samuel 9:2, "He (Kish) had a son whose name was Saul, a choice and handsome *man*, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people."

And,

I Samuel 10:23, "So they ran and took him (Saul) from there, and when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward."

Now later on that same day,

I Samuel 18:4-9, 13,

4: "Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt. 5: So David went out wherever Saul sent him, *and* prospered; and Saul set him over the men of war. And it was pleasing in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants. 6: It happened as they were coming, when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy and with musical instruments. 7: The women sang as they played, and said, "Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands." 8: Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" 9: Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on."

Jonathan was a full grown man when he gave David his equipment. Not anything

a boy could wear. Then, we have the chant of David "killing tens of thousands" and Saul his "thousands." This is to underscore that though Saul was a mighty and proven warrior, David more so. Saul was also impressed with David's skill and promoted him even though he feared and despised him,

13: "Therefore Saul removed him from his presence and appointed him as his commander of a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people.

Now David felt that due to his lowly estate and poverty he was not worthy to become the king's son-in-law through marriage to his daughter. These words were repeated to Saul."

I Samuel 18:25-27,

25: "Saul then said, "Thus you shall say to David, 'The king does not desire any dowry except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to take vengeance on the king's enemies.'" Now Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. 26: When his servants told David these words, it pleased David to become the king's son-in-law. Before the days had expired 27: David rose up and went, he and his men, and struck down two hundred men among the Philistines. Then David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. So Saul gave him Michal his daughter for a wife."

And then in the next chapter,

I Samuel 19:8, "When there was war again, David went out and fought with the Philistines and defeated them with great slaughter, so that they fled before him."

The verses above are just a short time after the Goliath defeat.

In visualizing David in our minds, we seldom think of him with a beard. But shortly after the Goliath incident, we read,

"Then David arose and fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath. But the servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of this one as they danced, saying, 'Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands?'" David took these words to heart and greatly feared Achish king of Gath. So he disguised his sanity before them, and

acted insanely in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard." (I Samuel 21:10-13)

Later David wrote in Psalm 18:34, "He (God) trains my hands for battle, So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze." In a brief research, bows made of pure bronze did not exist and would have been too wieldy and heavy for field use. Composite bows both curved and recurved had been in use long before David's time. But there is no literary, artistic or archaeological evidence of bows being made of, or partly made of, bronze.

Even the Hebrew phrase translated "bronze" is debatable and could even mean "snake like" referring to the recurved battle bow, some of which took two hands to pull the sinewed string. It took two men to string it. Also, in David's Psalm, he could even be using a hyperbole.

In any case David's point is that God had given him massive strength. David was spoken of as "a mighty *man* of valor, a warrior ..." before the Goliath encounter. It should be clear by now that the Bible is not speaking about a young boy when it speaks about David and the Goliath incident.

The point of this exposition on David is four fold. 1. To expose the ingrained thinking we have been taught that is incorrect. 2. To realize that much of the Scriptures are presented to us like this and to realize that we must do more research, like the folks at Berea, to see if what we are hearing is true. 3. To point out that a flawed person like David can be used by God in many positive ways despite one's weakness. 4. To see that God is with those who trust in Him despite mistakes and circumstances we or others make causing distress or tragedy.

Michelangelo did not see David as a child from his famous statue. Here is a picture of the statue below.



It would seem that the idea of David being a child is more of a modern concept than a commonly held idea.