

## Israelite Soldier Monologue – Faith over Fear Sermon Series

So, I guess it was war season again. The fields were harvested, the next crop newly planted and the Philistines were on the move.

Our King Saul gathered his regular troops and marched towards the valley of Elah to head them off. I, like most men, joined them.

We set up camp on the ridge overlooking the valley. We were a mob more than an army. Some had armour, metal shields, swords and spears. Many of us were just farmers who had grabbed whatever they thought would be a weapon. I was lucky enough to have my father's old sword and his leather shield. There were a few tents but mostly we just sought out a spot on the slope to throw down a blanket.

I buddied up with the Jessie brothers. Not bad blokes although the older one, Eliab had a bit of the arrogance of privilege as so many firstborn sons do. They lived not too far away, near Bethlehem, so their family were able to bring food to them. They shared it around so we had enough. Not much but enough.

Across the valley a real army had set up. Philistine men in armour with shields and spears who stood in rows and didn't walk so much as stomped. They didn't so much set up camp as built a tent town.

And they had Goliath. This really big unit. We had heard about him. The Philistine not so secret weapon.

Next morning it started. The Philistines formed into lines on the ridge on the other side of the valley, neat military 'we mean business' lines. We tried to emulate them with our rag-tag army of farmers and merchants but even we recognised that we didn't pull it off. So, we stood, weapons in hand, staring across the valley. Waiting, daring the other to make the first move.

Then movement from behind the lines of soldiers. The neat lines parted to reveal a huge bronze shield awkwardly carried by a Philistine soldier. Behind

him, Goliath. I heard the intake of breath from our side. He was everything we had imagined. Huge. Strong. Mean. Terrifying. Armed to the teeth. Clad in polished metal armour, carrying the biggest spear I have seen. As he strode down the slope towards us the Philistine soldiers slapped swords on shields keeping time with the footfall of their champion. Our loose lines moved perceptibly back.

At the floor of the valley, Goliath stopped, as did the beating of the shields. In the sudden silence, his deep voice boomed across to us.

"We can finish this now. Send out your champion in single-handed battle. Whoever is victorious will have the war." Feet shuffled in the dirt, eyes looked down but no one moved forward. The minutes dragged by.

"I thought so. Cowards." Goliath turned and followed by his shield bearer, strode back up the hill accompanied not by the drumming of shields but by laughter.

And so it went on. Morning and evening, the Philistine army would form up and Goliath would stride down the hill to issue his challenge. As the days went on the challenge was accompanied by more and more brazen taunts and mockery.

"You are all cowards, there is not a real man among you."

"My King is bigger than your King."

"My army is better than your army."

"My gods are more powerful than your God."

"Your King fights like a girl."

Maybe not those exact words, but you get the picture.

Every day, morning and evening. Every day the insults and mockery chipped a little more off our bravado. Every day our shoulders slumped a little more, our feet dragged in the dust a little more. Every day the fear plundered our faith and hope. King Saul who used to walk the lines encouraging us, spent

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more time in his tent. Days would go by where we would not see him at all. Saul had even offered money and his daughter for anyone who took on and defeated Goliath. There was a brief moment when I actually thought to take up the challenge myself but I knew how that would end. Mocked and afraid is better than dead and, you know, very dead.

And so every day the tormenting became more like truth. Maybe their King is better than our King. Their army certainly looked better than our poor excuse. They have many gods, we have only one and he seems to have abandoned us. Perhaps we are cowards. It certainly felt like that.

Every night our little army grew smaller as men slunk out of the camp to quietly return home. I'm not sure what kept me there. A sense of duty perhaps. Family pride? I was, after all, carrying my father's sword. So, I stayed. Just. Shuffling through the days, going through the motions. Eating the little food we had, sleeping in the dirt. All the while being reminded with clockwork monotony that I was small, afraid and useless.

Then one day the little brother of Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah came, as he had many times, bringing food. We had lined up for our ritual mocking, putting on the pretence of being an army, and this kid scuttled through the lines to find his brothers. Right on time Goliath appeared and began his tirade of abuse. The kid, full of youthful arrogance and as confident as they come, starts mouthing off at the rest of us and saying that if none of us are up to it, he'll go do battle with Goliath.

Someone passed that on to Saul who called the kid to him, I think to shut him down but somehow the little brat convinced the King that he had fighting experience and was capable of defeating Goliath. Next thing we know out of the King's tent staggers the kid wearing the Kings armour. It was the first laugh we'd had for some time. Sensibly, the kid

realised that he would be disadvantaged by the armour and removed it all. Taking only his sling he grabbed some stones from the creek and headed off down the hill towards Goliath.

Brave kid.