

AN IN-DEPTH BIBLE STUDY

DAVID AND GOLIATH

A Textual Variant, a Serious Weapon, and a Puzzle in 2 Samuel 21

1 Samuel 17 · 2 Samuel 21 · 1 Chronicles 20

A journey through history, biblical languages, and a story most readers only know from Sunday school

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Introduction: Above and Beyond a Children's Story

Few Old Testament narratives are as widely known, in outline, as David and Goliath — yet few carry as much genuine textual and historical complexity beneath their familiar surface. The giant's exact height is a matter of a well-documented ancient manuscript variant. His armor reflects real, identifiable ancient Near Eastern military technology. The sling David used was not a child's toy but a genuinely lethal, respected ancient weapon. And a later Old Testament text appears, on its plain reading, to credit a different man entirely with killing Goliath — one of the most famous and carefully studied apparent contradictions in the Hebrew Bible.

This study examines 1 Samuel 17 in full historical and textual depth: the manuscript evidence bearing on Goliath's actual height; his armor's connection to broader ancient Near Eastern and possibly Aegean military technology; the forty days of taunting and David's specific theological framing of the insult; Saul's armor and David's reasoned refusal of it; the sling's genuine status as a serious ancient weapon; the specific, debated question of why David selected five stones; David's own theological speech before the battle; the substantial textual puzzle of 2 Samuel 21:19, which appears to credit Elhanan with killing Goliath; and a related, genuine literary question regarding Saul's apparent failure to recognize David despite his prior service in the royal court.

As with the other studies in this series, this study treats several genuine, well-documented textual and historical questions with the same care and honesty this series has applied throughout, rather than smoothing over complexity in service of a simpler retelling.

Did You Know?

1 Samuel 17 exists in two notably different textual forms: the longer version found in the Masoretic Text (the basis for most English translations) and a substantially shorter version found in the ancient Greek Septuagint translation, which omits roughly forty verses found in the longer version — a significant textual-critical question examined directly in Chapter 10, relevant to several of this study's other discussions.

How to Use This Study

Each chapter includes: (1) the central biblical text; (2) historical and linguistic context; (3) explanations of Hebrew terms; (4) cross references; (5) 'Did You Know?' boxes with historical background; (6) suggestions for illustrations for those teaching this material in a classroom or small group; and (7) questions for personal or group reflection. At the end, you will find a consolidated summary of the main points, a list of further reading organized by theme, and a recommended bibliography for deeper study.

Suggested Illustration

Opening page with a simple comparative diagram showing the two proposed heights for Goliath (roughly 6'9" and roughly 9'9") alongside an average adult male height for scale, and a labeled illustration of his

described armor (helmet, coat of mail, greaves, javelin, spear) — establishing the historical and textual questions this study will examine before its detailed chapters.

Chapter 1 — Goliath's Height: A Textual Variant Worth Taking Seriously

"And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span." — 1 Samuel 17:4 (Masoretic Text, as reflected in the KJV)

Two Different Numbers in the Manuscript Tradition

This verse presents a genuine, well-documented textual variant deserving direct, careful treatment. The Masoretic Text (the standard medieval Hebrew text underlying most English translations, including the King James Version) reads Goliath's height as 'six cubits and a span' — using an eighteen-inch cubit, approximately nine feet, nine inches. However, the earliest complete Greek Septuagint manuscripts, a Dead Sea Scrolls fragment of Samuel (designated 4QSam-a), and the first-century Jewish historian Josephus (Antiquities of the Jews 6.171) all instead read 'four cubits and a span' — approximately six feet, nine inches.

Why the Shorter Reading Has Real Manuscript Support

This is a significant textual question because the shorter reading is attested by an unusually strong, independent convergence of ancient witnesses — the Septuagint (translated centuries before the Masoretic Text's standardization) and an actual Hebrew Dead Sea Scroll fragment (predating the Masoretic tradition by roughly a thousand years) agreeing against the received Masoretic reading, a pattern of evidence many textual critics find persuasive for judging the shorter reading as likely closer to the original text, with the taller figure possibly reflecting a later scribal inflation (whether accidental or a deliberate later embellishment emphasizing Goliath's fearsomeness).

A Question This Study Does Not Claim to Resolve With Absolute Certainty

This study presents the shorter reading (roughly 6'9") as the position favored by a considerable body of modern textual scholarship, given the strength of the combined Septuagint and Qumran evidence, while acknowledging that the Masoretic Text's longer reading remains the traditional reading reflected in most widely used English translations and continues to have its own scholarly defenders. Readers should understand this as a genuine, actively studied textual question rather than an invented modern skepticism, and should feel free to weigh the manuscript evidence themselves rather than assuming either figure is beyond legitimate discussion.

Either Height Describes a Genuinely Extraordinary Man

It is worth noting directly that even the shorter, more conservative reading (roughly 6'9") describes a man of quite exceptional, formidable height by ancient (or indeed modern) standards, fully consistent with the

narrative's overall presentation of Goliath as an intimidating, unprecedented physical specimen — this textual question concerns the precise, specific number involved, not whether Goliath was unusually large.

 Did You Know?

This is one of the relatively few instances in the Hebrew Bible where a Dead Sea Scroll fragment directly and specifically supports a Septuagint reading against the Masoretic Text on a substantive numerical detail, making 1 Samuel 17:4 a frequently cited example in academic discussions of Old Testament textual criticism and the sometimes complex relationship between these three major textual witnesses.

 **Further Reading:** 1 Samuel 17:4; 4QSam-a (Dead Sea Scroll fragment); Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 6.171.

Reflection Questions

1. How does learning about this genuine, well-documented textual variant affect your confidence in engaging honestly with other numerical or textual questions elsewhere in Scripture?
2. Why does either proposed height still fully support the narrative's overall portrayal of Goliath as an extraordinary, intimidating figure?

Chapter 2 — Goliath's Armor and Philistine Military Technology

"And he had an helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron." — 1 Samuel 17:5-7

A Detailed, Deliberate Inventory

This passage's unusually detailed itemization of Goliath's equipment — helmet, scale-armor coat, leg greaves, a javelin or target between his shoulders, and a spear with a distinctively heavy shaft — reflects deliberate narrative attention to the formidable, comprehensive nature of his military equipment, functioning to establish the scale of the physical challenge facing any potential Israelite opponent.

Substantial, Specific Weights

The coat of mail's weight, 'five thousand shekels of brass,' translates to roughly 125-150 pounds depending on the specific shekel-weight standard applied (ancient shekel weights varied somewhat across different periods and regions) — a substantial weight for body armor, consistent with genuine scale or lamellar armor construction well attested in the ancient Near East. The spearhead's weight, 'six hundred shekels of iron,' similarly indicates an unusually large, heavy weapon.

A Possible Aegean Connection

Some archaeologists and historians (including the influential Israeli scholar Yigael Yadin) have proposed connecting this specific armor description to Aegean-style military equipment associated with the 'Sea Peoples' — a term referring to various groups, including the Philistines themselves, who migrated into the eastern Mediterranean and Levant around the twelfth century B.C., with some of their distinctive military equipment depicted in surviving ancient Egyptian reliefs (notably at Medinet Habu, commemorating Pharaoh Ramesses III's conflicts with these groups). This study presents this connection as a reasonable, historically informed proposal linking the Philistines' biblical description to independently attested ancient Near Eastern archaeological and artistic evidence, while noting that connecting specific textual details to specific archaeological parallels always involves some degree of scholarly inference rather than absolute certainty.

Did You Know?

The description of the spear's shaft as being 'like a weaver's beam' (a reference to the thick, sturdy wooden beam used in ancient looms to hold the warp threads) is a striking, specific comparison meant to convey the weapon's unusual thickness and weight — a detail vivid enough that it recurs, as this study's later chapter will discuss, in the closely related account of 2 Samuel 21:19, where it becomes a significant clue in a genuine textual puzzle.

 **Further Reading:** 1 Samuel 17:5-7; 2 Samuel 21:19 (examined at length in Chapter 8).

Reflection Questions

1. How does the detailed, itemized inventory of Goliath's armor shape your understanding of the scale of the physical and military challenge David faced?
2. What does the possible Aegean archaeological connection add to your understanding of the Philistines' broader historical background?

Chapter 3 — Forty Days and "the Living God"

"And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days... And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" — 1 Samuel 17:16, 26

A Sustained, Repeated Provocation

Goliath's challenge was not a single, isolated taunt but a sustained daily provocation repeated 'morning and evening' across a full forty days — a detail underscoring both the depth of Israel's collective fear and hesitation (no one stepping forward across this entire extended period) and the mounting weight of the challenge David eventually responds to.

David's Specific Theological Framing

David's own response frames the issue in explicitly theological, rather than merely military or nationalistic, terms: Goliath's challenge is understood as defying not merely Israel's army or reputation, but specifically 'the armies of the living God' — a phrase David repeats (compare 17:36), consistently reframing what others may have regarded primarily as a military standoff as, at its core, an affront to God's own honor and reputation.

"The Living God" as a Significant Theological Title

The specific title 'the living God' (used elsewhere throughout Scripture to contrast Israel's God with lifeless, powerless idols, compare Jeremiah 10:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:9) reflects David's own clear theological framing from his very first recorded response to the situation — establishing, before any battle occurs, that David's motivation and confidence rest specifically on God's own living reality and reputation, not primarily on personal courage, national pride, or military calculation.

Did You Know?

The number forty appears repeatedly throughout Scripture in contexts of testing, waiting, or significant duration (compare Israel's forty years in the wilderness, examined throughout various studies in this series; Moses's forty days on Sinai; and Jesus's forty days in the wilderness, Matthew 4:2), making this specific forty-day period of Goliath's taunting consistent with, though not necessarily deliberately alluding to, this broader recurring biblical pattern of extended, testing time periods.

 **Further Reading:** 1 Samuel 17:16, 26, 36; Jeremiah 10:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:9.

Reflection Questions

1. How does David's specific theological framing of the challenge ('the armies of the living God') differ from a purely nationalistic or military response to the same situation?

2. Why might the extended, forty-day duration of Goliath's taunting have deepened the weight and significance of David's eventual response?

Chapter 4 — Saul's Armor and David's Refusal

"And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for it hath not proved them. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And he put them off him." — 1 Samuel 17:38-39

A Genuine Offer, Genuinely Declined

Saul's offer of his own armor represents a serious, well-intentioned attempt to provide David with genuine military advantage — royal armor would have been of notably higher quality than typical equipment available to an ordinary young shepherd. David's refusal is not framed as a rejection of Saul's genuine goodwill, but as a practical, reasoned decision based on his own specific experience and preparation.

A Practical, Not Merely Symbolic, Reason Given

David's stated reason — 'I have not proved them' (meaning he had not tested or practiced with this specific armor and equipment) — is a practical, experientially grounded explanation, not an abstract theological objection to using armor or weapons in principle. David does not reject military preparation generally (he brings his own sling and staff, and specifically selects stones, examined in the next chapter); he specifically rejects unfamiliar equipment that would likely hinder rather than help him in actual combat.

Fighting According to One's Own Genuine Preparation

This detail offers a notable model worth observing directly: David's confidence in God's provision (examined further in Chapter 6) operated alongside, not instead of, practical wisdom regarding his own specific skills and preparation — he chose to fight in the way he had actually trained and practiced, rather than either refusing all preparation on the assumption that God would simply override practical considerations, or accepting ill-fitting equipment merely because it was offered by the king.

Did You Know?

This scene's brief, somewhat awkward description of David 'assaying to go' in Saul's armor before quickly removing it has been a popular subject for artistic representation throughout Christian art history, often emphasizing the visual and physical mismatch between the armor (presumably sized for the fully grown King Saul, himself described in 1 Samuel 9:2 as standing 'higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward') and the younger, presumably smaller-framed David.

 **Further Reading:** 1 Samuel 17:38-40; 1 Samuel 9:2 (Saul's own notable height).

Reflection Questions

1. How does David's practical, experience-based reason for declining Saul's armor model a balance between faith and practical wisdom?

2. What does this scene suggest about fighting one's own battles according to one's own genuine preparation, rather than adopting an approach unsuited to one's actual skills and experience?

Chapter 5 — The Sling: A Serious Weapon, Not a Child's Toy

"Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss." — **Judges 20:16**

A Popular Misconception Worth Correcting

It is worth directly addressing a common assumption many readers bring to this narrative: the sling is frequently imagined, in popular retelling, as a simple child's toy, making David's victory seem to depend on a fortunate, almost accidental use of an unserious weapon. This significantly understates the sling's actual, well-documented status in ancient warfare.

Documented Precision and Lethality

Judges 20:16 explicitly describes a specific group of seven hundred elite slingers 'lefthanded' (or possibly 'restricted/impaired in the right hand,' a phrase of some minor translational uncertainty) who 'could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss' — explicit biblical testimony to the sling's capacity for genuine precision in trained, specialist hands, treating slinging as a recognized, respected military specialty rather than an improvised or childish weapon.

Broader Ancient Historical Corroboration

This biblical testimony is consistent with broader, independently attested ancient military history: slingers appear as a recognized specialist troop type across numerous ancient Near Eastern armies (depicted in Assyrian reliefs, for example) and later in the classical world (the Balearic Islands, in particular, were famous throughout antiquity for producing especially skilled slingers, employed as mercenary specialists by various Mediterranean powers including Carthage and Rome). Sling stones, propelled by a trained slinger, could achieve significant velocity capable of inflicting serious, potentially lethal injury, particularly to an unprotected or vulnerable target such as the head or face.

A Deliberate Tactical Choice, Not a Desperate Improvisation

Understood against this background, David's choice of the sling reflects a deliberate, informed tactical decision, drawing on a weapon he had genuinely mastered (as his own earlier account of defending his flock from a lion and a bear, 1 Samuel 17:34-36, suggests extensive practical field experience), rather than a desperate, unlikely improvisation against genuinely superior conventional weaponry — a meaningful reframing of the traditional 'underdog' narrative that does not diminish God's role in the outcome but corrects a common misunderstanding regarding the weapon's actual nature and status.



Did You Know?

David's stated target for his stone was specifically Goliath's forehead (1 Samuel 17:49) — one of the few areas of Goliath's body left unprotected by his extensive armor (examined in Chapter 2), which covered his head with a bronze helmet but would not have covered his face, suggesting David's aim targeted a specific, deliberately chosen vulnerability in Goliath's otherwise comprehensive defensive equipment, rather than being a fortunate, undirected shot.

 **Further Reading:** *Judges 20:15-16; 1 Samuel 17:34-36, 49.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does correcting the popular misconception of the sling as a child's toy change your understanding of David's actual tactical decision-making in this encounter?
2. What does David's specifically targeted shot at Goliath's exposed forehead suggest about the deliberateness of his approach, rather than a merely lucky outcome?

Chapter 6 — Five Smooth Stones: What the Text Says and Does Not Say

"And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine." — 1 Samuel 17:40

A Specific Number, Left Unexplained

The text specifies five stones without stating any explicit reason for this particular number, leaving the specific rationale open to reasonable inference rather than direct textual explanation.

The Most Straightforward, Practical Explanation

The most contextually grounded explanation, requiring no speculative connection to other biblical texts, is simply practical redundancy: David, uncertain whether his first shot would prove effective, or whether Goliath might have brothers or companions who might also need to be confronted, prepared multiple stones as a reasonable, prudent precaution — a detail consistent with the practical, experienced tactical mindset examined in the previous chapter.

A Popular but Speculative Connection Worth Flagging

Some popular teaching has proposed connecting the number five specifically to the four other Philistine giants described later in 2 Samuel 21:15-22 (descendants of 'the giant' in Gath, one of whom is explicitly identified as Goliath's context in that same general narrative region) — the theory suggesting David may have anticipated needing to face Goliath's brothers as well. This study holds that this specific connection is speculative and not stated or implied anywhere in the actual text of 1 Samuel 17 itself; the giants described in 2 Samuel 21 are dispatched by various different warriors among David's men at a considerably later point in his reign, not as part of this specific encounter, and the text of 1 Samuel 17 gives no indication David anticipated facing multiple opponents on this occasion. This connection should be presented, if at all, explicitly as a devotional or homiletical speculation rather than an established explanation the text itself supports.

Did You Know?

The specific phrase describing where David gathered his stones, 'out of the brook,' likely refers to smooth, water-worn stones naturally rounded and shaped through prolonged exposure to flowing water — a practical detail reflecting genuine knowledge of what makes an effective, aerodynamically consistent sling projectile, since irregularly shaped stones would fly less predictably than smooth, rounded ones.

 **Further Reading:** 1 Samuel 17:40; 2 Samuel 21:15-22 (for the later, distinct account of other Philistine giants).

Reflection Questions

1. Why is it important to distinguish the straightforward, practical explanation for five stones from the more speculative connection to Goliath's supposed brothers?
2. How does the detail of specifically smooth stones reflect genuine, practical knowledge of effective sling projectiles?

Chapter 7 — "The Battle Is the LORD's": David's Theological Speech

"Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, whom thou hast defiled... And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hands." — 1 Samuel 17:45, 47

A Direct Contrast of Sources of Confidence

David's speech before the battle draws an explicit, direct contrast: Goliath's confidence rests in his conventional weapons ('sword...spear...shield'), while David's confidence rests explicitly 'in the name of the LORD of hosts' — a direct theological framing delivered publicly, before the battle's outcome could yet confirm or disprove this claimed basis for confidence.

A Stated Purpose Beyond Personal or National Victory

David's stated purpose extends beyond his own or Israel's immediate benefit: 'that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel' (v. 46) and 'all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear' (v. 47) — framing the entire confrontation as intended to demonstrate God's own reality and power to a broader audience (both the immediate Israelite and Philistine assembly, and, in the first phrase, potentially an even wider scope), not merely to resolve a specific military standoff.

A Theological Claim the Narrative's Outcome Then Confirms

This speech's specific claim — that victory would come 'not with sword and spear' — receives direct narrative confirmation in the account's actual outcome: David defeats Goliath using a sling and stone, then uses Goliath's own sword only to finish and behead him after he had already fallen (17:51), meaning the initial, decisive blow came specifically through the very means David's speech had contrasted with 'sword and spear.'

Did You Know?

The title 'the LORD of hosts' (Hebrew יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, YHWH Tsevaot, examined at length in this series' study on the seven names of God) emphasizes God's command over armies — whether heavenly or, by extension, earthly — making its use here particularly fitting for a speech delivered specifically in a military confrontation context, directly asserting God's own superior command over any and all military force, including Goliath's evidently superior conventional equipment.

 **Further Reading:** 1 Samuel 17:41-51; this series' study on the seven names of God (regarding 'the LORD of hosts').

Reflection Questions

1. How does David's stated purpose — that 'all the earth may know there is a God in Israel' — reframe this encounter as serving a purpose larger than personal or national victory alone?

2. What does the narrative's actual outcome (victory through sling and stone, not sword and spear) confirm about the specific theological claim David makes in his speech?

Chapter 8 — Did David Kill Goliath? A Genuine Textual Puzzle

"And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaareoregim, a Bethlehemite, slew Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam." — 2 Samuel 21:19

A Passage Requiring Direct, Honest Engagement

This verse presents one of the most well-known and carefully studied apparent difficulties in the entire Old Testament, and this study addresses it directly rather than passing over it. Read plainly, in its own immediate Hebrew text, 2 Samuel 21:19 states that a different man entirely — Elhanan, son of Jaareoregim, from Bethlehem — killed Goliath the Gittite, using language (the distinctive detail of a spear 'like a weaver's beam') that unmistakably identifies this as the very same Goliath described in 1 Samuel 17.

The Parallel Account in 1 Chronicles 20:5

1 Chronicles 20:5, recounting the same general period and events, reads differently: 'Elhanan the son of Jair slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, whose spear staff was like a weaver's beam.' This parallel account both names a different father for Elhanan (Jair rather than Jaareoregim) and identifies the slain figure as 'Lahmi the brother of Goliath,' rather than Goliath himself — apparently resolving the tension by making Elhanan's victim Goliath's brother rather than Goliath directly.

Major Proposed Resolutions

Several explanations have been proposed by careful scholars across a range of theological commitments: (1) the Chronicles text may preserve a more original, accurate reading, with the Samuel text's Hebrew having suffered some form of scribal transmission error over time — a proposal supported by the observation that the Hebrew words involved (particularly regarding 'Bethlehemite,' 'et-lechem,' and the name 'Lahmi') share enough consonantal similarity that a scribal confusion or omission at some point in the text's transmission history is linguistically plausible; (2) 'Goliath' may have functioned, at least in part, as a title or recurring designation for a Philistine champion warrior (comparable to how 'Pharaoh' or certain other ancient Near Eastern royal or military titles could apply to multiple different individuals across different periods), meaning more than one warrior called 'Goliath' may have existed, with Elhanan defeating a different, later bearer of this same name or title; (3) some conservative harmonizations propose that 'Elhanan' may be an alternate name for David himself (perhaps a birth name, with 'David' functioning more as a throne name or epithet, similar to naming patterns attested for some other ancient Near Eastern rulers), though this specific proposal has not gained the same level of broad scholarly acceptance as the other two options and requires additional assumptions not directly stated in the text.

This Study's Position

This study holds that the first explanation (a textual transmission difficulty in Samuel's Hebrew text, with Chronicles preserving a more accurate reading) is the most straightforward and best-evidenced resolution, consistent with the kind of textual variants examined elsewhere in this study (compare Chapter 1's treatment of Goliath's height, itself another instance of Samuel's textual tradition containing a variant reading resolvable through comparison with other witnesses). This study presents this as the most likely explanation while acknowledging the question has not been resolved with absolute, universal scholarly consensus, and while affirming directly that this genuine textual difficulty does not undermine confidence in 1 Samuel 17's own clear, consistent, and independently well-attested account of David's victory over Goliath.

Did You Know?

This specific difficulty has been discussed by biblical scholars and commentators for many centuries, predating modern textual criticism considerably — it is not a difficulty invented by modern skeptical scholarship, but a longstanding textual question Jewish and Christian interpreters have grappled with since antiquity, reflected in various rabbinic discussions proposing that 'Elhanan' was simply another name for David himself, an ancient version of the third resolution mentioned above.

 **Further Reading:** *2 Samuel 21:15-22; 1 Chronicles 20:4-8; 1 Samuel 17:1-58.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does this study's direct, honest treatment of this well-known textual difficulty affect your confidence in engaging with other apparent Bible difficulties you may encounter?
2. Why does this specific textual puzzle not undermine the core, independently well-attested account of David's victory recorded in 1 Samuel 17?

Chapter 9 — Does Saul Really Not Know David? A Literary Question

"And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son is this youth? And Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell... And Saul said to him, Whose son art thou, thou young man? And David answered, I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite." — 1 Samuel 17:55, 58

A Genuine Narrative Tension

This passage presents a fair, honestly noted difficulty: 1 Samuel 16:14-23 has already recorded David entering Saul's service as a skilled musician, specifically summoned to soothe Saul's troubled spirit, with the text stating directly that 'Saul loved him greatly; and he became his armourbearer' (16:21) — making Saul's apparent complete unfamiliarity with David's identity here, only one chapter later, a genuine literary and narrative question worth addressing directly rather than ignoring.

The Septuagint's Shorter Text

As this study's introduction noted, the ancient Greek Septuagint translation of 1 Samuel 17 is notably shorter than the Masoretic Text, omitting a considerable block of material — including most of the specific verses (17:55-58) that create this particular tension. This has led many textual scholars to propose that the longer Masoretic version may represent a later combination of two originally separate, parallel accounts or traditions regarding David's introduction to Saul's court, with the shorter Septuagint version possibly preserving an earlier, less composite form of the narrative that does not raise this same specific difficulty.

Proposed Harmonizations

For readers working from the longer, Masoretic-based text (as most English translations do), various harmonizing explanations have also been proposed: perhaps sufficient time had passed between David's earlier court service and this battle for Saul's troubled, apparently fluctuating mental state (compare 1 Samuel 16:14's description of an 'evil spirit from the LORD' troubling him) to have affected his memory or recognition; or perhaps Saul's question concerns specifically David's family lineage and background (information relevant for the reward and marriage arrangement mentioned earlier in the chapter, 17:25) rather than reflecting complete unfamiliarity with David as a person he had never previously encountered.

This Study's Position

This study presents both the textual explanation (two originally separate traditions, reflected in the Septuagint's shorter text) and the harmonizing explanations as reasonable proposals worth knowing, without asserting a single, fully certain resolution. This is, similarly to Chapter 8's discussion, a genuine, longstanding scholarly question rather than an invented modern difficulty, and readers should feel free to weigh these various proposals rather than assuming the tension is either fatal to the text's reliability or fully, definitively resolved by any single explanation.

Did You Know?

The relationship between the Masoretic Text's longer version of 1 Samuel 17-18 and the Septuagint's considerably shorter version has generated an extensive body of specialized scholarly literature sometimes referred to as the 'two editions' question, with different scholars proposing different theories regarding which version is earlier, how the two versions relate to each other's transmission history, and what this means for reconstructing the most original form of this specific narrative — a genuinely complex, ongoing area of Old Testament textual scholarship this study can only introduce briefly.

 **Further Reading:** *1 Samuel 16:14-23; 1 Samuel 17:55-58; the Septuagint text of 1 Samuel 17-18, for comparison.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does learning about the Septuagint's shorter text, which omits this specific tension, add a new dimension to how you might think about this difficulty?
2. Which of the proposed harmonizing explanations, if any, do you find most persuasive for readers working from the standard, longer English text?

Chapter 10 — Common Questions and Interpretive Caution

Given the range of genuine textual and historical questions this study has engaged, this chapter draws together several further common questions.

"Does acknowledging these textual difficulties (Goliath's height, the Elhanan puzzle, Saul's recognition of David) undermine confidence in this narrative's historical reliability?"

No, and this study has aimed to model why throughout: engaging genuine textual and literary questions honestly, with careful attention to the actual manuscript and literary evidence, produces a more durable, defensible confidence in what the text does clearly and consistently establish — namely, David's genuine victory over a formidable Philistine champion through faith in God rather than conventional military strength — than would result from ignoring or dismissing these well-documented questions.

"Should popular retellings of this story be corrected to reflect this study's more historically careful treatment?"

This is a matter of appropriate judgment depending on audience and purpose; simplified retellings for young children need not include every textual nuance this study has examined, but teachers and preachers addressing adult or more mature audiences can responsibly incorporate this fuller historical and textual picture (the sling's genuine lethality, the height variant, the Elhanan question) without undermining the story's core message, and arguably strengthening its credibility for audiences who may otherwise dismiss a purely simplified version as historically naive.

"Which of this study's specific claims should be held with the most confidence?"

The core narrative claims — David's victory over Goliath through faith in God, expressed through skilled, deliberate use of a genuinely respected ancient weapon — rest on the consistent, primary testimony of 1 Samuel 17 itself and are not seriously undermined by any of the specific textual questions this study has examined. The more specific numerical and harmonization questions (exact height, the Elhanan puzzle, Saul's recognition) represent genuine areas of ongoing scholarly discussion this study has aimed to present honestly rather than resolve with artificial certainty.

Did You Know?

This pattern of addressing well-known, historically documented Bible difficulties directly and honestly — rather than avoiding them or pretending they do not exist — has been the consistent practice of this entire study series, and this particular study's treatment of the Elhanan/Goliath question represents one of the most direct applications of this discipline to one of the most frequently cited 'Bible contradictions' in popular skeptical literature.

 **Further Reading:** 1 Samuel 17:1-58; 2 Samuel 21:19; 1 Chronicles 20:5.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of this study's specific claims do you now hold with the most confidence, and which do you consider more genuinely open to ongoing scholarly discussion?
2. How does this kind of honest engagement with well-known textual difficulties shape your approach to discussing challenging Bible questions with others, including skeptics?

Chapter 11 — Practical Applications for the Christian Life

David and Goliath, examined in its full historical and textual complexity, carries direct implications for how believers understand faith, preparation, and confidence.

1. Genuine Faith and Practical Preparation Are Not Opposites

David's refusal of unfamiliar armor (Chapter 4) and his deliberate, informed use of a weapon he had genuinely mastered (Chapter 5) model a form of faith that operates alongside, not instead of, practical wisdom and honest self-assessment of one's own genuine skills and preparation.

2. Correcting Popular Misconceptions Can Deepen Rather Than Diminish a Story's Power

Recognizing the sling's genuine, well-attested status as a serious ancient weapon (Chapter 5), rather than a child's toy, does not diminish David's accomplishment but reframes it more accurately: a skilled, deliberate victory through genuine expertise directed by faith, rather than a fortunate, almost accidental triumph.

3. Honest Engagement With Difficulty Strengthens Faith

This study's direct treatment of genuine textual questions (Goliath's height, the Elhanan puzzle, Saul's recognition of David) models an approach believers can apply to their own engagement with challenging biblical questions generally: honest acknowledgment of real complexity, rather than defensive avoidance, produces more durable confidence in Scripture's central, well-attested claims.

4. Public Confidence Can Rest on God's Reputation, Not Merely Personal Courage

David's explicit theological framing of the confrontation (Chapter 7) — fighting specifically for God's own honor and reputation, not merely personal glory or national pride — offers believers a model for grounding their own confidence and courage in situations of genuine difficulty or opposition.

5. God's Purposes Often Exceed the Immediate Situation

David's stated purpose — that 'all the earth may know there is a God in Israel' — reminds believers that specific acts of faith and courage may serve purposes considerably larger than their own immediate, personal circumstances, contributing to a broader demonstration of God's reality and power to a wider audience than the immediate participants alone.

Did You Know?

David and Goliath has become one of the most widely referenced narratives in general (not specifically religious) Western culture and language, with the phrase 'David and Goliath' itself functioning as common

shorthand for any dramatic underdog confrontation against much greater odds — testament to this narrative's continued cultural resonance far beyond its specifically biblical and theological significance.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of these five applications feels most relevant to a current situation in your own life requiring faith, preparation, or confidence?
2. How might correcting your own understanding of the sling's genuine lethality change the way you tell or reflect on this familiar story going forward?

Summary of Key Points

- Goliath's height involves a genuine, well-documented textual variant: the Masoretic Text's 'six cubits and a span' (roughly 9'9") versus the Septuagint, a Dead Sea Scroll fragment, and Josephus's 'four cubits and a span' (roughly 6'9"), with the shorter reading favored by considerable modern textual scholarship given this unusual convergence of independent witnesses.
- Goliath's detailed, itemized armor reflects genuine ancient Near Eastern military technology, possibly connected to Aegean 'Sea Peoples' equipment attested in Egyptian archaeological reliefs.
- David's theological framing of the conflict as defiance against 'the armies of the living God,' established from his earliest recorded response, distinguishes his motivation from a merely nationalistic or personal military concern.
- David's refusal of Saul's armor rested on a practical, experience-based reason ('I have not proved them'), modeling faith operating alongside rather than instead of practical wisdom.
- The sling was a genuinely serious, respected ancient weapon (confirmed by Judges 20:16's description of elite slingers), correcting the popular misconception of it as a child's toy, and David's targeted shot at Goliath's exposed forehead reflects deliberate tactical skill.
- David's selection of five stones is best explained by simple practical redundancy; the popular connection to Goliath's supposed brothers (from 2 Samuel 21) is speculative and not supported by 1 Samuel 17's own text.
- 2 Samuel 21:19 presents a genuine, well-known textual puzzle, appearing to credit Elhanan with killing Goliath, most plausibly resolved by recognizing a textual transmission difficulty in Samuel's Hebrew text, with 1 Chronicles 20:5's parallel account ('Lahmi the brother of Goliath') likely preserving a more accurate reading.
- Saul's apparent failure to recognize David despite his prior court service (1 Samuel 16) represents a genuine literary tension, possibly explained by the Septuagint's substantially shorter text of this section, which omits the specific verses creating this difficulty.
- Practically, this study grounds the compatibility of genuine faith and practical preparation, the value of correcting popular misconceptions to deepen rather than diminish a story's power, the strength honest engagement with difficulty brings to faith, grounding confidence in God's own reputation, and recognizing that God's purposes often exceed the immediate situation.

Further Reading by Theme

On the Full David and Goliath Narrative

1 Samuel 17:1-58 (best read in its entirety); 1 Samuel 16:1-23 (David's earlier introduction to Saul's court).

On the Textual Questions Examined in This Study

2 Samuel 21:15-22; 1 Chronicles 20:4-8; the Septuagint text of 1 Samuel 17-18, for comparison with the Masoretic Text.

On Ancient Near Eastern Warfare and Military Technology

Judges 20:12-48 (including the elite slingers of v. 16); 1 Samuel 13:19-22 (Israel's general lack of ironworking capacity in this period, for broader military context).

On David's Later Life and Reign

2 Samuel 5:1-25; 2 Samuel 7:1-17 (the Davidic covenant, examined at length in this series' study on the covenant of salt).

On Textual Criticism of the Old Testament More Broadly

Various standard introductions to Old Testament textual criticism, addressing the relationship between the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Bibliography and Recommended References

The works below are recommended for readers who wish to go further than this introductory study, whether through academic commentaries or accessible reference resources.

Commentaries on 1-2 Samuel

- TSUMURA, David Toshio. The First Book of Samuel. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- FIRTH, David G. 1 & 2 Samuel. Apollos Old Testament Commentary. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- BALDWIN, Joyce G. 1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

On the Textual Criticism of Samuel

- TOV, Emanuel. Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible. Third edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- MCCARTER, P. Kyle. I Samuel. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday.

On Ancient Near Eastern and Philistine Military Technology

- YADIN, Yigael. The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- DOTHAN, Trude, and DOTHAN, Moshe. People of the Sea: The Search for the Philistines. New York: Macmillan.
- KING, Philip J., and STAGER, Lawrence E. Life in Biblical Israel. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

On 1 Chronicles and Its Parallel Accounts

- SELMAN, Martin J. 1 Chronicles. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- JAPHET, Sara. I & II Chronicles: A Commentary. Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Dictionaries and Original-Language Tools

- BROWN, DRIVER, BRIGGS. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (BDB).
- HARRIS, R. Laird; ARCHER, Gleason L.; WALTKE, Bruce K. (eds.). Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT).
- VINE, W. E. Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words.

— End of Study —