

Goliath's Head

Commentary of May 29, 2007 — What Happened to It?

There is an interesting passage in the narrative of 1 Samuel chapter 17 when David overcomes the giant Goliath. While the story is well known to anyone who has read about David's triumph (through God's miraculous assistance) over Goliath, this one passage (verse 17:54 has caused interest:

"So David prevailed over the Philistine [Goliath] with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith.

And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines, until you come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim, even unto Gath, and unto Ekron. And the children of Israel returned from chasing after the Philistines, and they spoiled their tents.

And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armour [meaning all Goliath's weapons] in his tent.

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 your soul lives, O king, I cannot tell.' And the king said, 'Enquire you whose son the stripling is.' And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his [David's] hand."

• 1 Samuel 17:50–57

I indented verse 54 to separate it from the flow of the rest of the text. This is because the verse 1 Samuel 17:54 is parenthetical to the story. Verse 54 takes place after David becomes King of the united tribes of Israel.

Goliath's Head to Jerusalem

When did David take Goliath's head to Jerusalem, and what was David's tent? It is thought by most commentators that **"his tent"** refers to David's flight as King Saul tried to kill David. The idea is that the armour was not that difficult to handle (it broke down into pieces) and it could be useful in battle. No one knows for sure what that statement means. The other statement **"brought it to Jerusalem"** is clear.

During the time of King Saul the Israelites did not control Jerusalem. The narrative of David's conquest of Jerusalem is found much later in 2 Samuel 5:6–10 (paralleled in 1 Chronicles 11:4–9). The verse 1 Samuel 17:54 was inserted into the text sometime after King Saul died, after David became king of both Judah and Israel, and after David conquered Jerusalem. David brought Goliath's head to Jerusalem after Jerusalem was conquered. It was probably kept with King Saul's court artifacts.

Question about Goliath's Head

This gruesome scene is interesting because it indicates that David must have considered Goliath's head important enough to be kept and preserved as a monument to God's victory over the Philistines through a shepherd boy of Israel.

My question and speculation is this: If David thought the head of Goliath important enough to bring to Jerusalem once the city had been conquered by the Israelites and after it became King David's capital city, what would have happened to Goliath's head after David died? Was the head of Goliath (as an artifact of King David's success given to him by God) put inside King David's Tomb as a memorial? I think that may be the case. The artifact was important to David and would be of no value to anyone else, so it may very well be buried with King David. Time will tell.¹

If the Tomb of David would be accessed in some future time, and there was a very large head found within the Tomb, then that would assist in validating that it was the Tomb of David. However, I feel that the Tomb complex will be self-identifying. There will be numerous indications that the Tomb is King David's. There will be many, many items labeled in various ways that this or that item belonged to King David. This was the case in King Tut's tomb. As a minor Egyptian pharaoh he had many items within his tomb that identified the tomb as King Tut's.

Far and away the most valuable items within the Tomb of David will be any written documents. Everything else will be relatively unimportant, including the mass of gold and silver and other metals within the Tomb complex.

Goliath's Size

If Goliath's head were found within the Tomb of David, it would be relatively easy for forensic scientists and anthropologists to determine the size of the man. That means that we would be able to determine the exact measure of a cubit used in that part of Judah in David's day. We would then be able to tell whether Goliath was 9 feet tall or 12 feet tall. Note the particulars of Goliath and the various measurements of size and weight:

“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. 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: and one bearing a shield went before him.”

• 1 Samuel 17:4–7

Did Goliath's head that David brought back to Jerusalem (1 Samuel 17:54) have Goliath's helmet of brass on it? Perhaps. Likewise, might Goliath's armour be in one of the chambers of the Tomb? Time will tell, if or when the Tombs are discovered.

David's victory over Goliath is the only so-called “miracle” contained in the entire narrative of David's life. Even though he was a prophet (Acts 2:29–30), nothing else of an overtly supernatural nature occurred to David throughout his entire life. He recognized fully that all of his greatness came from God (1 Samuel 15:17; 2 Samuel 5:12, 7:1; 1 Chronicles 14:2, 17, 17:19; and Psalms 96 and 105).

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1. See my article, [“The Location and Future Discovery of King David's Tomb”](#) which discusses the location of the Tomb complex in Jerusalem and gives informed speculation on what might be within the various chambers of the complex. *DWS*