

## Message #37

## I Samuel 17:1-11

When George Washington led his beaten, bruised and small abandoned group of soldiers across the Delaware River on Christmas night 1776 to attack the British at Trenton, New Jersey, most thought he was out of his mind. Many soldiers had deserted and the men with Washington were low on weapons, food and supplies. In fact, they thought they were going to die. Even George Washington said if God is not with us, we will all perish.

Not only did George Washington and his soldiers rout the British, not one of Washington's army was harmed. When General Washington asked how many of his men had been killed, he was told "none" and he could not believe it. George Washington knew God had blessed him. That battle has become one of the most famous military achievements in US history.

There are many lessons to be learned from this and one of them is this, in order to see God dramatically work, you must fight against the enemy. Sometimes, you must take them straight up and head on. If you do, you will see God give great victory. **One thing Israel seems to forget often is that God is on Israel's side and He stands ready to deliver Israel from her enemies, no matter how large or intimidating.**

That is what Israel was about to learn and see:

**GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER INTIMIDATING ENEMIES AND WHEN HIS PEOPLE ARE FAITHFUL TO HIM AND STAND AGAINST THOSE ENEMIES, GOD WILL GIVE THEM GREAT VICTORY AND BLESSINGS.**

God does not want His people to be wimpy, whiny soldiers so in order to get us to be manly and womanly soldiers, He will sovereignly orchestrate things in our life that will bring us up against powerful intimidating forces who will appear to be able to crush us. In those moments we need to trust God and take a stand because this will lead to great blessings.

This text in I Samuel sets the stage from one of the greatest, epoch stories in all of the Bible—the winner take all fight between David and Goliath. Lord willing, we will look at that fight next time.

But tonight we want to carefully understand the intimidation of the enemy that sets the stage for that great victory.

There are five main historical observations we want to make:

**HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #1 – The enemies of God’s people were on the offensive.  
17:1**

We do not know exactly how much time had transpired between the events of chapter 16 and this chapter, but we must make the assumption that some time had passed because Saul had permitted David to go back home for a while. We learn from **verse 16** that David was traveling back and forth from Bethlehem to Saul.

When this chapter opens, the Philistines were on the move. This was more of an offensive military move rather than a defensive military move. They were gathering for battle.

We are given precise data concerning the movement of the Philistines here. From what we see in **verse 1**, it appears that the strategy of the Philistines was to apparently march straight up the Valley of Elah into Judah’s territory.

The Philistine army was gathered for battle at Socoh. Socoh is a modern day city named Shuweikeh, located about 16 miles SW of Jerusalem and 15 miles west of Bethlehem on the road to Gaza.

Azekah is a city close to Socoh, whose site is uncertain.

Ephes-dammim was later called Pasdammim (I Chron. 11:13) and is modern day “Beit Fased” which is also located about two miles west of Socoh. It was in this area where the Philistines decided to set up their main camp.

So the Philistines have totally taken over this area south of Jerusalem and are ready to go. They are fierce, they are intimidating and they are ready to attack.

Now the question to ask here is who is behind the timing and the location of all of this movement? Who is prompting this enemy to move at this time to these places? The answer is God. God is sovereignly causing every bit of this movement because He is about to give Israel one of the greatest victories she will ever see.

When we seem to be surrounded by enemies and you are facing overwhelming threats and intimidations, just remember God is still sovereign. He has a plan and He may be leading you to the greatest blessings of your life.

**HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #2 – God’s people are on the defensive. 17:2**

The Hebrew verb “gathered” in **verse 1** is active (Qal stem) and the Hebrew verb “were gathered” in **verse 2** is passive (Niphal stem). So what we see here is that the Philistines are active in this matter and the Israelites are passively sitting by waiting to see what the Philistines would do next.

When Israel learned about this they gathered in a defensive move and camped in the Valley of Elah. The Israelites are not the aggressors or the intimidators, which they should have been. Saul should have been the aggressor because God specifically made him king to do this very thing (I Sam. 9:16). He should have routed these Philistines, but instead he is passively waiting for them to move. The Israelites were camped on the opposite side of the Valley.

Separating the two sides was a river bed. Often it is dry, but at various times there is water in the river bed. It is never like a flowing river, more like a rippling brook.

They did line up in a battle formation, anticipating some military encounter. They are prepared to fight and they are prepared to try to prevent the Philistines from taking over Judah.

One must give Saul some credit here because he knows, according to Samuel, that God is in the process of taking the kingdom away from him, yet he still has a desire to at least defend Israel's land.

It is interesting to see in Scripture that at the end of his life the Apostle Paul said, "I have fought a good fight." The Christian life is a warfare fight. It is a long distance race. The Christian is to be a good soldier and he needs to stand for what is right. He needs to wage war against his own flesh, against the world and the Devil. He needs to put on the armor of God and fight a good fight and Paul did that.

**HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #3** – The enemies were on one side and God's people on the other side. **17:3**

The Valley of Elah is a wide open valley that runs in a NW direction from the hills of Judah near Hebron. This Valley contains a deep valley or stream bed at the bottom. So the Valley actually contains a valley within a valley.

The Philistines were on the southwest side of the valley and the Israelites were on the north east side of the valley.

Truth is one who is an enemy of God will never be on the same side as one who is a true servant of God. The truth also is seen here in that one cannot be on both sides. One must be on one side or the other.

**HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #4** – The enemies of God's people were intimidating.  
**17:4-10**

Enemies appear to be dominant and overwhelming. In fact, we learn a great deal about them in these verses. There are two intimidations stated here:

**Intimidation #1** - Enemies intimidate God's people physically. **17:4-7**

Enemies of God's people do not appear to be meek, timid losers. They appear to be big time, big mouth winners. They appear to have success, promotion, power and prestige. They appear to be big time polished and impressive.

There are five facts brought out about this intimidation:

**(Fact #1)** - This intimidation came from a real person with a real name. **17:4a**

The enemy was a very real person named Goliath. He was from Gath, which was one of the five key Philistine cities—Ashdod, Gath, Ekron, Ashkelon, Gaza (6:17).

Your most intimidating enemies will have a name and they will come from somewhere. Paul lists some of the names of enemies with whom a believer is at war—immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, anger, dissensions, and drunkenness.

**(Fact #2)** - This intimidation came from a real military champion. **17:4b**

The name “champion” literally in Hebrew means “the man of the between.” This phrase is only used here. Apparently Goliath would actually fight to the death any combatant from any foreign power. He stood between his Philistine army and every other combatant in the world.

Your biggest enemies don't appear to be losers; they appear to be big time winners. This Goliath was a true military hero and champion.

**(Fact #3)** - This intimidation came from a physically intimidating giant. **17:4c**

Goliath was almost 10 feet tall. A cubit is approximately 18 inches and a span is about 9 inches. 18 inches times 6 equals 108 inches, plus 9 equals 117 inches. If we divide 117 inches by 12 then Goliath was 9.75 feet tall. There is no question that this was one intimidating enemy to see.

We have never seen a giant this tall. The tallest man in the United States was Robert Wadlow from Illinois (1918-1940) who stood 8 feet 11 inches tall. The tallest man in the world today is a 28-year-old man from Turkey. His name is Sultan Kosen and his height is 8 feet 2 inches.

No one in our time has seen a man who is 9.75 feet tall, but that was the height of Goliath.

**(Fact #4)** - This intimidation came from one wearing intimidating armor. **17:5-6a**

When anyone would first see Goliath, not only would they spot a huge man, but a huge man with lots of glistening heavy metal. If a normal, average size person tried to put on the armor described here, he would not be able to move.

- 1) He had a bronze helmet. This helmet would protect his head, but not his face.
- 2) He wore scale armor - armor had metal plates that overlapped. Several hundred resembled fish scales. His chest area would be well-protected.
- 3) He wore very heavy armor - 5000 shekels of bronze is about 125 pounds of armor.
- 4) He wore bronze greaves - bronze shin guards, like a catcher in baseball would protect his shins and legs.

When you would first look at this guy, it would appear as though there is no way to penetrate his body armor. As John Woodhouse said, "He stood there like a one-man, indestructible fortress" (*I Samuel*, p. 306).

**(Fact #5) -** This intimidation came from one carrying an intimidating deadly weapon. **17:6b-7**

Goliath did not carry some small concealed weapon. He carried a bronze javelin and just the head of the spear weighed 19 pounds, which is heavier than a 9 pound shot put or 16 pound bowling ball. There are different views on how much weight a shekel actually is. According to Hebrew conversion scales, 100 shekels weighs 2.5 pounds. 900 shekels would weigh somewhere near 22 pounds. This was an awesome offensive weapon.

When I was younger, I played organized baseball. I played High School varsity baseball for three years. Our baseball coach would have us hold out a bat 32, 34, 36 ounces and he would say hold out your arm and the bat you can comfortably hold is the one you need to use.

Goliath could hold out a spear that weighed 304 ounces. He was one intimidating enemy.

**Intimidation #2 -** Enemies intimidate God's people verbally. **17:8-10**

Now Goliath was not some meek and quiet giant. He was verbally intimidating. He verbally mocked them.

**(Mockery #1) -** He mocked their military. **17:8a**

Goliath came out and he challenged them as to why they were lining up as some military who was really going to fight, when they knew they weren't. He is saying your battle array is futile. Why are you lining up against us when you know you can't win?

Truth is Goliath is actually asking a good question. Samuel has not told them to go out and do this. So what exactly is their reason for being there? Israel did not have leadership who even knew what they were doing. I am sure that this question forced some of the Israelites to ask themselves, what exactly are we doing here?

It reminds me of people who say you mean you think that prayer and ministry of the word of God will build a church in this day and age?

**(Mockery #2)** - He challenged them to a winner take all fight. **17:8b-10**

Goliath lived to fight a war. Goliath proposed that a war be decided by individual combat. After all, Goliath was not intimidated by anyone and he thought himself to be unbeatable.

His proposal is send out one man to fight me and if I beat him, then you are servants of us and if he beats me, then we will be your servants.

Frankly, enemies do not call the shots, and God's people should not let them.

**HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #5** – God's people are afraid. **17:11**

The truth is the people were so afraid that had it not been for God rising up David, the enemies would have won by default.

Satan does not want God's people trusting God. He wants them afraid to do anything. He may intimidate you and come at you with big time enemy threats. You stand your ground.

Now when you initially look at this historical context, you conclude that this is a very intimidating and sad thing. **What God's people don't realize is that God is setting the stage for one of the greatest victories they will ever see.**

He is about to show Israel something she has forgot and that is I am your God and I am ready to deliver you from any enemy no matter how big.