



VALLEY OF ELAH

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One of the most famous upsets of all time took place in the Valley of Elah: The Israelite shepherd boy David slew the Philistine warrior giant, Goliath.

Named after the shady terebinth (Hebrew, *elah*) trees that grow there, the Valley of Elah is located in Judea about 15 miles west of Bethlehem, where King David grew up. The prophet Samuel already had anointed young David to be the second king of Israel before David faced Goliath. God was finished with King Saul and made plans to replace him with a man after His own heart (1 Sam. 13:14).

David went to the Valley of Elah because his father, Jesse, sent him there with grain, bread, and cheese to check up on his older brothers who were fighting the Philistines. When David arrived, he learned all the soldiers were terrified of Goliath and fled from him. So, David offered to fight, even though he was a youth and Goliath was “a man of war from his youth” (17:33).

But David wasn’t afraid and told Saul how God had helped him kill a lion and a bear who came after his sheep; “and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he

has defied the armies of the living God” (v. 36).

Armed with nothing but a slingshot, David took five smooth stones from the Brook of Elah and told Goliath, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts. . . . I will strike you and take your head from you” (vv. 45–46).

Then he revealed His motive: “that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD’s” (vv. 46–47). The very first stone struck Goliath in the forehead. He crashed to the ground, and David cut off his head with the giant’s own sword.

David’s sole goal was to glorify God, and God honored that desire. Approximately 3,000 years have passed since the famous face-off in the Valley of Elah, but God’s ability to fight for His people has not diminished. The Valley of Elah reminds us, “The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (2 Chr. 16:9).



GIDEON'S SPRING

JIM SHOWERS

Scripture teaches time and time again that bad choices lead to bad outcomes. Man's disregard for God and His Word leads to destruction. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel chose to do evil in God's sight, turning from Him and worshiping idols. Such was the case in the book of Judges.

For seven years, God gave His people into the hands of their enemies, the Midianites (Judg. 6:1). Each year at harvest, the Midianites would invade Israel from the east like swarms of locusts and ravage the land, taking its grain harvest. Impoverished, the Israelites fled to the mountains to hide in caves, clefts, and strongholds.

When we visit the Spring of Harod (Gideon's Spring) today at the base of Mount Gilboa, the account of Gideon and his 300 men comes into focus. Gideon gathered 32,000 Israelites at the spring (7:1-3). Across the valley, four miles to the north, the Midianite army of 135,000 was encamped on the hill of Moreh.

Gideon and his men had a direct line of sight to this terrifying Midianite army that outnumbered Israel's army four to one. But Gideon didn't have to trust in his own strength. God told him to

send the fearful men home; and 22,000 departed, leaving 10,000 men (v. 3). Then He told Gideon to take the rest to the stream flowing from the spring and have them drink water. God chose only those who lapped the water, leaving Gideon with only 300 men. "By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand" (v. 7).

That night, Gideon's 300 men took trumpets, along with lamps shielded by pitchers (but no weapons), and surrounded the Midianite camp. They blew their horns, broke their pitchers, and shouted, "The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!" (v. 20). Every man stood in his place as God confused the Midianite army and turned their swords against one another (vv. 21-22). Thus, the Midianite army was defeated without Gideon or his men wielding a single sword.

The lesson of Israel's victory is clear: The God who judged Israel for doing evil is also the God who saves Israel. When the "battle" ended, no one but God could take the credit. Gideon's Spring reminds us how much we need God. He alone provides salvation from judgment for us through His Son, Jesus Christ.