

How Tall Was Goliath and Who Killed Him? **By Warren C. Trenchard** **28 January 2022**

Everyone knows the story of David and Goliath. It is not only a staple of every child's Sunday School or Christian education experience but is a frequently employed metaphor for the unlikely victory of the weak over the strong. However, both familiarity and frequency pose significant problems for anyone who proposes to critically examine the original narrative, as we do here.

The Famous Story

This well-known story is found in 1 Sam 17, where, after the Israelite and Philistine armies squared off on either side of the Elah Valley, the latter sent out a very large warrior named Goliath for forty consecutive days to challenge any Israelite to one-on-one combat. Meanwhile, Jesse of Bethlehem sent his youngest son, David the shepherd, to the battle front with provisions for his soldier brothers. When the boy heard Goliath's latest taunting insult, he volunteered to take up the dubious challenge. King Saul was not amused or impressed but, after listening to David recount his exploits with a lion and a bear while protecting his flock, he finally agreed to let the shepherd face Goliath. So, David, after dumping Saul's armor, approached the warrior with only his staff, sling, and five stones.¹ After a scintillating verbal exchange between the unlikely combatants, the shepherd rushed the Philistine and hurled a stone that solidly connected with Goliath's forehead, knocking him out and leaving him sprawled face down on the ground. After David whacked off the Philistine's head with Goliath's own sword, the Israelite's enemies fled the battlefield, and Saul wanted to know who this kid was.

How Tall Was Goliath?

Although everyone knows Goliath as a giant, the story itself does not identify him that way. Instead, it simply gives his height as "six cubits and a span."² Because these ancient units of measure, referring generally to the length of a man's forearm and half that distance respectively, were, at best, rather imprecise, typical Imperial and metric conversions of six cubits and a span have a wide range. However, on the assumption that a biblical cubit, especially one used for general and not technical linear measurements, equaled about 17.5 in., Goliath's stated height would convert to about 9 ft 9 in. (or 2.89 m).³ By any calculation, this implies an enormous, and otherwise unattested, human height. Goliath would certainly have been a "giant"!

¹ The kid's song, "Only a Boy Named David" mentions "five little stones he took." This derives from the popular notion that David collected five little, round stones from the brook, one of which felled the giant! I have an ancient sling stone that my friend, archaeologist Larry Herr, gave me. It is about the size of a baseball!

² 1 Sam 17:4. Unless otherwise indicated, biblical translations are those of the NRSV.

³ Although some estimates of the Imperial and metric equivalents of the biblical cubit and span vary widely, e.g., "Biblical and Talmudic units of measurement," *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_and_Talmudic_units_of_measurement#Length_and_distance. I have followed the well-supported conclusions of R. B. Y. Scott ("Weights and Measures of the Bible," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 22, no. 2 (May 1959): 27) that the biblical cubit equaled 17.5 in. and that the span was half a cubit. Cf. "Weights and Measures," *Oxford Biblical Studies Online*. <http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/resource/WeightsAndMeasures.xhtml>, where a cubit in the HB and NT equals 17.49 in.

However, things are not quite that simple. Although the translation of Goliath's height, based on the traditional Hebrew – the Masoretic Text (MT), is accurate, the text itself is seriously in question. It has long been known that the reading of this text in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) and in the account of this story in Josephus⁴ give Goliath's height as "four cubits and a span." However, until the middle of the last century, the Heb reading prevailed. Then the situation dramatically changed with the discovery of texts of Samuel among the Dead Sea Scrolls, in particular 4QSam^a,⁵ which, like the LXX and Josephus, gives Goliath's height in 1 Sam 17:4 as "four cubits and a span." This reading, which is about 1000 years older than the finalized MT,⁶ matches, and, I think, confirms the readings of the LXX and Josephus. Accordingly, Goliath's height in this story was four cubits and a span, i.e., about 6 ft 9 in. (or 2.00 m). While this makes him tall by any standards and much taller than most men in his time and place (who were about 5 ft 4 in.),⁷ he was not the tallest documented human.⁸

Goliath's size has fascinated readers and added to the legendary character of this story for centuries. This is clear already with the early inflation of his height in the MT.⁹ Understandably, the standard translations of the seventeenth century reflected that reading of the Heb.¹⁰ However, it is unbelievable that virtually every English translation since the publication of 4QSam^a has continued to use the MT reading in 1 Sam 17:4 with Goliath's height as "six cubits and a span"¹¹ or something like "more than nine feet tall."¹² Some include one of these translations or similar interpretations but at least with at a note about the alternate reading.¹³ Only two versions in one collection of fifty-four currently available English translations of this text¹⁴ base the text of their translations on the preferred text in 4QSam^a, LXX, and Josephus: NET (2001)¹⁵ and ISV (2011).¹⁶ Not found in this collection is the original NAB, which translated this text in 1970: "A

⁴ *Ant.*, VI.9.1: "Now there came down a man out of the camp of the Philistines, whose name was Goliath, of the city of Gath; a man of vast bulk, for he was of four cubits and a span in tallness."

⁵ This fragmentary text of 1 Sam 1 – 2 Sam 24, one of three from cave 4 discovered in 1952, dates to no later than 40-25 BCE.

⁶ The Masoretic Text began to appear during the Second Temple period but was not completed until the ninth-eleventh centuries CE.

⁷ This is reported by Max Roser, Cameron Appel, and Hannah Ritchie in "Human Height," *Our World in Data*, May 2019. <https://ourworldindata.org/human-height> and is based on the research of Gregory Clark, *A Farewell to Alms: A Brief Economic History of the World*, book 27 of The Princeton Economic History of the Western World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁸ According to "Largest Human Skeletons in the World," Largest.org. <https://largest.org/people/human-skeletons/>, three excavated skeletons were at least 8 ft in height, the tallest being 9 ft 2 in. Guinness lists Robert Wadlow, at 8 ft 11.1 in., as the world's tallest, medically documented human. Wadlow died on 15 July 1940 at the age of 22. "Robert Wadlow: Tallest man ever," *Guinness World Records*. <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/records/hall-of-fame/robert-wadlow-tallest-man-ever>.

⁹ Even the LXX seems to have undergone a similar inflation over time, with manuscripts moving from "four cubits" to "five" and then to "six."

¹⁰ The KJV reads, "whose height was six cubits and a span"; cf. Luther: "sechs Ellen und eine Handbreit hoch."

¹¹ E.g., NKJV.

¹² E.g., New International Reader's Version (NIRV). The NIV has the text: "His height was six cubits and a span" and the note: "That is, about 9 feet 9 inches or about 3 meters."

¹³ E.g., NRSV (1989) has the note: "MT: Q Ms Gk *four*." Cf. NAB Revised Edition (1986).

¹⁴ *BibleGateway*. <https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/1%20Samuel%2017:4>.

¹⁵ NET has the text: "He was close to seven feet tall." and a very long note that discusses the textual evidence, various translations, and the contention that "the average Israelite male of the time was about 5 feet 3 inches."

¹⁶ "He was four cubits and a span tall."

champion named Goliath of Gath came out from the Philistine camp; he was six and a half feet tall.”¹⁷ This seems to be the earliest published awareness of the 4QSam^a reading.¹⁸

My curiosity concerning how this text is represented in one particular faith tradition led me to look at two types of writings within Seventh-day Adventism: (1) the writing of Ellen G. White, whom many Seventh-day Adventists hold to be an inspired interpreter of the Bible and (2) other Adventist writings. In what seems to be her earliest writing about David and Goliath (1864), White described the latter as “a man of great size and strength, whose height is about twelve feet.”¹⁹ She repeated this description verbatim in 1870.²⁰ Both were not only dependent on the language of the KJV but were also liberally stated in contemporary metrics. In 1890, she resorted to merely repeating the KJV by referring to Goliath’s “massive form, in height measuring six cubits and a span.”²¹ These three versions of the story are part of a more comprehensive survey of biblical history that was initially launched in 1864, further developed in 1870, and finally completed in 1890.²² Two years before her description of Goliath in 1890 – the third in the traditional trajectory – White published this reference to him in 1888: “For forty days the host of Israel had trembled before the haughty challenge of Goliath, the Philistine giant. Their hearts failed within them as they looked upon his massive form, measuring six cubits and a span, or ten and a half feet, in height.”²³ In summary, White migrates in her reports of Goliath’s height from “about twelve feet” in 1864 and 1870, to “six cubits and a span, or ten and a half feet” in 1888, to simply “six cubits and a span” in 1890.

A somewhat random sampling of reports of Goliath’s height in other Adventist writings from the 1860s to the present yields the following: In 1865, he was described in the words of the KJV with a height of “six cubits and a span.”²⁴ In 1889, Goliath is said to be “a man of immense stature, probably ten or eleven feet in height.”²⁵ In 1895, the reference is to “Goliath of Gath, whose hight [*sic*] was six cubits and a span (9 feet 9 inches).”²⁶ Jumping to 1941, there is a suggested sermon illustration in which a “little boy” tells his mother that he is “as tall as Goliath. I am nine feet high.”²⁷ In 1976, Goliath is described as “somewhere around ten feet tall.”²⁸ In 1995, there is photo of a “life-sized model of Goliath” that appears to be 11-12 ft high.²⁹ In 2017,

¹⁷ According Emanuel Tov (“The Textual Affiliations of 4QSam^a,” *JSOT* 14 (1979): 37), “Some readings of the Samuel scrolls have been incorporated in the textual notes to The New American Bible, New York - London, 1970.”

¹⁸ Frank Moore Cross (“A New Qumran Fragment Related to the Original Hebrew Underlying the Septuagint,” *BASOR* 132 (1953), 15-26) published two columns – not including 1 Sam 17:4 – of 4QSam^a in 1953. By 1992, the full text of 4QSam^a was still not published, according to Emanuel Tov, “The Unpublished Qumran Texts from Caves 4 and 11,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 55, no. 2 (June 1992): 94-104. The official publication would have to wait until 2005: Frank Moore Cross et al. eds., *Qumran Cave 4. XII. 1-2 Samuel*, vol. 17 of Discoveries in the Judaean Desert (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4a (1864): 79.

²⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1 (1870): 370.

²¹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890): 646.

²² The dates refer only to part of the survey that pertains to the story of David and Goliath. The dates for the entire comprehensive survey extend from 1858 to 1917.

²³ Ellen G. White, “The Slaying of Goliath,” *The Signs of the Times* 14, no. 31 (10 August 1888).

²⁴ “The Ancient Record Verified,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 26, no. 18 (3 October 1865): 140-141.

²⁵ “David and Goliath,” *The Signs of the Times* 15, no. 33 (26 August 1889): 521.

²⁶ P. Giddings, “The Mightiness in Mites,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 72, no. 47 (19 November 1895): 740.

²⁷ “Effective Illustrations,” *Ministry* 14, no. 11 (November 1941): 22.

²⁸ Royal Sage, “Only a Boy Named David,” *Ministry* 49, no. 4 (April 1976): 35.

²⁹ Terry Hall, “Where Hope Is Born,” *Adventist Review* 172, no. 51 (16 November 1995): 20.

a writer referred to “the three-metre Goliath.”³⁰ In the nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, the supposed height of Goliath in this literature ranged 9-11 ft. Nothing really changed in Adventist literature after the first public notice of the preferred reading of 1 Sam 17:4 according to 4QSam^a in 1970 or its official publication in 2005. Goliath’s height still ranges 3 meters (9.8 ft) to 12 ft.

So, how tall was Goliath? Of course, we don’t really know. All that we have to go on is a single, biblical report of his height in 1 Sam 17:4, which, in the preferred text, reads “four cubits and a span.” This likely converts to about 6 ft 9 in. or 2.00 m – tall, but far shorter than the fabled “six cubits and a span” (about 9 ft 9 in. or 2.89 m) of the traditional Hebrew text.

Who Killed Goliath?

The answer to our second question, certainly seems obvious. After all, we are dealing with the story of David and Goliath – David, the shepherd boy killed Goliath with his trusty sling and one of his five, smooth stones. That is certainly the message and purpose of the story in 1 Sam 17. Of course, David killed Goliath the giant! Or did he?

Another short, and very different, account of the death of Goliath appears in 2 Sam 21:19, which reads:

Then there was another battle with the Philistines at Gob; and Elhanan son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver’s beam.

Unlike the elaborate story in 1 Sam 17, where David the shepherd boy kills the very tall Goliath during the reign of Saul, this one is set in the reign of David and involves the slaying of four “giants” (underlined below) by members of David’s army or his associates during several battles with the Philistines (vv. 15-22):

¹⁵The Philistines went to war again with Israel, and David went down together with his servants. They fought against the Philistines, and David grew weary. ¹⁶Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze, and who was fitted out with new weapons, said he would kill David. ¹⁷But Abishai son of Zeruiah³¹ came to his aid, and attacked the Philistine and killed him. Then David’s men swore to him, “You shall not go out with us to battle any longer, so that you do not quench the lamp of Israel.” ¹⁸After this a battle took place with the Philistines, at Gob; then Sibbecai³² the Hushathite killed Saph, who was one of the descendants of the giants. ¹⁹Then there was another battle with the Philistines at Gob; and Elhanan son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver’s beam.

²⁰There was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great size, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number; he too was descended from the giants.

²¹When he taunted Israel, Jonathan son of David’s brother Shimei,³³ killed him. ²²These four were descended from the giants in Gath; they fell by the hands of David and his servants.

³⁰ Glenn Townend, “Inspiring the Impossible,” *Adventist Record* 122, no. 11 (3 June 2017): 4.

³¹ Abishai, brother of Joab and son of Zeruiah, David’s sister, was a well-known military associate of David’s (1 Sam 26:6-8; 2 Sam 2:24; 3:30; 16:9, 11; 18: 2, 5, 12; 19:21; 21:17; 23:18; 2 Chr 18:12).

³² Sibbecai the Hushathite is mentioned in 2 Sam 21:18; 1 Chr 11:29; 20:4; 27:11.

³³ Shimei is the name for more than ten persons in the OT. The Shimei mentioned here as the brother of David was also called Shammah, Shimeah, and Shimea (1 Sam 16:9; 17:13; 2 Sam 13:3; 21:21; 1 Chr 2:13; 20:7). His son,

This account reports that, although King David understandably was associated with slaying these unusual enemies, it was members of his army or other persons connected to him, each of whom is named, who actually carried out these deeds. The two common elements of these brief, individual battle reports are (1) that the slain Philistine warriors were very large men, identified as “giants” and (2) that those who killed them were named, regular members of King David’s army or his associates.

What interests us here in particular, of course, is the third of the four “giant” slayings. It has some noteworthy characteristics. Along with the second report, it is much shorter than the first and fourth notices and has no reference to David.³⁴ Without further identification, the slain warrior is simply called “Goliath the Gittite” – a person from Gath. The only thing that specifically links Goliath with the “giants” in this section is the concluding summary statement: “These four were descended from the giants in Gath” (v. 22). The only other descriptive statement about him is: “the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver’s beam.” However, even the few elements of this account are sufficient to link this warrior with the Goliath in 1 Sam 17, where he is identified as “Goliath, of Gath,” a very tall member of the Philistine army, which is confronting the Israelites and where it is said of him, “The shaft of his spear was like a weaver’s beam.”³⁵ So, 2 Sam 21:19 clearly reports that the very tall Philistine warrior named Goliath was killed by Elhanan, a member of David’s army.

However, this is far from the end of the story. The report of Elhanan’s exploit is also found in 1 Chr 20:5 with a significant twist:

Again there was war with the Philistines; and Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver’s beam.

This is not just a version of Elhanan’s feat but is an abbreviated parallel of the multi-part report of “giant” slayings in 2 Sam 21:15-22 in 2 Chr 20:4-8:

⁴After this, war broke out with the Philistines at Gezer; then Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Sippai, who was one of the descendants of the giants; and the Philistines were subdued. ⁵Again there was war with the Philistines; and Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver’s beam. ⁶Again there was war at Gath, where there was a man of great size, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number; he also was descended from the giants. ⁷When he taunted Israel, Jonathan son of Shimea, David’s brother, killed him. ⁸These were descended from the giants in Gath; they fell by the hand of David and his servants.³⁶

Jonathan, who killed the unnamed polydactyl “giant” (2 Sam 21:21; 1 Chr 20:7), may also have been called Jonadab, who is described as “the son of David’s brother Shimeah (2 Sam 13:3).

³⁴ The only associations with David in the third report are indirect, i.e., Elhanan, like David, was from Bethlehem and was one of David’s “servants” (v. 22).

³⁵ The expression comparing a spear or its shaft to a “weaver’s beam” is found only in 1 Sam 17:7; 2 Sam 21:19 (וַעֲצֵץ הַחֵבֶלֶתוֹ כְּמִנְיֹר אֶרְגִּים); 1 Chr 11:23; 20:5. All of these texts, except the third, which mentions a slain Egyptian (“a man of great stature, five cubits tall”!) refer to Goliath.

³⁶ Like the version in 2 Sam 21, this one includes the references to multiple battles with the Philistines (vv. 4-6) and the reports of three of the four “giant” slayings in the same order as in 2 Sam 21: “Sippai” slayed by “Sibbecai the Hushathite”; a “giant” slayed by “Elhanan”; and an unnamed, polydactyl “giant” slayed by “Jonathan son of . . .

Again, our interest here is primarily with the report concerning Elhanan (v. 5). This version differs from the one in 2 Sam 21 in several ways. Two of these are largely inconsequential, i.e., Elhanan is said to be the “son of Jair” rather than “son of Jaare-oregim” and the reference to his being “the Bethlehemite” is not included. However, the third is very significant. Instead of his killing “Goliath the Gittite” (2 Sam 21), this version has Elhanan kill “Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite”!

Here is a comparison of the two texts: A=2 Sam 21:19; B=1 Chr 20:5

A: Then there was another battle with the Philistines at Gob;

B: Again there was war³⁷ with the Philistines;

A: and Elhanan son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, killed [lit. “struck down”]

B: and Elhanan son of Jair³⁸ killed [lit. “struck down”]³⁹

A: Goliath the Gittite,

B: Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite,

A: the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver’s beam.

B: the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver’s beam.⁴⁰

This is clearly synoptic material, as is the whole report in both versions. However, particularly in this unit it is obvious that one version is dependent on the other or both are dependent on a common source. Because much of the Chronicles is a representation and sometimes a reinterpretation of previous HB material,⁴¹ the default position here is that text B is a conscious edit of text A. This is further supported by the comprehensive text critical principle that the reading is preferred that best explains the existence of the other variant readings. Given the political/theological tendency of the Chronicles to celebrate and sanitize David and the Davidic dynasty,⁴² the verbatim inclusion of the material from 2 Sam 21:19 that declares Elhanan to be

David’s brother.” The absence of the report of “Ishbi-benob,” a “giant” slayed by “Abishai” in this version seems to be deliberate and likely for the simple reason of limiting the length of the section. This is clear from its modified summary statement: “These three [2 Sam 21:19 had “four”] were descended from the giants in Gath; they fell by the hand of David and his servants” (v. 8).

³⁷ The Heb for this first statement is virtually identical in the two texts: וַתְּהִי-מִלְחָמָה עִוֵּר מִלְחָמָה cf. וַתְּהִי-מִלְחָמָה עִוֵּר מִלְחָמָה.

³⁸ The Heb words for Elhanan’s patronymic in both versions are very similar, especially the main elements: בְּדֹדוֹ בְּדֹדוֹ cf. אֶרְגִּים cf. אֶרְגִּים, strongly suggesting that these are simply variations referring to the same person. It is likely, despite the connection to Bethlehem, that Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem and leader in David’s army (2 Sam 23:24; 1 Chr 11:26), is a separate person. This means that the Elhanan in these texts is an otherwise unattested person who was probably associated with David in some unidentified way, probably as a member of the army. Cf. 2 Sam 21:22; 1 Chr 20:8, where he, along with the other killers of these “giants,” is said to be one of David’s “servants.”

³⁹ The Heb verb is the same in both texts: וַיַּךְ cf. וַיַּךְ.

⁴⁰ The Heb for this line is identical in the two texts: וַיַּעַן הַנִּיחֹ כַּמְנוֹר אֶרְגִּים cf. וַיַּעַן הַנִּיחֹ כַּמְנוֹר אֶרְגִּים.

⁴¹ In the HB, the combined book of Chronicles is the last book of the three-part canon, written probably 350-300 BCE. Chronicles is largely a repetition and reinterpretation of material drawn from Gen to Kings. Steven L. McKenzie, *1-2 Chronicles*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004). See also “Books of Chronicles,” *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Books_of_Chronicles.

⁴² The legend of David in the HB reached its apex in Chronicles with David the focus of what is now 1 Chr and his son Solomon and successors featured in 2 Chr. The story of David is summarized and sanitized. Missing are his questionable rise to power and much of the violence associated with it, his civil war with the northern tribes, his

the slayer of Goliath would be a significant problem, given the already existing story in 1 Sam 17 about David the shepherd boy slaying Goliath against all odds. Thus, there would be a strong motivation for the editor of this section of 1 Chr 20 to modify his source.

Another indication of the secondary nature of the Elhanan report in 1 Chr 20 is what seems to be the origin of the name Lahmi. The reason this name occurs nowhere else in the OT is because it was likely created by the editor of 1 Chr 20 from the last part of the word “Bethlehemite” in his source, 2 Sam 21:19.⁴³ So, instead of including the word “Bethlehemite” as a description of Elhanan, the editor seems to have taken the last part of that word in Heb and created the fictitious Lahmi (brother of Goliath) whom Elhanan slew.

We should note another textual manipulation of this material. Despite the fact that all Heb witnesses for 2 Sam 21:19 have Elhanan as the slayer of Goliath, including those that were available in the seventeenth century, the translators of the KJV, without any textual authority and without using their customary italics for the emendation, included the face-saving reading of 1 Chr 20:5 in 2 Sam 21:19: “Elhanan . . . slew the brother of Goliath the Gittite.” Some modern scholars, motivated by the principle of biblical inerrancy, in effect support this by arguing that the MT text of 2 Sam 21:19 is corrupt and must be restored from 1 Chr 20:5.⁴⁴ In my judgment, both the unwarranted action of the KJV translators and the modern, inerrancy-motivated attempts to argue for an original Heb text that supports that translation are without foundation and, therefore, unacceptable.

So, who killed Goliath? Well, it was not David. The slayer of Goliath was a man named Elhanan, who was probably an otherwise unheralded member of David’s army.

We must return to 1 Sam 17 to inquire how David the shepherd boy became the legendary slayer of Goliath. The compositional history of 1 Samuel including chs. 16-18, is very complex. The major evidence of this lies in a set of inconsistencies within these chapters. Emanuel Tov identified seven such inconsistencies.⁴⁵ Because I am concerned here with the story of David and Goliath and its context, I will examine only the first four of these:

1. 16:17-23 vs. 17:55-56

Tov considers this the “most conspicuous difficulty.” In the former text, one of Saul’s assistants recommended Jesse’s son, David, to serve as a musician to sooth the king’s troubled spirit, calling him “skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him.” After Saul summoned him through Jesse, David the

adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, his flight from and war with Absalom, and his responsibility for the census. Added are his extensive assembling of materials and workmen for the temple construction, his detailed charges and instruction to Solomon and other leaders, and his meticulous preparation of the staff and arrangements for the temple services.

⁴³ 2 Sam 21:19 has בֵּית הַלְחֵמִי, which is translated “Bethlehemite”; 1 Chr 20:5 instead has לַחֲמִי, which is “Lahmi,” identified as Goliath’s brother.

⁴⁴ E.g., Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 178-179.

⁴⁵ (1) 16:17-23 vs. 17:55-56; (2) ch. 16 vs. 17:22; (3) 16:13 v. 17:28; (4) 16:21 v. 17:12-31, 55-58; (5) 18:13 vs. 18:5; (6) 17:25ff. vs. 18:20ff.; (7) 18:20-27 vs. 18:17-19, 25. Emanuel Tov, “The Composition of 1 Samuel 16–18 in the Light of the Evidence of the Septuagint Version,” in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*, VTSup 72 (Leiden: Brill, 1999): 354-355.

shepherd came to the king, “entered his service, and became “his armor-bearer.” “Saul loved him greatly” and asked Jesse to let him “remain in [his] service.”

In the latter text, the writer/editor seems to be completely unaware of the above narrative: “When Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, ‘Abner, whose son is this young man?’ Abner said, ‘As your soul lives, O king, I do not know.’ The king said, ‘Inquire whose son the stripling is.’”

In addition to Saul’s ignorance of David in the second text in contrast to his intimate relationship with him in the first, we note the portrayal of David as a young (“stripling”) shepherd boy in the second text compared to the description of him given to Saul in the first: “a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence” and one who became Saul’s “armor-bearer.” If he were not identified in both accounts, we would certainly not see them as referring to the same person.

2. 16:18-19 vs. 17:12⁴⁶

In the former text, Saul’s assistant recommended “a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite,” whom Saul identified as “David who is with the sheep.”

Significantly, in the latter, the writer/editor, with seeming ignorance of the introduction of Jesse and David in ch. 16, has: “¹²Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in years.”

3. 16:13 vs. 17:28

In the former text, Samuel is said to have anointed David as Saul’s replacement “in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.”

In the latter, after David’s “eldest brother Eliab heard him talking to the men,” he became angry because David had abandoned his shepherd responsibilities, considered him to have “evil” in his “heart,” and accused him of coming “just to see the battle.” This may not be a significant inconsistency, especially if David’s older brothers were not especially enamored with his new status.⁴⁷

4. 16:21 vs. 17:12-31, 55-58

In the former text, David became Saul’s “armor-bearer.” Because that account continues into ch. 17, it would naturally be assumed that David was with Saul in that role when his king led the Israelite army against the Philistines and that David would have acted in that role in any engagement with the Philistine champion.

The writer/editor of the latter texts shows no knowledge of this and, instead, introduces David, who happens to be at the battle front to deliver provisions to his soldier brothers from their father.

⁴⁶ Tov (“Composition of 1 Samuel 16–18,” 354) gives this as 17:22, but calls it “the first sentence of version 2.” Accordingly, he clearly means 17:12.

⁴⁷ Tov (“Composition of 1 Samuel 16–18,” 354) seems at least partially to agree: “If the issue is judged only on a psychological level, it is understandable that the oldest brother might be jealous or anxious about the safety of his youngest brother.”

Accordingly, David engages the Philistine as a youthful shepherd and not as the king’s armor-bearer.⁴⁸

Based on these and other inconsistencies, as well as on additional text and source critical observations involving the MT, LXX, and the Samuel materials among the Qumran scrolls, Tov proposed two ancient versions now merged in these texts. He argues

that the short version underlying the LXX reflects an early stage of chapters 17–18 (continuing chapter 16) . . . and that the long version found in MT represents a later, expanded stage. Since the long version contains additional information (traditions) about the encounter of David and Goliath, parallel to that in the short version, the additional material in the long version constitutes a separate version of the story. We refer to the short text underlying the LXX (and parts of MT) as version 1 and the additions found only in MT as version 2. MT thus contains both versions 1 and 2.⁴⁹

With regard to the story of David and Goliath and its context, these versions are represented in the present text of 1 Samuel as follows:

<u>Version 1</u>	<u>Version 2</u>
16:17 – 17:11	
	17:12-31
17:32-40	
	17:41
17:42-49	
	17:50
17:51-54	
	17:55-58

Based on this analysis, we can reconstruct the story of David and Goliath according to version 1 – the early, short text of 1 Samuel 16-17:

16¹⁷So Saul said to his servants, “Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me.”
¹⁸One of the young men answered, “I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him.”¹⁹So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, “Send me your son David who is with the sheep.”²⁰Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them by his son David to Saul.²¹And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer.²²Saul sent to Jesse, saying, “Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight.”²³And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

⁴⁸ There is another inconsistency that Tov did not consider, although it seems to be implied in his determination of versions 1 and 2. The question posed by this inconsistency is “when and how was the Philistine killed?” In 17:49, 51 (version 1), David felled “the Philistine” with the sling stone (v. 49) then took his [presumably the Philistine’s] sword, killed him (יָמַתְתֵּהוּ), and “then cut off his head” (v. 51). In 17:50 (version 2), David “prevailed over the Philistine” with a sling stone, “striking [him] down and killing him (יָמַתְתֵּהוּ); there was no sword in David’s hand.” The identified verbs in both versions, each a form of מוּת (“to die”), mean “to kill or put to death,” BDB, s.v. מוּת.

⁴⁹ Tov, “Composition of 1 Samuel 16–18,” 351.

17¹Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. ²Saul and the Israelites gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah, and formed ranks against the Philistines. ³The Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. ⁴And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was four cubits and a span. ⁵He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. ⁶He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. ⁷The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him. ⁸He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. ⁹If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." ¹⁰And the Philistine said, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together." ¹¹When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

³²David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." ³³Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth." ³⁴But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. ³⁶Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." ³⁷David said, "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." So Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you!" ³⁸Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. ³⁹David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them." So David removed them.

⁴⁰Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

⁴²When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. ⁴³The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field." ⁴⁵But David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand."

⁴⁸When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David,

⁴⁹David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

⁵¹Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. ⁵²The troops of Israel and Judah rose up with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron. ⁵³The Israelites came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp. ⁵⁴David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem;⁵⁰ but he put his armor in his tent.

This account does not contain the inconsistencies found in the present, canonical text. Instead, it depicts David, a member of Saul's retinue, stepping up to fight Goliath, the large Philistine champion, not with the king's armor but his own simple sling and a few stones and with a declaration of confidence in his God. He succeeded in striking down the Philistine with a sling stone, killing him with his enemy's sword, and cutting off his head to the great dismay of the rest of the Philistine troops.

Although this dilution of the story removes its internal inconsistencies, it still does not address the most significant inconsistency of all, i.e., its essential contradiction of 2 Sam 21:19, where Elhanan, not David, killed Goliath. To address that matter we must consider the potential state of tradition prior to Tov's version 1.

Accordingly, I propose the following development stages of the tradition concerning David and the killing of Goliath, the large Philistine champion:

1. During the reign of David, Goliath, is killed by Elhanan, who is listed as one of four "giants" in the Philistine army that in different battles are slain by named members of David's forces or his associates. (2 Sam 21:19)
2. Version 1 of 1 Sam 16-17 inserted (1) the name Goliath from stage 1 as the Philistine champion during the reign of Saul, (2) created the list of his elaborate and huge armor and weapons, and (3) added the story of David as his killer using only his sling and stones.⁵¹
3. Version 2 of 1 Sam 16-17 added to version 1 the materials about David's trip to resupply his soldier brothers at the front and other details. This stage also included the inflation of Goliath's height from four cubits and a span to six cubits and a span.
4. The writer/editor of 1 Chr 20:5, when incorporating material from 2 Sam 21, tried to remove the inconsistency between stage 1 and stages 2 and 3 by having Elhanan kill the brother of Goliath, Lahmi – a name constructed from the word "Bethlehemite" in 2 Sam 21:19.⁵²

So, Elhanan was indeed the killer of Goliath. That tradition was incorporated into the text of 1 Samuel but the actor became David, the son of Jesse, the time relocated from David's reign to that of Saul, and the simple reference to Goliath transformed into an elaborate description of his

⁵⁰ Unless one is convinced that David, likely pictured here as a teenager, kept Goliath's head with him for over ten years, this is an anachronistic remark, because, at the time, Jerusalem (Jebus) is said to still to be occupied by the Jebusites, falling into Israelite hands only after David became king at age 30 (2 Sam 5:1-10; 2 Chr 11:3-6).

⁵¹ It was undoubtedly in this recension that the report of Ahimelech's giving a sword to David (1 Sam 21:9) was edited to imply that David killed Goliath.

⁵² We may note a final stage that does not involve the ancient traditions or the biblical text. It is the emendation of the KJV (1611) that, without any textual authority, used the wording of 1 Chr 20:5 in 2 Sam 21:19, thereby having Elhanan kill Lahmi the brother of Goliath.

height, armaments, and challenges to the Israelite forces. Further traditional developments filled out the legendary picture of David and his exploit.

Conclusion

My title posed two questions: how tall was Goliath and who killed him? We actually have no idea how tall Goliath was. The earliest stage of the tradition does not indicate his height, only that he was one of four descendants of the giants in Gath. However, the first mention of his height in the next stage of the tradition lists him as four cubits and a span, i.e., about 6 ft 9 in. As for who killed him. Again, the earliest stage of the tradition lists Elhanan, an otherwise unknown associate of David's, as his killer. This was later amended to David, whose elaborate story was incorporated into later stages of the tradition.

Finally, all this reminds me of the opening lyrics of Sportin' Life's song:

It ain't necessarily so
It ain't necessarily so
The t'ings dat yo' li'ble
To read in de Bible
It ain't necessarily so.

Li'l David was small, but oh my!
Li'l David was small, but oh my!
He fought big Goliath
Who lay down an' dieth!
Li'l David was small, but oh my!⁵³

¹⁷⁵³The Israelites came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp.

⁵⁴David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armor in his tent.

2 Samuel 5.6:

The king and his men marched to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, "You will not come in here, even the blind and the lame will turn you back"—thinking, "David cannot come in here."

1 Chronicles 11.4:

David and all Israel marched to Jerusalem, that is Jebus, where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land.

⁵³ From George Gershwin, "It Ain't Necessarily So," *Porgy and Bess*, Act II, Scene 2. In fairness to the Bible, we have found all the evidence and clues that lead to an informed understanding of the David and Goliath story through a critical analysis of the Bible itself.

