

The Elah Incident

It all began so well. We were camped at Socoh and Azekah and lined up in full battle armour on one side of the Elah valley. What a fantastic sight it was, men upon men standing line upon line in dazzling armour.

The enemy, an army of sheep farmers and goat herders lined up on the other side - unlike any army we had encountered before!

We were lined up on one side of a mountain and they another on the other side of the valley. The shame of it! We could not attack since we dare not advance into the valley, and the enemy seemed too scared to attack. It was getting nowhere - and that miserable army just stood there on their side of the valley looking at us.

Then my lord decided to take matters into his own hands. He was a great man, tall - nine feet tall - and he was a great champion. No soldier could ever beat him! I'd seen him wrestle four men at once and he would walk away without even breaking into a sweat! I had been chosen to be his armour bearer. I was proud of my position, and always ready to make sure that his bronze armour shone like the sun.

My lord descended to the valley floor. He strode with his mighty legs. I had to plead with him to slow down; after all, I was carrying his shield before him. Finally, he stopped and then he called out in a voice that sounded like thunder!

I almost burst into laughter when I heard his challenge:

"You cowards, you stand there in your great lines, but you won't come down and fight! Choose your champion! If he can fight and beat me then we will become your servants, if I beat him,"

at this he paused and laughed to himself and then called out again,

"if I beat him, you will become our servants!"

Suddenly our whole army cheered and then alternately laughed and jeered as not one of the Israelites moved forward. The sun was hot, and I would not be able to hold my lord's shield for long. I did not need to worry. There would be no champion from the Israelite army that day.

After we returned back to our lines I puzzled over the day's happenings, and hoped we would not have to repeat the excursion to the valley floor the next day. It was a long walk carrying that shield. My hopes were not realised. We repeated the same walk, and the same challenge, twice a day, morning and evening, over the next forty days!

It was very boring, every man was getting discouraged. We needed to return to our families, to tend to the family businesses. However, the commanders of the army were impressed with my lord and could not see how we could

advance when the Israelite army just stood on the mountain, not making any hostile moves against us.

On the forty-first day, the sun still shone, and the armies still stood as before with the Elah valley below us. Once again, my lord and I went to the valley floor and called the challenge.

“Choose your champion! If he can fight and beat me then we will become your servants, if I beat him you will become our servants!”

Suddenly the Israelite ranks parted and a young man, not much off a boy, came forward carrying only what appeared to be a short stick. My lord jeered:

“Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks? By all the gods! I don’t believe it! Come to me and I will feed you to the crows!”

And as my lord readied his sword, the young man spoke out:

“You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel. This day the Lord will enable me to kill you, to cut off your head and I will feed your body to the birds along with the rest of your army. The Lord does not need a sword or a spear - let every one know that the battle is the Lord’s and He will prevail.”

My lord was somewhat stunned by all of this, and may be the sight of such a young man, surely straight off the fields distracted him. As he strode forward to deal with the impudent young puppy, he was struck down. Yes, I saw it, that young man took a stone from the bag he carried around his waist, put it into a sling, and hurled it straight at my lord. The young man’s God must have been with him; the stone did not strike my lord’s armour but went straight into his forehead. My lord Goliath did not have time to strike one blow before he fell to the earth. To my shame, I did not wait; I dropped the shield and ran. That dread day many hundreds, no, thousands, of my fellow soldiers lay dead during that awful retreat. I still do not understand it! It should have been a great soldier, a great champion that bested my lord.

Yet it was only a boy. His Lord had been with him, and the battle was his Lord’s.