Telling Their Own Story: David and Goliath in Rabbinic Judaism

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To my beautiful wife Andrea
who helps me conquer
all the Goliaths in my life.

Table of Contents

Spices, Stories, and Summaries 3

Introduction: 4
The Biblical Story: 5
Summary: 5
Respect Due God: 7
Textual Inconsistencies: 9

Goliath: A Rabbinic Biography 12

Building Upon Biblical Biography: 13
Goliath of Gath Was His Name: 14
Introducing Size: 14
Naming Sin: 15
Goliath the Giant: 17
Size and Strength: 17
Size, Strength and Wickedness: 19
Goliath's Family: 21
Goliath's Brothers: 21
Goliath's Mother: 23
Goliath's Extended Family: 25
Biographical Conclusions: 26

Blasphemy and Belief 28

A Theological Explanation of History: 29
Goliath Attacks God: 30
Goliath taunts God: 30
Profanity and Punishment: 32
David Trusts In God: 34
The Basis of Trust 35
David Relies on God: 37
David's Reward For Faithfulness: 40
David vs/ Saul 42
Fighting Faith, Fighting With Faith: 44

YHVH is a Man of War 47

A Contest of Champions: 48
Divine Actions: 49
God Restrains Goliath: 49
Origin of Leprosy: 50
And the Stone Sank Into His Forehead: 51
And He Fell Upon His Face To the Earth: 52
Crediting the Divine: 54
David's View of Events: 54
Keeping David Humble: 56
And YHVH wrought a great victory: 58

Conclusion: Thou Shalt Not Change, Thou Shalt Change 60

Afterword: Changing Context, Changing Understanding: 64

Bibliography 70

Spices, Stories, and Summaries

Introduction:

In my china closet sits a spice box. For six days a week it is a piece of art and a family heirloom. On Saturday night, however, it becomes an instrument of holiness as it is removed from its encasement and becomes a player in my family's celebration of *havdalah*, the marking of the separation of the Sabbath from rest of the week. Our use of this spice box is an example of *hidur mitzvah*, of adorning and enriching the observance of a commandment with beautiful objects. This beautiful piece of Judaica, does more than just adorn my family's marking of *havdalah*. It tells its own story. Its design tells of an artist and community that no longer exist. The indentation on its side testifies to its long journey to America. The sweet spices that fill its center invoke memories of a century of *Shabbatot* spent surrounded by family.

In many ways exegetical rabbinic texts are also an example of *hidur mitzvah* as they enhance the beauty and holiness of biblical texts. Like the antique spice box, these ancient texts, most dating from between 400 and 1200 C.E.,[1] do much more than adorn the biblical story with new insights, they also tell their own holy story.

In the following chapters, the Talmudic and midrashic texts dealing with the story of David and Goliath will be examined. This study will illustrate how these texts explicate the biblical story, explaining events in the text and providing information not given in the biblical account. In so doing, this study will be show how rabbinic texts not only clarify but also reshape the David and Goliath story. This process of reshaping will itself tell its own story, exposing the values and world-view of the rabbinic texts' compilers.

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[1] Holtz. *Back to the Sources: Reading the classic Jewish Texts*, 178 .

The Biblical Story:

Summary:

Before one can examine rabbinic literature's treatment of the story of David and Goliath, it is important to first have an understanding of the biblical account. The story begins with a description of opposing military camps, one Philistine and one Israelite. A "champion"[2] named Goliath, a giant of a man adorned in what appears to be impenetrable armor,[3] steps forward and challenges the Israelites to engage him in one-on-one combat. "Goliath's physical presence—the weight of his armor suggests he was meant to frighten,"[4] a goal he succeeds in accomplishing as no Israelite is willing to accept Goliath's challenge.

In contrast to the imposing description of Goliath, David "enters the story as a menial shepherd and unimportant errand boy."[5] His father sent him to the Israelite military encampment to bring packages to his older brothers who are serving in King Saul's army. "David is to take bread to his three brothers; as the war is not one of movement, in which there is spoil for the taking, but a long-drawn-out (v. 16) and sedentary war."[6]

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[2] Hertzbeg, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary*, 148. איש הבנים "is unusual, and should perhaps be translated 'man who fights between the battle lines. Anyone who comes forward from the front line becomes a man between the battle lines and is thus a sort of challenger or champion."
[3] Ibid 149.
[4] Evans, *New International Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Samuel*, 83.
[5] Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 96.
[6] Hertzbeg, *I and II Samuel* 151.

After ensuring the safe delivery of the provisions to his brothers, David learns of Goliath's challenge, which he understands as an attack against "the living God."[7] Additionally, David is informed of Saul's promise to reward the individual who defeats the Philistine giant with riches.[8] This combination of factors prompts David to accept the giant's challenge.

Following a brief reprimand from his brother Eliab, David seeks out Saul and offers to fight Goliath. Basing "his offer primarily on the experience which he has gained as a shepherd with lions and bears who preyed upon his flock,"[9] David succeeds in convincing Saul that despite his size and youth, he is qualified to fight the Philistine Giant. Saul "proceeds to equip him in conventional terms, piling armor on him."[10] David, however, finds the armor ill-fitting and decides to enter battle armed only with a few stones and his sling shot.[11]

David and Goliath meet and engage in verbal jousting. Eventually the two begin to advance toward one another. David selects one of the stones he chose earlier, loads it into his sling shot and launches it at the giant. The stone finds its way to Goliath's forehead where it strikes a fatal blow. Goliath's dead body falls to the ground, landing with his face in the dirt. At this point David, lacking his own sword, picks up the giants sword which he uses to cut off its former owner's head, which he then carries from the battlefield.

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[7] 1 Sam. 17:26.
[8] Ibid, ibid, 22-27.
[9] Hertzbeg, *I and II Samuel* 151.
[10] Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* 98.
[11] 1 Sam 17:40.

While David's victory marks the climax of the narrative,[12] the text continues by describing how David's victory prompted the Philistine's to flee the battlefield as well as what David did with Goliath's head and weapons.[13] This marks the end of the interaction between David and Goliath, and thus the end of the biblical material that falls within the parameters of this paper. With this said, I Samuel 17:55 "is striking because it ends the narrative, which is not really at an end." [14]

"Somewhat lamely, the continuation and conclusion of the account next brings Saul's inquiry about David's descent."[15] Saul's inquiry ultimately leads to David's promotion to commander of Saul's army, and perhaps equally important, the development of David and Jonathan's friendship. Both of these events will have major impacts on I and II Samuel as the narrative quickly turns its attention to the complex and contentious relationship that develops between David and Goliath

Respect Due God:

The David and Goliath story is often categorized as a children's story, something that is understandable considering the pediatric appeal of a small boy defeating an evil giant.[16] While the narrative found in I Samuel 17 fascinates children, it also teaches an important lesson to adults. "Beyond the fairy-tale aspect lies a serious biblical issue: the respect due God."[17]

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[12] Hertzbeg, *I and II Samuel* 153.
[13] 1 Sam. 17:51-54.
[14] Hertzbeg, *I and II Samuel* 153.
[15] Ibid 154.
[16] Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* 96.
[17] Fox, *Give Us A King!*, 75-76.

This lesson is made evident by a close examination of the biblical text which includes the consideration of *leitworts*.[18] In the David and Goliath text "the most-repeated words in the story are חרף 'mock' and מערכות 'ranks [of the living God']." [19] This pattern suggests that David's victory over Goliath is not so much a victory for the Israelite army as it is for the God in which David trusts.

In addition to the use of *leitworts*, the text's focus on God's honor is illustrated through the narrative itself. Upon arriving at the battle lines David learns of Goliath's challenge. "As David takes in the situation, he is clearly intrigued by the possibilities of reward; he also expresses shock that God's people are intimidated by an uncircumcised Philistine."[20] David's shock reveals that Israel's future king sees the world not through a military but rather a theological lens.

David's theology leads him to "find it scandalous that an uncircumcised man, a worshipper of dead gods should insult the people of God and therefore the living God himself."[21] He thus sets out to defend God's honor by confronting Goliath in battle. Before meeting Goliath on the battlefield, David must first convince Saul that he should represent the Israelites in the contest of champions. During his lobbying of Saul, David makes reference to his experiences as a shepherd. "More than anything, however, David here expresses the fact that the Lord himself has been called forth by Goliath's invitation."[22] David's conversation with Saul again illustrates that David's and the text's primary focus is the respect due God.

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[18] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 93. "A *lietwort* is a word or a word-root that recurs significantly in a text . . . by following these repetitions one is able to decipher or grasp a meaning of the text, or at any rate, the meaning will be revealed more strikingly"
[19] Fox, *Give Us A King!*, 76.
[20] Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* 97.
[21] Hertzbeg, *I and II Samuel* 151.
[22] Ibid 152.

> Saul is persuaded to let David face Goliath, but because he doesn't see the actual qualities that fit David for the task, he proceeds to equip him in conventional terms, piling armor on him. It doesn't seem to occur to him that if this royal armor didn't qualify him, Saul for fighting Goliath, it could hardly benefit David. Saul's imagination is restricted by the conventions of the day, and stunted with fear. David, innocent of the conventions, is large with hope. An innocent in all matters Philistine, he is not innocent in the ways of God. He knows he cannot fight Saul's battle Saul's way.[23]

Moreover, by refusing to wear Saul's armor, an act that in the ancient Near East would have been interpreted as David acting on Saul's behalf or with Saul's power, David issues "a symbolic affirmation that he needed God's power, not Saul's."[24]

Finally, the text's focuses on God's power and the respect due God. David's speech before battle makes clear that not only does he fight in the name of YHVH, but also that YHVH "can give victory without sword or spear."[25] "The whole account is intended to demonstrate that the uncircumcised Philistines, indeed all the world, are to see that Israel has a God whose name alone is sufficient to strike the strongest man to the ground,"[26] and that God's thus deserves to be respected.

Textual Inconsistencies:

In response to the debate over whether the Bible should be seen as theological writing or historiography, Anthony F. Campbell writes, "it is difficult to assert that Bible

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[23] Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* 98.
[24] Evans, *New International Biblical Commentary* 84.
[25] 1 Sam. 17:47.
[26] Hertzbeg, *I and II Samuel* 152.

is about historiography at all. The practice of the Bible is generally to amalgamate competing traditions rather than to adjudicate between them."[27] The books of Samuel I and II in general, and the story of David and Goliath in particular, show signs of amalgamation, often with varying levels of success.

The present textual account of the battle between David and Goliath is itself a union of two narratives.[28] A structural analysis of the text reveals that "the Philistines champion is twice introduced to the reader, by name and town, once in 17:4 and again in 17:23."[29] Other evidence that suggests the current story was constructed through the combination of more than one tradition includes David's duel motivations for engaging Goliath in battle[30] and the separate accounts of Goliath's death found in 1 Samuel 17:50 and the following verse, 1 Samuel 17:51.

While the scrutiny of structure analysis reveals that the canonized version of the David and Goliath story is an amalgamation of different traditions, the outcome is overwhelmingly successful. The same, however, cannot be said when the story is read in its literary context, the books of Samuel I and II.

The story of David and Goliath tells of how David killed Goliath the Gittite. This, however, is at variance with II Samuel 21:19 which states "Elhanan son of Jaareoregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite." While Arthur Hertzberg attempts to resolve this narrative inconsistency by suggesting that "in the course of the

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[27] Campbell, *1 Samuel*,13-14.
[28] Ibid 171. A number of scholars, including J. Lust and E. Tov, agree with Campbell that the story of David and Goliath preserved in the Masoretic text is in fact an amalgamation of two texts, a notion supported by the fact that the Septuagint includes only a portion of the Masoretic text. Other scholars including D. Barthelemy and D. W. Gooding theorize that the Masoretic version of the text is in fact the original text and the brevity of the Septuagint telling is the result of editing either done during translation or perhaps to the text on which the translation was based (Auld and Ho, "The Making of David and Goliath,"*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. No. 56. (1992): *19-21*).
[29] Campbell 173.
[30] Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* 97.

tradition the well known name Goliath became used to describe an anonymous man,"[31] many find this explanation untenable.[32]

In addition to the disparate tradition found in II Samuel 21, "the Goliath narrative completely contradicts chapter 16 . . . Neither David's anointing nor his arrival at the court of Saul are presupposed."[33] This problem appears to have been recognized at an early stage as the Septuagint excludes from its account of the David and Goliath story 17:12-31 and 17:55-18:5, "those passages in which ignorance of chapter 16 is most conspicuous."[34] Even the truncated Septuagint text still reveals inconsistencies as David is described as a shepherd, not a musician and Saul "appears throughout as an amiable man who is completely normal."[35]

The inconsistencies within the David and Goliath story and the inability to reconcile the story with its literary context raise many questions about the text's historical veracity. Perhaps more importantly, the aforementioned inconsistencies invite one to wonder why, in light of the editorial problems it presents, the inclusion of the David and Goliath story in the biblical canon was deemed justified. Through its treatment of the biblical text, rabbinic literature provides an answer.

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[31] Hertzbeg, *I and II Samuel* 146.
[32] Scolnic, et al. "Did David Kill Goliath? Historical Criticism and Religious Meaning," *Conservative Judaism*, Vol. 42, Num. 1 (Fall 1989): 35. It should be noted that traditional exegesis resolves the discrepancy by explaining how Elhanan is in fact another name for God. Others suggest that the inconsistency between 1 Sam. 17 and 2 Sam. 21:19 was created purposefully (39).
[33] Hertzbeg, *I and II Samuel* 146.
[34] Ibid. As discussed above, there is not universal agreement as to whether or not the Masoretic text is the original text. A. Graeme Auld and Craig Y.S. Ho argue that the Septuagint text is in fact more original. Unlike scholars such as J. Lust and E. Tov, however, Auld and Ho do not believe the Septuagint was based on one of two existing manuscripts. Rather they theorize that most of the 45% of the Masoretic telling of David and Goliath not found in the Septuagint text was added at a later date in order to create contrasts and parallels to the introduction and characterization of Saul found in 1 Sam. 9-10. (Auld and Ho, "The Making of David and Goliath,"*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. No. 56. (1992): 24-39.)
[35] Hertzberg 147.

Goliath: A Rabbinic Biography

Building Upon Biblical Biography:

"Biblical narrative is notable for its extreme economy. Rarely does it present more than the bare minimum."[36] Because of its emphasis on verbal economy, many characters in the Bible are undeveloped. For example, the Bible offers no physical description of Abraham, the patriarch of the Jewish people. Several of the prophets, including Amos and Obadiah, are given no family history. In some cases, characters remain unnamed, such as Potiphar's wife, who plays an important role in the unfolding of events in Egypt with which the Book of Genesis concludes.[37]

When judged by the standards of biblical narrative, Goliath is a very well developed character. I Samuel 17 offers the reader both a name and detailed description of the Philistine giant. These descriptions are especially significant when read in light of Robert Alter's assertion that the biblical authors' "attraction to narrative minimalism was reinforced by their sense that stories should be told in a way that would move efficiently to the heart of the matter, never pausing to elaborate mimetic effects for their own sake."[38] When applied to I Samuel 17, Alter's assertion suggests that the introductory epithet and lengthy description of Goliath's physical appearance were included in the biblical text because they play an important and necessary role in the development and understanding of the story.

Rabbinic literature also sees these elements as tools for understanding the story of David and Goliath and thus seizes upon the information offered by the Bible in

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[36] Holtz, *Back to the Sources* 39.
[37] Gen. 39:7-20.
[38] Alter, "Introduction" in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, 23.

description of Goliath and both expand and expound upon it to create a more complete biography of the Philistine Giant.

Goliath of Gath Was His Name:

The modern Biblical scholar Meir Steinberg asserts that, "Biblical man receives a proper name in the fullest sense of the word. Apart from its uniqueness—by itself possibly a mnemonic aid—it also exhibits some opacity, arbitrariness, irreducibility to anything beyond itself, notably including the kernel of character."[39] The compilers of rabbinic literature saw things in exactly the opposite way, viewing a biblical character's name as a tool through which the character's history and personality can be elucidated.

In I Samuel 17:4 the biblical text introduces Goliath by asserting "A champion of the Philistine forces stepped forward; Goliath of Gath was his name." As part of their efforts to extract meaning from the story of David and Goliath, this epithet is analyzed word by word by the compilers of rabbinic literature.

Introducing Size:

The bible's introduction of Goliath begins with the phrase "ויצא איש הבנים."[40] The Babylonian Talmud: Sotah 42b offers several explanations for the word הבנים "champion." Although it is suggested that the word serves to identify Goliath as the בינוני "middle" child, the majority of explanations offered understand "הבנים" as descriptive of Goliath's size. For example, an assertion attributed to Rav teaches that the word "הבנים" is included in Goliath's introduction because he was built up (מבונה) without any blemish. Similarly, a teaching attributed to the School of Shila suggests that Goliath is

[39] Steinberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, 330.
[40] 1 Sam. 17:4.

identified as "הבנים" because he was made like a בניו "building."[41] These interpretations correspond with I Samuel 17:4 as the verse not only gives Goliath's name but describes the imposing nature of his physical features, physical features that, as will be illustrated below, form a major part of the rabbinic understanding of the character of Goliath.

Naming Sin:

In addition to viewing Goliath's name as descriptive of the giant's size, the compliers of rabbinic literature also assert Goliath's name reflects his moral character. As part of a series of explanations for Goliath's name, the Babylonian Talmud: Sotah 42b teaches that the Philistine warrior was named Goliath (גלית) because he committed גילוי פנים "the sin of effrontery" before God. That Goliath is guilty of this sin is proven in this Talmudic passage and elsewhere in rabbinic literature[42] by reading Goliath's challenge, "choose one of your men and let him come down against me"[43] as a reference to God, as it is written, "YHVH is a man of war."[44]

Beyond describing Goliath's own sins, the compilers of rabbinic literature assert that Goliath's name also identifies the sins of his mother. A Talmudic passage attributed to Rabbi Johanan asserts that Goliath is described as "הבנים"[45] by the biblical text because he was "the son (בן/בר) of a hundred fathers and one mother (נאנאי)." That the compilers of rabbinic literature understand Goliath to be the offspring of a lewd and lascivious woman is supported by an assertion attributed to Rabbi Joseph which reads the

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[41] B. Sotah 42b.
[42] Tanh. Lev. Mesora:4. (Tanh. Lev. Buber Mesora:10).
[43] 1 Sam. 17:8.
[44] Exod. 15:3.
[45] 1 Sam. 17:4.

phrase Goliath of Gath (גת) to imply that "all men pressed his mother like a wine-press (גת)."[46]

Finally, it should be noted that the compilers of rabbinic literature created meaning not only from Goliath's name, but also from the way the biblical text first shares that name with the reader. According to a teaching found in Numbers Rabbah,[47] and also restated in Ruth Rabbah,[48] the syntax the biblical text uses to share Goliath's name, גלית שמו,[49] reveals that he is a wicked individual. This is based on the exegetical principle that when introducing wicked individuals, the biblical text gives their name and then asserts "is his name." Examples of this include Nabal,[50] Sheba the son of Bichri,[51] and most germane, Goliath.[52] In contrast, righteous individuals are introduced by the text asserting "his name is" prior to the giving of the name, as is the case with Jesse,[53] Boaz,[54] Mordechai,[55] and others. While it should be noted that a text in Midrash Samuel acknowledges that there are exceptions to this rule, such as Laban,[56] it too asserts that the syntax surrounding Goliath's name indicates a poor moral character.[57]

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[46] B. Sotah 42b.
[47] Num. Rab. (Vilna) 10:5.
[48] Ruth Rab. (Vilna). 4:3.
[49] 1 Sam. 17:4.
[50] Ibid. 25:25.
[51] 2 Sam. 20:21.
[52] 1 Sam. 17:4.
[53] Ibid. 17:12.
[54] Ruth 2:1.
[55] Esther 2:5.
[56] Gen. 24:29.
[57] Midr. Sam. 1:6.

Goliath the Giant:

Size and Strength:

As discussed above, "biblical narrative offers us . . . only the barest hints and about the physical appearance, the tics and gestures, the dress and implements of the characters"[58] it describes. It is thus noteworthy that Goliath's introduction to the reader at the beginning of I Samuel 17 includes not only the sharing of his name, but also a lengthy description of his appearance, particularly his size and strength. Rabbinic literature, cognizant of the important role Goliath's size plays in the story of David and Goliath, adds to the biblical description.

The rabbinic explication of Goliath's size and strength relies almost exclusively on drawing comparisons and making connections between Goliath and other biblical characters known for their exceptional size and strength.

Throughout rabbinic literature the strength of Goliath is frequently linked with that of Samson. In Midrash Tanhuma, Goliath and Samson are linked as individuals who used exceptional strength to their disadvantage.[59] Similarly in Midrash Tanhuma, Goliath and Samson are identified as exceptionally strong individuals,[60] "who were lost from the world . . . because their gift was not from heaven."[61] The link between the strength of these two characters is so prevalent in rabbinic literature that according to

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[58] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* 114.
[59] Eccl. Rab. 1:18.
[60] Tanh. Num. Mattot :5. (Tanh. Num. Buber Mattot:8).
[61] Townsend, trans. *Midrash Tanhuma (S. Buber Recension): Translated into English with Introduction, Indices, and Brief Notes.* Vol. 3, *Numbers and Deuteronomy,* 254.

Leviticus Rabbah[62], it is Samson who is offered by the Israelites in response to the Nations of the World's question, "Who is as strong as Goliath?"[63] Rabbinic literature's repeated linkage between Goliath and Samson invites the reader to imagine that Goliath was capable of performing the same acts of strength that Samson performed, including the pushing over of two support pillars. This is important because the biblical text does not record any of Goliath's own acts of strength.

Elsewhere Goliath's physical attributes are compared with those of King Og of Bashan. Deuteronomy Rabbah (Lieberman) highlights the fact that King Og was so large that he could not sit on anything made of wood, for fear that it would break, and thus his chairs and bed had to be made of bronze. It also points out that unlike the normal person, who is three times as tall as wide; King Og width equaled half of his height. The text's description of King Og's size helps explicate Goliath's physical attributes as the text then asserts that Goliath's width was equal to his height.

While rabbinic literature relies heavily on comparisons with other biblical characters when dealing with the topic of Goliath's size and strength, there are exceptions. In response to I Samuel 17:5-7's assertion that Goliath

> had a bronze helmet on his head, and wore a breastplate of scale armor, a bronze breastplate weighing five thousand shekels he had bronze greaves on his legs, and a bronze javelin [slung] from is shoulders. The shaft of his spear weighed six hundred shekels,[64]

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[62] Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 5:3.
[63] Freedman and Simon, ed., *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus*, trans. Israelstram and Slotki, 63.
[64] Jewish Publication Society, *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and The New JPS Translation-Second Edition*, 608.

Midrash Samuel explain that Goliath's armor was so heavy that he had to be dressed by a large number of "קינטרין," (centaurs) [65] a term Marcus Jastrow defines as "savages represented as half-men, half-horse".[66] While there is an apparent conflict in the text over whether Goliath was dressed by sixty or one-hundred and twenty centaurs the text asserts that there is no difference of opinion as Goliath was dressed by sixty centaurs who were made known, and sixty who remained unmentioned.[67]

The resolution to the apparent conflict in Midrash Samuel 20:2 is likely based on an early rabbinic teaching found in the Talmud. Because the word "חץ" in I Samuel 17:7 is traditionally read and understood as if spelled "עץ" the compilers of rabbinic literature teach that the received spelling must be a clue for a deeper understanding of the text. The Talmud teaches that the word "חץ," is a sign that only half, "חצי," of Goliath's physical attributes were described."[68] Moreover, the Talmud asserts that the physical descriptions of Goliath that are given are offered only "to proclaim the praise of David who conquered such a giant."[69]

Size, Strength and Wickedness:

Rabbinic literature not only adds depth to the biblical description of Goliath's size and strength but uses it as a tool to describe Goliath's characteristic that they see as primary, his wickedness.

Exodus Rabbah engages in a discussion of those who have used exceptional wealth, strength, and wisdom for good and who for evil. Goliath appears in this text as

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[65] Midr. Sam. 20:2.
[66] Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 1363.
[67] Midr. Sam. 20:2.
[68] B. Sotah 42b.
[69] Epstein, ed., *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud: Sotah.* trans. Cohen, 42b.

an example of one who used strength for evil.[70] Variations of this text are found throughout the rabbinic tradition.[71] In all cases, however, Goliath is classified as not only an example of strength, but also wickedness, a point that is amplified by the others who share the latter grouping, individuals such as Korach, Haman, Doeg, and Ahitopel.[72]

A similar point is made in Midrash Psalms. As part of their treatment of David's assertion in Psalm 3:2 that "How great are they that rise up against me,"[73] the text's compilers formulate a list of David's enemies who were "great" in size. By grouping Goliath along side Shobach and Saul, the text emphasizes not only Goliath's size but also the intensity of the hatred between him and David,[74] a hatred that when read in the context of David being God's chosen king,[75] clearly paints Goliath as wicked.

Elsewhere rabbinic literature highlights Goliath's wickedness by asserting that his gift of strength was "not from the Holy One blessed be He, rather he snatched it for himself."[76] This text, which also deals with individuals who possessed exceptional wealth and wisdom, repeating many of the names listed above, explains that because Goliath did not receive his gift from God, he was destined to be destroyed from the world.[77]

Finally, it should be noted that the collection of rabbinic texts that include lists of wise, strong, and wealthy individuals create a juxtaposition between David and Goliath as is illustrated by Midrash Samuel 17:3, a text that not only includes Goliath as an example

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[70] Exod. Rab. (Vilna) 31:3.
[71] Tanh. Exod. Mishpatim:8 and Midr. Sam. 7:3.
[72] Eccl. Rab. 1:18.
[73] Braude, trans., *The Midrash on Psalms*, Vol. 1, 57.
[74] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 3:4.
[75] 1 Sam. 16:1.
[76] Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers*, Vol. 2, trans. Slotki, 859.
[77] Num. Rab. (Vilna) 22:7.

of one who has used strength for evil, but also notes that David possessed wealth, wisdom, and strength, and used all three for good.[78]

Goliath's Family:

Goliath's Brothers:

Based on the description found in II Samuel 21, Goliath was one of four brothers, all of whom "fell by the hands of David and his men."[79] Goliath's brothers' names were Saph, Madon, and Ishbi-benob. Aside from describing their names and their deaths, the Biblical text offers very little information about Goliath's brothers (though it does tell us that Madon had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot).[80] Despite the dearth of biblical information regarding them, Goliath's brothers play a prominent role in the life of David, as described by rabbinic literature.

In a list of David's ten enemies, Midrash Samuel includes Goliath and his three brothers. Their inclusion is especially noteworthy when one considers that they comprise 80% of David's enemies who originate outside the people Israel (the other being Shobach).[81] Moreover, the tradition teaches that David despised Goliath and his brothers so strongly that they read Psalm 18:1 to mean that David so longed for their defeat that he would not sing songs of praise to God until after he had killed the four giants.[82]

In addition to general descriptions about Goliath's brothers and the animosity that existed between them and David, rabbinic literature also tells of specific interactions they

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[78] Midr. Sam. 7:3.
[79] 2 Sam. 21:22.
[80] Ibid. 21:20.
[81] Midr. Sam. 26:3.
[82] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 18:5.

had with David, interactions that play a major role in shaping David's life and those of his descendents.

According to a teaching from Midrash Psalms, one of Goliath's brothers endangers and ultimately forces David to abandon his plan to flee Saul by joining the Philistine King Achish of Gath as described in I Samuel 21.[83] Goliath's brother, who remains unnamed in the text, serves as Achish's bodyguard and thus when David appears at court, he attempts to avenge the death of his brother by trying to kill David. Goliath's brother's efforts are spoiled by King Achish's argument that David had killed Goliath in a fair battle, an argument that according to at least one rabbinic source was inspired by God.[84] Nevertheless, Goliath's brother is able to raise enough suspicion and animosity towards David that he is forced to fain madness and flee from Achish and his Philistine subjects.[85]

In another teaching from Midrash Psalms, a teaching also found in B. Talmud Sanhedrein 42a-42b, David is given a choice by God. In order to atone for his misdeeds, David is forced to choose between having the royal line of his descendents ended and being delivered into the hands of his enemies. David chooses the latter and ultimately finds himself in the hands of Ishbi-benob, Goliath's brother. It is noteworthy that it is to Goliath's family that David is brought when "delivered into the hands of his enemies." As the text unfolds, David's life is only spared as a result of a miracle performed by God that prevented him from being crushed and by the eventual arrival of his friend, Abishai, whose coming to David's aid is made possible by gaining permission to travel on Shabbat

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[83] Ibid. 34:1.
[84] Ibid. 56:1.
[85] Ibid. 34:1.

in a time of danger[86] and by being one of four individuals in the Bible for whom the spatial distance of the earth was contracted in order to expedite travel.[87] While David and Abishai are ultimately able to kill Ishbi-benob, this encounter forces David's men to demand that he no longer join them in battle.[88] Moreover, it is because of the danger posed by Ishbi-benob to David's life that David is convinced by Abishai to change his decision and agrees that his royal dynasty should ultimately end, so that, according to rabbinic tradition, at that very moment it was decreed that Nebuchadnezzar would conquer Jehoiakim, king of Judah, thus ending the Davidic line of kings.[89]

Goliath's Mother:

In addition to expanding upon the biblical descriptions of Goliath's brothers, the rabbinic literature also identifies and describes Goliath's mother. *Midrash Zuta-Ruth*, in a discussion of Naomi's two sons, Machlon and Kelyon, asserts that Kelyon's (כליון) name should be linked with destruction (כלייה) because his marriage to Orpah led to the birth of Goliath.[90] By declaring Orpah as Goliath's mother, the compilers of rabbinic literature connect Goliath to a figure that can both be praised and attacked as meets their needs.

Although the rabbinic tradition records divergent opinions over whether Orpah walked four miles or forty paces with her mother-in-law Naomi upon her return to Bethlehem, it is agreed that Orpah's action were praiseworthy and that she was rewarded

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[86] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 18:30.
[87] Tanh. Gen. (Buber) Wayyetse:8. It is noteworthy that the three other times the earth is said to have contracted, according to this text, it did so for the benefit of the Patriarchs, as it is taught that the earth contracted for Abraham when in pursuit of the kings (Gen. 14), Elazar when searching for a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24), and for Jacob when journeying to Haran (Gen. 29). As will be illustrated below, the grouping of David with the Patriarchs appears frequently in rabbinic literature and is often a way of declaring David's merit.
[88] 2 Sam. 21:17.
[89] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 18:30.
[90] Midr. Zuta-Ruth (Buber) 1:Vshem Shna Banav.

for this act of loyalty.[91] According to Midrash Tanhuma her reward included the notion that "from her the Holy One raised four heroes"[92] (Goliath and his brothers). Moreover, her act of loyalty was used to explain how her son Goliath possessed enough "merit" with God to warrant the toleration of his taunting the Israelites for forty days.[93]

While the compilers of rabbinic literature are willing to praise Orpah when necessary to resolve perceived problems in the biblical text, they also engage in attacks on Orpah's character in order to explain Goliath's absolute wickedness.

As noted above in the discussion of Golaith's name, the rabbinic tradition includes the notion that Goliath's mother was a woman of poor sexual values.

This is seen very clearly in the Talmud's attempt to reconcile the traditions that Goliath's mother was known as both Orpah (ערפה) and Harafah (חרפה). In one explanation the Talmud asserts that her name was really Harafah but that she was called Orpah because all had intercourse with her from the rear (עורפין).[94] In another effort at reconciling the difference in tradition, the text asserts that Goliath's mother's name was actually Orpah but that she was also called Harafah "because all ground her like a bruised corn (הריפות),"[95] a euphemistic way of saying she had engaged in sexual intercourse with many men.

The attacks on Orpah's character are so prevalent in the rabbinic tradition that Midrash Samuel 20:4, a text that begins by praising Orpah for following Naomi for forty paces and for shedding forty tears upon their separation, asserts that on the very same

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[91] Tanh. Gen. (Buber) Wayyiggash:8.
[92] Townsend, trans., *Midrash Tanhuma (S. Buber Recension): Translated into English with Introduction, Indices, and Brief Notes*, Vol. 1. *Genesis*, 277.
[93] Tanh. Gen. (Buber) Wayyiggash:8.
[94] B. Sotah 42b.
[95] Epstein, ed., *Hebrew-English Babylonian Talmud: Sotah*, 42b.

night that she separated from her mother-in-law, Orpah had sexual intercourse with one hundred uncircumcised Philistine men and a dog, and that Goliath was the result of that evening's sexual activities.

These attacks are significant because "the sages, like the Greeks and Romans of that era, believed that the way sexual intercourse was engaged in effected the kind of child that intercourse produced."[96] Thus, by showing that Orpah's sexual activities, particularly those that led to her conception of Goliath, were of an immoral nature, the compilers of rabbinic literature are able to suggest that Goliath's wickedness was inherent to his being.

Goliath's Extended Family:

Perhaps the most important insight exposed by rabbinic literature's treatment of Goliath's family is the linking of Goliath to Orpah and thus her former sister-in-law, Ruth, who according to both the biblical[97] and rabbinic sources,[98] is the ancestress of David. By creating a connection between Goliath's ancestress and that of David, the compilers of rabbinic literature invite the reader to ponder the importance of the decisions made by two widows in the Moabite desert.[99] Ruth's decision to go forward with Naomi resulted in her joining the people Israel and accepting YHVH as her God and the God of her descendents. Orpah's decision to separate herself and watch Naomi vanish into the horizon forever placed her family in opposition to the people Israel and their God.

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[96] Abrams, *The Women of the Talmud*, 152.
[97] Ruth 4:17.
[98] Ruth Rab. (Vilna) 4:3.
[99] Ruth 1:14.

Interestingly, while the rabbinic literature only guides the reader to make this connection, the writing of Philo makes this point explicitly. In Ps. Philo 57; 61.4-8 David, immediately prior to killing Goliath, asserts

> Were not the two women, of whom thou and I were born sisters? Thy mother was Orpah, and mine was Ruth. Orpah chose for herself the gods of the Philistines, and went after them, but Ruth chose for herself the ways of the Almighty, and walked in them. And now . . . I that am born of thy kindred am come to avenge my people. For thy three brothers also shall fall into my hands after thy death.[100]

Why the compilers of rabbinic literature elected not to explicitly share this idea, an idea that clearly existed within the Jewish world prior to the redaction of most rabbinic works remains unanswered.

Biographical Conclusions:

In many ways, rabbinic literature's discussion of Goliath's name serves as an introduction to the rest of Goliath's biography. Through the use of word-play, the compilers of rabbinic literature begin to expand upon the biblical text's description of Goliath's size and strength. During their treatment of Goliath's name, word-play is also used to introduce the idea that Goliath's family, particularly his mother, was a woman of poor moral standing. Finally, the construction of Goliath's name is used as a tool to emphasize that Goliath was

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[100] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*. Vol. 2 *Bible Times and Characters From Moses in the Wilderness to Esther, Indexes*, 918.

wicked, a theme that is prevalent throughout the rabbinic materials that deal with Goliath's biography.

While word-play is used by the compilers of rabbinic literature in describing Goliath's name, comparisons and groupings are used throughout rabbinic literature to highlight Goliath's size and strength. Goliath's strength is repeatedly linked to that of Samson while Goliath's size is favorably compared to that of King Og of Bashan. Additionally, by grouping Goliath with individuals such as Haman and Korach, the compilers of rabbinic literature are able to use their treatment of Goliath's strength as a tool to highlight Goliath's wickedness.

During its treatment of Goliaths' family, rabbinic literature makes use of word-play and groupings, as well as other exegetical techniques. Together they emphasize the point that David's struggles against this evil clan were not limited to the episode described in I Samuel 17. Rather, as described by the compilers of rabbinic literature, they extended over much of David's life. This raises the possibility that Goliath and his brothers' fundamental purpose in life was to struggle against David. Moreover, these texts, particularly those dealing with Goliath's mother illustrate that Goliath's wickedness was in many ways inherent from birth as he was conceived on a night of incredibly despicable actions, even by the standards of a woman with obviously poor sexual morals.

While both these points add insight into Goliath's character, it is rabbinic literature's linking of Goliath with Orpah, and the subsequent comparison the reader can thus make between the actions of Ruth who chose to follow YHVH, and her descendent David, and the actions of Orpah, who chose not to follow the Israelite God, and her descendent Goliath, that is most instructive. By linking David and Goliath to the choices

made by Naomi and Orpah, the compilers of rabbinic literature are able to introduce the variable of "proper faith" into the story, the variable that they see as most important in determining the outcome of the battle.

Blasphemy and Belief

A Theological Explanation of History:

In his work, *The Wars of the Jews*, Josephus writes in detail about the conquest of Jerusalem by Roman forces led by Titus. He tells of the Roman use of battering rams against the walls of the city and how fire was used to demoralize the Jewish fighters, and highlights specific shield tactics employed by the Romans during their battle against the Jews of Jerusalem.[101] Josephus' writing, while clearly biased to appease his intended audience, is an early example of what today might be considered "history" as it tells how human action led to the unfolding of events. In other words, in *The War of the Jews*, Josephus explains the unfolding of events by analyzing "worldly" variables such as military techniques and soldier morale.

Like Josephus, the compilers of rabbinic literature believed that the unfolding of events in time and place could be explained by looking at an array of causes. Where they differed from their contemporary was over which causes to examine. Rabbinic theology maintained "since God is the Lord of History, whatever happens takes place with his knowledge and in accordance with the divine dispensation of justice."[102] Thus the success or defeat of Israel in a particular battle is not determined by their choice of weapon but rather their moral behavior.

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[101] Josephus, "Wars of the Jews" in *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, Vol. 2, trans. Whitson and Burder, 409-412.
[102] Pearl, *Theology in Rabbinic Stories*, 43.

This is clearly illustrated by looking at the primary rabbinic explanation for the destruction of the Second Temple by Rome in 70 C.E. Since "the sages deemed it a fact that man lived in a world in which good is rewarded and evil punished,"[103] the compilers of rabbinic literature found it necessary to explain that Israel had behaved in an evil way. This is illustrated by the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza (Gittin 55b-56a), a story about mistaken identity and the mistreatment of one Jew by another. While the story ultimately offers an explanation for the Roman siege of Jerusalem, it makes it clear that an act of baseless hatred, not military inferiority, caused the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. [104]

As was the case with the destruction of the Second Temple, the compilers of rabbinic literature found it necessary to explain the battle between David and Goliath not along military but rather moral terms. They believed "world order is best embodied when sin is punished, merit rewarded."[105] Since the story of David and Goliath results in Goliath being punished and David rewarded, the compilers of rabbinic literature concluded that Goliath must have committed a grievous sin and David a meritorious act. They explain both of these conclusions by creating a corpus of literature that shows the two primary characters relating to God in opposite ways.

Goliath Attacks God:

Goliath taunts God:

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[103] Neusner, *Rabbinic Judaism: The Theological System*, 19.
[104] Pearl, *Theology in Rabbinic Stories*, 43.
[105] Neusner, *Rabbinic Judaism: The Theological System*, 17.

I Samuel 17:16 states "The Philistine stepped forward morning and evening and took his stand for forty days."[106] As discussed above, rabbinic literature explains Goliath's ability to taunt the Israelites for this period of time by linking it to the meritorious acts of Goliath's mother, Orpah.[107] The compilers of rabbinic literature add that by "rewarding" Goliath in this world, God avoids rewarding Goliath for the merits of his ancestors in the world to come,[108] as it states, "in the case of someone wicked who performs a righteous act, the Holy One renders it unfit by giving him his reward during his life in this world in order to destroy him in the world to come."[109] While this discussion explains why Goliath was able to taunt the Israelites for such a lengthy period of time, elsewhere rabbinic literature addresses why Goliath taunted the Israelites specifically for forty days, as well as why he did so in the morning and evening.

In response to the biblical teaching that Goliath "took his stand for forty days,"[110] the rabbinic tradition asserts, in the name of Rabbi Johanan, that this period "corresponds to the forty days in which the Torah was given," [111] a teaching that is supported by the writings of Philo.[112] While neither source offers further explanation, it is possible that Goliath consciously chose the period of forty days to challenge God by suggesting that his impending defeat of the Israelites would render the revelation of Sinai irrelevant.

The idea that Goliath is challenging the Israelite God by taunting the Israelites people is supported by the rabbinic discussion of the times of day at which he came forward. The compilers of rabbinic literature explain that Goliath came out to taunt the

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[106] Jewish Publicaton Society, *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, 608.
[107] Midr. Samuel 20:4.
[108] Tanh. Gen. (Buber) Wayyiggash 8.
[109] Townsend, trans., *Midrash Tanhuma*, Vol. 1. *Genesis*, 277.
[110] 1 Sam. 17:16.
[111] I. Epstein, ed., *Hebrew-English Babylonian Talmud: Sotah*, 42b.
[112] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*. Vol. 2 *Moses to Esther*, 917.

Israelites specifically in the morning and at night so as to prevent them from reciting the *Shema,*[113] a biblical verse,[114] imbedded in the liturgy, which affirms the oneness of God.

That the compilers of rabbinic literature understand Goliath's actions in I Samuel 17:16 as an attack on God is perhaps best proven by looking at what might be considered tangential texts. For example, during a discussion of Korach and his followers, the compilers of rabbinic literature draw an analogy between Numbers 16:27, which asserts that "Dathan and Abiram had come out and they stood at the entrance of their tents, with their wives, their children, and their little ones," and the notion that Goliath "stepped forward . . . and took his stand"[115] in order to show that Korach, Dathan, and Abiram were guilty of blasphemy.[116] The use of Goliath's actions in rabbinic literature as a standard by which to determine whether or not something was an act of blasphemy suggests a wide held acceptance of the belief amongst the compilers of rabbinic literature that Goliath's actions were indeed acts of blasphemy.

Profanity and Punishment:

The compilers of rabbinic literature believe that Goliath, for the acts of blasphemy highlighted above, was punished while still alive and ultimately with the taking of his life. The biblical text makes it clear that Goliath was killed by the combination of a blow to the head and the blade of sword.[117] The compilers of rabbinic literature, however, add insight to the readers' understanding of Goliath's death by suggesting that his blasphemy played a part in the giant's demise. In a text dealing with the special vestments of the high priest, the compilers of rabbinic literature argue that each article of the priestly dress

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[113] B. Sotah 42b.
[114] Deut. 6:4.
[115] 1 Sam. 17:16.
[116] Num. Rab. (Vilna) 18:4.
[117] 1 Sam. 17:49-51.

atones for a specific sin. While it is not a unanimous opinion,[118] the midrash highlights a rabbinic tradition that teaches the forehead plate atones for blasphemy. This tradition, based on I Samuel 17:49, which reads, "the stone sank into his (Goliath's) forehead," suggests that if Goliath had not blasphemed God, his life may have ended in another way.[119]

In addition to seeing the location of the stone's blow as a sign that Goliath's death was punishment for his blasphemy, the compilers of rabbinic literature also understand the biblical assertion that Goliath fell on his face[120] as proof that Goliath's death was linked to his acts of blasphemy. In Midrash Rabbah Leviticus (Margulies) 10:7, the compilers of rabbinic literature answer the question of why Goliath fell on his face by asserting, "Let the mouth that taunted and blasphemed be put in the dust,"[121] an assertion they support with the verse, "Hide them in the dust, together, bind their faces in the hidden place."[122]

In addition to linking Goliath's death to his taunting of the people Israel and their God, the Rabbi's believe Goliath was also punished for his blasphemy while still alive.

This notion is supported by Goliath's appearance in rabbinic texts enumerating the causes of leprosy. Whether the list comprises ten[123] or eleven causes[124], Goliath is

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[118] The text also includes a tradition that the priest's forehead plate atones for the shameless, a tradition based on Jeremiah 3:3 which reads, "you had the forehead of a street woman, you refused to be ashamed."
[119] Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 10:6.
[120] 1 Sam. 17:49.
[121] Freedman and Simon, ed., *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus*, trans. Israelstam and Slotki, 131.
[122] Job 40:13.
[123] Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 17:3. The ten causes of leprosy listed are: idol worshipping, gross unchastity, bloodshed, the profanation of God's name, blasphemy of God's name, robbing the public, usurping a dignity to which one has no right, overwhelming pride, evil speech, and an evil eye. An identical list appears in the Vilna edition of this midrash, however the Margulies phrase "קלול השם" (really חילול השם) is replaced with "ברכת השם".
[124] Num. Rab. 7:5 (Vilna). The eleven causes of leprosy listed are: cursing the divine name, immorality, bloodshed, falsely ascribing fault to another, haughtiness, trespassing, lying, theft, swearing falsely,

always chosen to serve as the example of effrontery before God causing the aforementioned skin disease. That Goliath is guilty of blasphemy is often asserted without proof,[125] suggesting a widespread acceptance of this belief. When an explanation of Goliath's blashemy is offered, it is often linked to Goliath's assertion, "Choose a man for yourselves,"[126] a phrase that the compilers of rabbinic literature understand as a reference to God, as Exodus 15:3 reads "God is a man of war."[127] Elsewhere Goliath's blasphemy is proven by the I Samuel 17:36's assertion that, "He has taunted the armies of the living God."[128]

Whether Goliath's blasphemy was assumed or proven, throughout rabbinic literature it is convincingly shown that Goliath suffered from leprosy by linking the word "יסגרך" in I Samuel 17:46 to Leviticus 13:5 where the word "והסגירו" appears in reference to leprosy.[129]

The explanation rabbinic literature offers for Goliath's taunting the Israelites for forty days, both in the morning and at night, as well as the recurring use in rabbinic literature of Goliath as a paradigm for blasphemous behavior, make it clear that the compilers of rabbinic literature understood Goliath's actions as directed not only against the people Israel, but also their God.

David Trusts In God:

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profanation of God's name, idolatry. It also points out that other traditions add ill will and despising words of Torah to the list of causes.

[125] Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 17:3 and Leviticus Rab. (Margulies) 21:2.

[126] 1 Sam. 17:8.

[127] Tanh. Lev. Metsora:4. (Tanh. Lev. Buber Metsora:10).

[128] Num. Rab. (Vilna) 7:5.

[129] Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 17:3.

The Basis of Trust

While the Rabbi's emphasize Goliath's antagonistic relationship with the Israelite God, the picture they paint of David is one of a young man who has a deep and abiding faith in God. In the rabbinic literature pertaining to the story of David and Goliath, two explanations for this faith are offered, previous experience and previous prophecy.

With a clear basis in the text, the compilers of rabbinic literature assert that David's faith in God was at least in part based on previous life experience. Quoting heavily from I Samuel 17, Leviticus Rabbah (Margolies) creates a dialogue between Saul and David in which David explains to the Israelite king the basis for his confidence in battle. [130] In response to Saul's question "Who told you that you will be able to slay him?" David asserts, as he does in I Samuel 17:37, "the Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine."[131]

While rabbinic literature is able to firmly link the idea of David's faith being based on previous experience to a specific biblical verse, the second explanation, the notion that David's belief that God will aid him in battle against Goliath stems from previous prophecy, requires the compilers of rabbinic literature to employ more creative exegetical techniques, particularly the technique of linking otherwise independent biblical verses to create new understandings.

One rabbinic tradition understands David's poetic assertion "though an army besiege me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise up against me, in this will I be

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[130] Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 26:9.
[131] Freedman and Simon, ed., *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus*, trans. Israelstam and Slotki, 339.

confident"[132] to be in reference to Moses' prayer for Judah. Moses' prayer asks God to "Hear O Lord the voice of Judah and restore him to his people. Though his own hands strive for him, help him against his foes."[133] By linking these two texts the compilers of rabbinic literature suggest that David, a member of the tribe of Judah, is not only aware of Moses' prayer but believes it assures God's assistance in battle.[134]

This point is made explicit by a midrash in *Aggadat Bereshit*. This midrash divides Deuteronomy 33:7 into small sections in order to show how each part relates to David and his encounter with Goliath. This text argues that Moses' words "And this for Judah"[135] should be understood as "And this for David." Moreover, the phrase "Hear O Lord the voice of Judah" should be understood as Moses urging God to hear the voice of David as he prays for assistance before going down to fight Goliath. A similar treatment is given to the rest of the verse so that it predicts that David should return safely from his battle with Goliath and that he and Israel go into battle with זכות, "merit," superior to that of Goliath and the Philistines.[136] Perhaps most importantly, the midrash makes it clear that God intended Deuteronomy 33:7 to be a divine message addressed to David, delivered through the mouth of Moses, assuring him that he would receive divine aid in his battle against Goliath.[137]

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[132] Ps. 27:3
[133] Deut. 33:7.
[134] Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 21:2.
[135] Deut. 33:7.
[136] The discussion of merit in Agadat Genesis 41:1 is quite lengthy and gives several possibilities as to on whose merit each side enters into battle. This leads to the construction of oppositional pairs that include Avimelech and Abraham, Goliath and David, and Satan (the accusing angel) and the ministering angels. These pairings give the battle between David and Goliath not only an earthly history but also place their battle in a celestial context. The celestial context reaffirms seeing the battle between David and Goliath not as a struggle between two humans or two nations but rather between good and evil.
[137] Ag. Ber. 41:1.

Another rabbinic tradition suggests that David was confident in God's aid because his victory over the Philistine Giant had earlier come to him as a prophecy. *Tannaim Dvarim* teaches that from the time of his youth, David prophesized that he would kill a Philistine Giant named Goliath and would be responsible for building the Temple. While David's father, Jesse, responded to these predictions by labeling David contemptible, sending him off to watch the sheep, and initially keeping him from Samuel, when Samuel finally met David he understood these predictions as a sign that he was indeed the correct person to anoint as the future King of Israel.[138] It is probable that Samuel's anointing of David served to reinforce David's belief in the prophecies he made earlier.

David Relies on God:

In addition to showing that David had reason to trust in God, the compilers of rabbinic literature also make it clear that he relied on that faith during his battle with Goliath. One example of David relying on faith is that he realized it gave him an insurmountable advantage against the Philistine Giant.

According to a rabbinic teaching found in Midrash Psalms, when David first saw Goliath's size and assortment of weapons he wondered whether or not anyone could defeat the giant. David's doubt, however, was overcome when he saw Goliath blaspheming God, an act that assured David that he alone would have God on his side.[139] The importance David put on God's assistance is clear by his assertion that, "Now I shall prevail against him [Goliath], for there is no fear of the Holy One, blessed be he, in him . . . there is no fear of God before his eyes."[140]

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[138] Midr. Deut. Tannaim 1:17.
[139] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 36:2.
[140] Braude, trans., *The Midrash on Psalms*, Vol. 1, 416.

Another example from the rabbinic corpus of David acting upon his faith is the notion that he prayed to God before entering battle. That David prayed is important because according to rabbinic tradition,[141] Moses had earlier requested of God that "whenever David the king of Israel, finds himself in trouble and prays to Thee, deliver him from it."[142] Thus David's prayer was pivotal in bringing about God's assistance.

As illustrated by midrashim found in *Midrash Psalms*[143] and *Ozar Midrashim*,[144] David fulfilled this requirement by praying the words "A song of ascents: I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills: from whence shall my help come?"[145] before entering battle with Goliath. Though the details vary, both texts make it clear that God responded to David's prayer in a way that allowed David to join Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob[146] in asserting that "The Lord is for me; I will not fear."[147] What can my enemy do unto me?[148]

The importance of David acting on his faith is addressed as well in *Aggadat Bereshit* 12:1 which asserts that the nations of the world are most afraid of Israel not when they have superior weapons but when engaged in the study of Torah because that is when God's assistance is guaranteed. The compilers of rabbinic literature thus understand that David's declaration to Goliath that, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come against you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God

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[141] Sipre. Deut. Piska 348 and Midr.Deut. Tannaim 33:7.
[142] Neusner, trans., *Sifrei to Deuteronomy: An Analytical Translation.* Vol. 2, 361.
[143] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 118:9.
[144] Eisenstein, ed., Ozar *Midrashim*, Vol. 1, 135.
[145] Ps. 121:1.
[146] As will be illustrated below, grouping David with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is understood by the compilers of rabbinic literature as a way to bestow honor upon David, an honor the rabbinic tradition suggests David earned by having faith in YHVH.
[147] Ps. 118:6.
[148] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 118:9. David actually states "What can Goliath do unto me?" This follows Abraham's "What can Nimrod do unto me?," Isaac's "What can Abimelech do unto me?" and Jacob's "What can Esau do unto me?" The text's construction makes it clear that although it is taught elsewhere that David had ten enemies (Midr. Sam. 26:3), Goliath is David's primary enemy.

of the ranks of Israel, whom you have defiled"[149] as not only an illustration of David's faith and his engagement in the study of Torah, but also a declaration that insured God's intervention and Israel's victory.[150]

Elsewhere the compilers of rabbinic literuatre elucidate David's words, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come against you in the name of the Lord of Hosts"[151] by arguing that they are a fulfillment of Job's teaching, "In famine He (God) will redeem you from death, in war from the sword."[152] This understanding of the phrase emphasizes that it is God's intervention that David relies upon, not his own actions. Additionally, the compilers of rabbinic literature highlight the importance of David's words by contrasting them with Doeg's use of words not for the praise of God but for the spreading of gossip, a use that results in Doeg's exclusion from the world to come.[153]

By emphasizing David's faithfulness and all but ignoring his physical attributes and actions, the compilers of rabbinic literature make it clear that the most important thing David did during his battle with Goliath is have faith in God. This is in many ways consistent with the rabbinic construction of masculinity, a construction that emphasizes

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[149] 1 Sam. 17:45.
[150] Ag. Ber. 12:1.
[151] 1 Sam. 17:45.
[152] Job 5:20.
[153] Ag. Ber. 3:1.

faith and study over strength and physicality.[154] As Michael Satlow writes, "Torah study is constructed as the masculine activity par-excellence."[155]

The compilers of rabbinic literature apply the aforementioned notion of masculinity directly to David in Ruth Rabbah (Vilna) 4:3. By breaking apart and elucidating the phrase, "Skillful in playing, and a mighty man of valor, and a man of war, and prudent in affairs, and a comely person,"[156] The compilers of rabbinic literature make it clear that they value faith and knowledge over appearance and strength. They assert, "'Skillful in playing' refers to his knowledge of Scripture; 'and a man of war' who knows how to give and take in the contests of the Torah; 'And prudent in affairs,' in good deeds; 'and a comely person' in Talmud"[157]

David's Reward For Faithfulness:

As noted above, Goliath's attacks on God lead to him being afflicted with leprosy and ultimately to his death. In contrast, David's faith in God results in handsome rewards.

One reward for David's faithfulness is receiving credit for the victory. According to a teaching found in Midrash Psalms, [158] David fought Goliath in order to illustrate to all God's power and the power of faith. Thus he asserted, "That all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's"[159] The

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[154] Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, 8. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Boyarin highlights the idea that unlike many of the surrounding cultures, the compilers of rabbinic literature "did not regard violence as enhancing or definitional for masculinity" (Boyarin 8). Additionally, Boyarin argues that the exclusion of women was a key component in Torah scholarship becoming a dominant expression of masculinity (Boyarin 156).
[155] Satlow, "Try to Be a Man: The Rabbinic Construction of Masculinity,"*Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 89 (January 1996): 24.
[156] 1 Sam. 16:18.
[157] Freedman and Simon, ed., *Midrash Rabbah: Ruth*, trans. Rabinowitz, 51.
[158] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 36:1.
[159] 1 Sam. 17:47.

people, however, credited David with defeating the Philistine giant. David initially resisted taking credit, saying to God, "Yours, Lord, are greatness, might, splendor, triumph, and majesty."[160] In response God explained that because of David's faith he too would be given credit for the victory, as is written in Psalms "For the man of victories: for David the servant of the Lord."[161]

David also receives as a reward for his faith in God, the honor of having his name incorporated into the liturgy. Midrash Psalms teaches that just as the *Amidah* contains the phrase "shield of Abraham," the blessing after the *Haftarah* includes the phrase "shield of David."[162] This honor is explained by connecting it to David's repeated acknowledgment[163] that it was God, not he himself, who defeated the ten enemies that plagued him during his life.[164] A similar point is made by the compilers of rabbinic literature in *Midrash Shmuel* where the same logic is applied to explain the juxtaposition of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with the God of David, the builder of Jerusalem, in the *Amidah*.[165]

In addition to finding a place along side the patriarchs in the liturgy, David is rewarded by finding himself in another list including Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. According to the Rabbi's, God felt sadness in causing the death of God's five most loyal servants. This list of honor is comprised of the patriarchs, Moses, Judaism's foremost

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[160] 1 Chron. 29:11.
[161] Ps. 36:1.
[162] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 18:8.
[163] In Midr. Ps. (Buber) 18:8 the compilers of rabbinic literature argue that David acknowledged YHVH's assistance in defeating his ten enemies, a list that included Goliath and his three brothers, by praising God with ten words in one sentence (Psalm 18:2-3) and by concluding the Book of Psalms with ten hallelujah's.
[164] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 18:8.
[165] Midr. Sam. 26:3.

profit, and David. It is particularly noteworthy that the midash credits David's actions when facing Goliath as the reason for his inclusion in this illustrious list.[166]

The rabbinic corpus suggests that David not only received words of praise and a position of honor, but also material rewards for his display of faith. *Midrash Zuta Ruth* teaches that on the day David killed Goliath the people Israel sent him all the gold and silver that they possessed. Since David immediately sanctified the gold for use in the Temple, one may conclude that David saw these gifts not as a reward for his physical actions but rather for his faith.[167]

Similarly the compilers of rabbinic literature explain the placement of the Temple, located on the border of Benjamin and Judah, as a reward for David's faith and actions. Midrash Tanhuma, by reading together the story of Joseph's brothers and the story of David and Goliath, concludes that David, at his father's urging, fought the Philistine giant in order to "fulfill" a promise Judah made in reference to Benjamin, a promise to be his surety.[168] The text paints a picture of God responding to David's actions by declaring, "By your life, just has you have risked your life for Saul, since his is from the tribe of Benjamin, even as your ancestor Judah did for Benjamin . . . so I am placing the sanctuary within your territory and within the territory of Benjamin."[169] Because the same midrash also teaches that Judah and Benjamin were not sent into exile[170] with the remaining ten tribes because of the faith in God that they, along with Moses, showed at the Red Sea, it is possible to conclude that the reward given David was also related to a

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[166] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 116:6.
[167] Midr. Zuta-Ruth (Buber) 2:13
[168] Tanh. Gen. (Buber) Wayyigash:8. The link between the two stories is made by possible by reading the word "ערובתם" their token as "ערבות," surety.
[169] Townsend, trans., *Midrash Tanhuma,* Vol 1. *Genesis*, 278.
[170] This is a reference to the Assyrian Exile that affected the Northern Kingdom in 722 b.c.e.

demonstration of faith, the faith David showed in trusting that God would assist him in fulfilling Judah's pledge by rescuing Saul from Goliath.[171]

David vs. Saul:

While the compilers of rabbinic literature maintain David's faith played an important role in the physical rescue of Saul, they also understand David's faith as an illustration of David's supremacy to Saul. A supremacy based not on physical attributes, but rather spiritual correctness.

Whereas David is portrayed as not being afraid of the giant, the rabbinic tradition includes a text that tells of Saul's cowardice before the giant. In elucidation of the phrase "A Benjaminite ran from the battlefield and reached Shiloh that same day, his clothes were rent and there was earth on his head"[172] the compilers of rabbinic literature assert that the "Benjaminite" refers to Saul. Although the rabbinic tradition contains a difference of opinion as to whether he ran sixty, one hundred twenty, or one hundred eighty miles, the compilers of rabbinic literature agree that Saul fled the battlefield in fear of Goliath, a fear so overwhelming that it motivated him to run until he reached the safety of Shiloh.[173] While not explicitly stated, Saul's fear suggests he is afflicted by a lack of trust in God, an affliction that does not plague David.

Elsewhere the compilers of rabbinic literature suggest that unlike David, who is able to recognize that his acts are not only strengthened by God but carried out for the glory of God,[174] Saul is unable to turn his concern to anyone else but himself. In a

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[171] Tanh. Gen. (Buber) Wayyigash:8.
[172] 1 Sam. 4:12.
[173] Midr. Sam. 11:1.
[174] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 118:15.

teaching that appears throughout the rabbinic corpus,[175] the compilers of rabbinic literature tell of how when David tried on Saul's armor, a man who the Bible describes as "a head taller than any of the people"[176] it fit him perfectly. While much energy is dedicated to explaining David's remarkable size,[177] something previously not indicated by the text, the compilers of rabbinic literature make it clear that the miracle of Saul's armor fitting David's is of no assistance against the Philistine giant because "when he [Saul] had clothed him [David] in his garments and seen that they were made for him, he immediately cast a jaundiced eye at him."[178] David thus returns the perfectly fitting armor to Saul in order to abate the king's jealousy. This textual tradition, with its characterization of Saul as a jealous king, testifies to the rabbinic understanding that even at a time of war, a time of great peril to the Israelite people, Saul remained primarily concerned with the continuation of his, not God's dominion.

Fighting Faith, Fighting With Faith:

The compilers of rabbinic literature believe that the question of faith played an important role in determining the outcome of the battle between David and Goliath. As the battle has a clear victor and loser, the rabbinic tradition portrays the two participants as individuals who stand on opposing poles of the spiritual world.

Goliath, the character who losses the battle, is repeatedly described as actively attacking God. As is illustrated above, the compilers of rabbinic literature suggest that

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[175] Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 26:9 and Tanh. Lev. Emor 4. (Tanh. Lev. Buber Emor 6).
[176] 1 Sam. 9:2.
[177] In both Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 26:9 and Tanh. Lev. Emor 4 (Tanh. Lev. Buber Emor 6) the compilers of rabbinic literature explain David's height by likening his position "of anointed king" to that of a High priest. According to tradition, the High priest is superior to the other priests in five categories: beauty, strength, wealth, wisdom, and age. The rabbinic tradition asserts that the same is true for a king in relation to all of his subjects. Thus when David was anointed king, he underwent a physical transformation which included growing so that he was taller than the rest of the Israelites.
[178] Freedman and Simon, ed., *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus*, trans. Israelstam and Slotki, 322.

Goliath blasphemed the Israelite God in a manner so despicable that it became the standard by which they determined whether or not others had engaged in blasphemy. Moreover, rabbinic literature teaches that Goliath taunted the Israelites at times specifically chosen so as to prevent them from worshiping their God. Goliath's attacks on God were so vicious that before being killed for this offense, the compilers of rabbinic literature explain that Goliath received the added punishment of being afflicted with leprosy

In contrast David is represented by the rabbinic tradition as an individual who has a profound faith in God. The compilers of rabbinic literature suggest that this faith began at an early age and was reinforced by several factors, including David's understanding of previous events in his life as well as prophecies dating back to Moses. In addition to explaining the origins of his faith, the compilers of rabbinic literature show how David made use of his belief in God when facing Goliath. They highlight the confidence David gained by seeing that Goliath did not fear God as well as the notion that David offered a prayer to God before entering into battle. Finally, the rabbinic corpus teaches that David was rewarded for his faith, receiving gold and a place of honor within Jewish tradition.

While the compilers of rabbinic literature explain the origins of David's faith, how David applied that faith when confronted by Goliath, and ultimately how he was rewarded for his faith, they offer no explanation of how David physically defeated Goliath. No explanation is offered because unlike the biblical telling of the story, rabbinic literature does not credit David with defeating Goliath. Instead, the rabbinic tradition expresses the belief that the physical events that led to Goliath's death were not

caused by a shepherd from Bethlehem but rather by the shepherd's God, the Creator of the world.

YHVH is a Man of War[179]

[179] Exod. 15:3.

A Contest of Champions:

Epics from the ancient Near-East and Eastern Mediterranean often depict contests of champions. In these contests "individual combat of champions was intended to obviate the necessity of a general engagement of troops which would spill more blood than necessary to resolve the dispute."[180] Homer's Iliad highlights two such contests: the battle between Menelaus and Paris,[181] and that of Hector and Ajax.[182] While additional examples of contests of champions can be found in Babylonian[183] and Hittite writings,[184] the most famous example of a contest of champions is the battle between David and Goliath depicted in I Samuel 17.

As illustrated by its handling of the David and Goliath story, rabbinic literature does not contest that the events described in I Samuel 17 unfold in a way that can be classified as a contest of champions. What Rabbinic Literature does contest is the identity of the participants. Through the exegetical reconstruction of the battle, as well as the testimony of David, the rabbinic corpus argues that the participants in the contest of champions described in I Samuel 17 are not David and Goliath, but rather God and Goliath.

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[180] Hoffner, "Hittite Analogue to the David and Goliath Contest of Champions," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly,* Vol. 30, (April 1968): 220.
[181] Iliad, Book 3.
[182] Iliad, Book 7.
[183] Hoffner, "Hittite Analogue to David and Goliath," 220. "Marduk's battle with Tiamat in *Enuma Elish* is a clear case of representative fighting."
[184] Ibid 222. In the Hitite Apology of Hattusillis III, Hattusillis writes that he personally defeated the enemy by killing one of the enemies ranks in such a way that the remainder of the enemy troops fled.

Divine Actions:

God Restrains Goliath:

While the tradition teaches that Goliath entered the battlefield without fear of God in his eyes,[185] they do not believe that his eyes were empty. Rather, Leviticus Rabbah (Margolies) 21:2 teaches that when Goliath first saw David, his eyes filled with lust and his mind turned to homosexual desire.[186] The tradition, in the name of Rabbi Judan, teaches that "he [Goliath] lusted carnally for David who was 'of beautiful eyes, and goodly to look upon.'[187] Straightway David prayed,"[188] asking God to protect him. According to Midrash Samuel 21:3, David prayed "O Lord, do not grant the desires of the wicked; do not let their plan succeed, else they be exalted."[189]

The rabbinic description of David's prayer can be understood as both an example of David's faith, something discussed above, as well as David's acknowledgment that God was the one who could control and defeat Goliath, something discussed below. Additionally, and perhaps most significantly, rabbinic literature paints a vivid picture of God responding to David's prayer, a response that not only restrains Goliath from acting upon his homosexual desires for David, but also helps facilitate Goliath's defeat.

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[185] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 36:2.
[186] Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 21:2. Goliath's homosexuality was not included in the chapter dedicated to Goliath's biography, as constructed by rabbinic literature, because for the compilers of rabbinic literature there was no such thing as a homosexual or heterosexual orientation as we understand it. "In antiquity . . . sexuality was defined by the act itself" (Artson: 6). The compilers of rabbinic literature were aware of individuals who engaged in homosexual acts but did not recognize the existence of homosexuals. "It is only in our generation that homosexual behavior had been found to involve not merely a single overt act, or series of such acts, but often to reflect a profound inner condition and basic psychic orientation involving the deepest levels of personality" (ibid).
[187] 1 Sam. 16:12.
[188] Freedman and Simon, ed., *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus*, trans. Israelstam and Slotki, 266.
[189] Ps. 140:9.

The rabbinic tradition teaches that God responded to David's request by fastening Goliath to the ground with 248 chains, one for each of Goliath's "limbs."[190] The notion that Goliath was fastened to the ground is supported by highlighting Goliath's words "Come to me."[191] The complier of the midrash understands Goliath's call for David to come to him as a sign that Goliath could no longer freely walk. The text's desire to emphasize the power of the chains to control Goliath's freedom of movement expresses itself in the description of the chains as exceptionally strong, made of iron.[192]

Origin of Leprosy:

As detailed in the previous chapter, the rabbinic literature teaches that Goliath was afflicted with leprosy and that he was beset with the skin disease as punishment for committing the sin of blasphemy. With this established, it should be noted that the compilers of rabbinic literature also engage in identifying the person or power that sent the aforementioned affliction upon the Philistine Giant.

Midrash Samuel 21:3 teaches that it was David and his words, "This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hands"[193] that were responsible for Goliath contracting leprosy. This verse is used throughout the rabbinic corpus in determining the source of Goliath's leprosy. With the exception of Midrash Samuel, however, the corpus of rabbinic literature focuses its attention not on the character who uttered the words listed above, but rather their context. This change in focus leads to the dominant rabbinic tradition being that God, not David, was responsible for afflicting Goliath with leprosy. For example, Leviticus Rabbah (Margolies) 21:2 teaches that, "He [God] smote him with

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[190] Midr. Sam. 21:3
[191] 1 Sam. 17:44.
[192] Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 21:2.
[193] 1 Sam. 17:46. How these words are linked to leprosy is discussed in detail in the previous chapter under the subheading "Profanity and Punishment."

leprosy."[194] In texts addressing the ten or eleven sins that result in the punishment of leprosy this point is made implicitly by the prolific use of biblical proof-texts that cite God as the source of leprosy.[195] For example, "My Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion,"[196] and "And the Lord set a sign for Cain."[197]

And the Stone Sank Into His Forehead:[198]

The Biblical story of David and Goliath tells of how when confronted with the approaching giant, David selected one of the five stones he had picked up earlier[199] and slung it at the giant, hitting him in the forehead so that he fell to the ground.[200] The emphasis in this telling is placed on David and his actions. The rabbinic literary corpus, however, downplays the role David's physical actions played in causing Goliath's defeat. They accomplish this by emphasizing in their retelling of this part of the story not David's skill in slinging the stone but rather the stone itself.

Midrash Psalms (Buber) 78:11 highlights a number of instances "when God gave mastery to the frail over the tough."[201] This list, credited by the tradition to Rabbi Judah, includes David's slinging a stone into Goliath's forehead. While the phrase "mastery of the frail over the tough" is unclear as to whether the "mastery" over Goliath belongs to David or the stone he used, the context of the discussion provides a clear answer. The midrash's discussion of Goliath is surrounded by examples of how animals, plants, and

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[194] Freedman and Simon, ed., *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus*, trans. Israelstam and Slotki, 266.
[195] Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 17:3, Num. Rab. (Vilna) 7:5, and Tanh. Lev. Mesora:4 (Tanh. Lev. Buber Mesora:10).
[196] Isa. 3:17.
[197] Gen. 4:4.
[198] 1 Sam. 17:49.
[199] Ibid, ibid, 40.
[200] Ibid, ibid, 48-49.
[201] Braude, trans., *The Midrash on Psalms*, Vol. 2, 30.

other parts of nature were able to gain mastery of human beings.[202] The midrash also makes it clear that it is God who empowers the elements of nature, a point made not only by the introduction to the list (when God gave mastery to the frail over the tough), but also by several of the biblical texts brought to support the included examples.[203]

Midrash Psalm (Buber) 144:1 adds support to the notion that God was in control of the stone that entered Goliath's forehead. The compilers of rabbinic literature ask rhetorically and then respond, "How could the stone have penetrated the brass [of Goliath's helmet], except for the fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, was with David."[204]

And He Fell Upon His Face To the Earth:[205]

In addition to answering how the stone could penetrate Goliath's helmet, the rabbinic tradition also sets out to resolve how and why Goliath fell on his face. The midrash compilers' understanding of physics leads them to wonder why, since the Biblical text asserts "the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell upon his face to the earth,"[206] that Goliath did not fall upon his back.[207] The resolutions offered throughout rabbinic literature imply a divine hand in the unfolding of events.

Midrash Psalms (Buber) 144:1 teaches, "Why then did the Philistine fall upon his face? Because an angel went along with the stone and deliberately threw the Philistine

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[202] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 78:11. It is noteworthy that according to Midrash Psalms 78:11, Goliath's defeat was not the first time that nature was used by God to defeat the Philistines. The midrash recalls how "the hand of the Lord . . . smote them with mice" (1 Sam. 5:6).
[203] "Moreover, the Lord they God will let loose the hornet at them" (Deut. 7:20) and "The hand of the Lord smote them with mice" (1 Sam. 5:6).
[204] Braude, trans., *The Midrash on Psalms*, Vol. 2, 358.
[205] 1 Sam. 17:49.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 18:32.

upon his face."[208] Elsewhere in rabbinic literature this tradition is repeated with the added explanation that the angel acted in the particular way so as to fulfill God's decree that those guilty of blasphemy should have their mouths stuffed with dust,[209] as it is written, "Hide them in the dust together; and bind their faces in the hidden place."[210]

In addition to burying Goliath's mouth in dust, Leviticus Rabbah (Margulies) 10:7 suggests that Goliath fell forward so that his god would be buried in the dust. The rabbinic tradition teaches that Goliath had an image of Dagon drawn upon his heart. Thus by falling forward, Goliath's death was not only a defeat and source of embarrassment for his people, but also for his god. A similar point is made by Midrash Psalms (Buber) 18:32 which suggest that Goliath fell the way he did so he could serve as a reminder of his god, Dagon's earlier defeat, as described in I Samuel.[211] Both of these explanations have great theological implications when viewed in light of the compilers of rabbinic literature's understanding that it was God, not David, who defeated the Philistine Giant.

While the majority of sources link Goliath's fall to God, there is a counter-tradition within rabbinic literature that explains Goliath's fall forward as a reward or birthright of David. Midrash Psalms (Buber) 18:32 explains that Goliath fell forward "in order that David should not be put to the least trouble, but could proceed at once to cut

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[208] Braude, trans., *The Midrash on Psalms*, Vol. 2, 358.
[209] Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 10:7. and Midr. Ps. (Buber) 18:32.
[210] Job 40:12.
[211] 1 Sam. 5:1-4. 1. When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Eben-ezer to Ashdod. 2. The Philistines took the Ark of God and brought it into the temple of Dagon and they set it up beside Dagon. 3. Early the next day, the Ashdodites found Dagon lying face down on the ground in front of the Ark of the Lord. They picked Dagon up and put him back in his place; 4. but early the next morning, Dagon was again lying prone on the ground in front of the Ark of the Lord. The head and both hands of Dagon were cut off, lying on the threshold; only Dagon's trunk was left intact.

off Goliath's head, without having to go a distance of twelve cubits and two spans."[212] In Leviticus Rabbah this explanation is repeated, however, the distance is halved,[213] failing to account for the possibility that if Goliath had not fallen forward, he would have fallen backwards, thus creating a distance two times his body length.

In addition to easing David's burden, the rabbinic corpus suggest that Goliath fell forward so that David, a descendent of Judah, could fulfill the blessing bestowed upon Judah by his father.[214] Midrash Psalms (Buber) 18:32 teaches that Judah earned the blessing "Your hand shall be on the nape of your foes"[215] by killing his uncle when Esau threatened Jacob's life. The text teaches that while Joshua prayed for his enemies' necks, it was only David, a member of the tribe of Judah, who received them.[216] It should be noted that this text, through the example of Joshua's prayer, implicitly suggests that while Goliath may have fallen forward in order to fulfill David's birthright, the ultimate course of action was decided by God.

Crediting the Divine:

David's View of Events:

Beyond showing how God played a role in the unfolding of events, rabbinic literature further develops the notion that it was God, not David, who defeated Goliath by having David himself acknowledge this reality.

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[212] Braude, trans., *The Midrash on Psalms*, Vol. 1, 266.
[213] Lev. Rab. (Margulies) 10:7.
[214] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 18:32.
[215] Gen 49:8.
[216] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 18:32.

Midrash Psalms (Buber) 131:1 teaches that David's eyes where not lofty but rather filled with humility when he slew Goliath. David explains his humility in this and other moments during life[217] as resulting from awareness that he was "like a child that is weaned from its mother."[218] This description suggests that David realized that just as an infant is dependent on its mother for food and life, so too was he dependent upon God for all that he received in life.

This idea is echoed in Midrash Psalms (Buber) 144:1. This text goes through a series of moments in David's life during which he acknowledged the role God played in the unfolding of events. Using an assortment of biblical texts, the midrash asserts that David realized that "YHVH had established him king over Israel"[219] and that God was responsible for his wealth.[220] Most germane is David's declaration that "not by my own power have I conquered; the Lord helped me and the Lord brought me victory."[221]

Midrash Psalms (Buber) 118:14 joins David with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in recognizing that although attacked by enemies, they emerged without harm because of God's aid, an aid so strong that they proudly declare "God is my strength and song."[222] The next midrash in the collection, Midrash Psalms (Buber) 118:15, groups David not only with the patriarchs but also Moses, in constructing a list of those protected by divine miracles. All of those in the list argue that they should continue living so that they can "declare the works of YHVH.[223]" David asserts, "Is it not my duty to tell the

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[217] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 131:1. Other moments identified as times when David acted with humility include when he returned the ark from the Philistines and when he had his kingship returned.
[218] Ps. 131:2.
[219] 2 Sam. 5:12.
[220] Midr. Ps. (Buber) 144:1.
[221] Braude, trans., *The Midrash on Psalms*, Vol. 2, 358.
[222] Ps. 118:14.
[223] Ibid 118:17.

miracles which were done for me in the days of Goliath?"[224] The texts' portrayal of David as having a sense of obligation to publicize God's assistance illustrates the midrashic compilers' desire for David to explicitly acknowledge that it was God who is responsible for Goliath's defeat.

Keeping David Humble:

While Numbers Rabbah (Vilna) 4:20 teaches that "David humbled himself in honor of the Holy One, blessed be he,"[225] rabbinic tradition also records moments when David appears to forget that he has been the recipient of divine assistance.

In two separate texts from Ozar Midrashim, David responds to a description of his prowess in war by becoming boastful and declaring that there is none like him in the world and there never will be. In both cases the compiler of the midrash depicts God responding to David by questioning his haughtiness and warning him that he will soon learn his true warrior aptitude. [226]

This is accomplished in both texts by God summoning a deer which David subsequently chases until finding himself lost and in trouble. Ozar Midrashim "Do Not Praise" section 8 tells of David chasing after the deer until running into Ishbi-benob, one of Goliath's brothers. Ishbibenob captures David, imprisons David and tries to kill him, once by sitting upon him and once by impaling him on a spear. Both attempts fail as David is twice saved by miracles brought about by uttering verses of scripture that acknowledge God's protective power. While the narrative's tension is resolved with Abishai rescuing David, which corresponds to the scriptural record of events,[227] the

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[224] Braude, trans., *The Midrash on Psalms*, Vol. 1, 242.
[225] Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers*, Vol. 1, trans. Slotki, 132
[226] Eisenstein, ed., *Ozar Midrashim*, Vol. 1, 83, and Eisenstein, ed., *Ozar HaMidrashim*, Vol. 1, 18.
[227] 2 Sam. 21:17.

midrash does not conclude until David acknowledges his sin of flaunting military prowess.[228]

A similar story is told by Ozar Midrashim "Goliath the Philistine" section 3. As was the case in Ozar Midrashim "Do Not Praise" section 8, David chases the deer until encountering trouble. In this text, however, David is confronted by not only Ishbi-benob but also Goliath's mother, who recognizes David as the man who killed her son. They attempt to kill David, first by crushing him and then by impaling him on a spear. While unlike the previous text David utters no verses, Ozar Midrashim "Goliath the Philistine" section 3 explicitly states that God acts to protect David, including suspending a spear in midair. As was the case in the previous text and in II Samuel 21:17, the biblical text on which this midrash is based, David is rescued by Abishai. The midrash then concludes with David returning to Jerusalem and the people Israel castigating him so that he never forgets that strength in battle is the sole property of God.

In both Otzar HaMidrashim texts, David is reminded of his own weakness and God's strength. The use of individuals closely associated with Goliath to make that point should not be seen as coincidental. Rather they serve to connect the midrash's description of David's military and physical impotence to his greatest military victory, a connection that suggests that without God's aid, none of David's military victories, including his defeat of Goliath, would have been possible.

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[228] Eisenstein, ed., *Ozar HaMidrashim*, Vol. 1, 18.

And YHVH wrought a great victory:[229]

While I Samuel 17 is commonly identified as the story of David and Goliath, the exegesis provided by the rabbinic tradition reframes the story in such a way that a more accurate title would be the battle between God and Goliath.

This reframing or reconstruction of the story is accomplished by repeatedly transferring the focus of events from the subject to the direct object. For example, the rabbinic tradition emphasizes not David's slinging of a stone at Goliath, but rather the stone itself. Similarly, as illustrated above, the emphasis in rabbinic literature is not on David speaking but rather the words he uttered. By transferring the focus to the direct object, the rabbinic tradition is able to introduce and make primary a force not explicitly active in the biblical account of events, God.

The rabbinic tradition further emphasizes God's role in the story by asserting that God is the force behind all unexplained action in the story. The tradition identifies, perhaps creates, two such moments: Goliath's call for David to approach to him[230] and the description of Goliath falling forward.[231]

Finally, the argument that God, not David was primarily responsible for Goliath's defeat is buttressed by several texts that portray David acknowledging this himself. While in the majority of these texts David makes this acknowledgment of his own volition, God's role in David's military successes is perhaps best articulated by the texts in which David is forcibly reminded of his physical impotence and God's military prowess.

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[229] 2 Sam. 23:12.
[230] 1 Sam. 17:44.
[231] Ibid, ibid, 49.

As illustrated above, the corpus of rabbinic literature views the contest of champions described in I Samuel 17 as a battle not between David and Goliath but rather God and Goliath. One may even speculate, based on the inclusion of the Philistine god Dagon in the tradition's description of Goliath's defeat, the rabbinic corpus attempts to transform the story into a battle between deities, God and Dagon.

Conclusion: Thou Shalt Not Change,

Thou Shalt Change:

My Father Was God and Didn't Know It

My father was God and didn't know it. He gave me
the Ten commandments not in thunder and not in anger,
not in fire and not in a cloud, but gently
and with love. He added caress and tender words,
"would you" and "please." And chanted "remember" and "keep"
with the same tune, and pleaded and wept quietly
between one commandment and the next: Thou shalt not
take the name of thy Lord in vain, shalt not take, not in vain,
please don't bear false witness against your neighbor.
And he hugged me tight and whispered in my ear,
Thou shalt not steal, shalt not commit adultery, shalt not kill.
And he lay the palms of his wide-open hands on my head
With the Yom Kippur blessing: Honor, love, that thy days
may be long upon this earth. And the voice of my father—
white as his hair. Then he turned his face to me one last time,
as on the day he died in my arms, and said, I would like to add
two more commandments:
the Eleventh Commandment, "Thou shalt not change,"
and the Twelfth Commandment, "Thou shalt change. You will change."
Thus spoke my father, and he turned and walked away
And disappeared into his strange distances.

Yehuda Amichai[232]

In its treatment of the story of David and Goliath, rabbinic literature observes both the eleventh and twelfth commandments described in Yehuda Amichai's poem. It simultaneously changes and doesn't change our understanding of the David and Goliath story.

When read through the lens of rabbinic texts, the David and Goliath story remains a test of champions between two forces, one good and one evil. The antagonist, as in the biblical account, is a Philistine giant named Goliath. The protagonist, motivated by a desire to defend God's honor, defeats Goliath in battle by lodging a stone in the giant's

[232] Amichai, *Open Closed Open*, trans. Bloch and Kronfeld, 58-59.

forehead. He is then handsomely rewarded for his actions and made welcome amongst Israel's leaders.[233]

While the rabbinic texts do not change the plot line of the story, they radically alter one's understanding of the narrative. In the biblical text, Goliath's dominant feature is his size, descriptions of which occupy several verses. When read through the lens of rabbinic texts, however, Goliath's dominant feature is not his size but rather his heresy, a notion that the compilers of rabbinic literature develop by suggesting that, among other things, Goliath challenged God directly to battle and did so at such times as to prevent the Israelite forces from saying the *Shema* prayer. Rabbinic literature buttresses the notion of Goliath being a heretic by linking his evil ways and rejection of God to both the circumstances of his conception and his genealogy, a genealogy that includes Orpah, who unlike her sister-in-law Ruth, turns away from both Naomi and Naomi's God, the God of the Israelites.

In addition to changing how one views Goliath, the rabbinic texts transform David from a brave young shepherd who acts independently, into a man of faith who agrees to face Goliath in a one-on-one contest of champions precisely because he knows that will not be the case. David knows that God will accompany him in battle, a factor that assures his victory. Moreover, for the compilers of the Talmud and Midrash, the indispensable act that David performs before entering battle is not the selection of stones for his sling, but rather his prayer to God.

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[233] In the biblical account David's defeat of Goliath immediately precedes the forming of his friendship with Jonathan and marriage to Michal, both children of King Saul (I Sam. 18). As illustrated above, the compilers of rabbinic literature reward explain that it is David's defeat of Goliath that merits his inclusion in the liturgy, an honor shared by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

David's prayer to God is so critical because, as the David and Goliath story is shaped by rabbinic literature, David is not the hero and champion warrior, rather those titles belong to God. God is the protagonist of the David and Goliath story. God protects David from Goliath's homosexual desires. God afflicts Goliath with leprosy. It is God's intervention that causes Goliath to disgracefully fall on his face, echoing the fate of his god, Dagon. And most importantly, God is responsible for the stone fatally lodging in Goliath's skull.

That these radical changes are made by rabbinic literature is not coincidental. The systematic reshaping of the David and Goliath story into a tale about proper belief and God's ultimate power is consistent with the ideology and theology of rabbinic Judaism. These beliefs, however, did not develop in a vacuum. Rabbinic literature's downplaying of human power, along with the simultaneous emphasis of God's role in history is in many ways a response to the historical context in which rabbinic literature developed, a context shaped by physical powerlessness and the memories of destruction and disaster that accompanied the failed Bar Kokhba revolt.[234]

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[234] Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 2. Ephraim Urbach, in his work חז"ל פרקי אמונות ודעות [The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs], illustrates that scholars who lived during and after the Bar Kokhba revolt began to explain the destruction of the Second Temple in theological rather than political language. For example, linking the destruction of the Temple to the divisions that existed amongst the people Israel, divisions that were seen as a violation of their sacred covenant with God (Urbach, חז"ל פרקי אמונות ודעות, 478).

Afterword: Changing Context, Changing Understanding:

Just as rabbinic literature's understanding of the David and Goliath story was shaped by historical context, the way that each successive generation of Jews understands the events of I Samuel 17 is shaped by the context in which they find themselves. Despite its many transformations, however, the David and Goliath story has remained a part of the religious and national discourse, a point clearly illustrated by Modern Hebrew Literature.

Although written in 1998 to mark Israel's fiftieth anniversary, Gouri's "Wellspring of Memory" reflects the experience and sentiments of his youth spent in British controlled Palestine.[235] In this short story, Gouri recalls a series of boxing matches between Israelis and a British soldier who challenges the "bloody Jews to stand up and box in a fair fight."[236]

Gouri writes that after several days of listening to the British soldier's taunts, a young Israeli named Ephraim Koitzim accepted the challenge. Although he is rewarded for his efforts with a dislocated jaw and two black eyes, Gouri, influenced by the Zionist notion of the new Jew,[237] writes that fragments of Koitzim's teeth are "preserved to this day in the museum of renewed Hebrew heroism" adding "it's better to lose a duel than to avoid it."[238]

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[235] Shaked, *Hebrew Writers: A General Directory*, 54.
[236] Gouri, "The Wellspring of Memory," *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. trans. Green, January 7, 1999, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1990_1999/1999/1/Haim%20Gouri%20-%20The%20Wellspring%20of%20Memory.
[237] The notion of a "new Jew" is developed, among many places, in the writings of Joseph Hayyim Brenner and Jacob Klatzkin. (Brenner, "Self-Criticism," *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Hurtzberg, 307-312 and Klatzkin, "Boundaries," *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Hurtzberg, 316-327).
[238] Ibid.

In the second bout the "British Goliath"[239] is defeated by an Israeli named Emil, a man whose physical description as "splendidly built, made for dealing blows" more closely resembles that of Goliath than David. Gouri praises Emil's victory, declaring that "He redeemed our sullied honor and provided moments of joy, pride, and pleasure to Tel Aviv and the Hebrew settlement in the Land of Israel."[240]

This image of national celebration, however, is contrasted by one of Gouri's literary contemporaries, Yehuda Amichai. In the wake of the Israeli War of Independence, Amichai wrote "Young David." This poem all but ignores the biblical account of the story, drawing only the notion that David took Goliath's head with him from the battlefield. "Instead the poem focuses on the period immediately following David's victory. Such a shift of focus challenges the Israeli tendency to celebrate each Israeli victory over its Arab foes as analogous to the divinely inspired victory of young David over Goliath."[241] In the poem David is unable to celebrate with the soldiers who offer him congratulatory slaps on the shoulder. Instead, deaf to their festive shouting, David finds himself holding a giant's head, unsure of what to do with it. The David of Amichai's poem wonders, perhaps "realizes that in modern times there are no more David-like heroes because the celebration of victory in the unself-conscious manner of David in biblical times is no longer possible.[242]

"Young David" written in the 1950s is an early example of the "new poets" rejection of the ideological poetry of Natan Alterman's generation, in favor of poetry that

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[239] Ibid.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Jacobson, *Does David Still Play Before You: Israeli Poetry and the Bible*, 97.
[242] Ibid.

reflects the poets "subjective, existential experience in a complex modern world."[243] This is illustrated by Amichai's attempt to express how, after fighting to establish the state of Israel and return Jews to political power for the first time in two thousand years,[244] he and many others found them selves unable to join in the national myth and euphoria permeating the infant state.

In wake of the 1967 Middle East War Ephraim Kishon, best known for writing and directing the film *Sallah Shabati,*[245] published a collection of short stories entitled *Unfair to Goliath.* In the story, from which the collection draws its name, Kishon employs imagery of Israel as David and the Arabs of Goliath to offer a satirical response to critics of Israel's prosecution of the war.[246] In contrast to Amichai who all but ignores the account found in I Samuel 17, Kishon extracts details of the biblical account and systematically reinterprets them so that one's sympathies lean toward the Philistine giant. For example, Kishon, in his sardonic commentary, understands Goliath's size and armor to be disadvantages, whereas "David enjoyed superior mobility due to the light arms at his disposal."[247] Similarly, alluding to the events leading up to the 1967 Middle East War, Kishon writes that David's attack on Goliath was unnecessary as there had been no movement between the enemy camps for forty days, going as far as to suggest "toward

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[243] Spicehandler, "Hebrew Poetry 1965-1988." *The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself.* ed. Burnshaw, Carmi, Glassman, Hirschfeld, and Spicehandler, 323. It should be noted that Haim Gouri was "singled out by the new poets as one of the most conspicuous followers of Shlonsky and Alterman" (325).
[244] Shaked, *Hebrew Writers: A General Directory*, 14.
[245] Lev-Ari, "Author and Satirist Ephraim Kishon Dies, Aged 80," *Haaretz*, January 30, 2005.
[246] During the 1967 Middle East War, the imagery of Israel as David permeated the American press. Deborah Dash Moore writes, "representations of Israeli Jews as David and their Arab enemies as Goliath form a leitmotif in news reporting during the Six-Day War" As Moore illustrates, images of Israel found throughout the American media were rooted in and influenced by earlier Zionist depictions of Jews and Israel. (Moore, "From David to Goliath: American Representations of Jews Around the Six-Day War," *The Six Day War and World Jewry*, ed. Lederhendler, 69). It should be noted, however, that in the weeks after the war, American media outlets began to shift from images of Israel as "David" showing Israel increasingly as a militant aggressor. (Ibid 77-78).
[247] Kishon, "Unfair to Goliath," *Unfair to Goliath*, trans. Goldman, 47.

the end a certain détente made itself felt which raised hope for a settlement through diplomatic action."[248] Kishon concludes "Unfair to Goliath" by writing, "Second Lieutenant Goliath, victim of brazen aggression, has entered the pages of history as a symbol of the little man facing the relentless juggernaut of war."[249] This conclusion, when read cognizant of the author's satirical tone, suggests that in the months following the 1967 Middle East War, Kishon resonated with imagery of a young, David like, Israel triumphing over Goliath sized enemies.

In recent years the state of Israel has begun to transition away from nation building. Nevertheless, the image of David and Goliath has remained a part of the cultural discourse. Its expressions, however, are more personal than national, reflecting the sentiments of a generation of authors living in a post-Zionist Israel.

In his poem "The Book," Asher Reich presents a nuanced understanding of Goliath. Cleary colored by his experience of the Palestinian uprising (intifada) of the early 1980s, Reich describes Goliath's head as being "adorned with rubber bullets like a black man's curls."[250] While Goliath remains representative of the Arabs (in this case specifically the Palestinians), Reich imbues the character with a sense of humanity, writing that "Goliath strips off his armor and goes on a lunch break/from his eternal battle with little Israel."

Moshe Benarroch, a contemporary Hebrew poet born in Morocco,[251] completely discards the early-state myth of Israel being David and the Arabs being Goliath. In his

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[248] Ibid 48-49.
[249] Ibid 51.
[250] "Asher Reich," *Poetry Magazine,* Vol 5, No. 1. (September 2000). http://www.poetrymagazine.com/archives/2000/September00/reich.htm
[251] "Moshe Benarroch," *Poetry Magazine,* Vol 4, No. 6 (June-July 2000). http://www.poetrymagazine.com/archives/2000/June-July00/benarroch.htm

poem "Self Definition" Benarroch writes, "Some days I am Goliath / Some days I am David."[252] Benarroch, a man whose biography places him on the periphery of many cultures, rejects the notion of absolutes, an idea embodied by the absolute good of David and evil of Goliath. Instead he argues for a fluid definition of self that extends no further than the individual.[253]

During the past fifty years, Modern Hebrew Literature has depicted the story of David and Goliath in a number of settings, utilizing the ancient myth to express a variety of ideas and emotions, both personal and national. These secular depictions are radically different from the explicitly religious understanding expressed in rabbinic literature's treatment of the text. That they differ, however, is not what is noteworthy. What is noteworthy is the ability of each generation of Jews to tell their own narrative through the language and imagery of the David and Goliath story.

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[252] Benarroch, Moshe. "Self Definition." *Horses and Other Doubts.*
[253] Ibid.

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