

1 Samuel 17:1-3

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/1sam/1sam-17/1-samuel-171-3/>

Israel sets their army in array against the Philistine enemy.

The *Philistines* were one of *Israel's* chief enemies. They dwelt in southern Israel along the seacoast in roughly the same area as the modern Gaza Strip. The *Philistines* are introduced in Genesis 10:14, where it indicates a connection between the *Philistines* and the “Caphtorim.” Some hypothesize that Caphtor refers to the island of Crete. Recent DNA studies show the *Philistines* to be of Aegean or Greek origin. They are believed to have been a seafaring people who came to Israel by way of Crete in the early to middle Bronze Age. Genesis 21:34 says Abraham sojourned among the *Philistines* many days. This sojourn would have been roughly a thousand years prior to the time of Saul and David.

During the battle of 1 Samuel 17 the *Philistines* gathered their armies for battle and crossed into the lands belonging to *Judah* and were gathered at *Socoh*. *Socoh* was a town in the hill country of *Judah*, meaning “bushy.” See map in the Additional Resources section. But their actual camp was located *between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim*. *Socoh*, and *Azekah* are mentioned in Joshua 15:35 as belonging to the Tribe of *Judah*. *Ephes-dammim* is only mentioned once in the Bible, in this verse, and means “boundary of blood-drops.”

Led by the first King of *Israel*, *Saul*, the men of *Israel* camped on a mountain above the valley of *Elah*. *Elah* is Hebrew for “an oak.” The *Philistines* stood on the mountain on one side while *Israel* stood on the mountain on the other side of the valley. With each army camped on a hill opposite each other and the valley between them, one could imagine the noise being amplified because the valley of *Elah* would act as a natural amphitheater. If the armies were to charge each other from those positions the bottom of the valley would become the front of the battle line. It is likely that in the brook at the bottom of the valley of *Elah* is where David will later pick his five smooth stones for ammunition in his sling.

Biblical Text

¹ Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; and they were gathered at Socoh which belongs to Judah, and they camped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. ² Saul and the men of Israel were gathered and camped in the valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array to encounter the Philistines. ³ The Philistines stood on the mountain on one side while Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with the valley between them.