

# 1 Samuel 17:12-19

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/1sam/1sam-17/1-samuel-1712-19/>

*David, a shepherd and the youngest of eight sons is sent by his father Jesse to his brothers on the battlefield with the intention of knowing their welfare.*

*David* had already been anointed as the future king of Israel by Samuel the prophet in 1 Samuel 16:13, and the Spirit of the Lord was upon *David* from that time forward. The name *David* means “beloved” and is a title of Jesus—being God’s beloved son. *Jesse* who is *David*’s father is called an *Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah*. Ephrathah is the region around *Bethlehem*. *Bethlehem* means “house of bread” and was where the Messiah was prophesied to be born (Micah 5:2). Roughly a thousand years later, Jesus will be born in Bethlehem as a descendent of David, and heir to his throne (Matthew 1:1, 17). He will be born in the “house of bread” and become the “Bread of Life” (John 6:35).

*Judah* was *David*’s tribe, in which *Bethlehem* was located. *David* was one of *eight sons* of *Jesse*. The Bible says that *Jesse* was *old in the days of Saul, advanced in years among men*. *David*, being the last son of *eight*, was apparently born when *Jesse* was older, for now he is *advanced in years*.

*Jesse*’s three oldest sons had gone after *Saul* in battle, and were currently with *Saul* at the *Valley of Elah* in battle array against the *Philistines*. The *Valley of Elah* is about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem. The names of *Jesse*’s three oldest sons were *Eliab the firstborn, and the second to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah*. *David*, being the youngest, would at times be called to assist *Saul* and the army and then would return home to tend his father’s flock at *Bethlehem*. Now the three oldest brothers followed *Saul* fighting battles and protecting Israel. This was predicted in 1 Samuel 8:11-12 when Samuel warned the Israelites that if they crowned a king like the other nations, the king would enlist their sons to follow him in battle.

During the next *forty days* Goliath came forward morning and evening and took his stand shouting his demoralizing words to the *men of Israel*. The number *forty* in the Bible signifies testing. Israel spent *forty* years in the wilderness, where they were tested, so they could learn that man does not live by bread alone (Deuteronomy 8:2-3). Jesus was tested after He spent *forty* days in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-2).

*Jesse* instructs *David* his son, “Take now for your brothers an *ephah* of this roasted grain and these ten loaves and run to the camp to your brothers.” An *ephah* was an ancient measurement that might have been roughly *forty* pounds of wheat. *David* would have traveled about twenty-five miles to get to the *Valley of Elah* from *Bethlehem*, so he might have led a donkey to carry the bag of roasted grain and ten loaves of bread and *cheese*. That would have been about a one-day journey. This would indicate that the primary source of food for the army was coming from the families of the soldiers.

In addition to sending grain and bread for his *brothers*, *Jesse* told *David*, “Bring also these ten cuts of cheese to the commander of their thousand.” This might have been custom, to provide for the *commanders* as well as the soldiers. And it might have been shrewdness on the part of *Jesse*, to gain favor for his *sons*. This also tells us that the army was divided into units of a *thousand* men. *Jesse* further instructed *David* to “look into the welfare of your brothers and bring back news of them. For Saul and they and all the men of Israel are in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.”

Not only was *Jesse* providing for his sons, but he was also understandably eager for their *welfare*, and desired to hear *news* of their fortunes. He did not seem to have any concern for *David’s* safety. This could be due to many factors, including his knowledge of *David’s* expertise and success in the wilderness.

### **Biblical Text**

<sup>12</sup> Now David was the son of the Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, whose name was Jesse, and he had eight sons. And Jesse was old in the days of Saul, advanced *in years* among men. <sup>13</sup> The three older sons of Jesse had gone after Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and the second to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. <sup>14</sup> David was the youngest. Now the three oldest followed Saul, <sup>15</sup> but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father’s flock at Bethlehem. <sup>16</sup> The Philistine came forward morning and evening for forty days and took his stand. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesse said to David his son, “Take now for your brothers an ephah of this roasted grain and these ten loaves and run to the camp to your brothers. <sup>18</sup> Bring also these ten cuts of cheese to the commander of *their* thousand, and look into the welfare of your brothers, and bring back news of them. <sup>19</sup> For Saul and they and all the men of Israel are in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.”