1 Samuel 17:45 *His Name Is… The God of Angel Armies*

***Google Star***We are in a series called “His Name Is…” As we approach Christmas, we are looking at some of the names given to God in the Bible to learn what they reveal about God’s nature and character. Our anchor verse is **Psalm 9:10**, which says:

Those who know your name will trust in you.

That’s our goal: to trust in God more. To put our hope and faith and confidence in God.

And the name we are going to look at today is **Jehovah Sabaoth**. This is a very common name for God in the Bible, occurring almost 300 times. In Martin Luther’s great Reformation hymn, *A Mighty Fortress*, he includes this name of God—untranslated—in the second verse. **It goes like this:**

Did we in our own strength confide,

Our striving would be losing

Were not the right man on our side

The man of God’s own choosing.

Dost ask who that may be?

Christ Jesus it is He—Lord Sabaoth His name,

From age to age the same

And He must win the battle.

So, what does it mean? **Sabaoth** is a word that means “armies” or “hosts’ or “battle lines.” In the NIV this name of God is usually translated as **“LORD Almighty.”** In the King James Version, it is translated as **“LORD of Hosts.”** And in Eugene Peterson’s translation, it is “**God-of-the-Angel-Armies.”**

Fun story: as I was preparing this message, I wanted to make sure I had the Hebrew name right. So I went to Google, and typed in “God of Angel Armies.” Most of the results that came back had to do with the song we just sang, written by Chris Tomlin. But there on the first page, about 8 or 9 entries down, I noticed a reference to the Spencer Daily Reporter. I clicked on it, and what came back was a pastor’s column I had written back in March of 2013.

Now, I don’t know a ton about how Google works, but I figured they knew my location and knew my search habits and so they boosted that column a little bit. So I went over to Eric’s office, and asked him to do a Google search, and sure enough, there was my column, about 8th on the results. So we figured, Google knows our location. So I texted a friend who lives in Des Moines, and I asked him to Google “God of Angel Armies” and share the results. And sure enough, after about 7 links to the Chris Tomlin song, there was my article from the Daily Reporter.

So, I’m still not sure if people on the West Coast or in Europe or elsewhere would get the same results, but based on my limited research it would appear that Google considers me the second leading expert on “God of Angel Armies” after Chris Tomlin.

Anyway, the point of that Pastor’s Column, which I wrote shortly after the Chris Tomlin song first came out, is that this name of God says something about His unlimited resources. Not just the commander of angelic armies, this name of God implies that all of the forces of the universe are at His beck and call: the stars in the sky, the waves of the ocean, the sand in the desert… it all answers to His voice.

***1 Samuel 17:45***

Our text today, to get at the meaning of this name, is 1 Samuel 17:45. It’s part of the story of David and Goliath. **Here’s what it says:**

**45**David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

“The name of the LORD Almighty” is Jehovah Sabaoth. God of angel armies. And the question that we need to ask, as we look at this familiar story, is: Do we leave room for God to work? Or do we live as though He is not there?

I know you are all pretty familiar with the David and Goliath story, but I want to go over it again. It covers all of 1 Samuel 17. I’ll hit the highlights. We are going to learn three things about what happens when God goes to work.

***A Defiant Enemy***

First, when God goes to work, **no enemy is too strong.**

So, you know the story. The armies of Israel are mustered for battle against their perpetual enemies, the Philistines. The two armies oppose each other on two sides of the Valley of Elah. And every day, giant named Goliath would come out of the Philistine camp and challenge the Israelites to send a man to fight him one-on-one. **Verses 4-7:**

4 A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. 5 He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; 6 on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. 7 His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him.

This description—which is probably the most detailed physical description given of any individual in all of scripture—is designed to convey two things to us: Goliath is frightfully huge and he is well-equipped.

At over nine feet tall, he’s truly a giant. That’s over a foot and a half taller than Shaquille O’Neal. The armor he is wearing weighs in at 125 pounds. Can you imagine trying to walk around with that draped over you, let alone fighting with it on?

Plus, his weaponry is the latest in Philistine armaments. His spear is tipped in iron—a reminder that the Philistines knew how to work with iron and the Israelites didn’t. It was the Philistines’ one great advantage over Israel and they kept the secret carefully. In fact, back in 1 Samuel 13 we’re told that there wasn’t a blacksmith in all of Israel and the only Israelites to own a sword or a spear were King Saul and his son Jonathan.

So, Goliath is huge and well-equipped and he obviously knows his way around a battlefield. And his challenge is for the Israelites to choose their own champion, who will come out and fight him in single combat. His terms are, if he wins, then the Israelites will lay down their arms; and if the Israelite win, the Philistines will lay down theirs. There is some evidence that this was an idea that was often taken into ancient battles—the idea that by having two representatives fight, the issue could be settled without the need for excessive bloodshed. Whether it ever really worked out that way—that is, whether there was ever an army that was willing to surrender just because their champion was defeated—is a little less clear.

Here's a taste of Goliath’s challenge, **verses 10-11:**

10 Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." 11 On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

A couple of things: the inclusion of Saul’s name is not accidental. Saul is the King of Israel and if anyone should serve as Israel’s champion, it’s Saul. The most noteworthy thing about Saul is that he stood at least a head taller than any other man in Israel. Remember, he’s the only Israelite with access to iron weaponry. He should fight for Israel. But he’s quaking in his boots.

The other thing I want you to notice is what is missing. There’s no reference to God here. No room for God in this picture. Goliath spares no thought for God, as far as he’s concerned might makes right. And the Israelites forget to factor God in as well, they don’t get how awful it is to have somebody insulting and taunting and lording it over *God’s people.*

And yet, that’s the most important part of this story. This isn’t a story about finding the courage to face your biggest obstacles. This isn’t about God helping you to pass that big test or get out of debt. This is a story about God defiance. About a giant who is an enemy of God.

In the whole story, only David understands that. In **verse 26** he says:

26 David asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

David gets how awful this is. It’s a disgrace. Goliath is not just challenging the armies of Israel, He’s mocking the living God.

Yes, Goliath is big and tough and mean. No, there is no way any Israelite soldier can stand against him in hand-to-hand combat. But he is defying God and therefore He has to go. God is going to do something about him.

***The Little Brother***So now, let’s talk about David a little bit. The second thing we need to know is that when God goes to work, **no weapon is too weak.**

David is the youngest of 8 boys born to a man named Jesse, from the town of Bethlehem. David was introduced a chapter earlier in the Bible when he was secretly anointed to become the next king of Israel. But the main thing that stands out about David in that story is that he is small, young, and—in the eyes of his own family—not likely to amount to much.

The same theme emerges here. Because while David’s older brothers are a part of the front lines of Israelite troops, David has been kept at home with his father to tend the sheep. Jesse would use him as an errand boy, occasionally sending him with a lunch to check on his brothers and bring back news of the war. But even then, his brothers can’t help but see him as an annoying little pest, one who is too young and immature to understand the big issues at stake here.

And yet, when Goliath comes out to roar his challenge, it is David’s older brothers and all the rest of the Israelite soldiers running in fear, while David alone is willing to stand up to him.

David gets that there is a lot at stake here. Goliath’s perspective is one in which all there is in this world is what you can see. So in his mind, might makes right. You do what you have to do to get ahead. Survival of the fittest. And the Israelites have bought in to his perspective. So they cower in fear.

But David believes in a Living God, and if there is really a living God then things should be different. There’s a moral code and rules for behavior. You don’t get to just bully people around. And if there’s a living God, then His chosen people shouldn’t have to cower in fear. They should be confident. Victorious.

There’s a lot at stake here. This is a battle of unbelief verses belief.

So David goes to Saul. **Verses 32-33:**

32 David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." 33 Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth."

Saul sees David the way everybody else does. He’s just a kid. He’s weak. He has no chance against someone as big and experienced as Goliath.

But Saul is leaving God out. And he doesn’t get that God loves to work though jars of clay. In fact, it is through the unlikeliest of candidates that God most likes to show his strength.

So David tells some stories from his sheep herding days. He’s already faced down a lion and a bear. The God who protected him then will surely protect him against this God-defying giant. **Verses 36-37**:

36 Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. 37 The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

But still, Saul can’t quite trust God to work this all out. So he tries to outfit David with his own armor and equipment (yet another reminder that maybe it is Saul himself who should be fighting on Israel’s behalf.) But the armor is just too big, the sword just too unwieldy.

In the end, David decides to go into battle with the tools of a shepherd: a simple staff in one hand, a leather sling in the other, and five smooth stones in his bag. The outcome of this battle will not come down to equipment, it will come down to faith in a God who is in control.

***The Confrontation***

Now we can see the third thing: when God goes to work, **no battle is too big**.

When Goliath gets a look at the champion Israel is sending out, he’s not happy. “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” “Come here,” he says, “and I’ll giver your flesh to the birds!”

As far as Goliath is concerned, this is an insult. He believes he is the best, he wants to fight the best. So he is coarse, gruff, just plain mean. Again, he can’t see beyond appearances. **Verse 45**:

45 David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

There’s our name. Jehovah Sabaoth. The God of Angel Armies. The Lord of Hosts. The Lord Almighty. David has more than just the tools of a shepherd, he has the resources heaven’s **armies at his back.**

46 This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. 47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

Here’s the point. Here’s what this whole story is about. “Today the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.” This is what God wants. He wants to be known. He wants to be recognized. He wants to be honored and acknowledged and worshipped.

And that hasn’t been happening. Not with the Philistines. Not with the Israelites. Not with Saul.

Nobody has factored God in. Nobody has wondered what He thought about their battle.

They’ve all overlooked Him. They’ve all forgotten Him.

But not David. David is God’s champion. He sees what is going on, and he sees what God wants. So he walks out to face that giant and to teach the whole world a lesson. He knows God is going to win this battle for him. He knows that today people will understand there is more to this world than just what you can see.

So now, it all happens in an instant. The Philistine moves, David runs, the stone comes out of the bag, the sling is in his hand, the stone is in the air, and then Goliath is down. GOLIATH IS DOWN! David sprints over, grabs the giant’s sword and—irony of ironies, killed by his own weapon—he cuts off the giant’s head.

It’s all pretty gruesome and violent and bloody. The Philistines forget the earlier agreement that they would surrender if Goliath lost—who could imagine that Goliath would lose?—and they turn and flee. The Israelites, suddenly courageous, rush after them and the rout is on.

David actually keeps the giant’s head. It’s kind of a warning: this is what happens when you defy God. It’s also a pretty cool—if gross—souvenir. Imagine the conversation with his dad:

“Hey Dad, I’m back from the front lines.” “Cool, did you bring back anything interesting?” “Nah, not much. Just this giant’s head.”

The point here, as David said in verse 47, is that the battle belongs to the Lord. His strength is made perfect in our weakness. No enemy is too strong. No weapon is too weak. When the God of Angel Armies goes to work, nothing can stand in His way.

***The Lesson***

Now, what’s the lesson? What do we learn from this story?

Well, one thing you need to know is that there isn’t a single miracle in the David stories. Some might argue that this was a miracle—a boy beating a giant—but it’s not. A miracle, by definition, defies explanation by the known laws of nature. This doesn’t. Any expert in ballistic science would be able to explain how a single stone thrown with enough force could bring down a grown man. It’s not a miracle.

And yet, it is obvious that God is at work here. David knew it, and we know it. The battle is the Lord’s. David has triumphed not because his weapon was technologically superior, but because he came onto the field of battle in the name of the God of Angel Armies.

This story is about how you see the world, and what role you assign to God in it.

So many people today adopt the **perspective of Goliath**—that all there is to this world is what can be seen. They allow no room for God. They convince themselves that God does not exist.

What happens when you adopt this perspective?

Well, for some, it leads to **reckless indifference**. This is the attitude of Goliath and the Philistines. Might make rights. Do whatever works, whatever feels good, whatever it takes to get ahead. There’s no moral code, no Creator God, no one to judge you in the end. We see so many in our world who only look out for themselves. And we see the devastation and hurt they leave in their wake.

For others, this “live only by what you can see” perspective leads to **uncontrollable fear**. This is what happened to the Israelites. You can see that the world is an obviously dangerous place, that there are a lot of people and things that can hurt you. And so you withdraw. You try to get away. You build elaborate, legalistic boundaries to try to protect yourself from the big, bad world. This is what happens to so many people within the church. They believe in God, but they don’t really believe He is at work in the world. And so they cower in fear.

And then, for still others, a world that is limited to only what can be seen leads to **prideful self-help**. This is what Saul tried to do when he attempted to pass on his armor to David. It’s the idea that we have to make the world better on our own. It’s our therapeutic culture with its blind faith in technology and psychology and experts. It’s the notion that if we just try hard enough, we can make this world a better place.

That’s the perspective of Goliath. A perspective that leaves God out of the equation.

Or, we can approach the world from the **perspective of David**. A perspective that sees that God is active in the world. That God judges and saves and wins battles. That He wants His name honored and glorified.

David’s perspective allows us to approach the world with **God Reliance**. David’s perspective allows us to take enormous risks, to battle Goliaths. Knowing that no matter how strong the enemy—whether it is poverty or AIDs or unbelief or sin--and knowing that no matter how weak our weapons, the battle belongs to the Lord. The God of Angel Armies has more than enough resources.

And so, we have to ask ourselves: whose perspective will we take out into life with us? Will we allow the doubters and the unbelievers to force on us the perspective of Goliath? Or will we run with David from the perspective of faith?

***Angel Army, Deployed***So, where’s Christmas in this?

Well, bear with me, we’re going to have to make a bit of a leap of imagination. David Stone, of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, paints this picture: <https://www.southeastchristian.org/sermons/hello-my-name-is/god-of-heaven-s-armies/>

He says, as big as the battle David fought verses Goliath seemed at the time, it was nothing compared to the battle God’s armies were preparing to fight over David’s hometown of Bethlehem several centuries later.

You need to imagine the armies of God, poised and ready. Picture them assembled on the heavenly launch pad, leaning forward, trembling with anticipation. A rumor has passed through the ranks that tonight is the night that God is going to invade. That He is going to show up on earth and address humanity’s problems. So the angel armies are ready. They are simply waiting for the supreme commander-in-chief to whisper the word, to give the signal that it is time to attack.

But instead, the God of Heaven’s Armies looks at them and says: “Your combat services will not be needed, at least not today.” Because on this mission where God will infiltrate the earth, he says to them, “I already have all that I need. The seed was planted inside of a virgin some 9 months ago. And a baby is about to be born. He’ll be born in a stable in Bethlehem.”

The angel armies can hardly believe their ears. What a strange way to save the world! This baby, is this the display of power that the Lord of Hosts has chosen?

But what they may not realize is that at that particular time, God’s power was not what was needed. God’s presence was what was needed.

The enemy was strong. Sin had reigned over humanity since the days of Adam and Eve with no potent remedy. Read Revelation 12 to get a picture of this cosmic battle. The enemy is pictured as an enormous red dragon with seven heads and a tail that sweeps stars out of the sky. It’s ravenous, and it consumes all in its path.

The God of angel armies is getting ready to fight His biggest battle, and He chooses to use His smallest weapon—a weapon that can only be described as weak, at best. A baby! A crying, squirming, sleeping, baby.

And that is God’s plan.

And so, when God commands His angel armies to deploy on this night, it is not to fight, but to sing. He sends them into the skies over Bethlehem to make an announcement to a bunch of lowly shepherds that this birth, this baby, is the hope of the world. They deploy to announce that the **promise of the prophet Isaiah** has been fulfilled:

**6**For to us a child is born,  
    to us a son is given,  
    and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
    Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
    Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
**7**Of the greatness of his government and peace  
    there will be no end.  
He will reign on David’s throne  
    and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
    with justice and righteousness  
    from that time on and forever.

That’s a great promise, filled with hope.

It’s also an enormous burden to put on the shoulders of a newborn baby.

So how is it going to happen? How will it come about? **There’s one more line to the prophecy**:

The zeal of the Lord Almighty  
    will accomplish this.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty. That name of God is, you guessed it, Jehovah Sabaoth. The Lord of Hosts. The God of Angel Armies.

God is at work in the world. God commands the resources of heaven. And when the battle was the biggest, and the enemy was the strongest, God came at his weakest so that—in His S on—he could take on death and sin and win the battle.

God is at work in the world. Do you leave room for Him to work in your life? Do you believe that the God of Angel Armies is on your side?