

Goliath's Height

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It is true that a Dead Sea Scroll document (4QSam-b) has 4 cubits and a span (approx. equivalent to 6.5 feet) for Goliath's height, while 1 Samuel 17:4 reads 6 cubits and a span (approx. equivalent to 9.5 feet). Since some scholars approach the Scriptures with the hermeneutics of doubt, some have questioned its accuracy regarding the height of Goliath for a long time. With 4QSam-b they feel their doubt has been vindicated and leap at the opportunity to point out the apparent discrepancy. The reduction of Goliath's height in 4QSam-b, when carefully examined, appears to be a deliberate alteration, not the reflection of an original reading nor even a scribal slip of the pen. When one takes into account the description of Goliath's weapons, the biblical text's reading makes more sense. In 1 Samuel 17:5 the weight of his bronze armor made of chainlink mail was 5000 shekels (approx. equivalent to 126 pounds). In verse 7 the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam and the blade alone was made of 600 shekels of iron (approx. equivalent to 15 pounds).

Consider also the fact that King Saul, who stood head and shoulders above other men (1 Sam 9:2; 10:23), was probably close to 6.5 feet in height himself. Therefore, it is really peculiar that Saul's men would be retreating from before Goliath in such fear (1 Sam 17:24), if he was just a man like Saul. Saul was not adverse to battle—he eventually died in battle. The women sang about Saul having slain his thousands (1 Sam 18:7). If Goliath put such fear into the Israelites and was such a champion of the Philistines at a mere 6.5 feet in height, why wouldn't Saul take the field against him and create the same kind of fear in the Philistine army? A height of 9.5 feet makes a lot more sense in the overall context than 6.5 feet.

When the scribe of 4QSam-b changed the height to 4 cubits and a span instead of 6 cubits and a span, it was a clumsy attempt to express his own hermeneutics of doubt. The idea might have come to him via the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), produced by heretical Jews in Alexandria, Egypt about 250 years before Christ. The Septuagint also reads "4 cubits." To make such a change believable, the translators of the Septuagint and the scribe of 4QSam-b needed to alter much, much more of the story—but they did not. The Dead Sea Scrolls were not produced by orthodox Jewish believers. They were members of a cult living outside the normal Jewish circles and were generally ostracized by the Jews of their day as extremists living in a commune near the Dead Sea. They were not always accurate or careful in the way they copied the biblical texts and their commentaries on biblical books reveal extreme interpretations far afield of what the text says (e.g., the Messiah would not be superior to angels; in fact, they believe that there would be two Messiahs). The Great Scroll of Isaiah has sections in it where up to eight words at a time were accidentally omitted and reinserted by another scribe (a different style of script is clear) between the lines and then down the margins (as at Isa 40:7-8). That jewel of the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit (the complete book of Isaiah) was never considered worthy of being used in synagogue worship because of its many mistakes—witness the fact that the four dots indicating where the sacred name of God (Yahweh) should be inserted in Isa 40:7 are still there without the four letters of the divine name being written. As with any synagogue scroll that

is unfit due to inaccuracies or damage, it was not burned and destroyed, but was given an honorable “burial”—just like the many scroll fragments found in the *geniza* of the synagogue in Cairo, Egypt, that date back to around A.D. 850. It was wrapped in linen, like a corpse. It was placed within a jar and the lid was sealed with pitch (so that it would not be opened) and placed in Cave 1 at Qumran. Why would anyone be willing to accept without careful and detailed examination, any reading from discarded scrolls that differs from the Hebrew text as we have it with all of its weight of evidence to support it? If one reads the text with the hermeneutics of doubt or suspicion, he is willing to accept anything that even gives a hint of feeding his doubt. It was what happened at Alexandria. It occurred at Qumran. And, it is still occurring today.