

How Old Was David When He Fought The Giant?

The story of David and Goliath is an encouraging to anyone to people of all ages, young and old. There are pictures of him as a little child fighting Goliath and as a young man, but which one is right? What was David's age when he fought Goliath?

David Was Under 20

Numbers 1:3 – “From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies.”

[twenty years old and upward] – Keep in mind that all of David's brothers were fighting in the army, but David wasn't. All males 20 and up fought in Israel's army. From this, we can see that David was under 20 years old because he wasn't in the army.

David Was Called a “Valiant Man of War”

In 1 Samuel 16, David was anointed and called the youngest of all Jesse's sons. However, in just in a few verses later, before he fought Goliath as “a youth”, he was called a man. Check this out:

1 Samuel 16:18 – “Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD is with him.”

[a valiant man] – Understand that these 2 stories of 1Sam 16 and 1Sam 17 are not in chronological order. David wasn't a man of war until after he fought Goliath. Infact, before David fought Goliath, he didn't have any war experience. So, chronologically, David was anointed, he fought the giant, and then this story happened where he played the harp for Saul in 1Sam 16. This makes more sense if you look at 1 Samuel 17:55-56.

David Was Called a Youth

1 Samuel 17:55-56 – “And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son is this youth? And Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell. And the king said, Enquire thou whose son the stripling is.”

[whose son is this youth?] – If David had been playing harp for Saul that whole time, of course Saul would have known who David was, and his right hand man Abner (who would have checked David's background for Saul's safety) would have as well. This also explains why he was called a mighty man of war at that time and a youth later. The reason why the author did not put the story in chronological order was to compare how the Holy Spirit left Saul and came onto David after his anointing (1Sam 16). David was anointed and the Holy Spirit came on him, Saul disobeyed God and the Spirit left him.

[this youth] – H5288: a boy from the age of infancy to adolescence.

[stripling] – H5958: a young man, a lad.

1 Samuel 17:33 – “And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.”

[though art but a youth] – This same word for youth H5288 was applied to Ishmael when he was made to leave Abraham, somewhere between age 16-19. Abraham conceived Ishmael when he was 86 (Gen 16:16), conceived Isaac when he was 100 (Gen 21:5), and when Isaac was weaned (Gen 21:8), which was probably 2 years after he was born, Abraham made Ishmael leave (Gen 21:14). That would at least make Ishmael 16 or older. David was probably about the same age. It can be assumed that neither Ishmael nor David were old enough to grow a beard.

David's Age

Jessee had 8 sons (1 Sam 18:12). The oldest 3 were 20 years old and older according to Numbers 1:3. At the youngest, the 3 oldest sons would have been 22, 21, and 20 (unless they were triplets and all 20 years old). The 4th oldest son didn't serve in the army, which means at the oldest, he would have to be 19. That leaves the 5 sons who didn't join the military to be 19, 18, 17, 16, and 15 assuming that David's mother had 1 son a year. It's also a possibility that David had elder twin brothers, which would potentially make him older than 15.