WHO KILLED GOLIATH?

Who killed Goliath? Every kid who ever knocked over a can with a slingshot knows the answer to that one. David killed Goliath.

David the shepherd boy met the nine-foot tall Philistine giant one-on-one. He K.O.ed Goliath with a single well-aimed stone from his sling, borrowed his opponent's sword and chopped off his head.

The story is told in greater detail in 1 Samuel 17 (or 1 Kings 17 in some Bibles). The Philistines and the Israelites were at a standoff.

Their armies had pitched their camps on two opposing mountains. Once or twice a day the enemy giant would saunter into the valley and challenge any Israelite hero to fight him.

None of the Israelite solders were foolish enough to take the bet. Who would fight a brass-plated giant whose spear was the size of a mini-telephone pole? For six or seven weeks they played out the same charade.

Then young David arrived in camp. Three of his big brothers were serving in the Israelite infantry.

Their father had excused David from his sheep-tending chores long enough to take a sack of cheese sandwiches to the front line. And to bring back some news from his soldier boys.

As luck would have it, Goliath put on his act while David was in camp. And David reacted like any idealistic youth whose God and country have been insulted.

He finagled the king's permission to accept the giant's dare. And the rest is history.

So back to the original question: Who killed Goliath. The answer is cut and dried: David killed Goliath.

Except that at another spot in the Jewish scriptures there's another answer. Check out 2 Samuel 21:19 (or 2 Kings 21:19 in some Bibles). It's part of a series of appendices tacked onto the end of the book.

According to this verse, a fellow named "Elhanan the son of Jaareoregim" is credited with killing Goliath the giant with the over-size spear.

And just to confuse the issue a little more, try glancing at 1 Chronicles 20:5, a near dupli-cate of the verse in 2 Samuel 21. But with one significant difference: 1 Chronicles says that Elhanan the son of Jair killed "Lahmi the brother of Goliath."

All of this adds up to a fascinating puzzle. Who killed Goliath? David, as the main story has always had it? Or Elhanan, as the note in the appendix to 2 Samuel has it? Or did Elhanan kill Goliath's brother, not Goliath himself, as 1 Chronicles suggests?

This is the sort of nit-picking that keeps Bible scholars on their toes. The variety of imaginative answers they have proposed is, well, imaginative.

Perhaps this is a case where one or the other passage in the Bible is mistaken. Perhaps there were two Philistine giants, one killed by David when he was a teen-ager and the other by his lieutenant some years later.

Perhaps somewhere over the centuries the words "the brother of" slipped out of the text of 2 Samuel 21, but were retained at the proper spot in 1 Chronicles 20. Perhaps David had gone under the name of Elhanan at some stage of his career.

Or perhaps this riddle will never be solved to everyone's complete satisfaction.

In any event, it's one of those little quirks which make reading the biblical documents such fun. Just about the time you think you have everything figured out, you find a fly in the ointment.

So figure it out for yourself: Who killed Goliath?

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