

ELAH VALLEY

The account of David's crushing the Philistines' confidence by slaying the great warrior Goliath with a single sling stone has inspired believers for millennia. It begins,

Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Socoh in Judah. They pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Socoh and Azekah. Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them (1 Sam. 17:1-3).



The Valley of Elah

Since the sites of Azekah and Socoh are known, we can positively identify the location of this battle, which took place about 25 miles west-southwest of Jerusalem and about 5 miles south of Beth Shemesh. Azekah and Socoh are also mentioned together in the tribal allotment given to Judah (Josh. 15:35). Azekah was later fortified by Rehoboam early in the period of the divided kingdom (2 Chron. 11:5-12). It, along with Lachish, was one of the last cities left standing before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (Jer. 34:7). Socoh was located on a

hill east of Azekah, and the Elah Valley was between them. Initial survey work at Socoh has revealed pottery from various periods as well as some iron slag. Near the base of the hill, one can see an old well which may be “Samson’s well at Socoh” (see Jerome *Letters* 108.14). Judges 15:14-19 reveals that Samson killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey. Afterward, when he cried out in thirst, God satisfied him by opening a hollow place in the rock where water poured out.

Other sites in the vicinity of Elah Valley include the Brook Elah, from which David gathered the five smooth stones in preparation for his battle with Goliath (1 Sam. 17:40). There is also Adullam, where David once hid in a cave (1 Sam. 22:1). Located between the ancient sites of Azekah and Socoh, the ruins of Qeiyafa overlook the Elah Valley. Located about 6.5 miles east of the Philistine city of Gath, Qeiyafa was a fortified border town between the hostile kingdoms of Philistia and Israel. At this site, archaeologists have found the ruins of a casemate wall as well as *two* four-chambered gates—a unique and surprising feature. These fortifications date back to the time of David and Solomon (10th century B.C.).