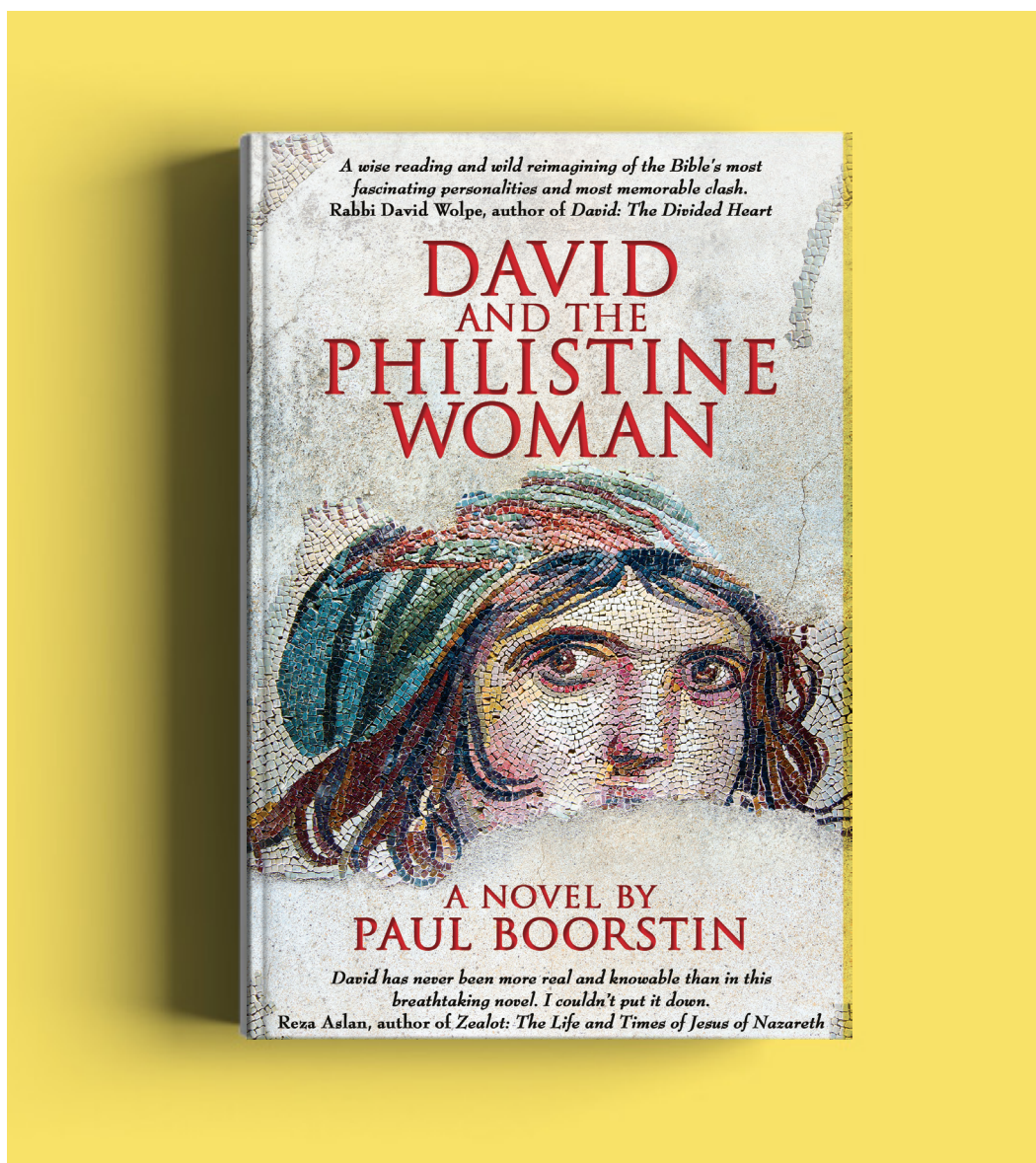


JBC Book Clubs Discussion Guide

Content provided by Paul Boorstin
Jewishbookcouncil.org



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A New Perspective on David and the Philistines

The clash of David and Goliath, one of the world's most beloved stories, is only a few pages long in the Bible (I Samuel, Chapter 17). Beginning with the ancient text, I set out to write a novel based on the narrative I envisioned between the lines, through my own unique perspective as a veteran documentary filmmaker. To discover what mysteries and surprises might be hiding there, I decided to broaden the scope of the story—to take a look with a wide-angle lens that would capture the sweeping panorama of the conflict. I was determined to do this while remaining faithful to the spirit of the original.

The Philistines

Using the latest archaeological research as well as my own imagination, I decided to add the dimension of the Philistines themselves. Archaeologists accept that Goliath's city of Gath actually existed. The Bible says the Philistines were formidable warriors. It also indicates that they had forbidden the Israelites to learn the secrets of how to work iron:

(I Samuel, 13:19): “Not a blacksmith could be found in the whole land of Israel, because the Philistines had said, ‘Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears!’”

Forced to face the Philistines in combat without iron weapons, the Israelite soldiers were at a deadly disadvantage.

Except for their mastery of iron, the archenemies of the Israelites were depicted in the Old Testament as crude barbarians. I was surprised to learn that the latest archaeological discoveries tell a different story. In digs at sites such as Beth Shemesh and Ashkelon,

in what is now Israel, artifacts have revealed that the Philistines were an advanced, sophisticated people. They were accomplished builders, skilled makers of wine and olive oil, and adept with the loom and the pottery kiln. Because history is written by the victors, the Bible gives the Israelites the last word, and only in modern times has the truth come to light.

Nara, the “Philistine woman” of the title, is a pivotal figure in the novel. In fact, I was so intrigued by the notion of a female Philistine hero, that Nara was the first character I conceived. While Goliath the Philistine is one of history's most despised villains, I wanted to show that this much-maligned people also could have fostered heroes. And why not a woman?

Idol Worship

Another dimension of the panorama I captured in the novel is that just as the Israelites believed profoundly in their God, so other peoples of the time fervently worshipped their own gods. Archaeological evidence shows that the Philistines worshipped the mighty god Dagon, which I chose to depict as a god of war. There is also evidence that the Philistines had worshipped a mother goddess. I depict her in my novel as Ashdoda, goddess of the moon, representative of other female deities from the eastern Mediterranean. I also added the cult of an animistic serpent god, such as might have been worshipped by foreign traders traveling through David's world.

A Time of Conflict

In addition to revealing a panorama of gods and peoples, I wanted to focus intensely on key players in the drama. For the characters who are well known, I sought to portray them in a way faithful to the Biblical accounts: dangerously unstable King Saul; his son, the impulsive Jonathan; and, of course, David the shepherd hero.

Among lesser known Biblical characters, I found Saul's youngest daughter, Michal, who would become David's first wife, especially fascinating. She is the only woman in the Old Testament of whom it is explicitly said that she loves a man. (I Samuel, 18:20): "*Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David.*" Though Michal will never bear David a child, later in the Bible she will save his life, helping him to escape from Saul's assassins (I Samuel, 19:11). Certainly, Michal's actions in my novel illustrate her heartfelt devotion to him.

Another important Biblical character I decided to include was David's mother. Surprisingly, her name is not even mentioned in the Bible, though it is given as Nitzevet in the Talmud. Despite her omission from the Biblical account, I wanted to show how I believe that her influence on David could have been significant.

Into this story renowned for depicting one lone hero, I introduced other, unexpected heroes. Among them is Najab, a Nubian, who could have come from the land south of Egypt that is known today as Sudan. I wanted to show that such an adventurous trader might have enriched the texture of life in the land of the Israelites as well as, in my novel, helping David's cause.

David Uncorrupted

A towering figure in the Bible, David is the leader who united his nation, wrote immortal psalms and conquered Jerusalem. He is the king from whose line will spring the Messiah. But David's moral weaknesses will have devastating consequences later in his life, when he seduces Bathsheba and brings about the death of her husband, Uriah the Hittite. In David

and the Philistine Woman, I wanted to tell the story of David when he was still uncorrupted, a young man finding his way, a shepherd seeking to grasp his destiny. Even then, he was a human being with weaknesses as well as strengths.

Unlike Moses or Abraham, David, as depicted in my novel, never hears the voice of God. He must seek out that voice in his own heart. Perhaps that is the spark that kindled my passion to tell this story in the first place. Like David, in our troubled world, we must do the right thing without hearing a divine voice to direct our actions. I wanted my novel to show that what links people of goodwill is not so much the god they worship as it is their bond of common humanity and shared compassion. By the end of the novel, David learns that whether or not it is ordained in heaven, nothing of value is achieved in our world unless it is done by human hands.

Discussion Questions

Questions were provided by Paul Boorstin

1. Discuss the stages of awareness that David goes through as his character develops in the novel.
2. What does the novel say about the relationships between fathers and mothers and their sons and daughters?
3. The relationships between siblings is important in the novel. What are other examples in the Bible of siblings helping or hurting each other?
4. The novel portrays worshippers of four gods: the Philistines' Dagon; the goddess Ashdoda; a serpent deity; and the Israelites' Almighty. Discuss how the ways these gods are worshipped — and the values of the worshippers — differ.
5. Discuss how the author depicts David's character and the world he lived in. How does this differ from your perception of David and his world before reading the novel?
6. At the end of the novel, why does David choose not to use either Joshua's sword and shield, or Ashdoda's stones, when he finally faces Goliath?
7. As women of their time, how do Ahinoam, Nitzevet and Hada attempt to fulfill their own ambitions through the lives of those they have raised?
8. What is the role of the Philistine priests? The Israelite priests? How do they differ?
9. How and why is the secret of making iron a key element in the story?
10. Several places in the novel, the author describes Israelites who worship idols along with the Almighty. Why did these Israelites do so?
11. Do you think that at the end of the story, Nara will stay with the Israelites, as David requests? Will she worship Ashdoda or the Israelites' Almighty?
12. Read the story of David and Goliath as it unfolds in the Bible (I Samuel, Chapter 17) and discuss how it may have inspired the author's retelling of it.

Menu

Recipes and menu by Sharon Boorstin,
author of the cookbook/memoir *Let Us Eat
Cake: An Adventure in Food and Friendship*
(William Morrow, 2003)

In Chapter 7 of *David and the Philistine Woman*, David dines with King Saul in the royal palace to celebrate that Saul has been cured of his “demons” by the music of David’s lyre. A mere shepherd, David is astonished by the lavish feast:

He dined alone with Saul in his royal chamber, which was illuminated with beeswax candles. Accustomed to the weak glow of oil lamps, David was dazzled by their radiance. Tobiah, the king’s advisor, directed a procession of servants bearing platters with delicacies unknown to David, luxuries too costly to be sold to common people in the market in Gibeah: roasted quail and venison; walnuts glazed with date honey; bowls of quince and carob with sweetened fig cakes. For him, tasting this food was like hearing bold new harmonies played on his lyre for the first time. The flavors were sharper, sweeter, spicier than any he knew. They vary as sunsets vary, he thought, no two alike, each leaving its own afterglow. In the flush of the moment, he allowed himself to drain another cup. He knew he was drunk on more than wine. He was drunk on Saul’s praise.

Readers of *David and the Philistine Woman* are invited to celebrate with a “David’s Feast” of their own, enjoying dishes that feature the authentic foods and flavors of David’s time.



Appetizer

Hummus with Toasted Pita Triangles

Salad

Baby Greens with Apples, Toasted Walnuts,
and Pomegranate Vinaigrette

Entree

Roasted Chicken Thighs with Dates, Olives,
and Capers with Couscous Pilaf

Dessert

Honey Almond Olive Oil Cake

Recipes by Sharon Boorstin, author of the memoir/cookbook
Let Us Eat Cake: An Adventure in Food & Friendship

DAVID'S FEAST RECIPES



Appetizer

Hummus with Toasted Pita Triangles

The Middle Eastern chickpea dip, hummus, is so popular, that you can buy it in flavors ranging from plain and roasted garlic to Sriracha. Serve a selection along with a basket of crisp packaged pita chips, or fresh pita bread that has been cut into triangles and toasted on a baking sheet for 5-6 minutes in a 350°F oven.



Salad

Baby Greens with Apples, Toasted Walnuts, and Pomegranate Vinaigrette

In Jewish tradition, the pomegranate is a symbol of righteousness because it is said to have 613 seeds, which corresponds with the 613 mitzvot, or commandments, of the Torah. Thanks to its high antioxidant qualities, today you can find fresh pomegranate juice and seeds (arils) in your supermarket and avoid the hassle of juicing and seeding a fresh pomegranate.

Salad Ingredients:

1 medium Fuji or other sweet, crisp apple, unpeeled
Juice of 1/2 lemon
1 package (12 ounces) baby spring or baby romaine lettuce
1/4 small red onion, peeled and thinly sliced
1/2 cup chopped walnuts, toasted (see note)
1/4 cup chopped fresh mint
1/3 cup pomegranate seeds (arils)

Vinaigrette Ingredients:

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive or vegetable oil
2 Tbs. pomegranate juice
2 Tbs. red wine vinegar
1/2 tsp. Dijon mustard
1/2 tsp. honey
1/4 tsp. Kosher salt
Freshly ground pepper, to taste

Directions:

1. In a screw-top jar, combine vinaigrette ingredients. Tighten the lid and shake well. Refrigerate for up to 2 days.
2. Core and slice apple thinly, and in a small bowl, toss with the lemon juice.
3. To serve, place greens, apple slices, and onion slices into a large salad bowl. Toss with just enough vinaigrette to lightly coat the leaves, then toss in the walnuts and pomegranate seeds. Sprinkle with the mint.

Note: To toast the chopped walnuts, preheat the oven to 350°F. Spread the walnuts out in a single layer on an ungreased backing pan, and toast them in the oven until they begin to brown and smell aromatic, 5 to 7 minutes.



Entrée

Roasted Chicken Thighs with Dates, Olives, and Capers Couscous Pilaf

An homage to the Silver Palate Cookbook's '80s classic Chicken Marbella, this recipe evokes the flavors of ancient times with ingredients from olives and dates to date syrup or honey. For vegetarians, substitute one half of an acorn squash, skin on, per person. Date syrup is available online or at some Trader Joe's and Whole Foods stores.

Roasted Chicken Ingredients:

8 chicken thighs, bone in and skin on	1/2 cup pitted green olives
1/4 cup red wine vinegar	1/2 cup roughly chopped pitted dates
1/2 cup olive oil	1/2 cup dry white wine
4 cloves garlic, minced	1/3 cup date syrup or honey
2 tsps. dried oregano	1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley
1/3 cup capers	Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Place the chicken in a large bowl or a large Ziplok bag.
2. Prepare the marinade: In a small bowl, combine all other ingredients except the white wine, date syrup or honey and chopped parsley, and mix well. Add the chicken thighs to the marinade, and, using your hands, toss until all the thighs are well covered. Cover the bowl (or seal the bag) and marinate in the refrigerator for from 2 hours to one day, turning the chicken pieces once or twice in the marinade.
3. Preheat the oven to 375°F.
4. Place the chicken thighs, skin-side down, in a large roasting pan and cover with the marinade.
5. In a small bowl, whisk together the wine and date syrup or honey. Pour evenly over the chicken.
6. Roast the chicken thighs for 30 minutes, basting once, then turn them over, skin-side up, baste again, and raise the oven temperature to 400°. Roast chicken for 20 to 30 minutes more, basting with the marinade 2 or 3 times, until the skin is crisp.

Couscous Ingredients:

3 cups chicken broth
3 Tbs. olive oil, divided
1/2 cup chopped yellow onion
2 cups regular or whole-wheat couscous
1/2 cup sliced almonds

Directions:

1. In a medium-size sauté pan with a tight-fitting lid, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil over medium heat for 1-2 minutes, then add the onions and lower the heat to low. Sauté, uncovered, until soft and golden, about 8-10 minutes, stirring often.
2. Add the chicken broth and bring to a boil. Stir in the couscous and the remaining 2 tablespoons oil. Cover the saucepan, and remove it from the heat, leaving it covered for 6 minutes. Then remove the lid, and fluff the couscous with a fork.

To Serve:

On a round serving platter, spoon the couscous on the outer edges and sprinkle with the slices almonds. Transfer the chicken to the middle of the platter. Spoon the solids from the marinade over the chicken. Sprinkle with the parsley. Pour the marinade liquid into a gravy boat, and serve on the side.



Dessert

Almond Honey Olive Oil Cake

Olive oil and honey lend a special fragrance to this moist almond cake. Cover and refrigerate the leftover cake for tomorrow's breakfast.

Cake Ingredients:

3/4 cup all-purpose flour	1/2 cup plus 2 Tbs. honey
3/4 cup almond flour or finely ground sliced almonds	1 tsp. vanilla extract
2 tsps. baking powder	Grated rind of 1 orange
3/4 tsp. fine kosher salt or fine sea salt	3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
3 large eggs	1 cup sliced almonds, toasted (see note)

Topping Ingredients:

1/2 cup sweet orange marmalade
2 tablespoons orange liqueur, orange juice, or water
1/3 cup sliced almonds, toasted (see note)

Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Grease the bottom and sides of a 9-inch spring-form pan. Drop a tablespoon of all-purpose flour into the greased pan, and shake the pan until all sides are covered with flour. Turn the pan upside down and discard the extra flour.
2. In a medium-size bowl, sift both flours, the baking powder, and salt. Set aside.
3. With an electric mixer at medium speed, blend together the eggs, honey, extract, and orange rind. Reduce the speed to low, and add the flour mixture in three additions, alternating with the olive oil in two additions, beginning and ending with the flour, scraping the bowl with a rubber spatula as necessary. Add the toasted sliced almonds and mix well.
4. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Set it on the middle rack of the oven, and bake until the cake springs back when lightly touched and the edges start to brown and pull away from the pan, about 45 minutes. If the top browns too quickly before then, cover lightly with foil.
5. Remove the cake from the oven, and let it cool for 15 minutes.
6. Meanwhile, heat the marmalade in a small saucepan or in the microwave until bubbly. Remove from the heat and add the liqueur.
7. To serve, carefully open the spring-form pan, loosening the cake with a knife at the edges if necessary, and remove the sides. Place a plate over the cake, and flip the cake over. Then place a serving plate over the cake, and flip it again. Prick the top all over with a toothpick, and drizzle on the marmalade mixture. Sprinkle with the sliced almonds, and allow the cake to cool completely before serving.

Note: To toast the sliced almonds, preheat the oven to 350°F. Spread the almonds out in a single layer on an ungreased baking pan, and toast them in the oven until they begin to brown and smell aromatic, about 5 minutes. Check them frequently beginning at 4 minutes as they burn easily.

Q&A with Author Paul Boorstin

What drew you to the story of David and Goliath as the basis for your novel?

Paul Boorstin: Growing up in Chicago as a Jewish kid with thick glasses and zero athletic ability, I was always the last to be picked for baseball, football, soccer—you get the idea. So when I learned at temple about young David triumphing over the giant Goliath, I knew who my role model was! And David is still my hero. My novel examines what it takes to be a true hero, someone of moral character as well as physical daring.

How did your experience as a documentary filmmaker affect the way you approached the subject?

Working with camera crews around the world under difficult and sometimes dangerous conditions, I learned that what is happening outside the narrow frame of the camera—both behind the scenes, and in the human heart—can be more important than what finally appears on film or video. In the same way, starting with one of the world's most beloved stories—only a few paragraphs in the Bible—I felt I had to reach beyond it. I felt compelled to reimagine the panorama of conflict that raged during this crucial turning point in ancient history.

How closely do the characters and story points in your novel adhere to the Biblical account of David and Goliath, and in what ways did you take liberties?

No liberties were taken! I used my imagination to dig deeply into the story and explore its most provocative possibilities. The resulting novel, my personal

vision, is the product of that journey. I'm grateful to say that the enthusiastic response from readers including Rabbi David Wolpe suggests that they have found relevance and inspiration in it. For subsequent chapters, I had my notebooks from reporting in the Middle East, South America, and South Africa. I used the diaries I kept as a diplomatic spouse, as well as photos and background material of the countries we lived in and the workbooks from

Why the importance of women in your novel?

I believe that the role of women as a moral anchor in the Bible cannot be overstated. Of course, that role was not as openly discussed in ancient times as it is today. So in reimagining the story of David and Goliath, I saw the part played by women as crucial. In my novel, the women of David's time risk their lives for what they believe is right, just like the women of today, whether or not they always get the credit they deserve.

Why did you choose to focus not just on the God of the Israelites in your novel, but on the gods of other peoples of that time?

For us to truly understand just how revolutionary Judaism was in that era of idol worship, I believe we have to experience the broader landscape of other gods of that era. The clash of religions in my novel is as fierce as the clash of the Israelites against the Philistines, and it will change the world.

Who do you see as the audience for your novel?

The duel of David and Goliath is one of the best-known stories in the world, so I consider the world my audience. I believe that my novel's story of courage, selfdiscovery and sacrifice reaches across religions and cultures.

What do you hope readers will learn from reading *David & the Philistine Woman*?

There's "learn" and there's "experience." First of all, I want readers to experience what life might have been like in those distant times, understanding that, to my mind, human nature has not changed in the thousands of years since. As far as what readers can "learn" from the novel, that is for each reader to decide. One theme that I hope to convey is this: Whether or not we look to God for miracles, it is for each of us to do all that is in our power to help defeat Evil in our own time, as young David did in his.

What attracted you to the cover image of the young woman who represents the character of the Philistine woman Nara in your novel?

This ancient mosaic from the Eastern Mediterranean comes from the same region as the setting of the novel. What spoke to me was the haunting look in the woman's eyes—the look of a woman who is afraid, but who has the strength to triumph over her fear.

Are you working on a sequel to *David & the Philistine Woman*?

Yes! It's a companion piece about the dangerous struggle of another renowned and beloved figure in the Bible at another decisive turning point in ancient history. The story will be told from a fresh perspective and written with the goal of offering the reader a compelling experience. I can promise that if you liked *David and the Philistine Woman*, you will enjoy it every bit as much!

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