He wanted to see my full-size replica of Goliath’s suit of armor. It’s in my studio. Nine feet, six inches tall, not including his intimidator helmet. Another eight inches.

I cleaned the mess off my writing table, ordered dates, dried fig cakes, cheeses, and roasted lamb from our best Mediterranean restaurant. The dishes weren’t my idea. David had requested them.

I’d always wanted to visit with the first unifier of Israel, the man who wrote seventy-two Psalms, and the man God said was ‘a man after my own heart.’ This was my chance to ask him a few questions.

For five minutes he ate in silence. I couldn’t eat. I couldn’t take my eyes off him. He appeared to be about thirty years old. In his prime. Ruddy complexion. Lips that reminded me of Elvis. A stronger than usual chin. Curly hair. And dark black, piercing eyes. Which were noticeable only when he took the time to peer at me between bites of dates and lamb.

“May I ask you a question?” He nodded and kept eating. "When you were in the Valley of Elah and reached down to choose those stones, were you looking for round rocks, or flat ones?"

He stopped eating and peered up at Goliath’s suit of armor. He seemed to be reminiscing.

“Round,” he said, and continued eating.

“Why round?” I asked.

He held a fig cake close to his mouth, but stopped short, and with a slow, disbelieving shake of his head, said, “More accurate.” I think he thought me ignorant for asking such a stupid question. He stood and approached my Goliath suit of armor. “See this opening in his helmet, just above his forehead?”

“Yes,” I said.
“Goliath was thirty paces away. I had to send the stone here,” he said, pointing to where Goliath’s forehead would have been exposed, “and with enough force to put him down.”

“I know what happened next.”

“Our army, on the cliff, they were shouting, ‘Cut off his head! Cut off his head!’ I ran and took Goliath’s sword. I stood over him and removed his head.”

“And you held it up for your army to see.”

“Yes, ten thousand of them swarmed the valley and chased the Philistines, killing them all the way to Gath and Ekron.”

“I’ve read about that. But back up. Tell me how it came to be a fight between two men, instead of both armies fighting each other. Still gnawing on a lamb rib, he said, “The Philistines had lost thousands of warriors in our many battles with them. They couldn’t afford to lose any more, and neither could we, so they challenged us. Our best fighter against their best. It was called a ‘Champion’s Battle.’”

“I never knew the reason for the mano a mano fight. The Bible doesn’t explain it. Thanks for telling me.” I paused. “But your army was afraid to send a man down to fight the giant.”

“It’s true. My father sent me to take bread and cheeses for my brothers. It had been 39 days since they set up camp on the east side of the valley. The Philistine army was near Socah, on the west side. When I saw Goliath down in the valley calling us pigs and cowards for not fighting him, God gave me the courage.”

“Were you afraid?”

“No.”

“But you were only sixteen.”

“I wasn’t afraid. God was with me. He controlled the path of the stone.”

I popped a date in my mouth, and pondered my next question. “I’d like to ask something different, and please tell me if it’s too personal.”
“Go ahead, ask.

“Bathsheba. Was she as beautiful as the Bible says?”

“More beautiful than a lamb beside streams of living water.”

“Do you think she wanted you to see her while she was being bathed?

“Yes, I believe she knew what time of day I always stood on the balcony, observing the city. She turned and looked up at me.

“Did you know she was married to Uriah?”

“Not then. Only after my guard brought her up to the balcony and we talked.

“What did she say?”

“She wanted to know why I summoned her. She told me she was married to one of our finest warriors, Uriah.”

I was afraid to ask this, but did it any way: “Then you charmed her, right?”

“Women are attracted to me. And me to them.”

“So I’ve read. Did you really have nine wives plus some concubines?”

“Ten wives, counting Bathsheba. And a dozen concubines, as you call them.”

“I have to say … you’re probably the most virile man I’ve ever met. But tell me, how can a man survive with so many women around. Seems like there’d be jealousy and back-biting everywhere.”

“Oh, there was jealousy. Don’t know what back-biting means. Anyway, I wasn’t around all that much. Except for that one battle, that one battle when Joab convinced me to stay in the palace. I was fifty years old. But I should have been on that battlefield, where I belonged.”

I ate some more, as did he.

“But you brought Uriah back from the battle, got him drunk, and told him to sleep with Bathsheba, his wife. You were covering up her pregnancy, weren’t you? And then, when he slept with his fellow soldiers by the wall instead of with Bathsheba, you had him put on the front lines of the battle, knowing he would be killed.” (I saw the muscles
rip in his arms and knew he could reach over and kill me with one blow. I feared I was
digging too deep into his sins. But he shook his head.

“It was a mistake. One of the worst in my life. And I paid the price for it. God punished
me … as he should have.”

“You lost the child,” I said with a deep sigh.

“Yes,” thickness in his throat.

That was heavy. I let a minute or two pass.

“Something else I don’t understand,” I said. “Saul offered you his daughter in marriage
with the condition you’d hunt down the Philistines and bring back 100 foreskins as proof
of their deaths. But you brought back 200. Many people believe you were a ruthless
killer for that act. Why’d you kill 200 instead of 100?”

David straightened. His voice was forceful. “Were not the Philistines our sworn enemy?
Hadn’t they been killing us and we them for hundreds of years? Besides, I wanted to
impress my king.”

“Then King Saul tried to kill you.”

“Yes. For over eight years he chased me from En Gedi to the Forrest of Hereth.”

“Ahh, that’s when you tried to blend in with the Philistines. But they recognized you. So,
you acted insane and they tossed you out.”

David laughed for the first time.

“I did. I did. I drooled from my mouth, muttered crazy words, and drew symbols on the
wall.”

I could only smile at his cleverness.

“Back to Saul for a second,” I said. “Why did he want to kill you?”

“He was jealous. He was afraid the people wanted me as their king.”

“Ahh, yes, I remember the story. You’d return from all those victories and the men,
women, and children would chant, ‘Saul has his thousands, and David his tens of
thousands.’ It must have made you feel good to hear so much adulation.”
“I was a warrior. It was my job. I happened to be good at it.”

“But hadn’t you already been anointed by Samuel? You were destined to be Israel’s next king—the king of the South and the North.”

“True. I was fifteen when Samuel anointed me with oil. But Saul was still the king when I was thirty. And until God—not me—did something to change that, I wouldn’t dare touch a hair on his head.”

“That’s why you spared his life in the cave.”

“Yes.”

“You were tired of being hunted by Saul, so you went back to the Philistines and made an agreement with them, didn’t you?”

“They offered me sanctuary in Ziklag. It was a desolate place in Philistine territory. In return, they expected me to carry out raids against my own countrymen. The Philistines knew I was Saul’s enemy.”

“Did you raid any Israelite troops?”

“No. We went on many raids against our other enemies—the Amalekites, the Geshurites, the Girgashites.”

“You and a band of misfits, outlaws, and rabble-rousers, right?”

“They were my army. I cherished them.”

“Let’s talk about Absolom, your eldest son.”

“Let’s not.” He slipped a date into his mouth.

“It bothers you to talk about him?”

“Of course. I loved Absolom with all my heart. He turned against me and my heart was broken. But I still loved him.”

“What went wrong?”

“He had more selfish ambition than allegiance to his own nation.”

“The Bible says you were distraught over his death.”
“I would have spared his life.”

David reached for his last lamb leg. My time with him was running short. I had one more important question to ask.

“David, why do you—you personally—think God said you were a man after his own heart?”

He stopped everything and pondered this for a few seconds.

“I believe God said it because I did everything he asked me to do. But you must understand something. When I took my eyes, my mind, and my soul off of God’s desires and took matters into my own hands, I was a failure.”

“Now that comes as a surprise. You’re admitting to being a failure.”

“I was a sinner in my mother’s womb, and remained a sinner my entire life. For some reason, God chose me to lead his people.”

“And you made plans for God’s temple, for the ark, and his Holy place of worship. You gathered the materials. You even built a scale model. Then you told Solomon, your son, he was to build it.”

“In God’s righteous judgment, I was not allowed to see it finished. I had too much blood on my hands.”

The dates, the fig cakes, and the lamb were all gone.

“David, thank you for being so open. So honest. Before you go, would you like to ask me a question?”

He thought about this for a second, and said, “Yes, I would. Tell me … what is life like now.”

I laughed. “You know, it would take three dinners to explain all that’s happened in the last 4,000 years. But, since our time is up, I can tell you one thing that will make you want to sup with me again.”

“Oh, what’s that?”

I pointed out my window up to the sky. “We’ve been to the moon and back.”
“I do believe we should have dinner again,” he said, staring at the full moon.

I closed my eyes to reflect on my dinner with David ben Jesse. When I opened them he was gone.