

20. David and the dwarf – Part 1

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Some of the Bible stories we know so well no longer have the same impact like they did at the beginning. This is the case in point. We all know about David and Goliath story. Even unbelievers know about it. But I guarantee you that we will still learn something new from this famous truth – not a fancy fairy tale.

This is not only about slaying the giant Goliath with David's sling, but it is the principle of trusting God and stepping forward in faith with His strength. Nowhere was this more evident than in David's showdown with Goliath. Let's join David on the battlefield and see who the real giant was.

A. GOLIATH: FRONT AND CENTER

1 Samuel 17:1-11 Now the Philistines gathered their armies together to battle, and were gathered together at Sochoh, which belongs to Judah; they encamped between Sochoh and Azekah, in Ephes Dammim. 2 And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and they encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array against the Philistines. 3 The Philistines stood on a mountain on one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. 4 And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. 5 He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. 6 And he had bronze armor on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders. 7 Now the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his iron spearhead weighed six hundred shekels; and a shield-bearer went before him. 8 Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel, and said to them, "Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. 9 If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." 10 And the Philistine said, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together." 11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

What do you see here?

The scene opens with the age-old enemies of God's people, the brutish Philistines – once again threatening Israel.

To avoid an all-out battle, the Philistines have chosen a one-on-one contest of champions to decide the victor. The earth seems to shake as their champion, the mean fighting machine Goliath, strides to within shouting distance and stands up to his full 9 feet, 9 inches. He would be the first draft choice for any NBA basketball team coaches.

Some people have a hard time believing that there was a man 9 feet 9 inches tall. Robert Pershing Wadlow was 8 feet 11 inches tall at the time of his death on July 15, 1940, at the age of 22.

Squaring his huge shoulders, Goliath bellows up to the Israelis who are peeking over the ridge. He shouts, "Fee, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of Hebrew men."

So what was Israel's response to Goliath's challenge? They all become scaredy cats.

This, of course, is a significant strategy of the devil against us. We don't battle against flesh and blood enemies like Goliath, but we have our "spiritual giants" that are principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places to battle against. The devil has a heavy interest in making you feel dismayed and greatly afraid before the battle ever begins.

Saul had a special reason to be afraid. Goliath was the giant among the Philistines, and Saul was head and shoulder taller than other Israelite men according to 1 Samuel 9:2. Saul was the logical choice to square off against Goliath, and we can expect he knew others were expecting him to fight Goliath.

B. ENTER: DAVID, "THE GIANT"

1 Samuel 17:12 Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, whose name was Jesse, and who had eight sons. And the man was old, advanced in years, in the days of Saul.

We now see the faith-filled David coming to save the cowering and faithless Saul.

1) AT HOME

1 Samuel 17:13-15 The three oldest sons of Jesse had gone to follow Saul to the battle. The names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. 14 David was the youngest. And the three oldest followed Saul. 15 But David occasionally went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

David, Saul's comforter and armor bearer, divides his time between caring for his aged father's flock and serving Saul.

2) WITH THE SOLDIERS

1 Samuel 17:16-23 And the Philistine drew near and presented himself forty days, morning and evening. 17 Then Jesse said to his son David, "Take now for your brothers an ephah of this dried grain and these ten loaves, and run to your brothers at the camp. 18 And carry these ten cheeses to the captain of their thousand, and see how your brothers fare, and bring back news of them." 19 Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. 20 So David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, and took the things and went as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the camp as the army was going out to the fight and shouting for the battle. 21 For Israel and the Philistines had drawn up in battle array, army against army. 22 And David left his supplies in the hand of the supply keeper, ran to the army, and came and greeted his brothers. 23 Then as he talked with them, there was the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, coming up from the armies of the Philistines; and he spoke according to the same words. So David heard them.

What is your interpretation of this?

Significantly, the number 40 is used in the Scriptures rather consistently as a period of judgment and or testing. It rained for 40 days in the time of Noah; Israel was in the wilderness 40 years; Jesus fasted and was tempted of the devil for 40 days before He began His public ministry; And here, Israel is also tested by Goliath's mockery for 40 days.

Suddenly, all eyes focus on the valley below. David catches his first glimpse of Goliath, who is “coming up from the armies of the Philistines”. No longer satisfied with beating his chest from the valley floor, the giant apparently ascends the Israelite slope to bully his opponents on their side. And Israel’s soldiers scatter like frightened sheep before a growling bear.

C. SEEING THE GIANT THROUGH GOD’S PERSPECTIVE

1 Samuel 17:24-27 And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were dreadfully afraid. 25 So the men of Israel said, “Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel; and it shall be that the man who kills him the king will enrich with great riches, will give him his daughter, and give his father’s house exemption from taxes in Israel.” 26 Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” 27 And the people answered him in this manner, saying, “So shall it be done for the man who kills him.”

Please give me your interpretation of this portion.

The soldiers tell him of Saul’s incentives: great riches, marrying the king’s daughter, and exemption from taxes for his family. Generous rewards, for sure. While other soldiers focused on the danger of the battle or the material rewards to be won, it seems that David alone focused on the reputation of Israel and the honor of the living God. David sizes up this pagan giant in light of God’s righteousness and power.

This truly shows David to be a man after God’s own heart. He cares about the things God cares about. He saw the problem in spiritual terms, not in material or fleshly terms. When the men of Israel said, “This man,” David said, “This uncircumcised Philistine.” When the men of Israel said, “Surely he has come up to defy Israel,” David said, “That he should defy the armies of the living God.” When the men of Israel said, “The man who kills him,” David said, “The man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel.” David saw things from the Lord’s perspective, but the men of Israel saw things only from man’s perspective.

D. THE BITTER AND JEALOUS BROTHER

1 Samuel 17:28-30 Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab’s anger was aroused against David, and he said, “Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle.” And David said, “What have I done now? Is there not a cause?” Then he turned from him toward another and said the same thing; and these people answered him as the first ones did.

What do you get out of this?

David’s oldest brother, Eliab, overhears the courageous words of David. But rather than support him, he slaps him down verbally.

Can you feel the slam? How true it is that as soon as you start stepping out in faith, somebody will want to put you down – often from another Christian or someone in your own family. Perhaps Eliab is still battling with the giant of jealousy that invaded his heart when Samuel anointed David instead of him.

E. THE COWARD KING

1 Samuel 17:28-39 Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab's anger was aroused against David, and he said, "Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle." 29 And David said, "What have I done now? Is there not a cause?" 30 Then he turned from him toward another and said the same thing; and these people answered him as the first ones did. 31 Now when the words which David spoke were heard, they reported them to Saul; and he sent for him. 32 Then David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." 33 And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth." 34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, 35 I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. 36 Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God." 37 Moreover David said, "The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!" 38 So Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail. 39 David fastened his sword to his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. And David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them." So David took them off.

Who has an interpretation of this section for me?

The God of Israel is the only giant David sees. David doesn't care about his glory or success, but only for the glory of the Lord. Goliath is already a dead man. This is where the battle was won.

Saul, however, cannot see past the human rank. Saul has forgotten what it is like to fight in the Lord's strength. But David remembers past victories and uses them to fortify his faith.

God has been preparing David to fight Goliath. This is generally God's pattern for preparation. He calls us to be faithful right where we are, and then uses our faithfulness to accomplish greater things for glory.

Relieved not to face Goliath himself, Saul says David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you." Then he suited up David the best way he knew how, with his own defenses. In giving David his armor and weaponry, Saul probably calculated to be able to take credit for, or at least to share in, David's victory over the Philistine giant, in case David wins. If David loses, Saul would say, "I tried to stop him. I even gave him my armor to save him."

It must have been a sight. David, a 36 regular, wearing the armor of Saul, a 52 long.

Often, people try to fight with another person's armor. They see God do something wonderful through someone else, and they try to copy it without really making it their own. This is not how God's work is done.

David did not face Goliath unarmed. He had much better armor than Saul's. Saul had a bronze helmet, but David had the helmet of salvation. Saul had a coat of mail, but David had a breastplate of righteousness. Saul had a sword, but David had the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. David had the whole armor of God.

F. REMINDERS

Goliath stands as a symbol of the giants we face daily. The following 2 reminders not only help us confront our Goliaths, but with God's strength we can slay them as well:

1) Facing giants is an intimidating experience.

Even through the eyes of faith, Goliath's 9 foot frame still towered over David. Faith doesn't blind us to reality, but it does enable us to see beyond the externals as we draw on God's power.

2) Doing battle is a lonely experience.

Your Goliaths are your Goliaths. In fact, they may not be gigantic to anyone else but they are to you. The battle is for you and the Lord to fight together. Your pastor can't fight it for you, nor can your family members or friends. They may stand behind you, but only you can cross the battle line to fight with the Lord.