

Let (The) Battle Commence

We come now to a most familiar story, echoes of which have reverberated down through 3 millennia even into the literature and vocabulary of the most wicked and perverse of generations and individuals. Who would not know, even today, what is meant by a David and Goliath contest or confrontation? Very few indeed! Even renowned atheistic secularists would happily retain the proverbial import of such a phrase whilst ridiculing the historicity of such a battle. Yet what is that to us who even ourselves were also once *“children of wrath, even as others”*?

The Bounds of Spiritual Speculative Reasoning

We take up the story again at 1 Sam.17:32. The verse begins ... *“And David said to Saul”*. Saul had sent for David (vs.31c) ... and immediately we note that David is addressing Saul. Those who have read my first 2 Chapters will know that I am reluctant in the extreme to speculate. As I have said earlier, theology ought to be dogmatic rather than speculative, although it is granted that speculative reasoning can bear some manner of fruit, but only insofar as such reasoning is based upon clear and specific textual clarity in its various stages. In other words, thoughts developed speculatively should be both logical and rational insofar as biblical precepts should lie at the heart of the thought process. Yet all such ‘conclusions’ will have to be carefully presented and ever so carefully assessed. The people of God should never be obliged to subscribe irrevocably to the speculative, and oft times fanciful, notions of a preacher, be he ever so ‘celebrated’ and ever so fruitful in his ministry to date. I was once cautioned, by a preacher of the old school, to realise that once a preacher has made a name for himself, he can say almost anything, however ridiculous, and get away with it ... and I partly believe it.

Faith Triumphant Over Despair

Returning to 1Sam.17:32 it would seem as if David, upon his arrival into the very presence of Saul, observes well nigh instantly what is only too evident (at least to David) in the face of Saul himself viz. **resignation and defeat**. Whatever Saul expected, or perhaps hoped, to see when David appeared in his presence, it now looks as if he is the rather disappointed; perhaps even now altogether disillusioned. Disappointed in the appearance of David as the one remaining glimmer of hope which had been kindled (or perhaps more particularly ‘generated’) in his heart by the hearing of David’s earlier words as they were *“rehearsed before him”* and disillusioned as to how things have come to this. It is as if Saul’s countenance had spoken volumes to David and that Saul’s apparent silence (at least textually) had resounded to the very depths of David’s heart. It might however be suggested that the silence here of Saul was more productive than the multiplication of words without knowledge which he might otherwise have uttered. For when Saul does eventually cease from silence he utters only words of unbelief viz. *“Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth”*. Yet surely Saul had not assented to receiving David simply in order to acknowledge or commend his enthusiasm? Surely he had not agreed to give David a hearing simply out of courtesy and good manners? Surely rather had David’s words, rehearsed before him, empowered even Saul to call upon David after this manner? But as **words** give way to **sight** Saul is plunged even further into the depths of despair than heretofore. David just doesn’t look up to the job as far as Saul’s judgement is concerned. Once again though we are reminded that *“faith cometh by hearing”* and as David continues his speaking in the presence of Saul, Saul’s carnal pessimism gives way to opportunity and David is *sent* on his way, however hesitantly, even by a sad and demoralised Saul (1Sam.17:37f).

David Takes The Initiative

Yet notice again that which is clearly significant ... when David arrives (in the narrative) it is he who first speaks. *“Let no man’s heart fail because of him (Goliath); thy servant will go and fight with this*

Philistine’. David has responded to the call of Saul but, much more importantly, David has come to the battlefield for such a time as this. David has not come to discuss or debate or defer to Saul, apart that is from the deference that is intrinsic to common decency and order i.e. *“thy servant”* (vs. 32c, 34b & 36a). This is one of many of David’s *Carpe Diem* moments; though not such as has been precipitated by rash or reckless reasoning, but even by the mysterious workings of the Holy Ghost. David had been prepared for this moment, as we shall see shortly, and he knows it. Providence has conspired to bring in this moment of opportunity and had earlier equipped this lad ever so effectively for what yet lay ahead. And David is assured thereof, whatever may be the ‘experienced perception’ of Saul to the contrary.

Though on the threshold of a victory of gigantic proportions, this is a sad moment indeed in the experience of Saul particularly - and of Israel generally. Saul, though *“head and shoulders”* above all the people in Israel on this battlefield, falls far short in stature when viewed over against the intimidating giant of the Philistines. And he knows it, else why would he fail to respond by not rising to the occasion personally? He will then, at best, seek to consolidate Israel’s position which was, you will remember, altogether static and therefore pointless. *“Stand still”* said Moses on another occasion to the children of Israel! But what did GOD say to Moses? *“Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward”!* Saul, it would seem, has come to the conclusion that if victory (and thereafter going forth) is not a realistic option, outright definitive defeat must be avoided at all costs. But such reasoning will solve nothing at all. The only thing guaranteed by such an approach to military conflict will be the multiplication of casualties. Yet what else is Saul to do? He hath no longer the Spirit of Christ to direct him. But another does; and is so emboldened thereby as to declare his intention to fight the said giant, even before Saul has had opportunity to seek to dissuade him (1Sam.17:32c). Oh! for a return to days when *tried* and *tested* men of God answer, in the providence of God, to the purpose(s) of God, by addressing spiritual issues head on - be such issues ever so daunting and fearful in their manifestation.

David Must Increase Whilst Saul Decreases

I have already indicated that David, however surprised or shocked he may have been after the flesh to find Saul in this state of mind and heart, falls not under the sway of dismay or despair which Saul now manifests abundantly. On the contrary, David *rises* in faith as Saul *descends* in unbelief. Yet note again the humility of David in his insistent solicitations ... *“thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine”* (vs32c). I remind you of that which is written in 1Sam.15:28 and conclude therefrom that whilst Saul may yet command natural and ‘official’ recognition (even in 1Sam.17:23) as King in Israel, David is, even now, King in Israel by Divine Right and Appointment. This may not be universally evident, but it is so nonetheless! In the natural realm, there is an authority that is official - but in the heavenly realm there is an authority that is both moral and spiritual - and whilst the former is not to be despised in its rightful place, yet such a natural principal should never be exercised within the Christian assembly. In the ‘heavenly’ realm that pertains to the ‘ecclesia’ (or ‘assembly’ of God’s people) authority must never be administered apart from both moral rectitude and spiritual giftedness. And this is a concept of eternal proportions that multitudes of apparently sincere and otherwise sober-minded Christians continue to fail repeatedly to comprehend, much less administer; yea even to this day. But such a detailed dissertation as is required to redress the balance of centuries of maladministration which has prevailed within the professing Christian church is for another day. Suffice meantime to ask how often is stark ‘official authority’ called upon in contemporary ecclesiastical structures to rule on matters of (in)discipline which have so often first germinated and then flourished under the ‘oversight’ of the self-same ‘officials’ now relied upon to judge righteous judgement? One might just as well suffer a known fraudster to rule upon the legitimacy of his own fraudulent tax submission. And how often have ecclesiastical controversies been perpetuated indefinitely all in the name of local *assembly* (or *church*) expediency? The ‘elders’ have spoken and that is an end to the matter! On earth, perhaps; but not necessarily in heaven!

David’s Blessed Assurance

Returning to David's words in 1 Sam.17:32; there is a composure here evident that seems to defy the reality of present circumstances. Indeed there is a peace here with David "*which passeth all understanding*". And there can be no doubt that David is convinced that victory for Israel would be the consequence of his engaging Goliath in battle, as it is written "*Let no man's heart fail because of him: thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine*". Only victory for David (and representatively Israel) would answer to such an exhortation. Defeat would have the effect of causing all men's hearts in Israel to fail.

Now note again Saul's response to these words of faith on the part of David (1Sam.17:33). Not only was David "a youth" (which indeed he was) in the eyes of Saul, but Goliath was, as it were, never a youth - even in his youth - in the eyes of Saul "*and he a man of war from his youth*". Insofar as Saul perceived matters this was a 'no contest' contest. Considering further the words of David in vs.32c ... "*thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine*". What have we here by way of contrast?

..... In the blue corner - "*And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had a helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was as like a weavers beam; and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him*" (1Sam.17:4-7).

..... In the red corner - "*Thy servant (David) will go and fight with this Philistine*" (1Sam.17:32c).

David is here (vs.32) flaunting not a carnal air of superiority to compete with Goliath on his terms, but rather a spiritual ability which must needs confront Goliath in terms altogether alien and therefore surprising to him. Rather would David have us focus on his acknowledgement of the principles of willing subordination and weakness of flesh in order to defeat Goliath. This is the way of the Cross; is it not? And what would Goliath know of that? Nothing whatsoever!

Sound in Logic; Short on Spiritual Facts

But we must hurry apace lest this battle be never fought. "*And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth*" (1Sam17:33). The words which Saul here utters cannot be easily challenged. They are both factual and full of logical import. Then that is an end to the matter, is it not? No; thankfully! Though Saul's specific words may not as such be easily faulted, his concluding intent is yet altogether carnal. Saul is suggesting that the outcome of any ensuing battle, given **these** facts, would be a foregone conclusion. But surely Saul's conclusion is grounded upon purely *carnal* logic? It ignores not only the revealed will of God insofar as His love for Israel is concerned, but even the possibility of mysterious providential intervention which God may utilise in order to maintain the continuing proof of this love. This is what Saul has come to in the great scheme of things. He may reason logically and naturally, but he has lost the ability to believe spiritually and supernaturally.

I would labour not unduly the point, but would suggest that many contemporary Christian 'leaders' (so-called) are no better than Saul here as they predicate a way forward for an apparently weakened Christian testimony/profession based predominantly - if not altogether entirely - on carnal facts, statistics, logic and pragmatism. Indeed there is an **honest** carnal logic in Saul's reasoning which altogether surpasses the "I know better" approach of many today who resort to mimicking their mentors (or should that be 'Fathers Superior'?) in order to maximise their own meaningfulness to expand their own circle of influence. Even the world will tell us that "flattery will get you nowhere". Yet in evangelical circles today flattery towards one's mentors will often get you everywhere, or so it would seem! Inasmuch as ministerial subordinates are willing to copy and re-create the schemes, and indeed novel doctrines, of their more celebrated Associates (however subtly they might 'tweak' their planned initiatives and enlightened insights in order to claim local and personal originality and authenticity) they will but secure for themselves temporal promotion within the ranks of earthly ecclesiastical courts of mediocrity (at best) whilst, in their hearts,

rejoicing over what they perceive to be their entrance into an ecclesiastical 'superior' elite (or pretentious 'illuminati'?) as they take their place at 'a top table'. If they have not yet gained for themselves 'celebrity' status, then surely such domestic expediency is the next best thing on the way to climbing the ladder of universal evangelical acceptance and widespread evangelical respectability. Such may speak of partnership, consensus, or even coalition - all in the name of the furtherance of the Gospel of course - but would the rather travel the way of a more dignified evangelical ecumenism in order to arrive at the celestial city before the time appointed. But I have already ventured further on such matters than I had originally intended.

The Preparation of David for Battle

When we come to 1 Sam.17:34a we are not to assume that David is petitioning Saul to change his mind. He is rather about to explain to Saul why his youthfulness must not to be considered a barrier to his contending with Goliath. What follows is both incredible and astonishingly supernatural. Here is not the testimony of a 'one-trick pony' but of a 'two-fold warrior' of note. Now, I am having a slight difficulty determining whether this is the report of one, or of two separate incidents. But I am inclined to conclude that David is reporting upon two separate incidents. First impression is to assume, at least grammatically, that both lion and bear came down together and conspired to secure the prospect, and then to share the reality of, a feast together. However unlikely this may sound it should not be forgotten, but remembered, that even Pilate and Herod were made friends together in order to devour Christ. Yet more probably, David is recounting two separate incidents which had the same intention i.e. the devouring of a lamb. A lion! A bear! Can anything be more challenging for David than these two giant obstacles? Perhaps? Yea verily!

*"And I went out after **him**, and smote **him** ..."* by which I conclude that two separate incidents are most certainly in view. Given the recognition of these facts, might not David have been considered worthy of being described by Saul (in vs. 33c) as "a man of war from *his* youth" also? But Saul knew not all of the facts - albeit he presumably thought he did. *"And when he arose against me ..."* (vs. 35c). Note this - David's motivational priority was certainly not just to fight with the lion and/or the bear, but the saving (or salvation) of the lamb; albeit the latter aim would necessitate the former activity. David was set for the **defence** of his flock. Both lion and bear **first** rose against him. David but responded appropriately. I have oft-times engaged, over the past 40 years, in incidents of conflict and controversy - but always (or so I thought!) with a view to an end viz. the glory of GOD. Upon reflection, I am now acutely aware of how easily one's focus may become sidetracked, and indeed obsessed, with the means to the end rather than the end itself. For many, temporal battles become all-consuming and eternal rest is lost sight of.

To take this further, and to establish the principle beyond a peradventure, of Christ it is written *"who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross; despising the shame"*. For Christ, the means to the end involved only 'suffering and shame'. The end alone held forth joy and glory. As the Apostle Paul said in another place *"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"*. If such a principle is grasped, one will not be surprised, or reluctant, to embrace the fact that our Saviour was, whilst on earth, described as *"a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief"*. Have you ever communicated this text to one who immediately responded with something like this ... "Well, I am sure that Christ must have laughed on many an occasion!" But from whence cometh such an assured certainty? I know that Christ was *"anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows"* but this description of him must not be contrasted with the former. These two descriptive texts must needs be harmonised; not set over against each other in contradistinction! The gladness here referred to was clearly a spiritual gladness and as such answers to *"the joy that was set before him"*. And I know that it is written that *"Jesus rejoiced in Spirit"* but I know not where such rejoicing is necessarily accompanied by any external physical or natural manifestations of joy whatsoever. No one has ever (or will ever) have occasion to anticipate and experience future joy in a measure greater than Christ. *"Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but when the desire cometh it is a tree of life"*. So said Solomon aforetime; and so was this scripture fulfilled in all its fullness in and by Christ as he first suffered and thereafter entered into his glory. How ready are we, in our natural depravity, to wallow in the perception of **our** sufferings for Christ rather than delight in the reality of **his** sufferings for us? And how excessively careless and carnal are we when we obsess with temporal means rather than indulge ourselves overwhelmingly in the **anticipation** of future eternal glory as saith the Apostle Paul *"God forbid that I*

should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal.6:14). The fact that I am crucified unto the world is not my doing; much less does it involve my suffering! It is all of grace, and it is all of Christ’s doing, and it is all of Christ’s suffering and it ought to be marvellous in our eyes. And it ought to sink down deep into our ears and to dwell in our hearts by faith.

But what shall we say of the things that really do pertain to **our** suffering and **our** affliction in the providence of God? *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.* (2Cor.4:17&18)

David’s Valuation of The Flock

We come now to 1Sam.17:34-36a and to David’s encounters with the lion and the bear. I would not wish to stray beyond the bounds of that which is written so I will be commensurately brief, as was David in the telling of it. We have again, in the narrative as related by David, another reference to the taking of “a lamb out of the flock”. I made reference earlier to the significance of such a loss as this as it concerned Uriah the Hittite - one of David’s mighty men. Suffice to extrapolate from these verses meantime that David perceived that whoever would do such a thing should surely be put to death. And David took it in hand to execute judgement here after this manner and so he *“slew both the lion and the bear”* (vs.36a). Yet, after what manner particularly did David slay both brute beasts? We are told he *“caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him”* (I take this to be descriptive of both incidents). Now in both cases David met the beasts head on, but as to the finer details of the slayings we are not told how they were accomplished and it becomes us to remain silent when no revelation thereof is even hinted at. What we may certainly deduce, however, is that David now perceives both incidents in terms of a preparatory work, in the providence of GOD, ahead of the task which now stares him in the face, even his impending battle with Goliath, the Philistine giant. Vs.36a is repetitious in order to reinforce the point. It is as if David is saying to Saul that one such successful incident might have been fortuitous, but two such incidents predicated a providential pattern and purpose.

But now the time draws near to ‘go forward’ in the purpose of God and David states definitively ... *“and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God”*. Now this statement obviously precedes the actual conflict and as such is intended to reassure Saul; not dismay Goliath! As to how greatly Saul was thereby reassured matters not so much as to how true the statement was. This is an important principle to grasp. Though David may intend to reassure Saul, he should not be held accountable for any measure of scepticism on the part of Saul now. Nor should we seek to excuse Saul naturally for a display of, what is effectively, carnal unbelief. That we might hesitate, or reason, accordingly if we had been in Saul’s position is no excuse for unbelief. There is no excuse for unbelief! Was it not David’s words, *“rehearsed before Saul”* (vs.31b), which had precipitated ‘faith’ (or at least a tenuous ‘hope’) in Saul’s heart sufficiently to provoke him to invite David into his very presence? Then having embraced the former words from afar, why should he not embrace the latter as uttered in his immediate presence?

The Primacy of Preaching

I am altogether convinced that the immediate hearing of the Word of God preached is the *piesta resisittance* of Christian experience. Nothing can surely compare to God speaking to us - and that is the spiritual reality of **true** preaching. No amount of prayer, or singing, or contemplation, or meditation, or reflection, or the exercise of spiritual gift, can compete with God speaking to us! Insofar as the Christian testimony is concerned, I am totally and ‘irredeemably’ assured of the primacy of preaching and critical (yea hyper-critical!) of anything and anyone which/who would suggest otherwise. Yet we are living in a day of famine as far as the **true** preaching of the Word of God is concerned. Nor should we be embarrassed to admit that which is obvious to such as are spiritual viz. that multitudinous organisational, denominational

and sectarian attempts to replicate a form of testimony based solely on an external structure mimicking a biblical pattern is at best superfluous, and often, in truth, fraudulent. I remember my earlier days when we, as children, would get together and play at 'houses', or 'schools' or 'hospitals'! (Now in those days, it was not considered feasible to replicate the truth of an household without a father, a mother and children.) And so those *playing the game* were chosen to fill those respective rolls. **But we were just playing !!!!!** And whilst such roll-playing was part and parcel of our cognitive development, yet it was *playing* nonetheless. "When I was a child but when I became a man"!

Sadly today many continue the experience of *playing* at 'church'. But unlike the simplicity of childhood they seek to perpetuate a perception of reality based primarily on a structural form and, given the requisite organisational or denominational approval, they become (at least in their own minds) what they are not *viz.* churches founded *solely* upon biblical principles from whence alone sounds forth the voice of God. This is not to accuse all such structures of hypocrisy, but to insist that there is a need for some measure of humility amongst those who find themselves within such established structures who would assume to themselves a spiritual dignity which they would most readily deny to others (some even more gifted than themselves) simply on the basis that such have no *immediate* or *affiliated* authority structure to give *official* credence, or recognition, to their efforts and exercises. I suppose I might liken such ecclesiastical structures to the Trades Union Movement of the 1970's which embraced, enthusiastically, a 'closed-shop' principle. Having established, in the workplace, official recognition for themselves, this movement proceeded to ensure that only those, and such as those, who did obeisance to the said principle, would be recognised as legitimate employees. Echoes of New Testament days I think! How sad that even evangelical structures today oft-times stoop to such discriminatory practices towards such as those who "are not of us". Should not 'evangelicals' know better? Of course they should, but as it has been said of them of old time "History teaches that history teaches us nothing" (Hegel). But more on this matter another day!

When Will We Ever Learn ?

Returning to the imminent conflict in hand (1Sam17:37b-d) David here records the fact that his two giant victories to date were *all of grace* and affirms that his forthcoming victory against this Philistine (Goliath) will be *of grace* also. When will we ever learn the lesson of *grace*? Even our past experiences of victory will not so much testify to our readiness, or fitness, to prevail, but of God's readiness and willingness to be *gracious*! How many have erred, even as Saul, of whom it is earlier written "When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel?"

"And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee" (1Sam.17:37e&f). What have we here? I have heard this sentence used to discredit Saul, as if he was sending David forth dismissively on this wise "Go and the Lord go with thee, for I will certainly not be going with thee"! I am the rather persuaded that Saul is here assenting, yea even deferring, to the manifest faith of David. Saul, though admittedly not able of himself to confront Goliath personally, 'discerns' (in some manner and measure at least) the faith and calling of David and acknowledges that such faith stands in the knowledge of the absolute necessity of the presence of, and dependence upon, the Lord if victory is to be secured for Israel in the battle which Saul knows must needs be fought and won. How strange that one, now ever so carnal, even Saul, can still recognise spiritual qualities and characteristics. Or is it strange(?) given that a man with an unclean spirit can cry out, even in the synagogue, "... Jesus of Nazareth I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God" (Luke 1:23&24).

There is a saying in the natural realm "We have to take him at his word"! The import of such a saying is usually uttered at a time of hesitancy or *doubt* in respect of a man's character or motive and is generally intended to give the *benefit* of the *doubt* to the *suspect* in question. Now oft-times this is a rational and reasonable strategy. What is puzzling in the current ecclesiastical / evangelical climate is that when we adopt this, apparently admirable and reasonable, strategy, or principle, and apply it universally (and, as such, to preachers who have attained *celebrity* status) we are castigated for *taking* them at their word - so often definitively expressed and written down for all to see. "I'm sure he didn't mean that", is often the retort

when we find fault with the clear expression of ‘his word(s)’! It is sad when those who should know better have a full assurance of faith in a preacher’s **hidden** intentions, even when that preacher’s words are clearly, at best, confusing and often somewhat mischievously novel. But what is that to them? They have a place at that *celebrated* preacher’s table and are permitted an audience into his presence, from time to time, if required! If only we knew him as they know him we would realise that he really disdains his *celebrity status* and that he has *a heart of gold*. He means no ill will to the Christian testimony! Of course not! But is it not written ... “*the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it*”? And has it not been proverbially expressed by one of old on this wise (?) ... “The way to Hell is paved with good intentions”. Tell me ... why is it that so many spiritually gifted men resort, in their apparent *maturity*, to seeking out new ways of expressing the “*faith once (and for all) delivered to the saints*” 2000 years ago? It has been my experience over 40 years to witness several significantly gifted men wend their way into (and not out of) Bypath Meadow by means of the development of new ‘**enlightened**’ expressions of the old faith. When will we ever learn?

Getting To The Heart Of The Matter

We prepare now for the battle set before us; or more precisely, set before David. *1Sam.17:38* sets the scene as far as Saul’s intended preparations for David is concerned “*And Saul armed David with his armour*”. This is difficult for me to interpret. I grew up hearing that Saul was arming (or clothing) David with his (Saul’s) armour. Now I am inclined to another understanding of that which is here written viz. that Saul brought forth armour previously set aside for David in his role, earlier appointed, as armour bearer to Saul (1 Sam.16:21d). What follows would seem to substantiate my measure of understanding insofar as it is written ... “*and he (Saul) put **an** helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with **a** coat of mail*”. This would surely be but a more detailed explanation of what is embraced by the words ... “*And Saul armed David with his armour*”. I would not want to dwell over much on the alternative option, but I find it somewhat amusing to imagine that Saul’s armour is considered by some to be here in view given Saul’s physical stature and David’s youthfulness.

“*And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it*” (1Sam.17:39b&c). Not proved what? From that which follows it should be deduced that all of David’s armour, including his sword, had not been proved. The putting on of the sword, however, appears to have been the defining moment which had convinced David that this was not the way; at least not for this battle. If I may be so bold for a moment as to *spiritualise* this incident; David came to realise with a witness that his sword, for this battle, would be of the Spirit i.e. the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God! Is it not written in vs.47 ... “*And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give you into **our** hands*”? But I am reluctant to proceed too quickly through the verses lest the thread of unfolding revelation be disturbed, so I return to *1Sam.17:39*. Now note carefully what follows upon David’s hesitancy in the earlier part of this verse. “*And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them.*”

A Contemporary Application of This Principle.

I would venture at this point to make a wider contemporary application of the principle herein enunciated. That which is not proved is, by implication, inherently suspect. And that which is suspect is not safe! Yet we live in a day characterised by novelty (i.e. by “some new thing”) which is, by implication, neither tried nor tested *i.e. not proved*. And so the mature insight of ‘elders’ (aged persons) in the ‘church’ is overcast by the advance and impatience of youth! And tried and tested spiritual principles, embraced by such ‘elders’, must give way to the ‘enlightened’ contemporary perspective of younger men who are more ‘street wise’ than their aged mentors! It is surely a disturbing and distressing trend within evangelicalism when the very notion of ‘elderly’ wisdom and ‘leadership’ is despised, or at least considered only of peripheral worth. How often have you heard it said that “we need **young men** to come forward” for the ministry of the Word? Why so? What we need is not young men particularly, nor old men exclusively, but spiritually gifted men who have been tried and tested i.e. *proved*.

When Paul exhorts Timothy to *“let no man despise thy youth”* he is not telling Timothy to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to criticism but is rather exhorting him to a manner of life in ‘the ministry’ which is above reproach. Why is it that this particular exhortation - to Timothy - is so often addressed in sermons to those who may have genuine and substantial reservations about the ability, or rather apparent lack thereof, which is perhaps all too evident in the untried and, therefore, ‘unproved’ vessel which has been fast-tracked into the pulpit? And has this generation never heard that when Paul addressed Timothy thus, Timothy was probably around the age of 40? Then what are we to say of, or to, multitudes of spiritual babes who compete to ascend pulpit steps before they have been *proved*. **“The less we say the better”** some might suggest. Perhaps! But that would warn no one of the dangers of trivialising the role of ministering the Word of God as a result! **“Let things be; if their ministry is not of God it will come to nought!”** might others advise. Agreed! ... if discerned and measured spiritually! Yet who measures spiritually today? But that still does not excuse a system which first creates, and then sustains, and then perpetuates a model of ‘ministerial training’ which engenders, or at least tolerates, a surfeit of mediocrity in and from the pulpit. Meanwhile the *plebs* (sorry, I meant to say ‘*saints*’) are expected to nod their heads in passive approval, against all spiritual evidence to the contrary. Is it not, then, time to take our leave of that which is *“not proved”* in the Christian testimony and return to the old paths? Is it not time to seek the Lord, while he may be found? Neither, admittedly, is this a time to reject youthful enthusiasm and exuberance. God forbid! It is rather a time to first discern, then recognise, and then nurture true spiritual giftedness in young disciples for profitable ministry to be exercised in the fullness of time. If it be thought that the example of the ‘stripling’ David does not substantiate, but rather negates, the case that I have herein sought to make, humility alone should surely prevent the verbal expression of such an objection.

I remember an American Vice-Presidential debate which took place some decades ago (1988 to be precise) involving the Republican Dan Quayle. When challenged about his youthful inexperience, he retorted by seeking to identify himself, in some way, with a youthful John F. Kennedy. The *put-down* was as succinct as it was brutal. His Democratic opponent Lloyd Bentsen’s response was ... “I served with Jack Kennedy. I knew Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you’re no Jack Kennedy”. Well might it be a meaningful response in kind to the arrogance of reckless youth, carelessly mentored, within the church today ... as it is written ... *“not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil”*. Perhaps you been confronted with a like-minded defence when you have expressed spiritual reservations concerning the promotion of unproved youth. And perhaps you have been met with the retort “What about Spurgeon? What about McCheyne? What about Toplady?” Has it never crossed your mind to respond on this wise ... “Sir you are no Spurgeon, or McCheyne, or Toplady!” Some might consider this approach to be abrupt, hurtful and confrontational, whereas it ought to be (in their opinion) more subtle, soothing, and convivial. But you who fall into that category, do you leave the erring youth and careless mentor in no doubt as to your subtle, soothing and convivial spiritual reservations or do you simply excuse yourself by suggesting that the responsibility for such an error of judgement lies elsewhere in the church and is not therefore your remit? Tell me!!! How does it feel to ‘wash your hands’ after this manner? Is it not the more refreshing to read (1Sam.17:39g) ... *“And David put them off him”*? David would have nothing to do with that which was untested and untried i.e. *not proved*.

David’s Acceptance Of That Which Is Commendable

Let us now turn our attention (1Sam.17:40) to that which David accepts, and not rejects, in his battle against Goliath! I hasten to add, however, that David *first* rejects *before* he accepts. It seems to be that the present generation in particular is obsessed with the illusion of the need to present all spiritual truth in what must be seen as a positive setting and to decry all that is, in their opinion, *‘depressingly negative’*. Why so? Well; negativity will ultimately lead into the wilderness apparently ... i.e. according to those with whom wisdom will surely die. But some will say **“Have ye not read the life story of A. W. Pink? Is that what you want? That cannot be the will of God surely?”** If we are to be led of the Spirit into the wilderness then so be it! **“But who will listen in the wilderness?”** Only the LORD perhaps! Yet this is not always the sum and substance of the matter. You will recall that John Baptist was *“a voice crying in the wilderness”* ... yet *“there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem!”* (Mark1:5). That

which seemed to be such a singularly dismal setting became abundantly fruitful. The wilderness blossomed as a rose, at least for a time! And shall we despise such wilderness experiences if called thereunto?

Even when an apparently negative approach is acknowledged as being both scriptural and spiritual, such is often presented apologetically. A glimpse into the calling of Jeremiah should establish the folly of such an approach beyond a peradventure*“See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant”* (Jer.1:10). Should it not be ‘seen’ as significant (*“See, I have ”*) that there is a four-fold ‘negative’ aspect to Jeremiah’s calling which **must needs** precede a two-fold ‘positive’ aspect? As for me; I view the six-fold aspect of Jeremiah’s calling as being altogether wholly and utterly positive. The initial ‘rooting out’ was Jeremiah’s first **forward** step. It marked the moment of turning, of reversal, of recovery, of restitution, of reformation, of revival, of that which had, until now, signified a prevailing departure from the Word of God. If there is no ‘rooting out’ there can be no ‘planting’. What ‘church’ today would be willing to start at the very beginning of Jeremiah’s call to ministry and work it’s way systematically through the various stages thereof. Can you imagine the scene where a new ‘minister’ or ‘pastor’ delivers his first ‘sermon’ to a congregation entitled ... *“Growth? That’s at the Very Bottom of my List of Priorities!”*?

In Jeremiah’s case ‘growth’ would require, *firstly, rooting out; secondly, pulling down; thirdly, destroying; fourthly, throwing down; fifthly, building; and sixthly, planting* **after which** God must needs be implored to give the increase! But for so many today the situation is not so desperate. The ‘church’ today (they would optimistically suggest) may have problems, but not to such a degree as would warrant such a negative approach as that predicated in Jeremiah 1. If truth be told, is it not rather that such modernisers have not the stomach for a ‘*Jeremiah*’ ministry? And so, rather than face the daunting prospect of a long-term plan for radical repentance and reformation, existing pragmatic ‘missional models’ and ‘missional strategies’ are embraced, or new ones contrived, which will, in their humble opinion, (or would that be ‘naughtiness of heart’?) bypass the urgent need for a strategy such as that followed by Jeremiah which requires, proverbially, ‘blood sweat and tears’. Following the way of ‘cheap grace’ (as the heretic Bonhoeffer rightly called it) such modern day carnal Lilliputians masquerade as spiritual Brobdingnagians (no mean feat!) assuredly perceiving themselves as towering over less discerning ‘fundamentalists’ who would rather prefer to model their evangelistic strategies on Scriptural precedents alone.

David’s Priorities

“And he (David) took his staff in his hand ... ” (1 Sam.17:40a). Why so? For David’s staff speaks of the Holy Spirit and of comfort! (Psalm 23:4d). One who is about to face a giant foe, however strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, is still (yea is especially and particularly) in need of comforting. Spiritual boldness does not negate or over-ride the need for faith and assurance, but rather establishes it. *“And chose him five smooth stones out of the brook”* (1 Sam17:40b). Admittedly, an understanding of the spiritual significance of David’s choice of *“five smooth stones”* has perplexed me over the years. Why *“five smooth stones”* when **one**, the first cast, would ultimately suffice? Am I missing what is perhaps the obvious explanation viz that David is justifiably uncertain at this time as to how many stones he will need before hitting his target? But if so, why only five stones? Why not more? Is he unsure that one stone will suffice yet certain that five stones will? If not, what other reasonable explanation will account for David’s stopping at five? Are we to see no spiritual significance in the details of Holy Scripture here and simply attribute incidents like this to random activity? Then that which is embraced in the narrative of Holy Scripture, although meticulously detailed, is apparently superfluous and proffers little or no spiritual instruction of any real consequence. It is as if David walks casually, if not carelessly, toward that which is ahead of him of eternal import. Surely this cannot be the case! What then shall we say of these things? Beyond that which is logical, feasible, and perhaps even obvious nothing whatsoever? Surely not? Having deduced the logical, and having considered the feasible, and having stated the obvious, let us see if there is but a hidden gem or ‘stone’ (or more) yet to be discovered ... and from whence!

“And (David) took his staff in his hand ” do you see what I mean by stating the obvious? David *“took his staff in his hand”*. *“And chose him five smooth stones out of the brook,* (whoever noticed this

brook until now?) *and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip;*". "Smooth stones" i.e. stones which had the rough edges steadily eradicated from them over time. Stones so shaped over many years and that so by "the washing of water" by the brook. Tried and tested hidden stones ... fit for purpose! Yet a purpose altogether hidden from human sight - until now. Now was the accepted time for these stones – or at least one of them. Now was the day of salvation!

And what about David's shepherd's bag – his scrip? How large a bag would this be? Not very, but sufficiently large, apparently, to hold five smooth stones, as now prepared over time, from the said brook, "and his sling was in his hand". David's hands were now full with (both) staff and with sling now at the ready. Whether in the same hand as his staff, or his other hand, I cannot tell definitively from the narrative (God knoweth ... and David) but in the absence of guidance from the narrative I am to deduce that which is logical and only the contentious will argue this point given the intent of my conclusion. What we have here now is **fullness**! David has appeared in the **fullness** of time. David's hands are **full**. David's scrip is **full**. All things are now ready and so we read "and he drew near to the Philistine". What else may we reliably infer, deduce or discover from the circumstances set before us? Surely, in summary, the following! David has a **full** assurance of faith in undertaking this most daunting of battles. He has a **full** assurance of understanding substantiating his claim to a **full** assurance of faith. He has come to the kingdom for such a time as this i.e. now that "the **fullness** of the time (has) come". He has a **full** scrip i.e. he has all that he has the capacity to take regarding ammunition. And he has **full** hands; this man after God's own heart. David is significantly **full** to running over. No half-measured spirituality for David. No half-hearted commitment for David. How could there possibly be any such half measure for the man after God's own heart? And do not miss this ... a full scrip speaks of humility. It suggests trust rather than presumption. It says that David will go, but that he will take all the provisions that he can carry. It says that David will take all the ammunition he can possibly 'get his hands on' and which may be carried in his scrip, given that his hands are already full and given the necessary restrictions and circumstances of battle. David can never be accused of being presumptuous, not for one moment. "And David drew near to the Philistine" (1Sam.17:40f).

Let The Battle Commence!

As we approach the narrative of the battle to view it, as it were, from a safe distance (of around 3000 years) we should perhaps consider for a moment the gasps of astonishment and apprehension which one might safely assume were heard around the camp of Israel. And then, perhaps, the deafening sound of silence as David, unheralded, "drew near to the Philistine". Fear hath torments; and surely the armies of Israel understood that the ensuing battle would seal their fate from henceforth.

1Sam17:41 has perhaps, until now, struck you as a fearful display substantiating beyond any reasonable doubt Goliath's strength and apparent ascendancy over all Israel and therefore, even more so, over David individually. The outcome is surely predicable, is it not? Of course it is. To the carnal mind which is enmity toward God there is no contest. The result is a foregone conclusion. But not so to those who are spiritual. Rather has the die been cast altogether contrary to carnal convention. God will determine the outcome of this battle; not man, be man ever so Giant. That this is so in all battles (spiritual and temporal) is the conviction of all God's people, is it not? Yet how utterly inconsistent and unbelieving of us to frequently imagine that there may be natural and physical circumstances beyond which God might not be able to tilt the balance of power in His people's favour. It is as if we willingly acknowledge, in hindsight, God's power in the context of David's battle with the Philistine yet doubt His power so to do in times of personal adversity and apparent imminent defeat. That God did not so deliver us on such and such an occasion often crystallises into the pious conviction that He could not possibly have done so given such adverse (yea even sinful) circumstances as we presented Him with in our own experience. We seek to excuse Him for not delivering us out of our affliction because we did not deserve to be delivered. But when, tell me, do the people of God ever receive of Him on account of their deserving and not rather on account of His grace alone? And whilst we, as Christians, continue to pay lip-service to the righteousness and omnipotence of God, our evil heart of unbelief often exposes our depraved reasoning as we seek to acknowledge God's grace as the source of all that we perceive to be acceptable to us whilst assuming that dark providences are altogether divorced from His grace. All in all we are, by nature, an unreasonable and uncircumcised people.

Be David ever so full in all aspects of his preparation, yet victory in this battle will hinge upon the grace of God and not upon any actual or perceived merits (or even de-merits) on the part of man.

Yet Another Contemporary Application

Now this is a lesson that ought to be contemplated, appreciated and assimilated once and for all. Not only is our salvation by grace (and that alone) through faith (and that alone) but our triumphs of faith as we walk as Christians (be they ever so meagre in comparison to David's battle with Goliath which we are here considering) are wrought by grace **alone**. Nothing whatsoever is accomplished for God but by grace **alone**. Then boasting is excluded, is it not? But not today! You may think I state the obvious here but am I the only one to notice the Cult of the Celebrity preacher which flourishes today in the contemporary Christian Halls of Fame? Halls of Folly more like! I say Halls because this plague is not confined to those with a weak and beggarly doctrinal basis. This virus has entered even doctrinally Reformed Christian Assemblies who should have known better than to grant access thereto. Such have often, in the past, pointed the accusing finger similarly at those on the very fringes of what is comprehended by the world as the Christian testimony. So-called Christian leaders feeding off the excess of what **they** have wrought, or accomplished, for God. Proud and profligate preachers who claim for themselves a special dispensation to peddle some new thing rather than simply proclaim the good old-fashioned gospel in specific terms of the faith once (and for all) delivered unto the saints. Arrogant and **untouchable** '*servants of the most high God*' - or so they would have you believe.

I remember confiding in one who I once considered a mighty man of God, particularly in the pulpit. I shared with him my constant apprehension in ascending pulpit steps to preach. I spoke to him of my fears and the trepidation with which I approached the preaching of God's word. He reassured me by insisting that if the day ever came when I lost these feelings that would be the day when I should really begin to fear. These feelings of weakness and inadequacy were inextricably linked with preaching the Christian gospel as far as he, then, was concerned. Many years later, when domestic ecclesiastical matters were taking on a new guise, I spoke to him again of the same matter. Sadly he had changed his tune. Not on my behalf, but on his! He said to me that he now had such a wealth of experience and knowledge that he had gained an assurance with regards to his preaching that he would not be found wanting in the pulpit. God, he told me, had tried and tested him repeatedly over the years and could now trust him and that knowledge had removed his earlier anxieties in the pulpit. His speech now betrayed him. He had travelled the road from faithful dependence to arrogant presumption without the slightest thought of deviation or hint of self-sufficiency. Be warned!

Returning to The Scene Of Battle

As we read of the approach of '**the Philistine**' unto David we are immediately introduced to another, even '*the man who bare the shield (who) went before **him***'. It is interesting to note, is it not, that one so bold and most certainly confident of victory, even Goliath, should require a shield, particularly in the light of his extensive armour (1Sam.17:5-7) and a challenger he so much dismisses and despises? As for David ... '*The LORD is my strength and my shield*' (Psalm 28:7). Both then go forth with shields. But David's shield is invisible to Goliath. '*The things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal*'. How aptly descriptive of the respective shields of the two men about to engage in battle! Who would ever again hear of Goliath's shield?

Vs.42 is highly descriptive, though subtly so. Do you see the Philistine 'looking about'. He cannot believe that all his tauntings have produced nothing more robust than a ruddy and fair countenanced youth. It is as if the Giant Philistine is altogether astonished by the appearance of his challenger and he looks around to see if there is more to David's response than meets the eye. There must be more than this, he thinks. But David is all that he sees in opposition and because of David's aforementioned appearance, the Philistine disdains him. From this moment on he treats David with contempt. Do you see that contempt personified in his speech? '*Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David*

by his gods'' (vs.43). The Philistine has been deliberately insulted, or so he understands it. Is David coming to poke and prod and strike him with sticks? How ridiculous is this? How pathetic! The Philistine's ego has been bruised, yet not a battle stroke has been struck. And what of the **staves** of which the Philistine speaks? I can only assume he is referring to David's **staff** in particular. Yet he speaks collectively. Perhaps David's sling is embraced in his thoughts.

There is almost a felt slowing of the tempo in the Philistine's speech in vs.44 as he curdles his lips, as it were, to issue a final and definitive sentence of condemnation upon this contemptible youth, even David. "*Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field*". His words are brief and his intent clear as crystal. There follows 3 verses of 130 words which is the response of the *condemned* youth David. Now one is often confronted with a prepared oration from a condemned man. But this is altogether different, both in content and in the manner of delivery. David says, as it were, forget my staves, I have but one possession viz. "*the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast despised*". Notice this ... David does not make reference to his staff; for this relates to David's personal comfort. Nor does he make reference to his sling; for this is that which the Philistine fails to regard and it is not David's intention to proffer more information toward the Philistine than that is necessary.

A Breach In Goliath's Armour Perhaps?

In contrast, the Philistine comes forth "*with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield*" which he presumably judged might be needed in his fight with his adversary, even David? But as for the shield, it was in the hands of "*the man that bare the shield that went before him*". But why would such a mighty and positively confident Giant require a shield anyway? Who would have thought that a strategy (or implement) of defence would be relevant in the context of the Philistine's armoury? Is not this but the first hint or insight of doubt, over against a plethora of self-confident assertions, on the part of this uncircumcised Philistine? In vs.45 David taunts the Philistine by comparing their respective weapons of war. It is as if David is teasing the Philistine for having brought forth so many weapons in order to achieve what he had obviously considered earlier to be a foregone conclusion irrespective of who was found to defend the honour of Israel. There follows, by comparison, a lengthy response by David to the Philistine's arrogant presumption as related in vs.44. Who can read the words of vs.45b through to the end of vs.47 without seeing David, as it were, growing in stature syllable by syllable, his voice thundering across the divide reaching a crescendo as it falls upon the ears of the Philistine. Not only will David overcome the Giant, he will overwhelm the Philistine host also. The fowls of the air and the beasts of the earth (note this – not just of the field) would have a feast day according to David. This is a battle of monumental proportions. The consequence of David's victory would reverberate throughout the whole earth.

Anticipating The Battle

Before passing on to the actual battle, it is interesting to note that David dismisses both sword and spear as being altogether superfluous, yea even useless, in terms of such a battle. Not so a shield. The Philistine and David both went forth armed with shields. In the case of the Philistine, another *bore* his shield. In the case of David, the LORD *was* his shield. Further; in terms of the anticipated victory (according to David) the battle would place the spoils of that victory into the hands of all Israel. This would be the LORD's doing "*and he will give you (the Philistines - not just Goliath ... it is plural; the AV makes this clear!) into our hands*"(vs.47c) i.e. the hands of all Israel. By grace are ye (plural) saved !

Such a declaration on the part of David foreshadows a primary feature of the New Testament 'ecclesia' (or Assembly) viz. it's corporate nature and universality. No one doubts that Old Testament Israel was a wholly corporate body and yet few today view the 'ecclesia' (or 'congregation') as a wholly corporate and universal body! Here is a principle of collegiality which multitudinous Denominations pay lip-service to whilst, by their very structural existence, deny both the truth and the power thereof. And let not the non-conformist 'sectarian' (as he is so readily labelled, ridiculed and dismissed by the Evangelical

‘Establishment’) who longs to see that which has not yet been made manifest of the eternal purpose of God in Christ regarding the *ecclesia*, and who rejects all pretentious claims to the contrary within and without inter-denominational confederacies, be in any way intimidated by tin-pot *ecclesiastical* dictators who have wormed their way into inner-circles of pretentious ‘church groupings’ which recognise as legitimate only those, and such as those, who do obeisance to **their** treasured vision, whilst isolating themselves from, or at least happily ignoring, those who see an even bigger picture than themselves; all on the grounds of an apparent arrogant insubordination by such ‘separatists’ to their obvious spiritual supremacy.

“*And it came to pass, when **the Philistine** arose ...*” (vs.48). **The Philistine!** It was not that Goliath was the only Philistine present, but that he epitomised the character and manner of life of all Philistines at heart. Thus is he referred to here as “*the Philistine*”. He is the full embodiment of that which was, and still is, essentially at enmity with the heart of God and, therefore, is anxious to do battle with the “*man after God’s own heart*”. And if it be noted that Goliath is up for the fight by *arising* and *coming* and *drawing near* to David, it should be noted that David is even more than up to responding thereto by his *hasting* and *running (towards the army no less!)* to meet the Philistine. David will respond to the Philistine giant’s challenge in the giant’s home territory and on the giant’s home ground. It is not without significance that David’s greater Son would, in the fullness of time, take on Hell’s giant on Hell’s home ground, even in the realm of Death.

The Prospect of Bondage and Death Swallowed Up In Victory

Now 1Sam.17:49 takes us by surprise, does it not? Forty-five verses have thus far been devoted to report on, and account for, the appearance of Goliath, yet this one verse (vs.49) following thereupon settles the contest once-and-for-all. Such a monumentally significant battle, one might have thought, would have been fought out over a significant period of time. Had this been but a contrived account of a fictional battle it would surely have been reasonable to expect from the author a more lengthy and brutal engagement. But this was no fictional battle and the truth will be told, however surprisingly short the battle would last. It’s almost one of those *blink and you’ve missed it* moments; is it not? I suggested earlier that this was surely, on the surface at least, a “no-contest contest”; a giant against a stripling! If such a perception was to prove substantive one might well expect a brief encounter, but not on this wise. Yet brief the encounter turned out to be; but not as carnal logic would deduce or presume! This was a first-minute knockout which would upset all the odds. Proportionality has no place here - it would seem. The build-up to the battle may indeed be monumental and expressive, but the resultant conflict and surprising victory defies natural reason with a witness. And no wonder; for this is not David’s battle but the Lord’s battle.

I am thinking of Calvary now and how millennia upon millennia of defiant and deviant sin had challenged the purpose of God in Christ from the time of Adam. Having brought all into bondage, Adam had created the environment into which all, even spiritual Israel, had been brought. And sin had even found a way to exploit God’s own law to it’s own advantage. “*The strength of sin is the law*” said the Apostle Paul definitively in Romans 8. And sin had gone from strength to strength ever since the giving thereof on Mount Sinai. Not that sin was weak beforehand. Not at all! Indeed even before, and without the law given at Sinai, sin had demonstrated it’s power over and over again and had provoked God into a mighty response even in the days of Noah. And in the fullness of time, thousands of years of accumulated filth and depravity had, as it were, taken the field of battle on the day that Christ approached Golgotha. Sin and death on that day, we might say, were reaffirming their friendship together and having grown to Gigantic proportions, manifested themselves in all of their true colours of deathly hues (“*now is the hour, and the power of darkness*”) going to and fro from strength to strength and with treacherous malice. Standing upon that self-same battle field, in contrast, is Christ destined for crucifixion! This was a “no-contest, contest” was it not? At least it must so have seemed to those who were passing by and to those who stopped to look on.

The Blow That Bruised the Giant’s Head.

1Sam.17:49 begins with an apparently random choice, by David, of a stone from within his bag i.e. his *'shepherd's bag'* (even) *'a scrip'*. This stone is then slung in the direction of Goliath. Slung unceremoniously? Perhaps! But certainly not inadvertently or carelessly! And, of a truth, most certainly providentially! As to how confidently that first stone was projected from the sling of David, I cannot tell. I am persuaded, however, that David knew he had enough stones in his armoury to finish the task which he had ventured upon to accomplish. I am, nonetheless, inclined to affirm that David did not advance into this battle with a superficially frivolous and fearless certainty that no hurt would befall him in the midst thereof. He knew of a truth that ultimate victory was assured, but that is not the same as to suppose that David necessarily assumed that there would be no personal cost, or hurt, involved in the securing of that victory. If I am correct in likening this battle between Goliath and David to that of the battle between Satan and Christ fought out at the place called Calvary then ought not the analogy to allow for some measure of apprehension and anticipatory suffering at least on the part David. I press this analogy no further, however, insofar as I cannot prove, but only surmise, the former and there is certainly no scriptural evidence of the latter. David escapes altogether unscathed from the midst of this battle. Not a stroke of Goliath's might is in any way effectual against him. David comes away from this battle altogether unwounded.

By the end of 1Sam.17:49 Goliath has fallen flat *'upon his face to the earth'*. His forehead has been pierced and death has enveloped even him who had, until now, the power of death, even Goliath of Gath, as it is written in vs.50 viz. *'So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him ...'*. What then is the significance of the words of vs.50d and vs.51 for therein we read of David's apparent need, as yet, of a sword*'but there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran ...'* ? Now the slaying of Goliath is again referred to in vs.51 in such a way as to suggest, at first glance, that this **followed upon** the severance of Goliath's head from his body, yet vs.50c would certainly place the slaying of Goliath earlier. How then may we reconcile, or rather understand, these two apparently conflicting (or at least paradoxical) statements? I think the answer is obvious to all but those who would most readily seek to find fault with the verbal inspiration of scripture. Vs 50 is a factual account of the slaying of Goliath *'with a sling and with a stone'*. Yet for David the intention was not just to slay Goliath but to demonstrate to all and sundry that Goliath's death had been most certainly accomplished, and that without a peradventure.

The Consequences Of That Blow.

From the perspective of those who were afar off it would surely be reasonable to assume that though David knows of a truth that Goliath is dead following upon the first strike, all who were afar off would have no such certain knowledge. So David moves on, as it were, to the unmistakable confirmation and manifestation of the said victory rendering the disputation and feeble hopes of the Philistines pointless by proving beyond all shadow of doubt that the long awaited and decisive contest had concluded swiftly in David's, and therefore Israel's, favour. David, having slain Goliath with but one stone, would leave not that **stone** unturned in declaring his victory. Nor would he settle for anything other than the dramatic heralding to Goliath's hosts, as well as to the armies of Israel, that Goliath was indeed dead - and that with a witness! And so *'David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword (i.e. Goliath's sword) and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith'*. Whether or not David raised that head aloft for all or any to see, or whether in some manner it rolled away from Goliath's body, I know not. The resultant effect was, however, clearly visible from a distance. And is it not written earlier in scripture (*Gen.1:15c*) *'... it shall bruise thy head*'? From henceforth no one need be in any doubt whatsoever but that Goliath was dead and that David's triumph had been secured and his work, in this regard, finished. *'And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled'*.

Reflections Upon That Blow

My thoughts return again to Calvary, for there the Saviour, even Christ, fought a fight with Satan, even unto the death. He engaged him in battle upon his own ground. In apparent weakness, and to the natural eye, this was a *'no-contest contest'*. At the conclusion of this battle Christ, not the Giant Satan, is

dead and therefore apparently defeated. So it would seem! But the Apostle Paul writing to the Colossians narrates the story from an altogether different perspective saying that upon the cross Christ “*spoiled principalities and powers, (and) made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it*”. But this surely flies in the face of natural wisdom and perceptive logic? To triumph by means of death; how can these things be? And so it is written ... “*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he (Christ) also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were ... subject to bondage*” (Heb.2:14&15). And so also, in like manner, did David’s victory over Goliath!

Yet all who were both near and afar off from Calvary would have no clear understanding as to assume the defeat there of Satan and his hosts at the time when Christ uttered the words “*It is finished: and he bowed his head and he gave up the ghost*” (John19:30c-e). There must surely be further evidence forthcoming if this obscure and unlikely victory was to become believable; something which would render all those looking thereupon, both near and afar off, inexcusable. There was need of some clear and unmistakable display of the victory, which had most certainly been accomplished, that would put demonic hosts to flight whilst, contemporaneously, bringing comfort to the meek and solace to the spiritually broken-hearted. And there would yet most certainly be a demonstration of victory, leaving not even a **great stone** uncovered; not to mention many grave stones also as it is written ... “*Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in and found not the body of the Lord Jesus*”. Thus far those who entered in have no evidence of defeat as they had heretofore supposed; otherwise a body would have been observed altogether dead and in the process of decay and putrefaction. Yet more was needful for a full assurance of faith and a full assurance of understanding. Paul presents us with a summary of that which was needful as it is written “*For I delivered unto you first of all that also which I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that he was seen of about five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles, And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time*”. (1Cor.15:3-8).

Now this explanation answers precisely to that which is written viz. “*..... and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel*” (1Sam.17:46b-f). Some may venture to suggest that all the earth did not then know this to be the case and would thereby imply that David was but ‘*exaggerating*’ his hope in his moment of anticipated *glory*. But this would surely be but to challenge, however inadvertently and unintentionally, the verbal inspiration of scripture; though no doubt scripture includes within it’s boundaries many ‘*figures of speech*’ which therein enrich the revelation of God. I am of a mind to insist that **no exaggeration** is either intended, nor may be necessarily or realistically interpreted, by David’s words here recorded. Inasmuch as this narrative is unequivocally linked *typically* to the salvation of God in Christ, wrought at the place called Calvary and applicable universally, the parallels are certainly and precisely appropriate and therefore valid. Yet doubtless there will remain sceptics and unbelievers who would most readily scoff at my attempts to justify the veracity of the words ... “*that all the earth may know*” on this wise.

If I could but indulge such scoffers, for a moment and in a more simplistic manner, please bear with me. David’s words (“*that all the earth may know*”) require neither immediate acceptance nor understanding. It is a declaration which predicates future fulfilment. All that is required to establish the appropriateness of the declaration under scrutiny is a satisfactory explanation as to how the events of the day in question could possibly proffer the opportunity for global and universal application and appreciation. To this end it may surely be acknowledged that, on that day, the children of Israel were released from the darkness of a bondage that could be felt into the glorious liberty of the children of God - in a figure! And subsequently, in the fullness of time and within the nation of Israel, would come the only begotten Son of God.

The More Immediate Ramifications Of That Blow.

“And the men of Israel and of Judah arose” (1Sam.17:52a). Of course they did ... for he who had heretofore kept Israel in bondage under his power had been altogether defeated, in like manner as it is (subsequently) written *“And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his (Christ’s) resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many”.* Of necessity, there must needs be an indisputable witness to Christ’s ultimate triumph over death; and that witness was evidenced by resurrection from the dead; first to death itself and then to the faithful in Israel. In 1Sam.17 the Philistine host are first to respond to the defeat of their Giant Goliath (1Sam.17:51g and h) (as if they see it first) and Israel responds thereafter (1Sam.52a - c).

The cutting off of Goliath’s head constituted such indisputable evidence as anyone could possible require or demand to establish beyond a peradventure that he (Goliath) had been verily and utterly defeated and, as a consequence, so had the Philistines. And so it is written ... *“And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines, until **thou** come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim, even unto Gath and unto Ekron”.* For the Christian the parallels are clear. Satan has been utterly and altogether defeated. The resurrection from the dead has provided indisputable evidence of this fact. The battle fought out at Calvary belonged to the Lord and *“it is finished”.* Yet Christ’s victory over Satan, Hell, and the Grave would not prevent subsequent battles between two warring factions as it is written ... *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”.* (Eph.6:12). But the die was most certainly cast, and subsequent battles, be they ever so bloody and brutal, would but prove that the **decisive** battle had long since been fought and won by Christ himself upon the cross at the place called Calvary.

But what of the words *“until **thou** come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron”* as quoted in the previous paragraph? Is this not a somewhat peculiar way of describing the boundaries within which the sight of fallen Philistines may be viewed? Perhaps! And perhaps there is another *nuance* which may be gleaned here. Perhaps it is not just the boundaries, witnessing to the defeat of Goliath and, by implication, the Philistines in general that are in view (although those boundaries most certainly are defined), but our own individual appreciation of the victory accomplished with all the resultant consequences for Israel’s safety and security ... *“until **thou** come”!* I appreciate that, on the surface, the wider text appears to be but generally descriptive in it’s scope, yet the insertion of the word *“thou”* seems to me to be individualising it’s intent. I suppose the application of what I am trying to say may be summed up in three recurring words in scripture ... *“What seest thou?”* or *“Sees’t thou this?”*. The immediacy of the prophetic word always demands more than a knowledge of facts and figures, even a **personal** appreciation thereof and an obedient response thereto. This truth is embraced by the descriptive phrase ... *“the obedience of faith”* ... which alone constitutes *‘saving faith’*.

A Step Further.

Now; **a step further!** ... *‘And the children of Israel returned from chasing after the Philistines, and they **spoiled** their tents’.* After the slaying of Goliath and after the indisputable display of victory following upon the cutting off of Goliath’s head and the subsequent fleeing of the Philistines in answering to their defeat, Israel *“spoiled their tents”* (1Sam.17:53b). Now the New Testament speaketh on this wise concerning a step further i.e. beyond death and beyond resurrection..... *“Wherefore he saith, **When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men”.*** (Eph.4:8).

In Conclusion Meantime

I am to conclude this chapter in the life of David at 1 Sam.17:54 and for those who find my summary conclusion pedantic or novel I am to beg their indulgence; for a time at least. Two things stand out in this verse *viz.* Goliath’s head and David’s armour!! Goliath’s head is brought to Jerusalem whilst David’s armour is put in his (David’s) tent; both works being wrought by David himself. Having written what I have

written, I am obviously of a mind to affirm that the armour referred to in this verse is indeed David's armour and not that of Goliath, as has more often than not been assumed and/or affirmed by many preachers and commentators. I am, however, an unrepentant believer in the principle of "*comparing spiritual things with spiritual*". In its most basic and simple form this principle prompts the disciple of Christ to compare individual biblical texts in the context of the whole of scripture and, more immediately perhaps, in the context of the narrative surrounding the immediate passage under consideration. You should recall e.g. that in considering the import of 1Sam.17:38&39, I came to the conclusion that the armour with which "*Saul armed David*" (1Sam.17:38a) was not Saul's armour but David's own, as yet untried, armour. If you followed my reasoning then, and if you thereafter embraced my conclusion, it should come as no surprise to you that we are now reintroduced in vs.54 to **David's armour**. It had earlier been put off, not having yet been proved. But surely, by implication, there lingered the thought that the said armour had not been rejected altogether but rather required proving before being of further use to David. And so, we may logically deduce that this armour (in 1Sam.17:54) is indeed David's armour, being set aside and secured by David for proving in the fullness of time. I appreciate the apparent ambiguity surrounding these verses. I would but ask those who may be inclined to dismiss my conclusion too hastily to acknowledge the very same measure of apparent ambiguity.

This is by no means the only difficulty with which we are confronted in vs.54(c) "*but he put his armour in his tent*". Tell me, please, from whence cometh David's tent? There had been no prior indication that David had such a designated tent ... at least certainly not upon the field of battle. Are we to assume a tent in, or perhaps beyond, Jerusalem? Such statements are not often easy (indeed they are hard) to be understood. Can it be that it is in a tent located back home in David's father's house? Apparently not, for it is written ... "*And Saul took him that day and would let him go no more home to his father's house*". (1Sam.18:2).

I would therefore direct your attention to a passage in the New Testament which may not answer, but which may profitably stop us from enquiring any further after the specific location of *David's tent*. It is in John's Gospel. (John1:35-39). "*Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour*". As for the geographic location of Christ's dwelling place on that occasion I cannot tell. What may be deduced, however, is that two of John's disciples were led of Christ that evening to understand the whereabouts of a *spiritual* location which would be defined in a wider Gospel context later on, as it is written "*where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst*". If, then, we would but confine our thoughts regarding 1Sam.17:54c to the idea of a dwelling place appropriate to, and suitable for, David, this might be more profitable than any conjecture as to the geographic location thereof. What is important from Israel's perspective is that a tent belonging to, and for the use of, David is now located among them. John1:14 is instructive in the context "*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt (tabernacled or tented) among us, (and we beheld his glory ...*". And this spiritual principle is illuminated further in Rev.21:3 "*And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God*". No sooner are we introduced to David's tent in 1Sam.17:54c than we read (6 verses later) that David would be now **dwelling** in the very midst of Israel from whence his glory would thereafter be made manifest.

I am mindful, of course, that some readers may not instinctively, nor immediately, follow me in my understanding of these last few deliberations. That would be understandable. I would hope, however, that my thoughts hereon will not simply be dismissed as being too subjective and therefore, by implication, unreliable. At the very least, I would hope to introduce such doubters into a field of spiritual perception as has perhaps, heretofore, been off-limits to them. Insofar as they have sought 'chapter and verse' to establish every jot and tittle of Christian doctrine, they are to be commended. I remember being faulted on several occasions by one of old time for wanting simply "to dot all of (my) theological I's and to stroke all of (my) theological T's" as if to suggest that to embrace precision and spirituality was not an option. If this is your

fear I am sympathetic and would say, as the Apostle Paul once said (albeit in my case after a somewhat more subdued and less authoritative fashion) *“Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things”*.

And Finally (for now) Brethren

That which has gone before in this chapter, as embraced in it's historic context, has been of monumental importance and impact. All that really matters in terms of 'the big picture' is that David did indeed defeat Goliath the Philistine giant, and that in terms of the biblical narrative. The labours of this author in recording his reflections thereupon have been in many ways stumbling and far too brief. As a consequence, he is not above correction. I remember hearing something on this wise pertaining to a purported pronouncement by John Knox, the great Scottish Reformer. He is reported as having said something on this wise *“If any man can show me out of God's ain holy Book, where I am wrang, I will either put myself right or I will endeavour to put the complainer right”*. Oh for days again when Christians seek out a **biblical** conformity in all aspects of spiritual understanding rather than settle for a polite and courteous difference of theological opinion based upon divergent doctrinal views which engenders, at best, a democratic consensus and, at worst, a demonic confederacy.

To be continued W.M.B.