

1st Samuel 17:1-58
David and Goliath

Introduction

1. We saw in our last study (chapter 16) how God had rejected Saul, a disobedient and self-serving king), and a better king
2. This was David, a man God said was “after his own heart”
3. In our passage today we are going to see that reflected in probably one of the greatest examples of faith and courage in the Bible
4. It’s the real-life story of David and Goliath

A. The Israelites cower in fear before the Philistines (1-11)

1. Saul and the Israelites face off against the Philistines (1-3)
2. Goliath taunts Israel (4-11)
 - a. He was a “**champion**”—and a beast! (4-7)
 - 1) “**whose height was six cubits and a span**”: 9’9” tall (cubit: 18”; span: 9”)
 - a) The NET states he was “close to seven feet tall”
 - b) All MT manuscripts record six cubits and a span
 - c) However, the LXX, Josephus and one Qumran manuscript of this verse record four cubits and a span, which would be about seven feet
 - d) The NET rejects most manuscripts and favors Josephus and the Qumran scroll because “it seems more reasonable; it is likely that Goliath’s height was exaggerated as the story was retold”
 - e) There is no evidence of this, however, and the description of his helmet, armor, and sword suggest otherwise
 - 2) “**a bronze helmet**” (5): unusual because according to ancient depictions, Philistine soldiers wore feathered headdresses rather than metal helmets
 - 3) “**scale-armor which weighted five thousand shekels of bronze**”: 125 pounds
 - 4) “**bronze greaves on his legs**”(6): shin guards
 - 5) “**bronze javelin slung between his shoulders**”: dart or short spear which is likely intended to be thrown
 - 6) “**spear**” (7): may have been the most intimidating weapon Goliath held
 - a) It has a shaft “like a weavers beam”: probably 2 to 2.5 inches in diameter
 - b) The head was made of iron and weighed “**six hundred shekels**”: 15 to 17 lbs
 - c) The text doesn’t record a length but since spears were generally longer than the soldier was tall, we can assume the spear was likely 10 to 12 feet long!
 - d) See www.goliathsspear.com
 - 7) V. 45 states that he also had a sword
 - 8) Finally, he had a “**shield-carrier [who] also walked before him**”: there were two types of shields, a larger rectangular shield carrier by the shield carrier and a smaller, rounder shield used the soldier

- b. Not only was Goliath a big man, but he had a big mouth as well (8-11):
 - 1) He could come out into the land between the two armies and continued to taunt Israel twice a day for 40 days (v. 16)
 - 2) This caused Saul and the Israelis to be **“dismayed and greatly afraid”** (11)
- 3. All of this is designed by the author to set the stage for what is about to take place with David

B. David learns of Goliath’s taunts (12-40)

- 1. Jesse sends David to the front to bring supplies to his brothers (12-19): we can’t overlook the author’s deliberate attempt here to establish a contrast between David and his brothers:
 - a. He was the youngest of eight sons
 - b. The oldest were soldiers (**“gone after Saul to the battle”**; 13) while David was a shepherd who **“went back and forth from Saul to tend his father’s flock”** (15)
 - c. This contrast is further developed later when his brothers rebuke him for coming to the front and inquiring why no one has gone out to fight Goliath
- 2. When David arrives at the front, he learns of Goliath’s taunts, as well as the Israelites fear of facing him (20-24)
- 3. So, David asks what will be done for the man who attacks and kills Goliath (25-30)
 - a. Even with the promise of great wealth, the king’s daughter as a wife, and freedom from taxes, no soldier dared go out to fight Goliath (25)
 - b. David, while asking about the reward, seems more interested in something else:
 - 1) He was concerned with removing the **“reproach”** (think humiliation) brought upon Israel by Goliath’s taunts and Israel’s failure to defend themselves
 - 2) He was concerned with God’s reputation (26) as the **“the armies of the Living God”** were being taunted by an **“uncircumcised Philistine”** (e.g. someone outside the covenant with God taunting those under the covenant)
 - c. David’s concerns were met with a stiff rebuke by his oldest brother, Eliab (28):
 - 1) He rebukes David for coming to the front
 - 2) He accuses David of abandoning his responsibilities at home (caring for the sheep)
 - 3) He claims he “knows” that David is an arrogant and prideful person (**“insolence and wickedness of your heart”**)
 - 4) He even accuses him of improper motives: **“you have come down in order to see the battle”**
 - d. However, David’s response to Eliab seems to suggest that he, above everyone else, truly understood the significant nature of the event (29): **“But David said, ‘What have I done now? Was it not just a question?’”**
 - 1) Most translations render this verse in a way that suggests David was irritated with his brother and snapping back at him, “What??? Can’t I say anything???”
 - 2) The Hebrew word translated as “question” is more literally “word” or “matter”
 - 3) The KJV and NKJV favor the later and render it as “cause”: **“What have I done now? Is there not a cause?”**
 - 4) This suggests that David wasn’t snapping back at his brother, but rather suggesting that he had every right to speak up because the matter was a serious one—there was a cause for speaking up

C. David resolves to do what no one else will do (31-37)

1. David offers to fight Goliath (31-32)
2. When Saul tries to dissuade him, David strengthens his resolve (33-36)
 - a. David was but a “**youth**” (young man), while Goliath had been a “**warrior from his youth**” (33)
 - b. Undeterred by Saul’s warning, David appears to brag about his own credentials (34-36a):
 - 1) He had killed both a lion and a bear with his bare hands defending his sheep
 - 2) This “**uncircumcised**” brute would suffer the same fate
 - c. However, David reveals the real source of his confidence and resolve (36a-37): “**and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God.**” **37 And 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.”**
 - 1) He wasn’t arrogant or proud as Eliab had claimed
 - 2) He wasn’t confident in his own abilities
 - 3) He was confident of God’s ability to **DELIVER** him from Goliath (there’s that theme again)

D. David kills Goliath (READ: 38-51)

1. We have here one of the most remarkable acts of bravery and demonstrations of faith recorded in the Bible
 - a) A shepherd with no practical military experience against a battle hardened military champion
 - b) A youth who was likely average build and size against an almost 10 foot giant
 - c) No armor or protection against someone equipped with the most sophisticated armor of its time—over 125 pounds of scale armor, metal coverings to protect his head and legs, three offensive weapons (sword, javelin and massive spear) and two defensive weapons (hand-held shield and shield carrier out ahead of him)
 - d) And David takes a stick, a sling and five smooth stones (archeological evidence suggests these sling stones were possibly the size of tennis balls)
2. David’s courage reveals an understanding of one of the principles we’ve seen throughout this book: God protects His people but destroys those who oppose Him (45-47):
 - a) David knew he was no match for Goliath physically or militarily (45): “**You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin...**”
 - b) But that did not deter him because he knew that ultimately God would protect him but destroy Goliath, an enemy of both God and Israel (45b): “**but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted**”
 - c) He also fully expected that the LORD would defeat the entire Philistine army (46): “**And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth**”
 - d) David was also keenly aware that his victory over Goliath would serve as a rebuke and a reminder to Israel that it is the LORD who delivers them (there’s that theme again), not their own military might:

- 1) Saul and the Israeli army cowered in fear for 40 days and nights because of one man, Goliath
 - 2) Yet David's victory over Goliath would remind **"this assembly"** that **"the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD'S"** (47)
 - 3) It would also make it known to **"all the earth"** that **"there is a God in Israel"** (46)
3. God DELIVERS both David and Israel (48-51):
- a. He gives David victory over Goliath (48-51):
 - 1) Notice the text says he **"ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine"** (48)
 - 2) David's victory is clearly supernatural:
 - a) David takes out Goliath with the very first stone, in spite of the fact that there's a shield carrier out in front of him and he's heavily armored
 - b) It hits Goliath in the forehead, the one area not protected by armor, and with such great force that it crushes his forehead and knocks him face down into the ground
 - a) David then stands over the top of Goliath cuts off his head: The text is unclear as to whether it was the stone that actually killed Goliath or whether it mortally wounded him, with David hastening his death by finishing him off with Goliath's own sword and cutting off his head
 - b. He gives the Israelites victory over the Philistines (52-58)

Conclusion

1. It seems everyone knows the story about David and Goliath, even those who know very little about the Bible or discard it as a bunch of myths or fairytales
 - a. It's become a part of our language and references to David and Goliath have become commonplace when describing someone who overcomes great odds
 - b. We see this in sports all the time (like the recent college basketball playoffs and all the upsets), where the higher ranked team is referred to as Goliath and the lesser known or ranked team is called David
 - c. The world often uses this story as a means to encourage us to go after our dreams when the odds are against us, or to overcome our fears, or even to conquer our enemies
2. But as we've learned today, David's fight against Goliath wasn't really about any of those things:
 - a. David's battle against Goliath wasn't some attempt to show he could conquer his fear, or defeat a much more powerful adversary
 - b. His motivation was two-fold:
 - 1) To remind Israel that God was their DELIVERER, the one who fought their battles
 - 2) To remind the Philistines that there was a God in Israel who would protect His people and destroy His enemies
3. So, rather than use the story of David and Goliath as a guide on how to overcome giants in our own lives, might we instead:
 - a. Reflect on how God reminds us through such challenges that He is the one who fights our battles and delivers us
 - b. Reflect on how God will use them to reveal Himself to the world around us