

David and Goliath: the true story!

Passages: 1 Samuel 17:26–50
Luke 1:68–75

Today we come to the story of **David and Goliath**... a very well-known Bible story. In fact, it's too well known! The fact that everyone already knows the story makes it extra hard to discover anything new about it. And so, that is the challenge for today: Today, what I am interested in is that we uncover the "true story" of David and Goliath!

Let's pray.

The first thing we need to do is to set the scene: It's the year 2000 BC., and we are with Abraham as God calls him to go to a new land...a promised land... where he will raise up his descendants to be as numerous as the stars in the night sky! It is a land flowing with milk and honey. **However**, before Abraham's descendants can fully enjoy this land, God says that they must rid it of all the former inhabitants—the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Edomites, the Canaanites and the Philistines. In other words, the Promised Land must be cleansed of all evil practices and false gods.

This is, essentially, what Israel's first king, Saul, achieves 1000 years later! In his 20 year reign as king (and despite his gradual demise through pride and self-conceit) Saul has succeeded in liberating a large portion of the Promised Land, pushing back Israel's enemies just like God had instructed. The central highlands of Israel are now relatively free. Of most importance to our story is the fact that **the Philistines** have been driven back to the coastal plain of the Mediterranean (to the cities of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, and Gath).

And this is where today's story begins. The Philistines are attempting to regain some of their former territory by penetrating the highlands of Judah through the Valley of Elah. They are coming to take back...to steal back...the land that they believe still belongs to them, even though God has given it to Abraham's descendants. This manoeuvre by the Philistines, however, results

in a virtual stalemate as the Israelites and the Philistines set up their camps on opposite sides of the Elah Valley. Neither is willing to descend into the valley and cross the river to attack because it will make them far too vulnerable. In the end, both armies are stuck in their fortified positions.

There is only one way to resolve this deadlock. Following a popular Near-Eastern custom, a representative from each nation is invited to step forward and enter into a one-on-one contest, the outcome of which will decide the fate of the two nations. If the man who represents the Philistines wins, his victory will entitle the Philistines to dominate Israel. If, on the other hand, the man who represents Israel is victorious, his victory will entitle Israel to dominate the Philistines.

The Philistines have already chosen their man—His name is Goliath; a man standing nearly ten feet tall; a descendant of the dreaded Anakim. (Interestingly, the Anakim were the same giants who had struck such terror in the hearts of 10 of the 12 spies sent out by Moses to inspect the Promised Land. Israel's fear of the Anakim made them want to turn around and go back to Egypt!) Now, Goliath was a descendant of that family line. Dressed for battle, he must have been an awesome sight: with a bronze helmet on his head, a coat of armour on his chest and back, armour on his legs, a javelin strapped to his back, an enormous spear in his hand, a sword buckled to his side, and an immense shield to his front. Twice a day for 40 days, this giant descends the valley slope and shouts taunts at the armies of Israel, hoping to incite a challenger. And no doubt, each time he goes out, the rest of the Philistine army stands behind him, cheering him on! He is their man—they have great trust in his physical size and strength.

Enter David!

Of course, one of the most obvious things we see is that David, unlike Goliath, has not been popularly chosen by the people to represent Israel. To the contrary, David is ridiculed by his own people and his own family for being a mere youth. First, it's David's oldest brother, Eliab, who insults him for coming to the battlefield. Eliab says, **“Why have you come down here? And**

with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.” To add insult to injury, all King Saul can say to him is, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy!” (vs 33). Even Goliath has nothing but scorn for David as he curses the fact that Israel has sent out a mere youth. “Am I a dog that you come at me with sticks?” “Come here and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!” (vv 43–44). No one, it seems, thinks David is worthy of being Israel’s representative. His youth marks him out as the classic ‘underdog’.

But that’s not all! To make matters worse, when David goes out to meet Goliath, he goes out **without** armour or sword or spear or bow. All he has is his shepherd’s staff, five stones, and a sling. Who would put their money on David? Why would anyone put their faith in an unarmed, untrained, inexperienced youth up against a heavily armed and incredibly powerful giant? Humanly speaking, this contest is a farce! All the advantages are on Goliath’s side.

Now, with these obvious details in view, it’s easy to see why the story of David and Goliath has become a **synonym** for any situation where a little guy confronts a big guy. We immediately refer to them as “David and Goliath!”

- Take, for example, the case of the giant oil company, **BP**, who refused to admit any blame for the huge oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. What did the headlines say when coastal fisherman and tour operators got together to take up a case against BP? The headlines read, “David vs. Goliath: fishermen and tour operators against oil giant BP!”
- Here’s another example: On Friday night, Kim and I watched a movie called *The Bourne Identity*, starring Matt Damon. The good guy, Jason Bourne, once worked for the CIA. But now, the CIA wants to eliminate Bourne as a way to cover up an international scandal. What makes the movie so suspenseful is the way it is built around this David and Goliath scenario. Bourne, the good guy, looks small and impotent against the Goliath-like agency of the CIA. Yet,

Bourne still wins! You can imagine the reviews: “Matt Damon stars as Jason Bourne, a modern-day David standing up against the Goliath-like machinery of the CIA with nothing more than his bare hands!”

- Here’s one more example: Greenpeace owns a boat called the ‘Sea-Shepherd’. Two years ago, it got into a little tangle with the huge Japanese whaling vessel, the YUSHIN MARU. Headlines repeatedly referred to the incident as a “David vs. Goliath” type event.

From all this, it’s obvious that most people think of the story of David and Goliath as a **morality play** of ‘good vs. evil’. The good guy (David) stands against enormous odds, being pitted against a much larger and better equipped Goliath (the bad guy). And, of course, the underdog always seems to win, whether through greater skill, greater determination, greater belief in himself, or just plain luck!

Let me say, however, that we do a great disservice to the Bible if that’s all we see in here! In fact, there are **three key words** in the text which point to a far deeper, far bigger picture that stands behind the story.

“Defy”--To begin with, the most serious detail about Goliath is not his size, nor his armour, nor his race, nor his challenge. The most important detail centres around the word **"defy"**, used six times in chapter 17. Goliath defies "the ranks of Israel" (vs 10). He defies "the armies of the living God" (vs 26). Most serious of all, he defies the one true God by cursing His name (vs 43)! Indeed, Goliath is the representative of a nation which defies God. After all, the Philistines worship Dagon-- and, as we have already seen back in chapter 5, Dagon is a false god... a no god... a god who has already fallen down twice before the ark of the LORD! To put it simply, this giant, **Goliath, represents the forces of darkness; even Satan himself!**

“Fear”-- This brings us to the second most important word in this chapter: the word **‘fear’**! Fear has immobilised God’s people. Fear has caused them to lose all perspective when it comes to Goliath. All they can see is Goliath's armour and strength. As a result, they falsely think that only armour and strength can defeat

Goliath. It's no wonder why Saul tries to dress David in his own armour before sending him across the brook (vs 38,39)—manmade weaponry is the only way he knows to allay his fears.

“Anointed”-- But the amazing thing about David is that he perceives the situation in a very different way than his fellow Israelites. And here is where the third most important word in this chapter comes in: the word is **‘anointed’!** If you remember last week's reading in chapter 16, we saw how the prophet Samuel **anointed** David as Israel's new king, in the presence of his brothers. It is this **anointing from God** that makes all the difference for David's understanding of the situation! From the moment of his anointing, the Spirit of the LORD came to rest upon him. This is the only reason why David steps out to take up Goliath's challenge! By his anointing, David is enabled to see himself, not simply a mere 'shepherd boy' crossing the Valley of Elah, advancing towards Goliath with nothing more than a handful of stones. No! David sees himself as **the anointed one**; the one whom **God has chosen** to represent Him and, in the power of God, to defeat the Philistines!

In other words, the story of David and Goliath is not a morality play of good vs. evil. It is a story of how God overcomes every enemy who defies His lordship. Although we may fear these enemies and pull back in self-protection, God (through His chosen servant; his anointed one) will advance against them, and will ultimately defeat them all!

Let me, now, summarise the true story of David and Goliath using **three simple, Biblical statements** that come directly from those three words:

First, this story is about the fact that, although **God has a perfect plan to remake this world into a renewed Garden of Eden, Satan has continually defied those plans.** Ever since the Garden of Eden, Satan has used all sorts of deceptive influences to try to distract away God's good purposes for the world. Whether through false religions and idols, immoral practices or self-centred schemes, Satan has been at work to infiltrate God's land and turn this world away from God's universal purposes!

Hence, when the Philistines tried to infiltrate the Promised Land and steal it back, Satan was ultimately behind their plans. When Goliath marched forward in defiance of the living God, Satan was ultimately the inspiration for his cries. In the big-picture scheme of things, Satan is behind every challenge to God's purposes for the world. He incessantly defies the Living God. He incessantly tries to steal back what belongs to God. This is what the Apostle Peter meant when he warned us saying, "**Satan is a prowling lion, seeking whom he may devour.**" Jesus also made it clear that Satan "...comes to kill, steal and destroy."

Second, **this story is about fear**...about the fact that God's people have always been **afraid** of Satan. All through history, God's people have lacked faith and felt prey to doubt and despair. There was fear when they went down to Egypt. There was fear when they left Egypt. There was fear in the desert. There was fear when the spies saw the Anakim. There was fear as they stood before Goliath. Even today, Christians often get paralysed by fear...the fear of what might happen to us if we truly step out and follow God.

Third, **this story is about God's anointed one**...and the fact that God has (and always will) raise up His anointed one to overcome our fear and deal the fatal blow to Satan.

Throughout the Book of Judges, God repeatedly saved His chosen people through the intervention of an **anointed one**—saviours like Gideon, Deborah, Barak and Samson who would rid the Promised Land of Satan's strongholds. Saul was also one of these anointed ones. So, too, was David...and that's the only reason he could do what he did! By God's Spirit, David was able to bring down God's enemy with ease; not because of anything in him, but because God was fulfilling His own plans and purposes for Israel through him.

When you think of these three points, it becomes quite obvious how this story of David and Goliath now applies to us. **For it is Jesus Christ** whom God has raised up in these last days to be His **Anointed One**! Like David, he may not look like much. Like David, he doesn't display any physical strength or power to give us confidence. In fact, how many people during his lifetime cast

scorn upon him, saying things like, “Isn’t he the carpenter’s son?” “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” “If you are the Christ, come down from the cross and save yourself...and us as well!”

But, as we have seen today, it’s not what the eye sees that matters! The only thing that matters is the **anointing of God!** By the Spirit of God, Jesus has divine power to cast out demons...“to save us from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us.” Indeed, this man from Galilee...

- ... **is the cosmic and universal saviour** who can renew the Garden of Eden on earth!
- ... **is the cosmic and universal saviour** who can put a stop to the infiltration of Satan and his attempts to steal back what is no longer his.
- ... **is the cosmic and universal saviour** who can (and will) finally decapitate the true enemy of God, Satan, putting an end to his taunts and finally liberating the people of God for all time.

Like Israel before us, therefore, we must not give in to fear but, rather, put our faith in this man, **the Lord’s anointed one.** Only He can save us from the enemy, without sword or spear, but in the name of the Lord of heaven and earth!

Let me say: **If you understand all that, then you’ve understood the true story of David and Goliath.**