

# David and the Sitting Duck

## The Singer, Part 2

### 1 Samuel 17

Ask the average person on the street about David and Goliath and you'll probably get a fairly decent retelling of the outcome of the story.

But ask the average person why David fought Goliath and you'll get a number of different answers.

In fact, to the world out there, David and Goliath has become a metaphor for the underdog winning the day. I mean, isn't it great – a little shepherd boy defeated the great Goliath.

In fact, the name Goliath has simply become a title for tackling some gigantic problem or obstacle and if you just act like David, and you have enough faith in yourself, you'll be able to conquer all the giants in your life too.

Even the church has turned David and Goliath into some kind of therapeutic manual on how to defeat your giants – whether it's the giant of low self-esteem, or bankruptcy or a bad boss or even the bully down the street.<sup>i</sup>

This passage actually exposes a national sliding toward apostasy – a nation that had forgotten God and really didn't care about His name anymore. A nation that wanted kings like all the other nations so they could fight their battles like all the other nations too.

The accent in this passage actually begs the question – what is it that's worth giving your life to . . . what's really worth fighting for – and if it's something other than the glory of God – the advancement of God's reputation – the application of God's word – and the glory of His name, then you're fighting for nothing more than temporary junk and shallow, self-serving, self-promoting, self-congratulating objectives.

If you place David and Goliath in its context, I Samuel chapter 17 is really an amazing illustration of the truth God revealed to Samuel in chapter 16.

Mankind is all impressed with what's on the outside – the best, the strongest, the biggest, the most experienced; but God is impressed with what's on the inside.

While most of us understand *what* happened in I Samuel 17, it's easy to forget *why*.

Given the fact that First Samuel 17 is among the most familiar passages, I'm not going to read the entire chapter; what I want to do is divide it into four sections and then expound some on each section and make some observations as we go through this text.

#### 1. The front lines (17:1-18)

The first section we'll simply call the front lines.

Now if you were with us in our last study, Samuel the prophet has informed Saul that God has rejected him; He's rejected his house from creating a royal dynasty because of Saul's rebellion against the word of God.

Saul is devastated, angry, hostile and unrepentant.

For the next 15 years, Saul will remain in that kind of condition; repentance and fellowship with God will be the furthest things from his mind and heart.

In fact, the reason Saul is immobilized by fear and without any evidence of faith in chapter 17 is because of his disobedience and rebellion against God in chapter 15.

He can't fight Goliath because he's become just like him – only not nearly as strong. In fact, as you'll notice that Saul wasn't even as committed to his God, as Goliath was to his.

Now **chapter 17** opens with a stalemate between the Philistines and the Israelites.

Let me mention briefly – the Philistines were a fierce people who settled along the coastal regions of the land of Canaan. They would become one of Israel's most feared enemies during the early days of the Kings.

According to what we're told here, the two armies are stationed on either side of the Valley of Elah; below them was the valley floor where David and Goliath would meet.<sup>ii</sup>

And **verse 3** implies that that no army had any real advantage over the other. This was a stalemate.

In fact, even though **verse 3** tells us that both armies put on a daily show of strength, gathering in battle formation, they really had no intention of rushing down their side of the mountain, through the

valley, appropriately named, Ephes-dammim, The Valley of Blood, and then up the other side toward the enemy.<sup>iii</sup>

To do so would almost be suicidal.<sup>iv</sup>

Neither side has an advantage – that is, as long as Israelites think and fight like Philistines. So the Philistines offer up something that was used at times among warring armies.

**Notice verse 4. And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath.**

The word *champion* can be literally translated, “the man between two [armies]”; we get our word middleman from this. In the context of an army, the term would have been a description of the infantryman.<sup>v</sup>

One of my commentators who lived more than 100 years ago wrote that under these circumstances there seemed no way of deciding the contest except by a single combat.<sup>vi</sup>

It’s possible that Israel would have agreed. The trouble was the Philistine soldier just so happened to be a giant.

Samuel, the author of this account, evidently wants his readers to feel the terror of this giant because he’ll spend more time describing him than he will the actual battle with David.

**Notice verse 4b – his height was six cubits and a span.**

Which translated from the Hebrew text means, 9 feet and 9 inches tall. The Lakers would sign him in a heartbeat – he would be able to dunk the ball standing still.

He was one huge fighting machine.

**Notice verse 5** as Samuel describes his helmet of bronze; armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze.

Let me pause to say that this bronze coat – or shirt would have reached to his knees; made of small bronze plates that resembled fish scales. It would have allowed for both protection and freedom of movement. Samuel adds that his coat of mail weighed more than 100 pounds.<sup>vii</sup>

**Verse 6;** He’s also wearing bronze sheaves – or shin guards that covered where the coat of mail ended down to his ankles.

He’s got a javelin slung at his back between his shoulders; he’s got a spear with an iron spike at the end of it that weighed 25 pounds.

He’s got a sword that isn’t mentioned until later – the Hebrew word indicates the sword is a small curved sword in the shape of a sickle – just perfect

for slicing off heads. All of his weapons are designed for hand to hand combat.

He’s effectively covered from head to toe with bronze – the sun would have reflected off Goliath to make him all the more terrifyingly fierce and intimidating.

And for 40 days – here he comes with the offer of single combat.

**Notice verse 8. He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, “Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me. 9. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants . . .**

He’s lying of course; even after he’s dead, all the Philistines run – they don’t surrender.

And so all of Israel is standing on that hillside dismayed and terrified.

Maybe you’re tempted to think, what a bunch of sissies. Come on . . . get with it!

It’s easy to be brave when you know the rest of the story isn’t it? It’s easy to be brave at a distance . . . to be courageous when you’re not personally involved.

Reminds me of Bill Walton, the former NBA basketball star who once said, “I learned a long time ago that minor surgery is when they do the operation on somebody else.”<sup>viii</sup>

When it’s on me, it’s major surgery.

It’s at this point in the narrative that the scene shifts to let us know just how David ever showed up at the front lines in the first place.

If I could summarize the next three paragraphs, we’re told that three of David’s oldest brothers are in the army of Saul; it’s been more than a month since they drew up battle lines and Jesse the dad wants a firsthand report.

So he sends David over see what’s happening.

And the word you could use to sum up the feeling of the Israelites in battle array is the word, fear.

## **2. The Fear (17:19-30)**

Notice *the middle part of verse 20. And he (David) came to the encampment as the host was going out to the battle line, shouting the war cry. 21. And David left the things in the charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers. 23. And as he*

*talked with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him. 24. All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid.*

They literally drew back in haste.<sup>ix</sup>

By the way, David doesn't know if this is the first time Goliath has taunted the armies of Israel, or the 40<sup>th</sup> time.

He's completely in the dark.

The men in the ranks inform him quickly and then add that the king has promised three things to any man who defeats the giant.

**Verse 25** tells us there are three prizes to winning: riches, the king's daughter's hand in marriage and the father and family estate of the Israelite soldier who defeats Goliath will be **free in Israel**.

The Hebrew word for **free** is *hopsi* which is more than likely a reference to the family estate being free from any kind of taxation.<sup>x</sup>

For David, this is the ultimate path to fame and glory – this is better than some lottery ticket. He gets rich; doesn't have to pay taxes and gets to marry into the royal family.

But David's answer reveals an entirely different perspective on this scene.

The soldiers refer to Goliath as **this man** – in **verse 25** . . . **"Have you seen this man?"**

David refers to him in **verse 26** as **this uncircumcised Philistine**.

The soldiers said that Goliath has come out to **defy Israel** in **verse 25** and David says in **verse 26** that he is **defying the armies of the Living God**.

See the difference?

The soldiers saw a giant – David sees a blasphemer.

The soldiers think Goliath is insulting Israel – David sees him insulting the Living God.

David is effectively asking, "Hey doesn't the glory of God matter?"

Doesn't following the true and living God make all the difference out here?"<sup>xi</sup>

None of them were willing to fight Goliath because they didn't really want to risk anything for the honor of their country. David is about to fight Goliath because he is willing to risk everything for the honor of his God.

You see, the problem out here isn't a military problem, it's a spiritual problem.

Their eyes are on Goliath . . . David's eyes are on God.

About this time, David's oldest brother, Eliab effectively dresses him down – **verse 28b**. **Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness.**

That's the long way of saying, "Who do you think you are? Well, let me tell you who you are – notice, **I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle.**

You can actually translate that, "you have come down to be seen at the battle."

And David basically ignores Eliab, refusing the invitation to lose his temper and fire back at the jabs and putdowns. He basically responds by saying, **What have I done now? Was it not a word?** In other words, all I did was ask a question?

I agree with one commentator who wrote that Eliab was David's Goliath before David got to Goliath. Goliath will express ridicule and contempt for David, but Eliab has already done that here. You might even say, David had to contend with 3 Goliaths.<sup>xii</sup>

Eliab who says, "You're just an arrogant backwoods shepherd"; King Saul who will say, "You're just a child" and Goliath who will say, "You're dead meat." That's in the Hebrew language.

David ignores them all.

And he repeats his theologically rich statement that Goliath out there in the Valley of Blood is doing nothing less than taunting the true and living God.

And those words eventually make it up the chain of command.

- The first scene in this chapter is entitled, front lines.
- The second scene is entitled fear.

### **3. This next scene can be titled, Folly (17:31-40)**

Notice **verse 31**. **When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him. 32. And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." 33. And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth."**

Again, Saul has a measuring stick out and he's backed David against the wall. Okay, let's see,

- Goliath is 9 feet, 9 inches tall . . . let's see, David, how tall are you?
- You're about, oh goodness, only 5.3 . . .
- Look, David, you can't see over Goliath's belt buckle.
- C'mon, let's cut to the chase . . .
- You've got spunk, kid, but you're way in over your head . . . He's been fighting for as long as you've been alive.

Then and there, David instructs Saul on the principle of trust in a sovereign Lord. He recounts some life threatening experiences rescuing sheep from lions and bears – with nothing more than his shepherd's rod. We'll take a close look at that rod, in our discussion tonight – so not now.

**Notice verse 37. And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of the Philistine.**

In other words, if God can use a shepherd to rescue a lamb from the jaws of a bear, He can just as easily use a shepherd to rescue his nation from the jaws of a giant.

And what humility here . . . how many shepherds have a bear rug . . . David is pointing it all back to God. He's giving all the credit to God.

You see, David is effectively taking Saul to Sunday school . . . listen, Saul, the issue isn't how big Goliath is, the issue is how big God is!

Remember Him?

He defeated armies with a word; he knocked down city walls with His invisible finger; he pulled back walls of seawater with his breath . . . remember Him?

Saul does remember, sort of, because it no doubt deep conviction he says to David in verse **37b. Go, and the Lord be with you.**

But almost immediately, Saul slips back into conventional thinking – notice **verse 38. Then Saul clothed David with his armor.**

Why? Because he still doesn't get it. He's trying to fight Goliath like Goliath.

- Goliath has a helmet of bronze – notice – he put a helmet of bronze on his head.
- Goliath has a coat of mail – so he clothed him with a coat of mail.
- Goliath has a sword, so David, here's my sword.

This is absolute folly . . . Saul is trying to make David like Goliath.

And David responds in **verse 39, I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them.**

The Hebrew verb translated **tested** means "to try".<sup>xiii</sup>

To try out . . . to get used to.

I haven't spent any time practicing with swords and coats of mail while wearing a helmet of bronze. This isn't going to work.

The truth is, it should have been Saul going down there to take on Goliath. It's his armor; his nation; his leadership; his problem. And remember, Saul was taller than all his people – 1 Samuel 9; he's the biggest soldier Israel has . . . and he knows it.<sup>xiv</sup>

But you need to know there's something more going on here.

In these ancient days, wearing the clothing of another was to not only be imbued with their essence but to share in their being. One Old Testament scholar brought out the point that Saul is more than likely binding David to himself so that he will be able to take credit – or at least share in the victory, should David defeat Goliath.<sup>xv</sup>

Sort of like – he won the race, but he was driving my car; she won the baking contest, but she used my recipe; he made a hole in one, but I let him use my favorite club.

Yes, he killed Goliath, but he was using my armor. He is facing humiliation and so he attempts to connect David with his own essence through this armor so that he can claim a portion of the victory.

But David wisely discerns this and graciously says, "You know, I'm just not good at using this stuff . . . I'd better stick with what I know."

The late J. Vernon McGee once said, "If God has called you to use a slingshot, don't use a sword."

So David strips back down to his normal clothes which means he's absolutely unprotected . . . except by the providence of God, David heads down toward Goliath, who's sitting out there in the Valley of Blood.

But not before picking out five smooth stones, **verse 40, and placing them in his pouch, with his sling in his hand.**

There is some conjecture, based on a reading of I Chronicles 20 that Goliath had 4 brothers. We know for certain that he had at least one brother – also a giant.

David may know of these giants – or he may be simply preparing to miss a couple of times – we're not told.

One thing we do know is that David is entirely resting on the strength and direction and providence of God.

- These are the front lines.
- We've seen the fear.
- We've seen and heard the folly

#### 4. The final scene can simply be titled, faith (17:41-58)

Now in this scene, where David and Goliath eventually meet, more verses are spent on their verbal combat than the actual physical battle.<sup>xvi</sup>

The Philistine in *verse 41 moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him*. Notice, Goliath could clearly see that David was *ruddy – or redheaded, young and handsome*.

But what literally sent him into a rage is revealed in verse 43 – notice, *And the Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?”*

Some would suggest that Goliath couldn't see very well because he had acromegaly; a disorder related to gigantism; caused by excessive production of growth hormones by the pituitary gland.<sup>xvii</sup>

So that the person actually never stops growing.

It is true that the tallest person in recent history was Robert Wadlow who suffered from acromegaly – at his death; he was nearly 9 feet tall and still growing.<sup>xviii</sup>

Acromegaly often impairs a person's sight . . . is Goliath some lumbering, blurry eyed giant?

No, he can actually see very well. David does have sticks, plural.

Back in *verse 40* we're told he took his shepherd's staff in his hand. The word Goliath uses in reference to sticks is the Hebrew word that can be translated *rod*, singular. And like shepherds did, he had that stuck in his belt.

This is what infuriates Goliath – Israel has sent over a shepherd. Is he a dog, to be beaten away with a shepherd's rod and staff?

Are you kidding?

Goliath rages, *verse 44, You come to me and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field.” And David answers in kind – 45, You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies, whom you have defiled. 46. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies*

*of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth – now get this – that all the earth may know that there is a new king in Israel – no, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel – and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hand.*

David doesn't have an advantage because he has a slingshot; he has the advantage because he serves the sovereign Lord.

He has one all-consuming passion – it's worth fighting for – it's worth risking his life over – to show his world that the God of Israel is the true and living God.

But can you imagine this scene?

All the Israelites are out there holding their breath, thinking, Goliath is too big to kill; and David's thinking, “Goliath is too big to miss.”

As far as David is concerned, this isn't a story of David and the Giant; this is the story of David and the sitting duck!

This is David and the Sitting Duck.

He lets the rock fly and the stone struck the Philistine, *verse 49, on his forehead and he fell on his face to the ground.*

Goliath is evidently knocked unconscious – evidently not yet dead. *Verse 50* summarizes that *David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him – how? – here's the final details – v. 51 – then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath – he didn't even ask for permission – and killed him and cut off his head . . . that's undeniable proof to both armies that Goliath is finished.*

Let me summarize these four scenes with a few observations.

#### First, don't let your faith depend on majority opinion –

David refused to act like Saul . . . and dress up like Goliath. He was taunted by his brother, looked down on by his king, jeered and mocked by his enemy . . . the majority opinion has voted.

David, the odds are against you . . . you'll never win!”

I love the funny story I read in a ministry magazine recently that illustrated this; an archaeologist was digging in Israel and came upon a tomb containing a mummy. After just a few minutes

of observation, he called the curator of a prestigious museum and said, "I've just discovered the 3,000-year-old mummy of a man who died of a heart attack! The curator replied, "There's no way you can know all that . . . bring him in and we'll examine him."

A week later, the amazed curator called the archaeologist. "You were right about the mummy's age *and* cause of death. How in the world did you know he died of a heart attack?" The archaeologist replied, "It was easy – he was clutching a piece of parchment in his hand that read, '10,000 shekels on Goliath.'

Can you imagine the shock waves throughout this region?

No wonder, the women begin to sing of David's might in battle soon after this event.

Listen, don't pin your faith on the majority opinion.

### **Secondly, don't let your talents be depreciated by conventional wisdom**

David didn't trust in the weapons of war, but he didn't throw what he had away either.<sup>xix</sup>

A sling was a powerful weapon, directed by the providence of God and for the glory of God. It caught Goliath off guard. It was the perfect tool for this amazing moment.

If all you have is a slingshot . . . or a stick – then God has a plan to use them. Whatever your talents . . . whatever your gifts . . . they haven't surprised God.

J. Vernon McGee once said, "If God calls you to use a slingshot, don't use a sword."

Use whatever you are . . . whatever you can do . . . whatever you have, for the glory of God.

### **Thirdly, don't let your past be diminished by spiritual dementia**

As one author put it, "If you've got trouble remembering God's past deliverances, invest in a diary." [And start writing, because] in God's providence, no experience is wasted.<sup>xx</sup>

There's something easy to miss – If you look back at *verse 54*, these events actually take place at the end of the chapter.

What happens first, following the defeat of Goliath is a personal conversation with the King; David informs Saul of who his father is – in *verse 58* – and Saul obviously wants to know the family of David because David has been technically promised the king's daughter in marriage.

*Verse 54* tells us that David carried out two final actions.

First, he took Goliath's head to Jerusalem. At this point in time, Jerusalem is occupied by their enemies the Jebusites . . . more than likely David slips over there one night and affixes the head of Goliath to the wall as much as to say, be warned.

Then notice, *he put Goliath's armor in his tent.*

What tent? Saul isn't going to allow David to return home . . . David didn't come to the front lines with a tent?

Old Testament scholars point out that the plunder of the Philistines would have guaranteed that whatever belonged to Goliath now belonged to David.

This was Goliath's tent.<sup>xxi</sup>

And what a tent . . . it was two-stories high . . . and notice, the end of *verse 54*, David arranges Goliath's massive armor inside that massive tent, that now belongs to him.

We know later on that David presents the sword of Goliath to the Lord as an offering, but he will keep these mementos of this great day.

David will write in *Psalms 111, God made His wonders to be remembered.*

These mementos would become trophies of the grace and power and glory of God – displayed through the weakness of a shepherd boy who was willing to offer his slingshot to God.

But they would also be life-long reminders that there really are things worth fighting for . . . there really are things worth risking your life for . . . there really are things worth living for.

And above all . . . they would be a lasting reminder . . . that the only true Giant is God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/12/2014 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 2014 Stephen Davey  
All rights reserved.

- 
- i Adapted from Dale Ralph Davis, Expositions of the Book of 1 Samuel (Baker, 1994), p. 37
- ii Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 3, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Zondervan, 1992), p. 694
- iii Adapted from Phillip Keller, David I (Word Books, 1985), p. 82
- iv Malcolm Gladwell, David and Goliath (Little Brown and Company, 2013), p. 4
- v Expositors, p. 695
- vi The Pulpit Commentary: I Samuel, ed. H.D.M. Spence ( Joseph S. Exell, Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1909), p. 317
- vii Ibid
- viii Steve May, The Story File, (Hendrickson, 2000), p.236
- ix Pulpit Commentary, p. 329
- x Expositor's, p. 698
- xi Davis, p. 42
- xii Davis, p. 43
- xiii Brown, Driver & Briggs, p. 650
- xiv Charles R. Swindoll, David: A Man After God's Own Heart (IFL Bible Study Guide, 1982), p. 14
- xv Expositors, p. 700
- xvi Kenneth L. Chafin, The Communicators Commentary: 1, 2 Samuel (Word Books, 1989), p. 146
- xvii Viewpoint promoted by Malcolm Gladwell, p. 14
- xviii Gladwell, p. 14
- xix Pulpit Commentary, p. 335
- xx Davis, p. 45
- xxi Expositor's, p. 703