

# Against All Odds

Little Shepherd Boy – Part II

I Samuel 17

## Introduction

A number of years ago, the headline of a newspaper that I happened to be reading, told a story that, to the boxing world, was an undreamed of upset. It read, “Douglas Knocks Out Champ”.

This was almost too incredible to believe because Mike Tyson was the undefeated, undisputed heavy-weight boxing champion of the world. He had never tasted the canvas. He was a monster, annihilating those who would enter the ring. In fact, the newspapers had touted this as a real mismatch. No one had ever really heard of Buster Douglas. The match was supposed to be a warm-up for Tyson, who was on his way to bigger fights and bigger paychecks.

It is interesting that in Las Vegas, from what I read, there was only one person who bet on Buster Douglas. He put fifteen hundred dollars down, on that fateful Saturday night, and after the fight, the odds were so spread, he walked away with 56,000 dollars. I am not condoning boxing and betting, by the way, but this is what I read.

I happen to love following this particular kind of story. I love to see an underdog come out on top and fool all of the experts, like Buster Douglas did that day.

There is a portion of scripture, in our study of the biography of David, that tells basically the same story. In fact, it has become as legendary as David himself. Turn in your Bible to I Samuel 17, which tells the story of this underdog, who, against all odds, takes on the undefeated champion of the Philistine nation and, as you may remember, wins.

## David Meets Saul

Now let us turn back, for just a moment, to I Samuel 16. This is where we read of Saul meeting David for the first time.

Saul is evidently, troubled by an evil spirit. Most commentators that I read, believe that this would be some kind of melancholic or depressive spirit, based upon his guilt over his sin and his abandonment of God.

David is sent for and asked to come and play his harp and sing. Saul’s servants know that music will help, so they call for this young lad to come with his harp, or lyre, to play and sing for him.

This has classic implications on the power of music. Music has the ability to do something on the inside.

Now every time a preacher or a Christian leader starts talking about music, everyone automatically gets their armor up and hopes that he does not mention their particular favorite type. A secular journal that I read this past week as I was studying for this, had some interesting comments. It, actually reported that depression, and all its accompanying effects, are experienced more by those who listen to country and western music than any other style. Now those of you who like that kind of music, do not like me right now, do you? Those of you who do not like that kind of music are feeling rather smug and you like this. However, the point I want to make is simply the point scripture reveals from the life of Saul – music affects the way we feel. It is an undeniable truth. So David comes and plays for Saul.

I Samuel 16:21 is a comprehensive verse that gives a brief overview.

***Then David came to Saul and attended him, and Saul loved him greatly; and he became his armor bearer.***

The word “eventually” could be added to the end of this verse. David will become Saul’s armor bearer later, at the end of I Samuel 17. This verse looks over the whole picture.

Now it seems clear that when the difficulty arose with the Philistines, David had already returned home. It seems that he came and went, as Saul’s mood was either depressed or elated. It is at the end of I Samuel 17 that David will become a permanent employee of Saul, as his armor bearer.

## David Fights Goliath

Now I Samuel 17 opens with the classic story. Let us begin with verse 1.

***Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; and they were gathered at Socoh which belongs to Judah, and they camped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim.***

This is interesting because “Ephes-dammim” means “the boundary of bloodshed”. Evidently this is a common place for battles. Continue to I Samuel 17:2-3.

***Saul and the men of Israel were gathered and camped in the valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array to encounter the Philistines. The Philistines stood on the mountain on one side while Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with the valley between them.***

This stalemate, by the way, will last about six weeks. Look at I Samuel 17:4.

***Then a champion came out from the armies of the Philistines named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.***

Goliath is nine feet, nine inches tall. Continue to I Samuel 17:5-7.

***He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was clothed with scale-armor which weighed five thousand shekels of bronze. He also had bronze greaves [shin guards] on his legs and a bronze javelin slung between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver’s beam, and the head of his spear weighed six hundred shekels of iron; his shield-carrier also walked before him.***

It is interesting, as I studied this passage, that the scriptures spend more time telling us about Goliath’s armor than it does about the battle. I think the reason for this is that God wants to give us an understanding of the impressive nature of this man’s stature and of his warring ability. Goliath was armed to the teeth. I think God wanted us to recognize the incredible sight this man was. Continue I Samuel 17:8-9.

***He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel and said to them, “Why do you come out to draw up in battle array? Am I not THE Philistine and you servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will become your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall become our servants and serve us.”***

It was not true, by the way, that the Philistines would become servants of the Israelites if they were able to kill Goliath, he was lying. I am disappointed in him. Look at I Samuel 17:10-11.

***Again the Philistine said, “I defy the ranks of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together.” When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.***

You might say, “Afraid? That’s terrible. The living God is their protector. He’s the captain of their army. I wouldn’t have been afraid.”

To help us understand why the Israelites were afraid, let us consider a picture of Goliath. He was nine feet, nine inches tall. The coat of mail that he was wearing, which is just his shirt, weighed between 130 and 150 pounds. His sword is a “kiydown,” which is not the straight sword that hacks, but is one that is cut like a sickle so that it slices. I thought you might be interested in knowing that.

Goliath was an unbelievably impressive sight. Now how would you feel if you had been in Saul’s army when he asked for a volunteer?

This is a little like the story of two boys, a bigger one and a smaller one, who walked into a dentist’s office. The bigger one said to the dentist, “Sir, we’re in a hurry. We’ve got to get in and out of here. I don’t want any gas to deaden the pain and I don’t want a shot of novocaine because that will slow us down. We’re in a hurry.”

The dentist replied, “You’re sure a brave young man. Now let me see your tooth.”

The bigger boy turned to his smaller friend and said, “Tommy, show him your tooth.”

It is easy to be brave with someone else’s teeth! It is easy to be brave when we are not in the Israelite army facing Goliath.

Now I want to answer a two-fold question or thought. I think all of the narrative basically revolves around the two-fold thought, “Why would the Israelites not fight Goliath? Why would this young shepherd boy, David, fight Goliath?”

### **Why the Israelites would not!**

Let me give several reasons why the Israelites would not fight Goliath.

1. First, the Israelites were bound by fear.

We have already addressed this to some degree, but look at I Samuel 17:23-24. David has just joined the soldiers, as he brings food to his brothers, and Goliath appears. Goliath repeats the words that he has been saying for several weeks.

*As he [David] was talking with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine from Gath named Goliath, was coming up from the army of the Philistines, and he spoke these same words; and David heard them. When all the men of Israel saw the man, they fled from him and were greatly afraid.*

The Israelites were literally, paralyzed by fear.

2. Secondly, the Israelite soldiers would not fight Goliath because they were bound by misplaced confidence.

The Israelites basically thought that this battle was between human beings. As a result, they took a good hard look at Goliath and when Saul asked for a volunteer, no one raised their hand.

Obviously, the Israelites were looking at this giant, who had been a warrior since he was a teen, according to the scriptures, and recognizing that it was humanly impossible to fight him one-on-one. However, they were misplacing their confidence and that is the whole point of the rest of the narrative.

3. Thirdly, the Israelites would also not fight Goliath because they were bound by prayerlessness.

I find it interesting, as I read this chapter, that there is no mention of God until David arrives on the scene. In fact, Goliath is a better theologian than the Israelite soldiers because, later, in I Samuel 17:43, he curses David by a mention of his gods. In other words, Goliath believed that it was appropriate to refer to his gods in this battle, while the Israelites were mum; were paralyzed into silence and never mentioned God until David came along.

The Israelites think that their greatest problem is military. However, their greatest problem is spiritual. Saul, in this text, is without God's Spirit and power and thinks he lacks the military power to take on Goliath. It is tragic that a spiritual decline in someone's life is so obvious to everyone except the person who is in the decline. Perhaps Saul did not even know that the Spirit of God had left him, like Samson of old.

## Why the shepherd boy would!

Now let us turn our focus away from the Israelites for a moment, and look at David. Why, against all odds, when the entire Israelite army would not, would a shepherd boy fight Goliath?

Let us look at several verses, as David first meets Goliath. Look at I Samuel 17:26. David speaks words that are evidently, repeated to the king.

*Then David spoke to the men who were standing by him, saying, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?"*

Now David's words evidently, spread like wild fire through the camp. So Saul calls for an audience. Skip to I Samuel 17:32.

*David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."*

Did you catch this? David, the teenage boy, is speaking to the tall, handsome, warrior king and says, "Sir, there's no need for you to be afraid anymore. I'll go fight him for you."

The Israelites measured themselves against Goliath and they came up short – about waist high. David will measure Goliath against God and Goliath will become a dwarf.

Now Saul counters David, in I Samuel 17:33.

*Then Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth."*

What follows, from the lips of David, by the way, is one of the primary reasons that he fought. Let me give it to you.

1. First, David would fight Goliath because while the Israelites had memories influenced by present danger, David had a memory influenced by past deliverance.

Look at David's words in I Samuel 17:34-36.

*But David said to Saul, "Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has*

***killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God.”***

David has remembered the right things. He has tucked away mental mementos of God’s power and God’s grace and God’s deliverance.

Let me point out that Saul has had the same past experiences of God’s power and the Israelite army has had God move miraculously several times in their generation. They, however, have forgotten these experiences. Their memories are influenced by present danger, while David’s is influenced by past deliverance.

One commentator, who lived some time ago, wrote these words. Note them carefully.

*Some saints have very short memories. It has been well said that we write our benefits in dust and our injuries in marble! And it is equally true that we generally inscribe our afflictions upon brass, while the records of deliverances of God are written in water. It ought not to be! If our memories were more tenacious of the merciful visitations of our God, our faith would often be strengthened in times of trial.<sup>i</sup>*

In other words, David’s memory produced godly confidence. He is basically saying to Saul, “Do you think he’s dangerous? You should have seen the bear. You should have seen the lion. If God could deliver me from them, what is, including the helmet, a ten foot man worth?”

Was David just blowing hot air? Well David’s older brother Eliab, and probably a lot of the soldiers, thought he was nothing more than a teenage braggart – all talk and no action (I Samuel 17:28-30). It is easy to talk courageously; it is harder to act courageously.

I remember when I was nine or ten years old, there was a bully in our neighborhood named Frankie. Everyone knew Frankie. He was a teenager who, when he walked down the street, all of us little kids just kind of watched him in awe. He had a tough swagger and a leather jacket and was always in fights.

One day, my friend and I decided to test our courage. I do not know what clouded our judgment. It was temporary insanity, I think. We got on our bicycles and got up a lot of speed. Then, flying as fast as we could on our bicycles, we rode by Frankie’s

house, as he was out in his garage, and shouted insults at him. We called him “sissy,” and all kinds of impolite names. It was great fun.

Frankie lived near the corner of a cul-de-sac and my friend and I would ride into the cul-de-sac, pick up all the speed we could, flash by his house, and call him names. This went on for several days.

One day, however, something happened. We got up all the speed we could on our bicycles, rode by his house, called insults to him, but there he was. We then realized that we were riding into the cul-de-sac, rather than out. Frankie cornered me and knocked me off my bike. I started hollering for help. My friend, standing to the side with his bike, would not come near us.

I can still remember that my backyard fence was about a hundred yards away. My two younger brothers had climbed up and were sitting on the top of the fence, watching. I was screaming for help and I learned later, that my youngest brother, Jonathan, had turned to Tim, the older one, and said, “Tim, run get Mom.”

Tim had said, “No, I want to watch.”

I was finally rescued by my mother. My youngest brother went and got her. She climbed over the fence and ran toward us and rescued me.

What a humiliating experience! The neighbors were out and all the kids were watching. It was humiliating to be caught by Frankie and to be beaten up by him, but it was probably more humiliating to be rescued by my mom. I could still use some counseling, I think, as I reflect on that!

So is David going to just talk and run? Is he going to suit up? Evidently, he says, “Yes.”

Now everyone is crowded around Saul’s tent. What a commotion it must have been. Look at I Samuel 17:38.

***Then Saul clothed David with his garments and put a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with armor.***

Goliath has a bronze helmet, so Saul says, “David, you need a bronze helmet.”

Saul is not getting the picture. He is measuring external equipment and that is not the point. Continue to I Samuel 17:39.

***David girded his sword over his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. So David said to Saul, “I cannot go with these,***

***for I have not tested them.” And David took them off.***

David was not experienced with this armor and evidently, could not walk. So he took the armor off.

Let me give a second reason David would fight Goliath, while the other Israelites would not.

2. Secondly, while the Israelites were bound by safety, David was released by his understanding of God’s sovereignty.

Goliaths do not fall because of human power, but because of divine power.

Furthermore, it would not have helped David to wear armor or equipment belonging to someone else, and it still does not today.

What a wonderful lesson this is for those of us who are soldiers in Christ’s army. Let us not try to be someone we are not.

The late Dr. J. Vernon McGee once remarked, “If God has called you to use a sling shot, do not try to use a sword.”

This is great advice. How many Christian’s inactively sit and watch other Christians, while hoping, wishing, dreaming, “Oh, if only I had their ability, if only I had their gifts, if only I had their make-up . . . giants would tumble.”

This is not the point. David refused to act like Saul. Let every David be himself to the glory of God.

Look at I Samuel 17:40.

***He took his stick in his hand and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the shepherd’s bag which he had, even in his pouch, and his sling was in his hand; and he approached the Philistine.***

Now here comes the Israelite champion. I am certain that at the sight of him, a burst of laughter must have rocketed through the Philistine ranks. However, the laughter probably died away as David drew closer and they realized that this seemingly unarmed teenager was actually coming to fight. And, if they noticed, there was no sign of fear on his face.

Let us continue to I Samuel 17:42-46.

***When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance.***

***The Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.***

***The Philistine also said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field.”***

***Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted.***

***“This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. 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, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,”***

This last phrase in verse 46 gives us the point, “that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel”. David is the only person among them who gets the point.

3. Thirdly, David would fight Goliath because while the Israelites were concerned for their personal health, David was concerned for God’s personal honor.

This is the future leader of Israel and he is giving a lesson to both armies on both sides of the ravine. He is the only person who understood the distinction – this is *not* a military proposition, this is a *spiritual*, a theological proposition; this is between the gods of Philistia and the God of Israel. And the God of Israel can use a stick; He can use a sling shot; He can use a kid.

Let us finish the narrative. Look at I Samuel 17:48-49.

***Then it happened when the Philistine rose and came and drew near to meet David, that David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand into his bag and took from it a stone and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone sank into his forehead, so that he fell on his face to the ground.***

The only spot that was really vulnerable was right between Goliath’s eyes. Continue to I Samuel 17:50-51.

***Thus David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and he struck the Philistine and killed him; but there was no sword in David's hand. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.***

David was probably standing there holding that massive head to show the Philistines that Goliath was indeed, gone.

The God of Israel did not need giants to terrify armies, He simply needed a person small enough to depend upon Him alone. He still does.

I like the way Philip Keller wrote of this battle in one of his books. Let me read as he summarizes this battle that the Bible only gives us a verse of.

*With a rush, like a leopard leaping to the attack, David launched himself up the hill toward Goliath. The sling whistled ominously, as he whirled it over his head. Then the thong was released and the stone struck and it was as if Goliath had been struck by a bullet. David rushed up to the prostrate form, as Goliath's armor bearer fled in panic. Picking up the giant's massive sword, he severed the head and blood flowed everywhere. In triumph, David stood upon the huge hulk. The battle was over, the daring deed was done. What all of Saul's military might had been unable to achieve, a single shepherd had done with a sling shot and simple faith in God.*

## **Application**

Now let me add two additional thoughts to this, by way of application.

1. Number one, when God calls you to action, be prepared for the maximum.

I asked the questions, as I was studying this text, "Why did David get five stones? Was he a bad shot?"

II Samuel 21 tells us that Goliath had four sons who were soldiers as well. In other words, David had every reason to believe that when he killed their father, these sons would rush upon him too. He had a stone for each of Goliath's sons.

So if God has given you and I a sling shot – and that is what He has given most of us – we are to keep

it ready and be prepared to use it. Whether we use it in an obscure place while watching a few sheep or in front of thousands of people while killing a giant, we are to get our sling ready and be prepared.

2. Number two, when God provides you with expressions of His presence, provide for your memory.

I cannot stress enough the importance of remembering. In fact, David used the word "remember" more than any other biblical writer in scripture. He used this word nearly sixty times in his songs.

Look at David's actions in I Samuel 17:53-54.

***The sons of Israel returned from chasing the Philistines and plundered their camps. Then David took the Philistine's head and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his weapons in his tent.***

In contemporary language, David hung Goliath's sword on his bedroom wall where he could see it and could remember. Later, he deposits it with the high priest.

Now some have a big fish stuffed and mounted or perhaps, an imposing set of antlers or the rifle used to shoot the animal. Some have a football or a basketball in the closet with the date written on it in which they scored the winning points. Others have mementos of special events stored in a special place. Perhaps you bronzed your first child's baby shoes or you kept special cards or notes or maybe, you keep the wedding pictures out where you can look at them. All of this is wonderful, but what have you and I kept to remind us of spiritual events? What are we doing to provide for our spiritual memories?

Israel's greatest problem in this situation was that they had forgotten all that God had done in the past and God's power. Let me recommend that you get a journal or a Bible to mark with God's answers. Perhaps you could get a diary to record, just between you and the Lord, your spiritual journey. It is time you and I made up our minds to remember spiritual events.

Listen to David's words in Psalm 111:1-4a.

***Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart, in the company of the upright and in the assembly. Great are the works of the Lord; they are studied by all who delight in them. Splendid and majestic is His work, and His righteousness endures***

*forever. He has made His wonders to be remembered . . .*

In other words, God's work – in our lives, in our church, in our homes, in our personal walks – is intended by Him to be studied and remembered by us. So this week, turn off the TV, get alone, recline in a chair, get a piece of paper and write, or simply meditate on, things that you have forgotten.

Do you know what doing this will probably cause you to do? It will probably cause you to look for your sling shot because you left it out of sight somewhere.

We need to remember that as long as we live, there are giants to fight. There are giants in our lives that need to be conquered by little people who, against all odds, live and work and walk and serve to the honor of God's name.

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<sup>i</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, The Lion-Slayer – The Giant-Killer, Sept. 1875, [www.spurgeongems.org/vols19-21/chs1253.pdf](http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols19-21/chs1253.pdf).