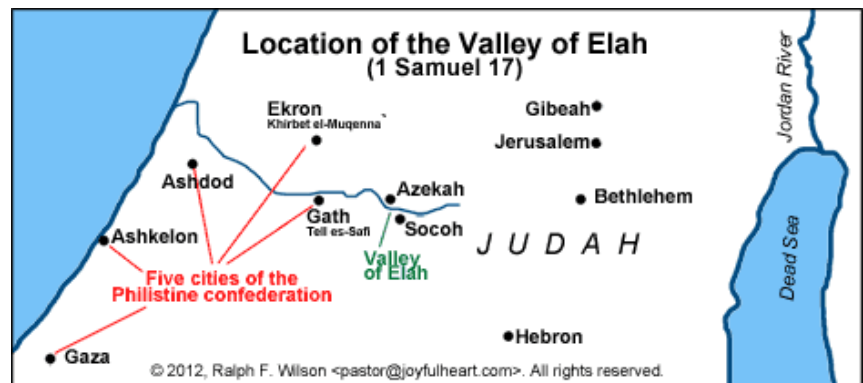


After God's Own Heart - David and the Grace of God

Of all the Bible stories of David, surely the best-known story is of his battle with Goliath, the Philistine giant who challenges the armies of Israel. Even people who have no real knowledge of the Scriptures know the image of David and Goliath. The small guy up against a giant and winning the decisive battle! But this is far more than a story about the underdog winning the day. In fact, what the David and Goliath story points to is a battle of cosmic importance, the battle against sin, death, and the devil. So, let's dig into this well-known story and mine out the real treasures that are there!

Some Background

- The Philistines have been enemies of the Israelites for generations. They are recorded in the Bible already at the time of Abraham and by the time of Moses were a people to be feared. In the book of Judges, they are often the people invading Israel when they turn away from God. Had the Israelites obeyed God and removed all inhabitants of the promised land, there would have been no problems with the Philistines, but that is water under the bridge by the time of David.
- By the time we get to 1 Samuel 17, both Samuel and King Saul have had several battles with the Philistines. On one occasion they captured the Ark of the Covenant but returned it again.
- The battles with the Philistines and the Amalekites have led Saul to disobey God and his actions ultimately cost him dearly as David is anointed as his successor.



1 Samuel 17

Even with the most familiar of stories it is good to review a few details:

- David's anointing was a private affair. King Saul does not know David is to be the next King of Israel. In fact, David and Saul are rather unknown to each other. David appears to have split his time between being a musician in Saul's court and tending the flocks of his father. but it is clear as chapter 17 unfolds that David was not really known to the King.
- The battle was to be fought in a valley, which was typical in the battles of the Ancient Israelites

- (v. 4) Goliath is described as a “champion.” Literally he is the one who goes on behalf of the army, and intermediary. In v. 10 he calls forth a counterpart from the people of Israel. Debate rages as to his height 6’9” to 9’ appears to be the range. He taunts Israel every day for 40 days!
- (v. 17) David’s initial mission was to bring food (cheese) to the front lines and return again with proof of life for 3 of his brothers.
- (v. 25-26) Here we begin to see how deep an impact this story has had on other stories. Saul promises a daughter to the man who can defeat Goliath. Countless folktales have used the same story line. Threatened by a tyrant, ogre or dragon, the king promises his daughter to the one who defeats the enemy.
- (v. 28) David’s brother Eliab isn’t exactly thrilled to see David at the frontline, and even less thrilled at his interest in the giant across the valley.
- (v. 31-37) When David is brought before Saul as a possible volunteer to confront Goliath he recounts his past battles with animals. Saul is unimpressed until David tells him that it is with the Lord’s help that these victories have been won.
- (v. 38-39) David rejects Saul’s armor. Not only is it too big, but David trusts that victory will come from God not from armaments.
- (v. 40) In addition to the 5 stones he gathers from a creek, David brings his shepherd’s staff. Tactically this may have been to distract Goliath into thinking David will use the staff as a cudgel to fend off the sword.
- (v. 41 – 51) the two combatants finally meet. Goliath insults David and David responds by calling upon the Lord to deliver the giant into his hand. As the two engage in battle David charges Goliath, leading him to think they will engage in hand-to-hand combat, but then stops short and lets fly with the sling. Goliath is killed and David finishes him off with the sword.
- The Philistines flee and are pursued by the Israelite army who plunder their camp.
- The chapter concludes with David meeting Saul and from here on in, Saul is very aware of this young man, even if he does not know his ultimate destiny.

Though we know the story as David and Goliath, it is really about David and Saul. Saul was to be the king who led God’s people into battle. But here we see his failure to do that. It’s not just that his courage gives out, but his faith gives out. Rather than trusting the Lord, Saul has habit of taking things into his own hands and the consequences of the at are always bad.

Back in Deuteronomy 17 Moses teaches the people God’s will concerning kings. Among the things kings are forbidden to do is gather horses for their armies. That’s a strange sounding rule. The point is that Israel is not to rely on military might or technology but instead to rely upon the Lord. David does just that and for the rest of 1 Samuel we will see the two in contrast to each other.

How does this story apply to our lives today?

Many times, when this story is applied to people's lives today it is presented as a Biblical equivalent of the "Little Engine that Could." If an underdog does the right things, tries hard enough and trusts God they will overcome their giants. In other words, the story becomes a prescription for dealing with the struggles in your life and living in victory over things that oppress us.

While it is true that trusting God and good strategy can get you through a lot of life's struggles our biggest giants remain beyond our power to defeat. Try as we might, we cannot conquer sin. And death awaits us all. Frustratingly our smaller giants, are often beyond our ability to slay, even if we have faith that can move mountains! Seeing this story as simply a model for underdogs battling the powers of life, will lead in one of two directions – to pride, if for a time we conquer our giant or (more often than not) to despair when in spite of our faith our giants remain.

But there is another way to see this story – a Gospel way!

Later in the Old Testament, Isaiah will remind us that our God reigns (Isaiah 52:7); he is our real king. Then he will direct our attention to one of the weakest figures presented in the whole Old Testament – the Suffering Servant who was rejected by humanity and yet brought salvation to humanity. There are definite parallels between the suffering servant and David:

- Both are presented as unlikely heroes
- Both are despised and not esteemed by the people around them
- Both are acquainted with suffering
- Both bear the weight of God's people
- Both win the victory for God's people

In the New Testament we learn that the prophecy of the suffering servant is fulfilled by Jesus who is referred to in at least 4 places in the New Testament as the "hero/founder" of our faith.

- Acts 3:15 "Author (hero) of life
- Acts 5:31 "leader (hero) and Saviour
- Hebrews 2:2 "founder (hero) of our faith
- Hebrews 2:10 "founder (hero) of salvation

When David and Goliath faced each other, the fate of both their nations rested on the outcome. The victory won by either of them will be victory for the nation. This is called "imputed" victory. Jesus came to do battle with our real Giants, sin, death, and the devil. He wins that battle in the same manner David conquered Goliath, namely through faithful trust in God and obedience to him. He wins that battle for us. Like the Israelite armies of old we share the spoils of the victory. His victory is imputed or credited to us, even though we did not and cannot slay our giant enemies.

With Christ's victory given to us, we put on the armour of God (Ephesians 6) and join the battle against sin and evil knowing we are really just a part of the "finishing off" of the enemy who is already defeated. We go forth in what seems weak to the world, knowing that victory is "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts." Zechariah 4:6