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1 Samuel 17:32-49

Children’s Bible Stories All Grown Up: David and Goliath

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1 Samuel 17:32-49 The Message

“Master,” said David, “don’t give up hope. I’m ready to go and fight this Philistine.”

Saul answered David, “You can’t go and fight this Philistine. You’re too young and inexperienced—and he’s been at this fighting business since before you were born.” David said, “I’ve been a shepherd, tending sheep for my father. Whenever a lion or bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I’d go after it, knock it down, and rescue the lamb. If it turned on me, I’d grab it by the throat, wring its neck, and kill it. Lion or bear, it made no difference—I killed it. And I’ll do the same to this Philistine pig who is taunting the troops of God-Alive. God, who delivered me from the teeth of the lion and the claws of the bear, will deliver me from this Philistine.” Saul said, “Go. And God help you!” Then Saul outfitted David as a soldier in armor. He put his bronze helmet on his head and belted his sword on him over the armor. David tried to walk but he could hardly budge. David told Saul, “I can’t even move with all this stuff on me. I’m not used to this.” And he took it all off. Then David took his shepherd’s staff, selected five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the pocket of his shepherd’s pack, and with his sling in his hand approached Goliath. As the Philistine paced back and forth, his shield bearer in front of him, he noticed David. He took one look down on him and sneered—a mere youngster, apple-cheeked and peach-fuzzed. The Philistine ridiculed David. “Am I a dog that you come after me with a stick?” And he cursed him by his gods. “Come on,” said the Philistine. “I’ll make roadkill of you for the buzzards. I’ll turn you into a tasty morsel for the field mice.” David answered, “You come at me with sword and spear and battle-ax. I come at you in the name of God-of-the-Angel-Armies, the God of Israel’s troops, whom you curse and mock. This very day God is handing you over to me. I’m about to kill you, cut off your head, and serve up your body and the bodies of your Philistine buddies to the crows and coyotes. The whole earth will know that there’s an extraordinary God in Israel. And everyone gathered here will learn that God doesn’t save by means of sword or spear. The battle belongs to God—he’s handing you to us on a platter!” That roused the Philistine, and he started toward David. David took off from the front line, running toward the Philistine. David reached into his pocket for a stone, slung it, and hit the Philistine hard in the forehead, embedding the stone deeply. The Philistine crashed, facedown in the dirt.

The most famous battle described in the Old Testament was not fought between two armies but between two people. We are in the midst of a sermon series called Children’s Bible Stories All Grown Up and today we have the proverbial story of the underdog. It is a story of a young boy using his brain and his speed to outwit the huge but rather immobile Philistine. It is a story of a courageous boy taking care of the giant warrior. It is a story of someone coming with sword and spear but David coming in the name of the Lord of hosts. Or as The Message puts it, “You come at me with spear and battle-ax. I come at you in the name of God-of-the-Angel-Armies” (Genesis 17:45). It is a story about a young boy being successful in battle and outshining the current King which foreshadows that he will be the new King.

The story of David and Goliath is the best known of all of the stories of David and people who don’t have any biblical knowledge have usually heard the basic outline of this story. We hear about David over Goliath victories at the Olympics or even in marketing when we want our children to eat their Wheaties so they can be strong like David. This is a story with detail, dialogue, strong characters, and so much drama. It is David with his unwavering faith that captures our imagination.[[1]](#footnote-2) And for anyone who heard this story, they knew that it was David who should become the leader of the Israelite people.

If you sat down and started reading 1 Samuel from the very beginning, you would see that this is the third time that David is being introduced. If you were reading, it would become very clear that different authors have written different parts of the Bible because when we get to this story it is like David is being introduced for the very first time, even though it is the third time for the reader to hear his name.

When we meet new people, it doesn’t take too long before we have opinions about those new people. Usually our opinions are based on our first impressions and the thing that we look at first is how someone looks. My husband is taller than I am, and I tease him that I married him to have tall children. Did you know that there is scientific research showing that the taller you are, the more money you earn? In a 2004 study a person who is 6 feet tall would be predicted to earn $170,000 more over a 30-year career than someone who is 5 feet 5 inches.[[2]](#footnote-3) Goliath had all the things that would normally impress and intimidate.[[3]](#footnote-4) The Philistines have gathered for battle and Saul and the men of Israel have gathered as well. The Philistines are on one side of the mountain and the Israelites are on the other side and the valley is between them (1 Samuel 17:3).

The Valley of Elah was a vast canyon, about a mile wide. You can just imagine that David found the stones for his slingshot in the dried up riverbed at the bottom of the canyon. Then we hear the description of Goliath, the champion, as 9 feet 9 inches tall! Not only was he huge but he was wearing a coat of mail, a heavy canvas-like undergarment interlaced with overlapping ringlets of bronze.[[4]](#footnote-5) This covered Goliath from shoulder to knee and probably weighed 200 pounds. And he had a bronze helmet on his head, bronze leggings to protect his shins, and he carried a bronze javelin slung between his shoulders. And there was a guy with a shield running in front of Goliath to protect him from any arrows.

Goliath shouts to the Israelites, “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” (1 Samuel 17:8-9). Goliath wanted a one-on-one fight. Whoever won, their army won and whoever lost, their army lost. The Bible says for 40 days Goliath issued this challenge. Whenever something happens for a long time, the Bible says it was 40 days. Morning and evening, day after day, for a really long time, Goliath came and taunted the Israelite army.

About 10 miles away, in Bethlehem, David is keeping his father’s sheep. He was too young to be fighting in the Israelite army, but his three older brothers were. David’s dad sent David to go check on his brothers, to bring them food and make sure that they were doing okay. David wasn’t going there to fight; he had no idea what was happening on the battlefield. David finds his brothers and as he was talking with them, Goliath came out to do this taunting. The Bible says, “when all the men of Israel saw the man, they fled from him and were greatly afraid” (1 Samuel 17:24). David had never seen Goliath before or heard his challenge and David isn’t impressed and he isn’t intimidated. David asks the people around him what was in it for the person who kills that Philistine and gets rid of this ugly blot on Israel’s honor? And then David said, “Who does he think he is, anyway, this uncircumcised Philistine, taunting the armies of God-Alive?” (The Message, 1 Samuel 17:26).

Then we hear from David’s older brother. It is so easy to imagine David’s older brother coming up and asking David, what are you doing here? What happened to the sheep that you were supposed to be watching? And then he just turns mean. David’s older brother says, I know what you are doing! You have come here to get a front row seat to the battle. David responds like someone who has been teased by his older brother a lot, “What is it with you? All I did was ask a question.” So, ignoring his brother, David turns to someone else and starts talking to them. And then we have the scripture for today. READ SCRIPTURE. My favorite part is the image of David being engulfed by Saul’s armor. It is a reminder that what works for one person will not necessarily work for someone else.[[5]](#footnote-6)

This is a story about the underdog, but it is so much more. It is a story that harnesses all of our hopes that when we are faced with overwhelming and evil power, there is a way to overcome that power and face the future. It is a story where we can see the David’s of this world, the weak, oppressed, powerless, and see that when they are faced with the giants of oppression, hope is found. We may hear this story and we think that we don’t have enough courage or we don’t have enough resources, but it is a story that shows us that the systems of power can not be beat on their own terms. We can’t beat systems of power, technology and violence by creating counter-systems of power, technology and violence.[[6]](#footnote-7) If we yell at our children for them to stop yelling, it does not work. As David says, the Lord does not save by sword or spear.

Trusting in God means that there is a way into the future when there seems no way. Who would have ever believed that we would see the end of apartheid in South Africa or the collapse of the Berlin Wall? There has been a future when at one time it seemed impossible. Trusting in God means persistence.

“The Lord does not save by sword or spear” is important for us to remember. We have this contrast between David and the Philistines, but we also have the contrast between David’s faith and the lack of faith of Saul and Israel. Saul and Israel try to play Goliath’s game instead of playing to their own strengths. They are poorly imitating the oppressive powers that they oppose. We do that too. We wear armor that doesn’t fit because we want to imitate others. We need to wear what is comfortable for us. We need to wear our own clothes and come to battle with our own gifts and skills. Greenland Hills is a unique church and we have to wear our uniqueness and be who we are in this community. That means that we will always be serving others, we will always be opening our doors to others, we will always be figuring out how we can help. We are a church that relies on God. We are a church that trusts in God because we know it is God who saves.

For me part of looking at these Bible stories as an adult means that I am seeing how I am like the different characters in the story. As a child I wanted to be David because I wanted to beat the giant. I identified with David because I was a kid like he was. As an adult I know that sometimes I am like Goliath. I may face the powerful with righteous anger, but when I get power I cling to it with all of my might. I am grateful when grace is extended to me but I somehow forget about grace when others hurt me. I treat people who look like me as family, and I ignore fellow human beings whom I see only from a distance. As an adult I recognize that too often I let fear control me and I let doubt become the way of life for me. If I can stop and breathe and look, I will see that God has me and the entire world cradled in God’s loving hands. If I can trust God and open my heart, I will see all the ways that God is healing me. If I am quiet, I will hear the peace and joy of God.

The David and Goliath story is one that we need. It is a story that helps us find hope when it feels like the powers of violence and death-dealing systems are overwhelming.[[7]](#footnote-8) By God’s grace, a well-placed stone can prove superior to the armor of a Goliath. We have the resources of a living God and those resources can still beat the powers of this world. It is a story that reminds me to have courage to stand up for what I believe in. What does this story of David and Goliath say to you? May the Bible stories that we learned as children continue to speak to us and move us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: 1 Samuel. P. 1108. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.businessinsider.com/tall-people-are-richer-and-successful-2015-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Swindoll, Charles. David. Word Publications, 1997. P. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Swindoll, Charles. David. Word Publications, 1997. P. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Swindoll, Charles. David. Word Publications, 1997. P. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: 1 Samuel. P. 1114. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: 1 Samuel. P. 1115. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)