

# **The Life of David**

## **David and Goliath—Part 1**

*1 Samuel 17:1-30*

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## David and Goliath—Part 1

### Scripture

We continue our sermon series on “The Life of David.”

The story of David begins in 1 Samuel 16. Because of King Saul’s repeated disobedience, the Lord rejected him as king over Israel. So, the Lord sent the prophet Samuel to Jesse the Bethlehemite to provide for himself a king from one of Jesse’s sons. David, the youngest of Jesse’s eight sons, was anointed by Samuel as the next king over Israel, although it would be many years before he started serving as king.

The Bible says that “the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him” (1 Samuel 16:14). David was then summoned by Saul to serve him by playing his lyre, which would refresh Saul.

During the following years, David apparently went back and forth between Saul’s home and Jesse’s sheep farm. Then, perhaps sensing that Saul was not the man he once was, the Philistines once again gathered for battle against Israel. This is the context for the battle between David and Goliath.

Let’s read about David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:1-30:

**<sup>1</sup>Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. And they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. <sup>2</sup>And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines. <sup>3</sup>And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. <sup>4</sup>And there came out from the camp of**

the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.<sup>5</sup> He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze.<sup>6</sup> And he had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders.<sup>7</sup> The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. And his shield-bearer went before him.<sup>8</sup> 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 servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me.<sup>9</sup> 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 and serve us."<sup>10</sup> And the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together."<sup>11</sup> When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

<sup>12</sup> Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in years.<sup>13</sup> The three oldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah.<sup>14</sup> David was the youngest. The three eldest followed Saul,<sup>15</sup> but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.<sup>16</sup> For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening.

<sup>17</sup> And Jesse said to David his son, "Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain, and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers.<sup>18</sup> Also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See if your brothers are well, and bring some token from them."

<sup>19</sup> Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. <sup>20</sup> And David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went, as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the encampment as the host was going out to the battle line, shouting the war cry. <sup>21</sup> And Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. <sup>22</sup> And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers. <sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid. <sup>25</sup> And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. And the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel." <sup>26</sup> And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall 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 defy the armies of the living God?" <sup>27</sup> And the people answered him in the same way, "So shall it be done to the man who kills him."

<sup>28</sup> Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men. And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle." <sup>29</sup> And David said, "What have I done now? Was it not but a word?" <sup>30</sup> And he turned away from him toward another, and spoke in the same way, and the people answered him again as before. (1 Samuel 17:1-30)

## Introduction

The triumph of good over evil is the quintessential theme of great stories. Whether it is found in children's stories or in real life events, we love to listen to stories of the good guy beating the bad guy. Actor Sylvester Stallone once said of movies, "I tend to think of action movies as exuberant morality plays in which good triumphs over evil."<sup>1</sup>

One of the great Old Testament stories of the triumph of good over evil is the story of David and Goliath. This story is found in 1 Samuel 17:1-58. I would like to examine this story in three parts in the coming weeks.

One of the difficulties when reading the Old Testament is the danger of making the Old Testament a "morality play." We read the text and apply it to ourselves by saying that we must "be like so-and-so," or "don't be like so-and-so." We look for life lessons and morals in the text and that becomes the application for us.

But a Christian, gospel-centered approach to the Old Testament means that a sermon from an Old Testament passage could not be properly preached in a synagogue. In other words, we must not merely find the moral lessons in the text. The goal is to find out how the particular text fits into God's plan of redemption. What is God doing in the story to provide salvation for his people?

So, for example, I remember hearing a preacher once preach about David and Goliath. He said that David picked up five "smooth stones" to go into battle against Goliath (17:40). And so the sermon was about defeating the "five Goliaths" we

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/280797?ref=triumph-over-evil>.

face; Goliaths such as fear, doubt, discouragement, and so on. But, dear friends, that is *not* the point of the text. While we may be able to draw some personal lessons from the text, the main thrust of every Old Testament narrative is to show us what God was doing in redemptive history to save his people. Or, to put it another way, Jesus is the main hero of the entire Bible. Everything in the Old Testament somehow points us to the coming Jesus, whereas everything in the New Testament somehow points us to the life and ministry of Jesus.

## Lesson

David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:1-30 shows us that God raises up a savior against those who defy him.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Setting for the Battle (17:1-3)
2. The Superman in the Battle (17:4-11)
3. The Savior in the Battle (17:12-30)

### I. The Setting for the Battle (17:1-3)

First, let's look at the setting for the battle.

The land of Israel in the time of King Saul—and eventually King David—was surrounded by enemies. Early in his reign, King Saul experienced several victories against the Philistines. After some time, however, **“the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. And they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim”** (17:1). This placed the **Philistines** about thirteen miles west of Bethlehem. As a result of the Philistines' march into Israel, **“Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and encamped in the Valley of Elah,**

**and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them” (17:2-3).**

Richard Phillips makes the following comment:

This battle would serve as a watershed for Saul’s reign, being the first battle he would face after being rejected by the Lord and abandoned by the Holy Spirit. In the past, Saul could rely on God’s saving help, but now Saul and Israel would have to manage things on their own. It was a good thing, then, that Saul was such an impressive person: he was handsome and “from his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people” (1 Sam. 9:2). It was these qualifications that made Saul so agreeable to the Israelites as their king. The people of Israel had demanded a king “like all the nations,” and one of the things they wanted him to do was to “go out before us and fight our battles” (8:20). Who better to do this than the man with the largest stature in all Israel?<sup>2</sup>

So, one can imagine that the people of Israel were extremely confident as they gathered for battle against the Philistines. Surely, they would defeat them again, just as they had done on previous occasions. How could they lose? Their tall King Saul would lead them into battle against the Philistines.

## **II. The Superman in the Battle (17:4-11)**

Second, let’s note the superman in the battle.

Both armies got themselves into position on each side of

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<sup>2</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken and Richard D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., 1st ed., Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 280.

a mountain. The men of Israel were ready to march against the Philistines, when suddenly and unexpectedly, **“there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath”** (17:4a). The biblical author notes that Goliath’s **“height was six cubits and a span”** (17:4b). That means that Goliath was nine feet nine inches tall. The tallest recorded and verified height for a person in modern history is Robert Wadlaw, who was eight feet eleven inches tall.<sup>3</sup> Goliath was ten inches taller than Robert Wadlaw!

Goliath was huge! Interestingly, the Bible spends more time describing Goliath’s armor than it does describing the battle. Goliath **“had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze [which is about 126 pounds]. And he had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver’s beam, and his spear’s head weighed six hundred shekels of iron [which is about 15 pounds]”** (17:5-7a). Goliath’s shield was so large that **“his shield-bearer went before him”** (17:7b).

The men of Israel froze in their tracks! They had never seen anyone as huge as Goliath. They thought that Saul was tall, but Goliath was probably still more than three feet taller than their tall Saul! Commentator Robert Bergen writes that Goliath’s “physical stature was awesome and psychologically overpowering, especially to the typically small Israelites.”<sup>4</sup>

Because of the geographical location with the two armies on each side of a mountain with the valley between them, everyone had a clear view of Goliath. Then, as the lone soldier in

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<sup>3</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_tallest\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tallest_people).

<sup>4</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 189.



the middle of the valley, Goliath **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 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 be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.”**

Moreover, the Philistine said, **“I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together”** (17:8-10). Apparently, the Philistines proposed that only one man from each side should fight so as to prevent the deaths of hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of soldiers. Only one man would die, and his side would then become servants of the victor’s side. Of course, the Philistines believed that they had an insurmountable advantage in the person of Goliath. I don’t know why Saul and Israel agreed to this proposal, but they did.

Goliath mocked the Lord’s people. He had nothing but hatred for them and meant to do them harm, just as Satan does. A. W. Pink writes, “Goliath pictures to us the great enemy of God and man, the devil, seeking to terrify, and bring into captivity those who bear the name of the Lord.”<sup>5</sup>

So, how did Saul and his soldiers respond? Saul was the natural candidate to fight against Goliath, since leading his people into battle was his job (8:20). But, in verse 11 we read, **“When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.”** Now, we know the reason for Saul’s fear. We remember that because of Saul’s repeated disobedience, the Spirit of God had departed from him (16:14). Saul was now leading the people of God in

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<sup>5</sup> Arthur Walkington Pink, *The Life of David* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2005), 1 Sa 17.

his own strength and power, and he knew that he was no match for Goliath! Sadly, his fear carried over to his people too.

Michael Bentley makes the following application:

When people are not led by God-fearing rulers they have every cause to be dismayed and terrified. The pastor who does not know the Spirit of the Lord guiding him in his daily walk is very unlikely to lead the people into the ways of God. The Sunday School teacher, or youth leader who is not living in close fellowship with the Lord will find it very difficult to set a fine example to his or her class or group. Those elders and deacons who have fallen away in their spiritual devotion to the Lord will discover that they are giving uncertain and unclear leadership to the people.

Is that not one of the major reasons why the church at large has so little impact upon the nations today? The Spirit of the Lord has certainly departed from large sections of religious communities because they have been disobedient to the Lord and his word.<sup>6</sup>

The entrance of Goliath onto the battlefield was designed in part to show us that Saul was no longer the Lord's chosen leader. Indeed, the Lord had raised up a savior for his people.

### III. The Savior in the Battle (17:12-30)

And third, let's observe the savior in the battle.

The scene shifts from the Valley of Elah to Bethlehem, the home of **Jesse, who had eight sons** (17:12). **The three oldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle**

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Bentley, *Face2Face with David: Encountering the Man after God's Heart*, ed. Simon J. Robinson, vol. 1, Face2Face Series (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 23–24.

(17:13a). Jesse’s youngest son was David, who **went back and forth from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem** (17:15). Meanwhile, **for forty days Goliath the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening** (17:16), shouting out the same challenge each time.

The number **“forty”** is significant because the Bible uses the number “forty” to signify a period of testing. One thinks of the Israel’s forty years in the wilderness and Jesus’ forty days of temptation. So, for **forty days** Goliath was challenging Saul and the people of Israel to see whose god is the greatest.

Then Jesse sent his youngest son David to take food to his three older brothers in the Valley of Elah. David was also to find out how they were doing (17:17-18). **David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went, as Jesse had commanded him** (17:20). David arrived in the Valley of Elah just in time to hear Goliath come **up out of the ranks of the Philistines and speak the same words as before** (17:23).

To his utter horror, David noticed that **all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid** (17:24). Richard Phillips notes the following:

This failure also proved Israel to be devoid of faith in their God. Goliath’s challenge of verse 8 was really a test of their confidence in the Lord. Roger Ellsworth paraphrases Goliath’s taunt: “Am I not a pagan, God-hating Philistine? Then why won’t any of your men of ‘the living God’ fight me? You must not really believe in him at all! In fact, you must believe that a nine-foot warrior is actually stronger than your ‘living God’ when it comes to a real battle.” This is the kind of test that the world still delights to pose for Christians, often with Goliath-like mockery: “We know what you teach in Sunday school, but let’s see how you do when faced with a real-

life sensual temptation, or an opportunity to gain riches by cheating. Let's see the look on your God-praising face when you receive a terrifying medical diagnosis or your stock portfolio crashes! Let's see how you respond when given an opportunity to cheat on an important college exam!" Behind Goliath was the same devil who wages spiritual warfare today. The issue is always the same: "Do you *really* trust in a loving God of power and grace?"<sup>7</sup>

As David moved among the soldiers he heard that Saul would give great riches, his daughter, and a tax-free house to anyone who killed Goliath. Incensed, **David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel?"** (17:26a). David clearly understood that Goliath was defying the living God. And David wanted the reproach removed from Israel. Moreover, David asked, **"For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"** (17:26b). Michael Bentley notes:

David did not view this challenge merely as a military problem; for him it was a spiritual conflict. He had no doubt that Israel was God's own chosen people. The army did not just belong to Saul (as Goliath had said in verse 8); it was the property of the living God and David viewed this battle as one where the honour and glory of the Lord overrode everything else.<sup>8</sup>

And Dale Ralph Davis comments:

David brings a whole new world view. To this point the

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<sup>7</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, 285.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Bentley, *Face2Face with David: Encountering the Man after God's Heart*, 25.

narrative has been “godless” (much like our own stewing over some insoluble dilemma), but now David injects the godly question into the episode. Doesn’t having a living God make a difference in all this? This fellow has mocked “the ranks of the living God.” If God is so identified with Israel, do you think he is indifferent toward such slurs on his reputation? Do you expect a living God to allow an uncircumcised Philistine to trample his name in military and theological mud? Israel thought the Philistine invulnerable; for David he was only uncircumcised. A living God gives a whole new view of things.<sup>9</sup>

The Lord sent David to show the fearful people of God that the Lord is indeed the living God, and that he provides a savior for his people. The living God is a loving God of power and grace, and he is *always* worthy of our trust.

Next time we shall see how David did indeed become the savior of Israel when he killed Goliath.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed David and Goliath as set forth in 1 Samuel 17:1-30, we should thank God for Jesus who is our Savior.

David points us to Jesus. Just as David was a savior to the people of Israel, so Jesus is the savior to all in the entire world who look to him in faith. Jesus has overcome Satan, sin, and hell. Let us thank God for such a savior as Jesus, and let us always trust in God. Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 184.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
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