

David & The Serpent's Seed

1 Samuel 17

These last few weeks, we've been in a series on the life of King David, looking at both his faith and his flaws. And today we get to dive into perhaps the most well known story of David's greatest example of faith - the story of David and Goliath.

The last sermon I gave several weeks ago in our series on Daniel, was Daniel and the Lion's Den - another extremely well known Biblical story by sinners and saints alike. In that message, I made the assertion that sometimes, certain Biblical stories can become "overly familiar", especially if you've been in the Church for any amount of time. And most modern Americans today, even if they've never cracked open a Bible, know the basics of the story of David versus Goliath. It's even a standard part of our cultural vocabulary to describe any type of underdog scenario as a "David versus Goliath" story.

So, what do we do with stories like these?

Well, first of all, they make for great Biblical stories to tell our kids. It's an exciting story, certainly! Giants, kings, slingshots, and swords!

But is that it? Was this story included in the canon of Scripture by the Holy Spirit as just a kids' church highlight amidst the laws and genealogies of the Old Testament?

There has to be more to it...

Certainly, there are nuggets of wisdom in the story. David was indeed an "underdog" against overwhelming odds, and won. Maybe there are principles in the story that are good to bring into everyday life. For example, how to deal with a difficult situation, how to beat the competition in the business market, or how to out-manuever an opponent in sports.

One of the most popular, NYT best-selling books using the story of David and Goliath as its premise is called "David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants" by social scientist Malcom Gladwell. Now, I really like Malcom Gladwell. He's a terrific author (I think we even have that book), and a brilliant mind. His naturalistic - meaning, non-supernatural - take on the story of David and Goliath is pretty interesting.

He argues that young, agile David with his excellent slingshot skills tricked and out-witted Goliath, by observing the giant's disadvantages. Gladwell's theory is that Goliath the Philistine suffered from a medical condition known as "acromegaly" which is a hormone imbalance affecting the pituitary gland. Famous wrestler and actor, Andre the Giant, had acromegaly. The Guinness Book of World Records tallest man alive also had acromegaly - and he measured in at 8'11". The hormone imbalance leads to excess bodily growth - known as gigantism. But along with the large features come several disabilities, most notably blurred vision.

According to Gladwell, by avoiding close combat with Goliath, and instead using his skills to his advantage, David was able to defeat the lumbering, visually impaired giant. He writes, "There is an important lesson in that for battles with all kinds of giants. The powerful and the strong are not always what they seem."

So, is that the point of this story? An interesting historical event with a naturalistic explanation that helps show us how to be clever and win against the odds?

No, we know there's more to the story. As we'll see when we read the story, David had faith in the Lord. David trusted Yahweh God to lead him to victory. So we know this isn't merely just a historical, naturalistic event. This is a story of faith in God.

But again, my question is...is that it? Is this merely a story that we repurpose to make it fit into our individual lives and into our own personal faith journey? Do we read ourselves into this story to try to "conquer our giants" in our life? Like, the "giant of depression", the "giant of fear", or the "giant of a bad boss"?

Does this story exist just to provide 5 bullet points to the stones that David collects from the river? I'm not saying these are necessarily bad things! There have been many sermons over the years that have encouraged or challenged me that used this story as a type of template for important spiritual truths.

But, the question remains: why is this story in the Bible?

I hope that as we re-explore this, once again, potentially "over-familiar" story, that we would see it with fresh eyes. That it isn't a historical tale with naturalistic explanations, but a key moment in the grand, **super-natural** story that God has revealed throughout the Scriptures.

In the same way we approached the story of Daniel and the Pit of Beasts, I think the same three points apply to help us see this Biblical account in a fresh way: that this story is **Structured**, **Sophisticated**, and **Supernatural**.

And that along the way, we'll see then how the main idea of the message today unfolds.

The **Main Idea**, then, is:

David's victory over the seed of the Serpent was a foreshadowing of Jesus' ultimate victory over the Serpent.

If it's your first time hearing or reading this passage in 1 Samuel, chapter 17, I'm glad you're here! I hope you are captivated by what God has been up to from Creation til now. And if this story is over-familiar, that you'll never look at David and Goliath the same way ever again!

1 Samuel 17

[1] 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.

[2] 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.

[3] 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.

[4] And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a **champion** named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.

[5] He had a helmet of **bronze** on his head, and he was armed with a (**scaly**) coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of **bronze**.

[6] And he had **bronze** armor on his legs, and a javelin of **bronze** slung between his shoulders.

[7] 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.

[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 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 and serve us."

[10] And the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together."

[11] When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were *dismayed* and *greatly afraid*.

[12] 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.

[13] 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.

[14] David was the youngest. The three eldest followed Saul,

[15] but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

[16] For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening.

[17] 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. [18] Also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See if your brothers are well, and bring some token from them."

[19] Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.

[20] 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.

[21] And Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army.

[22] And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers.

[23] 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*.

[25] 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."

[26] 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?"

[27] And the people answered him in the same way, "So shall it be done to the man who kills him."

[28] 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."

[29] And David said, "What have I done now? Was it not but a word?" [30] And he turned away from him toward another, and spoke in the same way, and the people answered him again as before.

[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."

[34] But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock,

[35] I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him.

[36] Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God."

[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 this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"

[38] Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail,

[39] and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." So David put them off.

[40] Then he took his staff in his hand and chose *five smooth stones* from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.

[41] And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him.

[42] And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance.

[43] And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine *cursed David by his gods*.

[44] The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field."

[45] Then David said to the Philistine, "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 of Israel, whom you have defied.

[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, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, [47] 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."

[48] When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.

[49] And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and **struck** the Philistine on his **forehead**. The stone sank into his forehead, and he **fell on his face to the ground**.

[50] So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. There was no sword in the hand of David.

[51] 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.

[52] And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron.

[53] And the people of Israel came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp.

[54] And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent.

[55] As soon as Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is this youth?" And Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know."

[56] And the king said, "Inquire whose son the boy is."

[57] And as soon as David returned from the striking down of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand.

[58] And Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" And David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite." (ESV)

Structured: Serpent & Genesis 3 Imagery

Before we get to Goliath, we must go all the way back to the first pages of our Bibles - namely, Genesis 3. Believe it or not, this passage has everything to do with the story of David and Goliath.

[Genesis 3 explanation]

Adam and Eve are tempted by the Serpent in Eden. The Hebrew word for Serpent is *nachash*. Remember that, it's important for later! The humans **see** that the fruit is **pleasing** to the eyes, so they **take** it. Then, they realize they are **naked** and are **ashamed**. They then **hide** from God because they are **afraid**.

[14] The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your **belly** you shall go, and **dust** you shall eat all the days of your life.

[15] I will put enmity **between** you and the woman, and between your offspring [**seed**] and her offspring [**seed**]; he shall bruise [**strike**] your head, and you shall bruise [**strike**] his heel." (ESV)

This passage is often called the "proto-evangelion", the first Gospel, or the first Good News in the face of sin and tragedy. The promise that God would provide a deliverer, a man, a seed of the woman, to strike the head of the Serpent, and free humanity from the curse of disobedience and evil.

But who would this seed of the woman be? Who would defeat the Serpent and open the way back to Eden? Would it be Abel? Enoch? Noah? Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob? Moses? Joshua? Each and every person that follows the Genesis 3 event is a potential candidate, but each one fails the task. They each have their failures, and succumb to the Serpent and to sin.

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel are tuned into this problem from Genesis 3, especially as Israel is entering an era where they are ruled by her kings; first, Saul, then David. There must be a man - a seed of the woman - who will defeat the Serpent, the **nachash**.

After the chaotic period of the Judges in Israel, where everyone did what was right in their own eyes, and Israel went into a repeating cycle of sin and suffering, they were longing for the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the nachash.

And wouldn't you know it, Israel's first king, King Saul, has his first major chance after his anointing in 1 Samuel, chapter 11. His very first battle is against...King Nahash of the Ammonites. King Nahash, as it says in our English translations. King Nachash. The Serpent King. It is literally the same Hebrew word as in Genesis 3.

Is King Saul the long-awaited Serpent Crusher? As we quickly find out, King Saul is clearly not the long expected deliverer - although he has all the right qualifications - he's strong, a mighty man, a head taller than all the other Israelites - but as we see in 1 Samuel 15, Yahweh God rejects Saul because Saul continually turned his back and disobeyed the Lord.

But it's extremely important to note that Saul's first test was against King Nahash - serpent figure #1 in 1 Samuel.

Later on in 2 Samuel, King David has an encounter with King Nahash's son, Hanun. Literally, the seed of the Serpent King. David's encounters with the enemy King Hanun show even more allusions to Genesis 3. Hanun is extremely hostile to God's people. In 2 Samuel 10, Hanun humiliates David's captured servants by stripping them naked. The text says that the servants were "greatly ashamed" in their nakedness...just like Adam and Eve's shame because of the Serpent's hostility and deception.

There are many more serpent-like characteristics of other people in the accounts of 1 and 2 Samuel. We don't have time, but men in these two books like Amasa, David's son Absalom, and

others are intertwined with Serpent imagery and Genesis 3 vocabulary. We'll see later on today that David himself becomes Serpent-like, even after his tremendous show of faith in the Lord.

So, if you study these books carefully, with Genesis 3 in your mind, you'll see there is a definite structure, with a clear theme or motif of the lurking Serpent throughout history. The Serpent and its seed, that must be defeated.

With this Structure in mind now, I hope we see that this story of David and Goliath is maybe more "**Sophisticated**" than we may have ever given it credit for. And again to clarify, I don't mean sophisticated in a snobbish way, but that God's masterpiece story has subtle hints and clues of where the story is headed. The accounts of these historical events have deeper meanings and expectations for God's people - to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear what God is doing throughout time to redeem and restore His creation, and to vanquish evil and the Serpent forever.

With that framework then, let's explore how Goliath is subtly characterized as a seed of the Serpent. A few points:

First, we went over the Hebrew word for "serpent" in Genesis 3 - *nachash*. We don't have time to fully explore this, (and believe me, it's super fascinating) but that Hebrew word "*nachash*" can have multiple meanings, depending how it's used.

We have the same things for some English words. The best example I could come up with at the last minute was the word "blue." It's a color, it can be a person (an baseball umpire), and it can describe an emotion (sadness). "The blue Blue likes blue" = "The sad umpire likes the color blue."

Back to *nacash*. As a noun (person, place, or thing), it means serpent. In the verb form throughout the Old Testament, to "*nachash*" means to practice divination or sorcery. In the adjective form (in describing something), it means bronze, or metallic, or shining/glimmering.

Can anyone remember what word is repeatedly used to describe Goliath's armor?

Yes, bronzel! (Hebrew: *nechoshet*)

The author of 1 Samuel even uses the word "scaly" to describe Goliath's coat - the Hebrew word in the Old Testament used to describe fish, sea monsters, and yes, serpents. So the repeated use of bronze is bringing echoes of the Genesis 3 *nachash*.

Second, Goliath is described as a "champion" in our English translations, but the Hebrew is kind of strange. He is literally described as the "in-between man." At the surface, it seems like maybe awkward Hebrew. The most obvious reason he is called that is because Goliath is literally standing in-between the two valleys, in-between the two armies of the Israelites and the Philistines. But some Biblical scholars have pointed out that yet again, this goes back to Genesis 3. That there will be hostility "in between" the seed of the woman and the seed of the Serpent. Goliath represents that hostility. He is the in-between man, the seed of the Serpent who is antagonizing and is hostile to the people of God.

Third connection of Goliath to the serpent: if you've already made the connection - good job! Goliath is struck on the head. His head is crushed, in that it is cut off.

And finally, the story makes sure to mention that Goliath falls face first into the ground. His belly is to the ground, and his face is eating dust. Genesis 3 yet again.

The point is clear: David defeats the seed of the Serpent, through the power of God Most High. This is a **Supernatural** story.

The author, or authors, of 1 and 2 Samuel - inspired by the Holy Spirit - cast Goliath as a supernatural foe opposed to the people of God. Yes, Goliath is a human. Yes, he is a giant (side note, here: Goliath was maybe 9 feet, maybe 6'6"-6'9" according to other earlier manuscripts and traditions...there's actually some controversy there. But I'm going to way over-simplify it, and say that it actually doesn't matter for our purposes today...if that bothers you, ask me about it later!).

The point is that even though Goliath was a physical enemy, the Biblical authors are telegraphing or hinting that there is way more to the story than just an underdog defeating a strongman. Throughout the Bible, there are key moments in the story of salvation where spiritual evil - paired with human evil - attempts to thwart the plans of God and to terrorize the people of God. Failure and fear. Those are the goals of spiritual evil - the Serpent and its seed.

Did you notice how many times fear played a role in the story of David and Goliath? King Saul was *dismayed* and *greatly afraid*. All the men of Israel were *much afraid*.

These lines are copy-and-paste from the previous books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Judges where fear grips the people of Israel as they fight their enemies in the land God had promised to them and...you know who is all over the land that causes the people to be dismayed and greatly afraid? **Giants!**

You know what God tells Moses and Joshua and the people of Israel over-and-over again in those battles? **Be not afraid.**

Deuteronomy 31:6 - "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."

David had heard those stories of old. The story of Moses defeating the giant King Og of Bashan (Bashan, by the way, is ancient Amorite for...serpent). He had heard the stories of Joshua fighting the giants of the Anakim, Rephaim, and the Nephilim. All those supernatural foes that find their roots in Genesis, chapter 6, where the "sons of God" **see** the daughters of men that are **pleasing** to the eyes, and then **take** them.

Now, we don't have time to get into that, though I've noticed that whenever anyone starts reading the Bible for the first time, they quickly come to Genesis 6 and have a lot of questions...

But once again, the point is that David was ultimately fighting a supernatural, spiritual foe. And he had heard about the God of Israel rescuing His people supernaturally. That is why we continue to read and tell these stories, after literally thousands of years. They serve as a constant reminder that God rescues, saves, and frees us from evil, fear, and His enemies.

That's why David could look at Goliath, and proclaim, "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...that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, [47] 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 knew that Yahweh God would have the ultimate victory. But, David had to play a role in the fight. He had to be courageous, despite his fears. He had to gather those five stones and stand up to face the giant. The victory against evil is not a passive one - it takes courage, action, and sacrifice. It takes picking up our cross daily to proclaim, "Fear not!" to those around us.

The days of physically fighting giants have long been over. As you continue reading through 1 and 2 Samuel, you see that King David and his mighty men finished dealing with the problem of evil giants that began in Genesis 6. But still, despite his tremendous show of faith and his defeat of the Serpent's seed, David was not answer to the Genesis 3 problem.

And that's because despite his faith, David had serious flaws. And just like all the others before him in the Old Testament, David had given into sin and had his own Fall, choosing evil over good. In 2 Samuel 11, David **sees** a woman named Bathsheba from his palace, and she is "**pleasing** to the eyes." And just like that fruit in Genesis 3, David **takes** her. One sinful act in a moment of decision, and it leads to nakedness, adultery, shame, murder, death, and ultimately, David's failure to enter into the Temple.

David could not be the long awaited Messiah, because he fell into the same sin as Adam in Genesis 3. But praise the Lord, there was a better Adam. A better David - a true King. His name is Jesus. He lived a sinless life, offered up his life as a perfect sacrifice, and showed God's power over death by His resurrection. Jesus is the true Serpent crusher who alone can truly free us from fear, death, and evil.

As was said earlier, the days of physically fighting enemies and giants in the Promised Land is long over, because as Paul writes in Ephesians, chapter 6, "...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

He then says to, "take up the whole armor of God." The armor that is truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God. These are our stones in the battle against the Serpent and its seed.

Truth over lies. Righteousness over evil. Peace over war. Faith over fear. Salvation over condemnation, and the true Word of God over the Serpent's twisting of it. These are our weapons, if we choose to fight.

There is a fascinating line in Romans 16:20, right at the end of Paul's letter where he has just addressed the church in Rome over their factions and the problems they are facing. He is hopeful that they unite together and encourages them in, once again, very Genesis 3 language.

He writes, "...I want you to be wise as to what is *good* and innocent as to what is *evil*. (reminds me of a certain Tree from Genesis 3...) The God of peace will soon crush Satan under **your** feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

That "your feet" is plural. God will crush Satan under you all's feet. The Serpent will be crushed by y'all's feet.

Notice, it's the God of peace that's doing the crushing. And we know that Jesus ultimately defeated Satan, death, and the grip of evil at the cross and through His resurrection. Jesus is the fulfillment of Genesis 3. He is the Serpent crusher. But it's an ongoing work. We are in the battle alongside our victorious King against the Serpent.