

David the Dragon Slayer: I Samuel 17

Introduction

David emerges from the insignificance of his father's fields to become *the* warrior of Israel in I Samuel 17. But his transition from being the hidden king-elect to the deliverer of Israel should not surprise us. David's time in the fields was not wasted. Both bear and lion had taught him about the Lord's power to deliver those who put their trust in Him.

The Text

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?" I Samuel 17:26

Goliath the Serpent

The opening of this story is dominated by the presence by Goliath. Goliath's heritage is significant. He was likely a descendant of the Anakim who were conquered by Joshua and Caleb and relocated to Gath, Gaza, and Ashdod (Josh. 11:21-23). The giants are back in the land. Goliath's taunting for 40 days indicates that Israel is back in the wilderness. Israel needed another Joshua and Caleb to lead them from the wilderness and rid the land of giants.

- Goliath's armor is described in unusual detail (vs. 5-7). He is covered in bronze, "scaled armor." The Hebrew word for bronze is related to the word for "serpent." All of this suggests that Goliath is a serpent; a serpent in the garden of Israel.
- Moreover, Goliath's words are words of defiance (vs. 10). Like Satan's words in the Garden, they challenge the veracity of God's word.
- The typology of Goliath's life encourages us to draw parallels with our own life. But that's a problem: We don't face 10 foot giants everyday. But Goliath's life stands for all the other "serpents" that defy God's power in our lives. We face giants that are of the "spirit of Goliath."

A God-Filled Imagination

The theme of "seeing" that was begin in chapter 16, continues here. In the face of this daunting challenge Israel is paralyzed with fear. Even Saul, who is supposed to be a Joshua, is terrified in the face of Goliath's insults (vs. 11). Like the first Adam he believes the word of the "serpent." All Israel can "hear" (vs. 11) "see" (vs. 24) is an enormous and invulnerable enemy, a serpent whose lies look like the truth. The people think that Goliath has defied (fearful) Israel (vs. 24-25).

David, who has just come to the battle line from the fields, "sees" an entirely different situation: Goliath is a reproach that needs to be taken away (vs. 26). "Why is everybody sitting around letting this uncircumcised Philistine taunt the armies of he the living God?" David's imagination is captured not by the greatness of the enemy, but by the insult that

Goliath has been allowed make against God's power. Where Saul and Israel see fear and intimidation, David sees a "dead dog" (vs. 43).

- Israel's response to Goliath should immediately remind us of the spies report in **Numbers 13:25-33**. Notice what Israel "saw."
- Like all the great men of faith David saw God's power rather than obstacles.
- David is a new a Caleb who defies Israel's unbelief. ***Numbers 14:6-10***
- Caleb demonstrated that he was a "man after God's own heart" by "wholly following" His command to drive out the giants of the land. (Joshua 14:6-15)

The Lessons of Insignificance

Of course, his brothers are annoyed. To them David is shirking his lowly duties ("why have you left those few sheep in the wilderness?") to see the battle. Even Saul denies that David has the ability to defeat a man who has been "a warrior from his youth" (vs. 33). The same people who saw Goliath as significant, saw David as insignificant. But David isn't simply full of naïve bravado, he counters with a lesson from the field; God had already delivered him from the "hand" of the lion and the bear, and Goliath, who had become an animal because he cursed the living God, would be would be the same as one of them. David is a new Adam who rules over the beasts of the field.

- David's time in the field was not wasted, in the fields he had learned about the power of God. David was being prepared to be a giant slayer while nobody noticed him in the fields.
- Experiencing the Lord's shepherding had made David a good shepherd who protected his flock.

The Honor of God's Name

David refuses Saul's armor and heads off to meet Goliath armed as a shepherd. In David's mind this is not a battle about armor or weapons, but about names. Goliath engages David with a volley of curses in the name of Dagon. David responds with one of the most wildly heroic speeches in all of Scripture (vs. 45). But unlike the heroism of the Greeks, David boast is not in human weapons, battle prowess, or personal glory; it is an invocation of the greatest weapon of all: the name of God (vs. 45). David loves the Lord's name and is jealous of His honor. This is the heart of godly heroism.

- It is interesting to note that the passage never says that Goliath directly defies the Lord. His taunts are directed against God's people. But David doesn't distinguish between them. To him, an attack on the people of God is an attack on God Himself (vs. 45).
- This identification of God with His people is foundation of David's imprecations in the Psalms. David pleads with the Lord to destroy his enemies because they are attacking the people on whom He has set his name and promised to defend (Ps. 135:13-18).
- Like Jesus, David gives himself to defend God's bride. We too should be zealous for God to defend his Name by defending his people. Love never stands idly by when the beloved is attacked.

The Greater Dragon Slayer

With one stone David turned the standoff into a rout and his action inspired the hearts of the spiritless Israelites. Goliath died like a great serpent, wallowing in the dust; his head crushed like the head of his god, Dagon (Psalm 115:1-8). The blasphemer was stoned to death. David's fearlessness is infectious. Throughout this story Israel is immobile, they are frozen with fear. In the first half of the narrative, Goliath is the only one moving. While Israel stands watching, David runs toward Goliath. David's courage and faith are expressed through action. Goliath is motionless and Israel is delivered from fear and rout the Philistines. Moreover, David's choice of five stones show us how big his vision was. Goliath wasn't the last giant; he was the first of five giants David would defeat (2 Sam. 21:15-22).

- After David severed the giant's head it was sent to Jerusalem, the place where David's descendant would crush the head of Satan, once and for all, on a hill named Golgotha, the place of the skull. Because of that victory, Paul says that we "have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but [we] have received a spirit of adoption, by which we cry out Abba Father" (Rom. 8:15). Notice that it is the Spirit of adoption leads us to call on the name of God. David challenged Goliath because he knew that God would fight for him. He fought in faith, not in fear.
- We are left with a striking image of David standing over Goliath *without a sword in his hand* (vs. 50). You cannot fight the giants in your life with the weapons of men. Only the armor of God will do. Because He has fought for you, we must not fear the enemies of God that taunt you or God's people. You are not slaves to fear. Christ, the Son of David has defeated the great serpent and all of his minions, and he has promised to deliver you. Put your confidence in Him, as David did, and be strong and very courageous!

With one smooth stone Goliath was defeated, but in the very next chapter, in the celebration of David's victory, a new enemy is born, an enemy far more elusive and treacherous than Goliath. Saul, the Israelite giant, would prove to be far trickier than a lion or a bear, or even a giant from Gath.