

Lesson 77

David Defeats Goliath

God gave David victory over the giant, Goliath,
because David trusted in him.

Overview

Lesson Focus

Goliath, the Philistine champion, challenged Saul's entire army, causing great fear. But David wasn't afraid. His faith in Israel's mighty God led him to fight Goliath. David put his trust in God who helped him defeat the giant with just one stone.

Key Passages

1 Samuel 16:19, 17:4, 17:24, 17:40, 17:48–49

Memory Verse

1 John 1:8–9 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

David had great faith in God, and God used him in a mighty way to accomplish his perfect plans. David had been chosen by God to take the throne of Israel after Saul had failed to lead Israel in a God-honoring way (1 Samuel 15:10–26). Samuel had anointed David in the presence of his father, Jesse, and his older brothers, and David was now the king in waiting (1 Samuel 16:11–13).

From the time of David's anointing, the Spirit of the Lord was with him, but the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul (1 Samuel 16:13–14). God had rejected Saul and set his favor on David. In his wisdom, God had sent a harmful spirit to harass Saul, and David was brought into Saul's service to play soothing music for him. When David played his lyre, the evil spirit left Saul, and he was refreshed. David became a part of Saul's household and was appointed as his armor-bearer (1 Samuel 16:21–23).

Although Saul loved David greatly at the beginning (1 Samuel 16:21), he soon became envious and despised the talented, courageous, godly young man. Saul's jealousy toward David began in the account we are studying today—the account of David's defeat of Goliath, the Philistine from Gath (1 Samuel 17:23).

How is it that the shepherd David, the youngest of the sons of Jesse, would be the one used by God to display trust, courage, and faith? The entire army of Israel was not able to exhibit this

degree of valor against its enemy (1 Samuel 17:24). The Israelite soldiers had no courage because their confidence was not in the omnipotent God of Israel. Yet David, who had no armor or sword or status as a soldier, volunteered to go and fight the one who would dare to defy the army of the living God (1 Samuel 17:36).

And on he went—armed with the tools of a shepherd and trust in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel (1 Samuel 17:40, 17:45). David's faith was in his God, not in sword and spear. His purpose was not glory and honor for himself but a desire to display that God's power alone can save (1 Samuel 17:47). God rewarded David's faith and gave him the victory over Goliath with one perfectly aimed stone to the giant's forehead. With their champion dead, the Philistines fled, and the Israelites pursued them (1 Samuel 17:49–52).

Throughout history, we see God using imperfect people to accomplish his plans. While the entire Israelite army feared one Philistine giant, a God-fearing young man came forward to kill the enemy. From the family line of this young man, David, would come the Messiah (Jesus Christ) to provide forgiveness, mercy, and grace to sinners—and the promise of eternal life.

Historical/Apologetics Background

Even though David was the youngest son of Jesse, he was not small and frail by any means. The common depictions of David and Goliath in Sunday school materials, coloring books, animated movies, and even paintings are of a tiny young boy facing a giant man. While this makes for a good “story,” it is not what the Bible presents. In 1 Samuel 16:18 one of Saul’s servants gives a description of David some time before his encounter with Goliath:

One of the young men answered, “Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the Lord is with him.”

This description portrays David as a valiant young man who was quite capable of fighting.

Another point often raised is the description of David trying to wear Saul’s armor. We know that Saul was a head taller than the average Israelite (1 Samuel 9:2). Many people assume that David refused to wear Saul’s armor into battle because it was much too big for him (1 Samuel 17:38–39). Looking carefully at the text, however, David said that he had not “tested” the armor—he was not comfortable fighting in gear he had not trained in. Also, Saul would not suggest David wear his armor if it was much too big for him. To do so would put David at a disadvantage. We need to purge the little-boy image and have a biblical perspective of the

young man, David, who was probably in his late teens when he faced Goliath.

Although David was no undersized boy, he might have appeared so next to Goliath. This warrior from Gath was probably a descendant of the giants who caused the 10 spies to be fearful of entering the promised land. Like those spies, the warriors of Israel did not trust God to fight for them, and they stood in fear of a mere man. The details of Goliath are indeed impressive—he stood 9 feet 9 inches tall, his coat of mail weighed 125 pounds, and his spearhead weighed 15 pounds. There was not a man among the Israelites in his own strength who could defeat Goliath.

We should note that there is some debate about Goliath's height due to the textual variants in ancient manuscripts. Most English translations follow the Masoretic Text in listing his height at "six cubits and a span" (approximately 9 feet 9 inches). However, the NET Bible puts Goliath at "close to seven feet tall." The reason for the discrepancy is that the Masoretic Text differs from some ancient texts, including the Septuagint and an ancient manuscript found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which list Goliath's height as "four cubits and a span" (approximately 6 feet 9 inches). More than nine feet definitely qualifies as a giant, but even a man approximately 6 feet, 9 inches in David's time, when the average height was around

approximately 5 feet 4 inches, might have been considered a giant.

Over the years, many falsified photos have circulated showing giant skeletons being excavated around the world. Unfortunately, some well-meaning Christians have used these to “prove” that someone as tall as Goliath could have lived in the Middle East. We must remember that we can trust God’s Word when it refers to giants, and we should not start with outside sources to demonstrate the Bible’s trustworthiness. If these archaeological finds (were they even real) could prove the Bible to be true, then we’d no longer be looking to the Bible as the authority. We must always look to Scripture as our ultimate authority.

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