DAVID AND GOLIATH: CHOOSING A MAN

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

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First Samuel 17, the story of David's encounter with Goliath, is the third vignette in this Old Testament book which introduces David as Israel's newly anointed king. Each vignette presents David on Israel's stage, with a new credential to serve as the messianic king; and each sets the stage for Israel to identify her future King, Jesus of Nazareth

In the first vignette (16:1-13), David is portrayed as the *shepherd*. To his family he is insignificant, but in the eyes of his God he is a chosen one. In the second (16:14-23), David is portrayed as the skilled *musician*. Through his prayers set to music, he subdues demons in the royal court. Today, in the third vignette (17:1-53), David is presented as the *warrior*, the representative man who does battle with Israel's enemies.

The chapter is built on this key term, "a man." It is used nine times (in verses 12, 12, 24, 25, 26, 26, 27, 28, 33). Even the term "the men" of Israel is actually singular ("the man" of Israel). It is rendered thus to portray the whole nation of Israel as one man, who is paralyzed by this one Philistine. How very different from what the nation was supposed to represent. Israel, of course, was meant to be the new man, the new humanity who would defeat the enemies of mankind.

Chapter 17 has three movements. First (vv 1-11), Israel is confronted by the Philistine giant Goliath, a man so imposing he paralyzes with fear the armies of Saul and all of Israel. His taunt to Israel, "Choose a man for yourselves...give me a man that we may fight together!" rings in their ears, causing dismay and paralysis, but it is unanswered. Then in the second movement (which is made up of three separate scenes, 12-22, 23-31, 32-40), the narrator traces how God orchestrates the situation so that the man of his choice is skillfully maneuvered to the front line of the battle and becomes the man of Saul's choice. The third movement brings the boy-king into one-on-one confrontation with Goliath.

The Ancient Philistines

A little background information on the Philistines will help us better grasp the story. Trude and Moshe Dothan are a Jewish couple who have worked for forty years uncovering the archaeological evidence of the Philistines. In their recently published book, "The People of the Sea; The Search for the Philistines" they trace the history of this archaeological research. It's a fascinating book. According to the Dothans, a French force under Napoleon Bonaparte landed in Alexandria to conquer Egypt in 1798. Napoleon brought with him 167 scholars to research the history of the ancient Mediterranean world. Three hundred miles up the Nile from Cairo lay ancient Thebes, the city which Homer immortalized in his magnificent descriptions of "the hundred-gated Thebes" in his Odyssey. In Thebes, the French scholars discovered the Temple of Medinet Habu, the facade of which was still standing, its walls reaching to their original height of ninety feet. When they studied the carvings on the side of the temple depicting incredible scenes of war, they noticed strange enemy figures. The Dothans describe the figures in these words: "Unlike the bareheaded Egyptian soldiers, they had distinctive 'feathered' head-dresses, secured with straps under their chins. They wore short, kilt-like garments with prominent tassels, and some of the warriors also wore close-fitting corselets on their upper torsos."2 Up to this point, it was commonly believed that these carvings depicted an Egyptian campaign which extended as far away as India. It took another generation to discover that the battle portrayed was not that of an Egyptian offensive campaign, but rather, of an Egyptian defense of its homeland, in which they almost lost everything to these invaders, the Philistines.

The Philistines were part of a larger group of peoples (the scholars refer to them as the *Sea Peoples*), who made several migrations from the Aegean to the Eastern Mediterranean over a period of two centu-

ries. Settling in this area around 1200 B.C., they were part of a long historical invasion process. Contrary to their bad press, the Philistines were not an uncultured, barbaric people. Archaeological findings in Palestine reveal that they were one of the most advanced cultures of the Ancient Near East. They were highly competitive in international trade; in parts of Palestine they held a monopoly on local trade and overland commerce; and they exhibited great ingenuity in the art of pottery making. They adapted their skills in whatever environment they found themselves, bringing to their work a combination of Greek, Egyptian and Palestinian influences. Their cities were far more complex and advanced than their Israelite contemporaries, as was their agricultural development and military prowess.

As we begin our text in 1 Samuel, we find Israel in face-to-face confrontation with the military machine of these people, the Philistines.

I. The Challenge from the Man (17:1-11)

(a) Setting the Stage for Battle (17:1-3)

Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; and they were gathered at Socoh which belongs to Judah, and they camped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. And Saul and the men (literally: *man*) of Israel were gathered, and camped in the valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array to encounter the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on the mountain on one side, while Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with the valley between them. (NASB)

The scene opens with a description of the Philistine military initiative and Israel's counter-initiative. The two armies have taken the high positions for battle; a valley lies *between* them. Neither army wants to make itself vulnerable by leaving the high ground in order to confront the enemy in the valley below.

The Philistines, however, unveil a plan to break the stalemate. Verse 4:

(b) The *Man* from the Philistines (17:4-7)

Then a **champion** came out from the armies of the Philistines named Goliath from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was clothed with scale-armor which **weighed** five thousand shekels of bronze. He also had bronze shin guards on his legs, and a bronze javelin (slung) between his shoulders. And the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and the head of his spear **weighed** six hundred shekels of iron; his shield-carrier also walked before him.

Goliath, who is called a *champion* (literally, "man of the space in between" — an apt description of the situation!), steps forward to challenge the army of Israel. The text focuses on his appearance, describing him from the top down, laying great emphasis on the weight of his armor. Many of the terms used to describe Goliath are non-Jewish. They have never seen armor like this before; thus "scale armor" is translated literally as "fish scales." So it is this awesome individual, standing some nine feet tall, his armor-bearer walking before him, who comes out to confront Israel. (In an ironic twist, it will be Saul's armor-bearer, David, who will respond to the challenge.)

Next, the challenge.

(c) The Challenge from the Man (17:8-11)

And he stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, and said to them, "Why do you come out to draw up in battle array? Am I not the Philistine and you **servants** of Saul? <u>Choose a man</u> 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." Again the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day;

Give me a man that we may fight together." When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

Goliath taunts Israel: "I am a lord; you are slaves of Saul." Then comes his challenge: "Choose a man! If you win (and you won't), but if I win (and I will), you will serve us." "Choose a man" becomes the haunting cry that echoes through the camp of Israel from the valley of Elah. As the echo penetrates the ranks of the "man" of Israel, there is no response, only silence.

From this scene of paralysis, to begin the second movement of the story the narrator reverts back to Bethlehem, to the home of Jesse.

II. The Son Arrives from Bethlehem (17:12-22)

(a) Introduction of Jesse's Family (17:12-15)

Now David was the son of the Ephrathite of **Bethlehem** in Judah, whose name was Jesse, and he had eight sons. And Jesse was **old** in the days of Saul, advanced in years among men. And the three **older** sons of Jesse had gone after Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and the second to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. And David was the **youngest**. Now the three **oldest** followed Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's flock at **Bethlehem**.

Here we are re-introduced to the family of David, the man from Bethlehem, the "place of new things." David and his brothers are set in dramatic contrast by their age, allegiance and occupations. Having gone after Saul, both the father Jesse and David's older brothers have lapsed into the same paralysis of spirit that has stricken the king. David, described as "the youngest" (insignificant), tends the flock. He is a shepherd by occupation, a fact that will be the key to his victory over the enemy.

Jesse has an errand for his youngest.

(b) Jesse Sends David To His Brothers (17:16-19)

Now the Philistine came forward morning and evening, and took his stand for forty days. Then Jesse said to David his son, "Take now for your brothers an ephah of this roasted grain and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to your brothers. Also these ten cuts of cheese, bring to the commander of their thousand, and look into the welfare of your brothers, and bring back news of them. For Saul and they and all the men (literally: man) of Israel are in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines."

As the stalemate continues for 40 days (a significant number, pregnant with memories of Israel's testing in the wilderness), Jesse becomes concerned. He sends his youngest with provisions to check on the welfare (*shalom*) of his *brothers* — the key word of the scene. These are the exact words which Jacob spoke to Joseph in Genesis 37:14. The reader is being prepared for the rejection David is going to experience.

David wastes no time in setting out for the camp of Israel.

(c) David Arrives at the Camp

So David arose early in the morning and **left the flock** with a keeper and took the supplies and went as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the circle of the camp while the army was going out in battle array, shouting the war cry. And Israel and the Philistines drew up in battle array, army against army. Then David **left his baggage** in the care of the baggage keeper, and **ran** to the battle line and entered in order to greet **his brothers**.

What a different spirit the boy David has. Without hesitation, he gets up early and *runs* to battle. Yet he does not neglect his responsibility to care for the flock and the baggage; he leaves all in the hands of a keeper. What a contrast to Saul. When he was called to a higher vision, he hid among the baggage (1 Sam 10:22). Picture the scene: the tallest man in Israel, stooping among the baggage. But David readily leaves behind these things for a higher calling and *runs* to the battle

Through Jesse's concern for his other seven sons, God has successfully maneuvered David to the front lines. Now he must get him from the outskirts of the camp into the very presence of the king.

The next section has three scenes. Each time someone gets a report saying that David has arrived inside the camp, the boy is being brought closer and closer to king Saul.

III. The Report of the Son Inside the Camp (17:23-31)

(a) Into the Army Camp (17:23-27)

As he was talking with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine from Gath named Goliath, was coming up from the army of the Philistines, and he spoke these same words; and David heard them. When all the men (literally: man of) of Israel saw the man, they fled from him and were greatly afraid. And the men of (man of) Israel said, "Have you seen this man who is coming up? Surely he is coming up to defy Israel. And it will be that 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." 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?" And the people answered him in accord with this word, saying, "Thus it will be done for the man who kills him."

Here we see the great difference between David and Israel. David is governed by what he *hears* (Goliath's taunts to Israel), while the rest of Israel is governed by what it *sees* (the size of Goliath, his armament, etc.). This is why David's emotion is one of amazement rather than fear, and why he cries, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should taunt the armies of the living God!"

These words, which describe David's faith, form the *center-line* of the chapter. David is governed by what he hears, not what he sees. And what he hears is blasphemy and the worship of idols. He knows any life built on idols cannot stand in the presence of God. God is finally taken off the shelf and introduced into the equation. This is the wake-up call all of us receive now and then. At the point of our struggle, a Christian friend suddenly comes along and surprises us by asking, "Where is God in this equation?" We had put him on the shelf and forgotten about him.

David even inquires about the reward for victory. It is nothing less than the king's daughter. Ironically, this would make him a potential heir to Saul's throne.

As David's brothers get wind that he is in the camp, the action moves from the circle of the army to the family circle.

(b) Into the Family Circle (17:28-30)

Now Eliab his oldest **brother heard** when he spoke to the men; and Eliab's anger burned 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 insolence and the wickedness of your heart; for you have come down in order **to see** the battle." But David said, "What have I done now? Was it not just a question?" Then he **turned away** from him to another and said the same thing; and the people answered the same thing as before.

When David's oldest brother Eliab hears that David is in the camp, an emotional scene results. Without any interrogation, he confronts David, accusing him of merely coming "to see" the battle — the very thing that paralyzed himself and all of Israel. Faced with this rejection by Eliab, David turns his back on his brothers. This is a significant act. David's authorization comes from another source.

The action now moves to the court of the king.

(c) Into the Royal Court (17:31)

When the **words** which David spoke were **heard**, they **told** them to Saul, and he **sent** for him.

The report of David's arrival has been carried from the army, to his family, and now to Saul. The king betrays no emotion. Once more he issues the executive edict, "send for him." Thus God has finally got the "chosen son" before the "rejected" king, to be chosen by the king to do battle with Israel's enemy.

What an amazing God we serve! When you are being sent on errands by people who have no interest in you, to serve people whom you don't know, it is God who is doing the sending. He is placing you in the front lines, right where he wants you, to do battle with him on behalf of mankind.

This is what has happened with David, as we shall see.

IV. The Son Selected and Armed by the King (17:32-

(a) David's Conversation with Saul (17:32-37)

And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Then Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth while he has been a warrior from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God." And David said, "The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you."

David makes his proposal to Saul, "I am your *servant*, let me *go* and fight." Saul replies that David is a mere *youth*, with no experience in war like Goliath, who has been a warrior since his *youth*. David's response, in effect, is, "No problem. I'm not going to do battle as a warrior, but as an animal tamer!" He presents his resume to the king to show how on two occasions, once when the flock was attacked, and another time when the shepherd was attacked, he prevailed. He, not Goliath, would determine how the battle would be fought.

How wise of David. The world cannot be fought on its own terms. While Israel had never seen armor like Goliath's, the Philistines had never seen a shepherd's sling-shot. The LORD would deliver David. This was the key to his success. As an animal tamer, he would make the Philistine, "like one of them." Victory is assured because God has been blasphemed and holy war declared. Saul grants him permission

The tallest man in Israel now tries to help the shepherd youth by clothing him in his armor for the looming battle.

(b) Arming David

Then Saul clothed David with his garments and put a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with armor. And David girded his sword over his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. So David said to Saul, "I cannot **go** with these, for I have not tested them." And David took them off. And he took his stick in his **hand** and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, even in his pouch, and his sling was in his **hand**; and he approached the Philistine

Saul tries to clothe David as a warrior but, of course, everything is way too big. Besides, David has no experience in the use of these things. "Get me a can opener," says David. "I'm not fighting like a warrior. I'm going to do battle as a shepherd." He arms himself with what is at hand, a shepherd's arsenal — a stick and five smooth stones, projectiles a little smaller than baseballs. But these small smooth stones could be hurled from the shepherd's sling-shot at more than one hundred miles an hour. Why five stones? you ask. Some commentators hint that Goliath had four brothers. I think the point here, however, is that David has faith, but he was not so cocksure as to think that it would take only one shot to kill Goliath. God uses means together with our faith. Faith coupled with perseverance gains the promises.

David now makes his way to the battle.

V. The Battle (17:41-54)

(a) The Battle of Words

Then the Philistine came on and approached David, with the shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a **youth**, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance. And the Philistine said to David, "Am Ia **dog**, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by **his gods**. The Philistine also said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the **birds** of the sky and the **beasts** of the field." Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and 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 taunted. This day the **LORD** will deliver

you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the **birds** of the sky and the wild **beasts** of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a **God** in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the **LORD** does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD's and He will give you into our hands."

As the combatants prepare to fight, their words are more important than the battle itself. Words display the source of the trust that lies behind actions. Goliath sees David and disdains him and his weapons, because he is a youth (insignificant). Then, invoking the names of his gods, he curses David. But here he makes a fatal error. Stepping out of his role for a moment as a great warrior, he asks, "Am I a dog?" This is the turning point of the battle. Goliath has forsaken his own terms for the battle and accepted David's. He goes even further, saying, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field" — not a smart thing to say to an animal-tamer.

David responds to Goliath's words by invoking the name of his God, the Lord of the armies of both heaven and earth, the God who commands the moon and the stars. Not only would David kill Goliath, he intensifies Goliath's threat, saying that *he* would destroy the Philistines and give their bodies to the *birds* of the heavens and the *beasts* of the earth. Then, what would happen on this battlefield would a lesson for all Israel: The Lord does not deliver by sword or spear. The battle is the Lord's.

Once David has spoken these words, the fight is as good over. The actual battle account itself is rather brief.

(b) The Physical Battle

Then it happened when the Philistine rose and came and drew near to meet David, that David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand into his bag and took from it a stone and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone sank into his forehead, so that he fell on his face to the ground.

Thus David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and he struck the Philistine and killed him; but there was no sword in David's hand. 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. And the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted and pursued the Philistines as far as the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the slain Philistines lay along the way to Shaaraim, even to Gath (the home of Goliath) and Ekron. And the sons of Israel returned from chasing the Philistines; and plundered their camps. Then David took the Philistine's head and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his weapons in his tent

Once more, in typical style, David does not hesitate, but runs into battle, thereby seizing the initiative. Taking one of the stones from his bag, he slings it at the Philistine, burying it in his forehead. Goliath falls face down to the ground. The scene is reminiscent of what occurred when the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant and placed it in the house of their god Dagon. The following morning, the god Dagon was found face down before the ark (1 Sam 5:2). The fate of the hero is identical to that of the idol. Then David uses Goliath's own weapon to cut off the Philistine's head. Goliath didn't even have time to unsheathe his sword. When the Philistines saw their champion face down, dead, they broke ranks and fled. Notice that all of Israel, the men of Judah and Israel, are energized by the work of David, the representative man. They partake in the spoils, and as they do they are given back their title as "sons." The son of Bethlehem has turned the spiritually paralyzed sons of Saul into men, full sons who subdue and plunder their enemies. Finally, David takes Goliath's sword as a trophy of victory.

Reflections

How do we make spiritual application of this epic story in our own day and age? There is no guesswork involved, really. The story of David, the chosen man in Israel who defeated Goliath, was to become the story of Jesus. Christ, the representative man, the new Adam, subdued Israel's ultimate enemy. But when David's story was re-enacted in Christ, it had immeasurably broader ramifications. We

will look at three of them.

(a) The Key to Maneuvering

David, the shepherd, was carefully prepared in the wilderness of Judea for his moment of battle on behalf of Israel. But no one knew about this. Even his own family disdained him. How could he possibly get from that remote place into the public sphere? He could not take a class on self-advancement; he had no apparent credentials. Only one person needed to know his credentials, however, and that was God. God used those who held the world's spotlight, people had no interest in David personally, to send him on errands. It was his hand that was behind it all. God used the wrong motives and prideful ambitions of men to get David from the back country, to the front lines, and finally to the very court of the king.

This, too, was the Christ story. He, too, was a hidden child. Born in Bethlehem and hidden for thirty years, Isaiah said of him, "In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me,...He has hidden Me in His quiver" (Isa 49:2). And how did God move Jesus into the spotlight to confront the great enemy of Israel? He used the evil intentions of Israel, and the greedy ambition of Judas, to bring his servant to the royal court. Unbeknownst to his enemies, he chose Jesus to do battle with the real enemy of Israel, and that battle which he won on the cross has held the world spotlight for two thousand years.

(b) The New Way of Victory

In the David story, the shepherd boy seized the initiative from the enemy, and in so doing redefined the battle. He would not fight on Goliath's terms, but on his own. They would battle not like warriors, but like civilians, a setting in which Goliath had no experience. And it was not much of a battle. The Philistine played into David's hands when he asked the question, "Am I a dog?" At that point, the fight was over.

Such was Jesus' story, too. When he walked the earth, all of Israel lay paralyzed before the might of the Romans, the great military machine of that day. But then the one from Bethlehem was brought into the camp. Reports about him were met with disdain by his Jewish brothers and by the authorities. Before the confrontation, one of his own, Peter, even offered to arm him. But, like David of old, this one rejected the warrior's weapons and clothed himself as a shepherd.

At this point, two new twists enter the story. First, the ending is very different. The New David did not cut off the head of the Romans. Far from it. They killed him. The enemy won. But in his apparent victory, the greater Goliath, the devil himself, was disarmed. John in his gospel said that the greatest weapon of the shepherd was his own life. And this is what Jesus did. He laid down his life to protect his sheep. But in dying, he won. "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him" (Col 2:15).

Here is the second twist to the story. Instead of asking the Israel of God to subdue the Romans, Jesus asked them to suffer like him and invite the Romans, and all nations, to join in the New Israel of God and participate in salvation worldwide. Jesus was referring to an entirely new outcome, one that zealots found not very exciting.

(c) The Invitation to Participate in the Victory

David's victory affected the whole nation, and all of Israel participated in the spoils. So it is with Christ, but on a much larger scale, because people from every nation participate in his spoils of battle. Christ, the New Adam, created a new human race which conquers and subdues evil. "Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, saith the LORD." The spoils of the battle that he won are the spiritual gifts that are given to build up the church and witness to the world. The main battle, therefore, has already been fought and won. There is no need to fight it again; all that remains is a mop-up operation.

Peter Dugulescu, a Romanian pastor, was with us at our men's Bible study on Wednesday last. He is one of two pastors who stood up against the communists in that country a few years ago. He said that as a pastor, he had to choose to either be God's man or a compromiser. He refused to tell the secret police what they wanted to know, and he suffered the consequences. They bugged his house so that he could not even talk to his wife. They even hired a bus driver run him down. He was injured, but his life was spared. Later, he looked into the bus driver's eyes and said, "I forgive you." The police

came to arrest his pastor friend, but despite the tanks and troops lined up in the city where they ministered, people began to come out in support of them, singing and praying to God as they assembled. At last, on Christmas Day, 1989, the anti-Christ was toppled. Two hundred thousand people gathered in the city square to give thanks. They chanted, "Who will tell us about God?" After forty-five years of communism, no Orthodox priest would come out to address them. Peter seized the initiative. He made his way to a balcony that overlooked the square and asked the huge crowd to say the Lord's Prayer. As two hundred thousand people spontaneously dropped to their knees, for the first time in forty-five years, the Lord's Prayer was recited in public in that land. Isn't that what we need to see happen in America?

It is my prayer that God will re-enact the David story in all our lives, and that we will allow him to move into situations where we are paralyzed. With eyes of faith, let us seize the initiative, redefine the battle, and engage in warfare on new terms. Instead of beating our enemies, let us suffer on their behalf and win them to Christ. For it is "'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD."

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- 1. For a complete and updated archaeological history of the Philistines, see the excellent work, Trude and Moshe Dothan, *The People of the Sea: The Search for the Philistines* (New York: Macmillan/Domino Press, 1992).
- 2. Dothan & Dothan, 15.