

David—the man after God’s own heart

4. The fight

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KING SAUL could not believe that David would even contemplate fighting Goliath, let alone be able to defeat him. “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him,” he said. “You are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth.”

But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD Who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul, who until that moment had been regarding the conflict in human terms, was smitten by what David had said, and was humbled by it. He realised afresh the power of the God he was supposed to be serving. Besides, there was no time to waste: the armies were now facing each other in full battle array, and it was clear that the issue must be decided. So he said to David, “Go, and the LORD be with you.”

Preparations for the fight

But how would Saul have him go? He could not go inadequately clothed to fight against a well-armed warrior. The best that Saul could offer was his own corselet, with a coat of armour on top (perhaps an indication that David was above normal height) and a bronze helmet for David’s head. By way of armament David was provided with a sword, but when he walked around trying to get used to his newly acquired equipment, everything was too clumsy for him. “I cannot go in these,” he said to Saul, “because I am not used to them.” So he took them off, preferring his own resources that were simple and allowed him freedom of movement.

Then, either in the evening light or at dawn next day, David took his staff in his hand and went down to the stream that flowed between the two armies, and from its clear waters took five smooth stones for use in his sling. They had to be carefully selected because, as is known by anyone who has practised throwing stones onto the surface of a pond so that they skim along the surface, they have also to be round in order to fly straight and true. Additionally, in David’s case, they had to be of the correct weight for their purpose as missiles. That they should come so suitably to hand was, of course, in the purpose of God, Who had made them in the first place!

There was then nothing further to be done except to pray as only a man after God’s own heart was able to do, and to wait for the giant to appear. As soon as he did so, David, with the five stones in his shepherd’s bag, his staff in the one hand and the sling in the other, went across the stream to meet him. Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield-bearer in front of him, advanced towards David. He looked him over and saw that he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome, and he despised him. He said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And he cursed David by his gods. “Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!”

Battle is joined

David, with the mind of God’s spirit, replied, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, Whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that

The Valley of Elah, the scene of the conflict between David and Goliath, in early springtime. The “brook” where David chose his five smooth stones can just be made out to the left of the picture beneath the trees.

Picture: Tony Benson



it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD'S, and He will give all of you into our hands."

Even as he spoke and the Philistine drew closer, David ran forward to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it. It flew as straight and true as the arrow that smote the wicked King Ahab between the joints of the harness, and it struck the Philistine on the forehead—the one vital part he had left unprotected. Senseless, he fell face down on the ground, whereupon David ran to him, stood over him, drew the giant's sword from its scabbard and with it cut off his head. It all happened so quickly that the onlookers could not take it in until David raised the severed head as the victory sign.

The cry of despair, as the Philistines turned and ran, mingled with the exultant shout of the men of Israel and Judah as they surged forward and pursued the enemy as far as the gates of the fortress cities of Gath and Ekron, slaughtering as they went. No attempt was made to enter the cities; they had not the resources for that. Instead the army of Israel returned to the battlefield and plundered the Philistine camp of whatever goods and weaponry left behind could be useful on another day.

Repercussions

Neither David nor King Saul seems to have taken part in the rout. David, by God's hand, had given them the victory, and he too reaped the spoils of war and put them in store—some think in his own tent, others in God's tent or tabernacle, where Goliath's sword was kept and had a later part to play in the life of David (1 Sam. 22:10).

He did not bury the giant's head on the spot. He took it north to Jerusalem, but was unable to bury it in the city, for that was then in the hands of the Jebusites. Instead, significantly, he buried it outside the walls of the city, at a spot that came to be known as 'the place of a skull'.

The record says that, when David left the battlefield and crossed over once more to what had been the Israelite lines, Abner, the captain of the host, brought him, still carrying Goliath's head, to King Saul, who had been enquiring of his origins. "Whose son are you, young man?" asked Saul. David said, "I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem." And that, it seemed, was the end of the matter. The threat of defeat was now over. What need was there to honour the promise of a princess to one so young and from such a lowly family, whose taxes did not amount to much anyway? It was the first of the many slights David was to endure at the hands of Saul—and of the occasions when he rested his cause in the hands of the Lord God.

A spiritual battle

In the challenge and defeat of the Philistine there are unique spiritual correlations. Viewed as a type the whole incident becomes a paradigm of the conflict between sin and righteousness, the god of this world and the Lord God. Goliath, in his blasphemy, stood on the one side; David, in his faithfulness, on the other. The Philistine, representing the gods of this world, cursed David by them; David, representing the Almighty, spoke in His Name. Before this giant all carnally minded men fled; David, being spiritually minded, did not. Goliath used the weaponry of this world;

David, though he walked in the flesh, did not war after the flesh, but, knowing that his God did not save by sword or spear, used the single stone of God's providing to bring victory.

All these significances occur in the story of David and the giant; but even more wonderful are the parallels in the life of the greater Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ. He it was who faced the giant Sin when the Holy Spirit led him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. For forty days he fasted; then he faced the three-pronged assault of the tempter's power, before which our first parents fell in the Garden of Eden: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Against that assault the Lord Jesus did not carry five stones from the waters of the brook in his bag but the five inspired books of the Law that he had hidden in his heart lest he should sin against his Father.

"If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" he countered with, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Mt. 4:3,4). To the temptation to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem

(thereby gaining instant acclamation as Messiah), "For it is written: 'He will command His angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone,'" Jesus answered, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'" (vv. 6,7). And, lastly, faced with the allurements of all the kingdoms of this world and their splendour, he replied, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only'" (v. 10).

Thus it can be seen that, even as David stunned the Philistine giant with only one of the five stones he carried in his shepherd's bag, so the Son of God at the beginning of his ministry stunned the power of sin with quotations that came from just one of the books of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, which begins: "These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel"—including the Son of God.

But the total destruction of sin in the flesh could only be accomplished through the death on the cross of the Saviour, at the hill where the head of the representative giant of Sin was buried, called Calvary—Golgotha, "The Place of the Skull" (Mt. 27:33).

[\(To be continued\)](#)