

David and Goliath.

Arguably the most familiar story in the Hebrew Bible. Great theater!!

Cast of characters:

- Philistines and their champion Goliath.
- Israel and their king Saul.
- David and his brothers.



Philistines, “Sea People.”

Migrated prior to Abraham, so well established.

Recurring conflict.

Occupied roughly the same territory as the Gaza Strip.

Somewhere in their sea-faring journeys, the Philistines have picked up the idea of choosing a **champion** to fight for them. Whole new kind of warfare!

And what a champion they have! **Goliath.**

1 Samuel 17:4-7 “A giant nearly ten feet tall stepped out from the Philistine line into the open, Goliath from Gath. He had a bronze helmet on his head and was dressed in armor—126 pounds of it! He wore bronze shin guards and carried a bronze sword. His spear was like a fence rail—the spear tip alone weighed over fifteen pounds.”

Scene:

Philistines/Goliath on one hilltop.

Across the valley, Saul and the armies of Israel.

v.16 “Each morning and evening for forty days, Goliath took his stand and made his speech...

v.10 ‘Pick your best fighter and pit him against me. If he gets the upper hand and kills me, the Philistines will all become your slaves. But if I get the upper hand and kill him, you'll all become our slaves and serve us. I challenge the troops of Israel this day. Give me a man. Let us fight it out together!’ ”

All of Israel is terrified.

Plus, this battle with the Philistines is the first time Saul has led Israel to war without the anointing hand of God guiding and directing him. Remember last week?? God rejected Saul and chose a new king. Saul is (v.11) “dismayed and greatly afraid.” He is the most likely champion for the Israelites, and he doesn’t want to do it!

Into this military gridlock comes David. He has been chosen by God to take over as king, but it's clear that no one has quite taken David's new status on board. He is still being treated like *haqqaton*, the runt of the litter.

He's not even there to fight. David enters the story as the delivery guy, bringing food to the front from the family farm.

v. 17-24

One day, Jesse told David his son, "Take this sack of cracked wheat and these ten loaves of bread and run them down to your brothers in the camp. ... David ... took the food and ... arrived at the camp just as the army was moving into battle formation, shouting the war cry. ... the Philistine champion, Goliath, stepped out from the front lines of the Philistines, and gave his usual challenge. David heard him. The Israelites, to a man, fell back the moment they saw the giant— totally frightened.

v. 32 "Master," said David (to Saul), "don't give up hope. I'm ready to go and fight this Philistine."

v. 38-39 Then Saul outfitted David as a soldier in armor. He put his bronze helmet on his head and belted his sword on him over the armor.

David tried to walk but he could hardly budge. David told Saul, "I can't even move with all this stuff on me. I'm not used to this." And he took it all off.

v. 40-49 Then David took his shepherd's staff, selected five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the pocket of his shepherd's pack, and with his sling in his hand approached Goliath. ...

David took off from the front line, running toward the Philistine. David reached into his pocket for a stone, slung it, and hit the Philistine hard in the forehead, embedding the stone deeply. The Philistine crashed, facedown in the dirt.

The Philistines are afraid. They are a tiny nation clinging to the coastline, always threatened by neighbors who are intent on driving them into the sea.



By some bizarre genetic fluke, they now have one man among them whose size and temperament are sufficient to terrorize their enemies.

They have armed him to the teeth and marched out to confront Israel with a shock and awe strategy: Goliath will go man to man with any Israelite, winner take all.

It is one way to deal with your fears. Identify a hero and expect them to save you.

The problem is that you have absolutely no back up if that hero fails.

It's the old eggs and baskets dilemma: if all of your eggs are in one basket, and that basket gets stepped on, you are out of luck.

I think even Goliath is afraid. What was it like to be Goliath? When did he start to grow so tall? How painful was it for him in junior high?

When did he catch the recruiter's eye and end up in the army, and how did he feel about it? Did he want to be a farmer? A sailor? A husband and father? Did they make him play basketball when what he really loved was chess?

His entire nation has pinned their hopes on him, and I wonder what was going on inside? What did he think about, parked up on that hill in 126 lbs of chain mail?

How hot was it inside a bronze helmet? What do you do with your own fears when everyone else is depending on you? Yell? Threaten? Show off?

Saul is certainly afraid. His instinct is to prepare David to fight exactly the same way he himself would prepare for a fight of this magnitude. He offers his armor to David, who is presumably an average sized man.

Remember that Saul is head and shoulders taller than everyone else?? His coat of mail is going to hit David somewhere near his ankles, and weighed upwards from 90 pounds if mail to fit Goliath weighed 126. Saul's sword was too long for David carry, let alone throw efficiently. The text says "David tried in vain to walk."

It is such a bizarre scene! If Saul believed the armor would protect David, why hasn't he put the whole suit on himself and gone out to deal with Goliath?

Saul was a man who dealt with his fear by doing more of the same, refusing to recognize that a new day had come. Not only did he do more of the same, he tried to get David to do more of his same. It had worked once, twice, maybe 10 times. Why not now? Except that now was different.

Which brings us to **David**.

- He doesn't say, "But I'm just a shepherd boy, the haqqaton of my family." It could have been easy to play the runt card all of his life, never stepping up because no one expected him to.
- He doesn't evade the problem, handing off the picnic he had brought and racing back home to his sheep.

- He doesn't become infected with the group paralysis that has overtaken the Israelite army. When that many people are terrified, it is hard not to believe the enemy is as insurmountable as they all believe.

- He doesn't assume the posture of all the other soldiers, presuming that someone else will do it.

I would seriously consider all of those options!!! How about you? Taking on the giant myself is seldom my first instinct.

Somehow, David stays very, very clear about the resources he has, clear about the enemy, and clear about God. Goliath is not unassailable. He has one clear point of vulnerability amidst all of that armor: his forehead is not covered by his bronze helmet.

David has been practicing with his slingshot all of his life, and knows his aim is sure. He's taken down lions and tigers and bears, all of whom have bigger teeth and sharper claws and move faster than the towering, armor laden Goliath. Suddenly his skills qualify him for an entirely new career!

David is our companion in uncertain times.

We are all affected by the our rapidly changing world, and the failure of old ways of doing things. Many of us wonder what new career our skills qualify us for. There are giants looming on the hills around us, and they look like they are in charge. Sometimes there are giants standing in the living room, and they look overwhelming.

- The same Spirit that was with David is with us. This side of Pentecost, we are all anointed by the Spirit of God to do the work of God in our world.
- We are not limited to the old roles that have always defined us,
- and we have far greater resources than just the armor that has “always worked before.”
- Our giants are not bigger than God.