

== IN SEARCH OF A KING ==

Understanding 1 Samuel

Small group questions

1 Samuel 16-17, The king who saved his people

Leaders – if the questions make no sense or you don't know the answer – please contact the preacher!

1. What is the passage about?

- Can you summarize chapter 16 in one sentence?
- Can you summarize chapter 17 in one sentence?
- Discuss ... “The Bible is misused when Goliath becomes whatever ‘big problem’ you face in your life and the moral is to be more like David”.
- “*Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him*” (16:14). How do we know this a periodic emotional distress (not demon possession)?

2. What does it teach us about God?

- Discuss ... “The essential issue of the text is *God’s anointed king delivers God’s incompetent people from their stronger enemy*”.
- Explain how David v Goliath is another step in the progressive fulfilment of Genesis 3:15, “*He will crush your head and you will strike his heel*”.

3. How does it point us to Jesus?

- Discuss ... “The first page of the New Testament makes the David – Jesus connection clear” (see Matthew 1:1-6).
- “*When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted, and divides up the spoils*” (Luke 11:22). How do these words of Jesus connect with David v Goliath?
- When we teach about ‘spiritual warfare’ (fighting ongoing sin) we should do it from texts that explicitly deal with that, like “*Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes*” (Ephesians 6:11). But 1 Samuel 17 is **not** one of those texts. Do you agree?

The king who saved his people

(1 Samuel 16-17)

No Bible event is more frequently alluded to than David versus Goliath. Whatever the arena, if an unlikely contender takes on a far stronger opponent it is described as another ‘David and Goliath’ scenario. Problem ... the true meaning is lost. Context is ignored, and the big-picture given by the New Testament is missed, even within the Christian community. Goliath becomes whatever ‘big problem’ you face in your life and the remedy is moralistic, namely you need to become more like David and fight like he did.

For example consider a Sunday school class being taught about David and Goliath. The teacher stands the biggest kid on a stage 1 metre above everyone else, and dresses him up in some hired medieval military gear ... bronze helmet, chain mail coat, sword, spear, shield, with heavy metal boots and plates protecting his legs. Down below him is the smallest skinny kid (dressed only in stubbies and thongs) ... equipped with just five stones and a primitive slingshot. He stares up at the monster on stage (Mike Tyson on steroids) and the teacher says ‘*go get him!*’ Talk about post-traumatic stress disorder!

Then a number of tags on Goliath are peeled off to reveal words like ‘greed’, ‘idolatry’, and ‘unbelief’ which the teacher explains are the big enemies threatening to kill us. We must fight them and defeat them, but how? So the five stones are identified as ‘faith’, ‘prayer’, ‘Bible-reading’, ‘hope’ and ‘love’. Assessment? Ten out of ten for imagination but zero for theology. It all came unstuck when one child exclaimed: ‘*forget the other four stones ... just tell me which one killed him!*’ Problem ... the Biblical text has been treated as a piece of plasticine to shape however we like. This text is not about **us** battling **our** individual Goliaths. So what is it about? What is the proper interpretation? I’ll answer that as we address the three questions before us ... *what is the passage about, what does it teach us about God, and how does it point us to Jesus?*

1. What is the passage about?

Now that God has rejected Saul for his rank disobedience, chapter 16 describes the provision of a new king. God chose David, a shepherd in Bethlehem, the youngest son of Jesse.

Samuel anointed him and ... “*From that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power*” (v 13). In stark contrast ... “*Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him*” (v 14). This is not ‘demon possession’ but some sort of periodic emotional distress. Antidepressant pills did not exist so Saul followed advice to find a good musician to calm him, namely David, whom the author later called “*the sweet psalmist of Israel*” (2 Sam 23:1). As a result ...

“*Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better and the evil spirit would leave him*” (v 23).

Then chapter 17 describes the contest between David and the giant Philistine champion Goliath. He was 9 feet 9 inches tall, wearing a chain-mail coat heavier than some humans ... 57 kilos! Twice a day for 40 days he mocked and terrified Israel, daring anyone to take him on. His venom peaked when he saw David, a mere boy, coming towards him:

“*Come here - I’ll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!*” (v 44) ... i.e. ‘*you little runt, I’ll turn you into chook food!*’ Since the story line is familiar to you and a good part of it has been read out today, I’ll leave any further comments for our next two questions.

2. What does it teach us about God?

To answer that we need to grasp the essential issue in this text. What is it? Look beyond the original setting ... beyond the valley of Elah with two ancient armies on opposite hills, what does it boil down to? Answer ... *God's anointed king delivers God's incompetent people from their stronger vicious enemy.*

That's how David summed it up, telling Goliath ... *"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 ... the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel ... the battle is the Lord's and he will give all of you into our hands"* (17:45-47).

This is core gospel! The first version is found in God's curse upon the serpent after Adam and Eve rebelled. God promised a future son from the woman: *"He will crush your head and you will strike his heel"* (Gen 3:15). The rest of the Old Testament shows God working out this promise. The identity of that son becomes progressively clearer ... he is a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Judah, another shoot of Jesse, another shepherd, a greater David born in Bethlehem, the ultimate "anointed one" (literally "Messiah"). So our text teaches us that God keeps his promise! *God's anointed king delivers God's incompetent people from their stronger enemy.*

David v Goliath is not *mere* history, it is *salvation* history (gospel history). It is not a feel-good story for us to moralise and apply to any unequal contest we can think of. Back to the Sunday school class ... of all the parties gathered at the valley of Elah that day, which one typifies us? Not David! Rather ... Israel, the people of God ... fearful, sinful, incompetent, outgunned by the vicious enemy, and totally dependent on God sending a champion to fight for them. That's us!

3. How does it point us to Jesus?

What are its gospel themes that converge on Jesus? We have already noted one answer ... Jesus is the ultimate David, the ultimate shepherd-son of Jesse born in Bethlehem. The first page of the New Testament makes the connection easy for us, announcing *"Jesus Christ the Son of David"* whose genealogy is through *"Obed the father of Jesse and Jesse the father of King David"* (Matt 1:1-6).

Another pointer to Jesus could easily be overlooked, namely the two results of David's triumph. First, God's people themselves made gains over their enemies, *"they plundered their camp"* (17:53). Second, David carried Goliath's weapons to his own place (eventually to Jerusalem when it became his capital). Is this merely a case of collecting some souvenirs? No! Though David wouldn't have known, it is a gospel theme. In the words of Jesus ...

"When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted, and divides up the spoils" ... "how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first binds the strong man? Then he can plunder his house" (Luke 11:22, Matt 12:29). Just as David's victory enabled his people to plunder the Philistines (dividing up the spoils) so Christ's victory enables his people to plunder the household of Satan ... setting his captives free by the spread of the gospel. As people come to faith in Jesus they are freed from bondage to the Prince of this world, and become servants of the Prince of Peace.

Bottom line ... why would anyone side with Goliath? Why follow a defeated enemy? Why remain with the serpent and his crushed head? But that is the reality for every non-Christian! It is imperative that we side with Christ. He is *God's anointed king who delivers God's incompetent people from their stronger vicious enemy*. I urge you all to follow him. Take up his gracious invitation ... "*Come unto me and I will give you rest*". Let me close with an excellent summary of David v Goliath (from Martin Luther's great hymn) ...

*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing.
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
The Lord of Hosts, his name --
From age to age the same,
And he must win the battle.*