

# *Taking on Giants*

## WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

1<sup>st</sup> in a five-part series

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### *1 Samuel 16:6–13 (NIV)*

[God has sent Samuel to the home of Jesse in Bethlehem. One of Jesse's sons will be God's anointed king. But which one?]

<sup>6</sup>When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD."

<sup>7</sup>But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

<sup>8</sup>Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either."<sup>9</sup> Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the LORD chosen this one."<sup>10</sup> Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The LORD has not chosen these."<sup>11</sup> So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?"

"There is still the youngest," Jesse answered. "He is tending the sheep."

Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives."

<sup>12</sup>So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; this is the one."

<sup>13</sup>So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

### *1 Samuel 17:38–51 (NIV)*

<sup>38</sup>Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head.<sup>39</sup> David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.

"I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off.<sup>40</sup> Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

<sup>41</sup>Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David.<sup>42</sup> He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him.<sup>43</sup> He said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.<sup>44</sup> "Come here," he said, "and I'll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!"

<sup>45</sup>David said to the Philistine, "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.<sup>46</sup> This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.<sup>47</sup> All those gathered here will know that 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."

<sup>48</sup>As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him.<sup>49</sup> Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground.

<sup>50</sup>So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

<sup>51</sup>David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the sheath. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword.

When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.

*A man after God's own heart . . . and with God, David stands ready to take on giants.*

This week, we embark on a series of studies looking at the stories of King David through the lenses of his personal relationships, beginning with David's relationship with God. It will be a fascinating journey, as the Bible devotes more narrative space to the stories of David than to any other person, with the exception of Jesus. The question is why. Granted, David came to be seen as the idealized king of Israel. And yes, he was the one with whom

God made an everlasting covenant. But still, what is there in these stories that God wants us to see? What will we learn about our own life with God from David's life with God? Eugene Peterson writes:

“The way of David is rich in so much of what is involved in dealing with all we deal with – men and women, enemies and friends, sex and children. The story is woven in a rich tapestry of love and war, deeply textured in all the emotions that express the highs and lows of daily existence. David is nothing if not *interesting*. There is a charismatic verve to his life that compelled the attention of everyone. The stories about him quickly developed in Israel into something approaching a national myth. The people of Israel remembered and talked about everything and everyone that had to do with this man.”<sup>1</sup>

### *From Samuel to David*

When the twelve Israelite tribes conquered and settled in Canaan, they were not ruled by kings. Instead the Lord God was their king and they were led by men and women called judges. Samson, Gideon, and Deborah were a few of these leaders.

Things did not go well in the time of the judges. The people drifted further and further from God. Though God was their king, they began to clamor for a human king, so they could be just like all their neighbors.

The last of the judges, Samuel, long grown into manhood and now a prophet of God, confronted the Israelites about their desire for kings. Kings are *takers*, he warned. Kings *take* sons for his armies and daughters for his cooking and his bed. Kings *take* the best of the fields and the vineyards. Kings *take* property. *Take, take, take* (1 Samuel 8).<sup>2</sup> But the people didn't listen; they persisted and God relented, granting their wish.

So God found a king for his people. His name was Saul and he certainly looked the part, for “there was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else” (1 Samuel 9:2). Interestingly, so far as the people were concerned, Saul was chosen by lot (1 Sam. 10:17-27a).<sup>3</sup>

But despite Samuel's anointing of Saul as the first king of a united Israel, Saul proved to be a disappointment. He might have looked like God's king, but he showed himself to be disobedient to God, figuring that, as king, he knew better. Saul even tried to supplant Samuel in some of his duties (see 1 Samuel 13-15 for more on Saul's disobedience). And so, “The Lord was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel” (1 Sam. 15:35).

### *God chooses a new king*

God decides to replace Saul and sends Samuel to the home of Jesse, who lives in Bethlehem. Jesse has eight sons. Samuel is to fill his animal horn with oil for he is going to anoint a new king, though Samuel doesn't yet know who it will be.

The first son, Eliab, is brought before Samuel. Like Saul, Eliab looks like he is from central casting. But God tells Samuel that Eliab is not the one. God won't look at outward appearances but at the heart. So, one by one, Jesse parades his sons before Samuel, who says that none of them have been chosen by God. Finally, Samuel asks if there are any more sons and learns that the baby of the family is out back tending the sheep.

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<sup>1</sup>from Peterson's book, *The Jesus Way*, Eerdmans Publishing, 2007, p. 80

<sup>2</sup>This theme of kings as takers is one to keep in mind as we move through the stories of David. Nathan, Samuel's successor as prophet to the king, would accuse David of this very charge. In the end, the people of God could count on one hand the number of good kings they had over a period stretching four centuries!

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<sup>3</sup>Choosing by lots, i.e., throwing the dice, was seen as a way of leaving the decision up to God, figuring that God would make the dice come out the way God wanted them to. This is the same method that the disciples used to replace Judas after Jesus' ascension.

So the young shepherd is brought in and Samuel instantly knows that he is the one. Yes, young David looks both healthy and handsome, but we know that God has looked on his heart and seen what God wanted to see. So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David, after which the Spirit of the Lord “came mightily upon David from that day forward” (1 Sam. 16:13). And, in the next verse, we learn that the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul.

Do David and Saul know what has happened, that the young shepherd has been handpicked to replace Saul? “No” is the simple answer and the ensuing tension grows inexorably as the lives of these two men, one a king and one a young shepherd, become ever more entwined. God’s king, David, *will* take the throne. The only questions are when and how.

It turns out that David has a good reputation as a musician. When Saul’s advisors see the king falling into bouts of despair, they send for the talented David, in the hope that the young man’s music will soothe the troubled king. Thus, David becomes part of the royal court. Soon, however, trouble is brewing; the hated Philistines are on the march.

#### *Trouble with the Philistines*

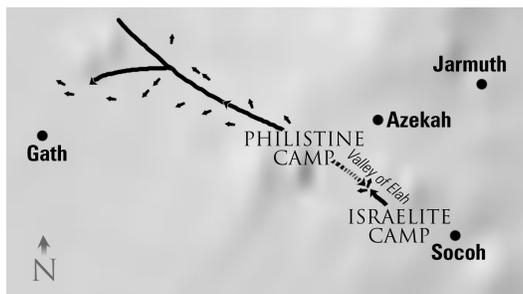
The Philistines were a sea-faring people from the Aegean basin who settled in the coastal areas of southern Palestine (roughly the area between Gaza and modern-day Tel Aviv) in the early twelfth-century BC and quickly became one of Israel’s principal rivals. To illustrate their significance in the region, the name “Palestine” is derived from the Greek and Latin names given to the descendants of the Philistines. Five Philistine city-states formed themselves into a league and would play a key role in David’s life: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron.

While David goes to be part of Saul’s royal court, the Philistines were continuing an expansive push into Israelite territory that had lasted, on and off, for more than a century. And from the time that the boy Samuel was called to God’s service (1 Samuel 3), the two peoples waged all-out war.

Thus, the two armies face each other and are separated only by a small, flat valley, the Valley of Elah, southwest of Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> As illustrated by this map, the armies are encamped on two hilltops, very near one another.

#### *Goliath*

As the two armies face each other, out of the Philistine battle line emerges an enormous man, who seems as if he has to be ten feet tall. His armor weighs 126 pounds and yet, Goliath wears it with ease. He has a proposal which will save many lives. Let the Israelites pick their best warrior to face Goliath in a one-on-one battle. Whoever wins will be deemed to have won the entire battle for his king.<sup>5</sup> The losers will become the slaves of the winners.



To a man, the response of the Israelite fighters is “Easy for him to say! He’s unbeatable!” So day after day, Goliath comes out to make his challenge and each day the Israelites turn a deaf ear. Each day, the Israelites’ humiliation grows. For forty days this goes on.

Meanwhile, Jesse, David’s father, has his three oldest sons in Saul’s army and so tells David to take them some fresh food. When David arrives with baskets of bread and cheese, he sees what is happening on the battlefield and is stunned. Who is Goliath to taunt the army of the Lord God? David also wants to know what reward is promised to the man who defeats Goliath. Why, only the king’s daughter in marriage, he’s told, and riches to boot!

<sup>4</sup>Jerusalem is controlled by the Jebusites at this time. David, when king, would conquer the city and make it the capital city of the united Israel.

<sup>5</sup>If you happened to catch Brad Pitt as Achilles in the movie *Troy* some years ago, you’ll recall that this is exactly how the movie begins. Rather than two armies facing off, each chooses a hero to represent them. There is a useful analogy here to Jesus, who suffered death on a cross as our representative Messiah, one man standing in for us all.

So, despite enduring ridicule from his older brothers, David decides that he is going to take on Goliath and heads for King Saul to tell him. You can imagine Saul's reaction. David is Saul's court musician, hardly more than a boy with no experience as a warrior . . . and *he* is going to take on Goliath when the best of Israel's army refuse? I imagine that Saul felt a bit like the mom in *A Christmas Story* who tells young Ralphie that if he gets his much-coveted Red Rider BB gun, "You'll shoot your eye out!" The whole notion of David going out to fight Goliath just seems absurd.

David persists however, confident that just as God enabled him to kill wild animals that threatened the sheep, so God will enable him to kill Goliath. This is the point on which the story turns. David is confident that God will see to the victory of his people over the Philistines, even if that means that one Israelite must defeat Goliath. This isn't about the skills of a particular warrior, but of God's faithfulness to his people.

David's faith in God is unyielding and I guess Saul figures that he has nothing to lose. So Saul outfits David in his own armor – and the kid looks ridiculous. He can hardly carry the weight, much less move and fight in it. So David heads out dressed just as he came in, as a shepherd. No sword, no shield, just a trusty sling.

David heads down the valley and stops alongside a stream to pick out a few suitable stones. What must have been going through his mind!?

When David steps out to meet Goliath, the giant and his shield-bearer step forward and laugh in disdain. They send a boy?!! Goliath, wise in the ways of battle, promises to feed the boy to the birds. David's reply is equally confident. "You come to me with sword and shield, but I come with the LORD God who will deliver you to me."

So David runs to meet the Philistine, loads a stone in his sling, and lets it fly, striking Goliath right in the middle of the forehead. The behemoth falls dead to the ground. David then draws the dead man's sword and uses it to cut off Goliath's head.

The "deal" was that the Philistines were supposed to hand themselves over to the Israelites, but to no surprise, they ran instead, with the Israelite army giving chase. David headed back to Saul to deliver the head of the Philistine.

You can imagine the uproar at home over David's victory. He is hailed a hero from town to town. The women danced and sang, even writing songs to celebrate David at Saul's expense. So Saul's jealousy of David was born. The truth is that the king was even afraid of David. He knew that there was no rational explanation for David's victory, surely God was with the young man. Sadly, one day, as Saul slipped into one of his foul moods, he actually grabbed a spear and through it at David as the shepherd played his music for his king.

The story of David and Goliath is a story of faith, a story that teaches us yet again that the world is really not as it seems. We imagine we know who are the mighty and the strong. But do we? The world is turned upside down in the Valley of Elah when a giant comes crashing down to the ground, defeated by faith in the power of God. Goliath is defeated by a stone and Death is defeated by a cross. A strange world indeed.

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. God chooses David for his heart; he is a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). What would you expect that God looks for in the heart? How would you expect this heart to play out in David's life? What do you think God sees when he looks at your heart? How different do you think your heart might be from David's? David wrote nearly half the psalms. Read psalm 6 and ask yourself what God is looking for in David – on what will their relationship be based?
2. Saul turns out to be a bad choice. How could such a thing be? Didn't God send Samuel to anoint Saul? Could God get this wrong? The story of Saul poses some real challenges for how we think about God. We are told, "the Lord was sorry that he made Saul king over Israel" (1 Sam. 15:35). How could an all-powerful, all-knowing God be sorry about anything? What sort of God is sorry for something he did?

3. The story of David and Goliath is one of the most used biblical stories, showing up across the cultural landscape. The story is usually cast as an underdog victory akin to the U.S. hockey team's miracle on ice in 1980. But is it really an underdog story? Yes, young David goes out to meet and kill a giant, but in what ways is it not a story of the weak defeating the mighty?
4. At one point, David says to Goliath: "All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves . . ." What do you think is meant here? What are we to learn? David doesn't use a sword or spear but he still launches a projectile that fatally strikes Goliath in the head, so it is not as if Goliath is defeated without resorting to violence. For God's people and in the light of Christ, what is the proper use of violence?

### *Daily Bible Readings*

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

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| <p><b>Monday, 1 Samuel 15</b> A story of Saul's sin and his rejection by God</p>  | <p><b>Tuesday, 1 Samuel 16</b> David anointed by Samuel and finds a place in Saul's royal court.</p>  |
| <p><b>Wednesday, 1 Samuel 17</b> David defeats Goliath, the Philistine champion.</p>  | <p><b>Thursday, 1 Samuel 18</b> Saul becomes jealous of David, who has formed a deep and life long bond with Jonathan, Saul's son. David marries Saul's daughter, Michal.</p> |
| <p><b>Friday, 1 Samuel 19</b> Saul sets out to kill David and the long, deadly game of hunter and hunted begins. David has to go on the run, aided by both Jonathan and Michal.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Prayer List</b></p>   |

