

OLD TESTAMENT READING FOR JUNE 21, 2015

START WITH SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 17:32-49

OBSERVE:

This is one of the most well-known and beloved tales in all of scripture. If we grew up in Sunday School, we will know it well. And yet it depicts a pivotal act of violence in the history of Israel and in the biography of David.

The setting is one of the chronic tribal wars between Israel and Philistia. The Philistines had once been sea-people who had invaded this fertile land of Canaan between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River Valley. And now, with their weapons of iron against the bronze of Israel, they were pressuring the tribes of Israel and encroaching on their territory.

The episode depicted here is a challenge to individual combat. The two armies are lined up facing one another, but it may be that the strength of the Philistines isn't sufficient to take on the Israelites — so Goliath has challenged the Israelites to send out their own champion to single combat. A kind of "winner take all" game.

Understandably, no one, not even the Saul the warrior-king of Israel, has been foolish enough to take on this massive human killing machine! Until now, that is.

David may seem to the seasoned soldier to lack experience and strength — but he more than compensates in wit and skill — and in faith. For him, Goliath's challenge is blasphemous. Goliath has been deriding the God of Israel!

Saul obviously admires this boy who would offer single-combat against Goliath, but there is no way he is going to send him against a man of war unarmed. And here is the irony: David says "*The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.*" King Saul answers David's declaration of faith with his own: "*Go, and may the Lord be with you!*" And yet the truth is, Saul doesn't have faith in David's faith, or his God. Saul dresses David up in his own armor, which David finds completely ill-suited to his own tactics.

The armor is discarded, and David relies on his own techniques — a careful search in a dry riverbed for five smooth stones. With just the right heft.

We all know what happens next. David's sling takes down the giant with one clean shot. What really leaps out, though, is that for David this is not his own battle. The battle belongs to the Lord. This is a theological war between the gods of Philistia and the Lord of Israel:

"You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷ and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand."

APPLY:

There are several applications to our own lives here.

- when dealing with challenges, don't try to wear somebody else's armor. Be who God has called you to be!
- Faith + wisdom leads to solutions that are outside of the box.
- When we have faith, we can respond to challenges with courage: *When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.*

RESPOND:

How often do I try to use outmoded and ineffective techniques to try to accomplish God's purposes? Faith gives me the courage to try new methods to obey God.

Lord, when I face my Goliaths, give me David's faith, wisdom and courage. Amen.

BY TOM LETCHWORTH

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