

## A SHEPHERD BOY, A STONE, A GIANT & GOD

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This morning's responsive reading about David and Goliath was a long one, but it tells a story that we have all heard before. And yet, when we read these biblical stories, sometimes the more familiar they are, the more distant they seem in space and time that their concrete, historical realities tend to escape us. Last week, I came across a news article in christiannews.net about one of the places mentioned in the closing part of the Scripture that we read this morning—that place is the ancient Philistine city of Gath. And what prompted my focus on David's encounter with Goliath was that this news article reported about a recent archaeological discovery in Palestine that related to Israel's ancient struggle with the Philistines. The article stated: "Large fortifications dating to the time of the biblical King David have been found below an archaeological dig site already thought to be Gath, the hometown of the giant Philistine Goliath. The walls made of 3-6 foot stone blocks. . . were found at . . . a site not far from Hebron that has uncovered numerous finds from various time periods, including what appears to be that of the inhabitation of the Philistines. . . [T]his summer, it was decided to dig deeper, down at the lower city of Gath, to see what was there." Aren Maeir, a professor of archaeology at a university near Tel Aviv, is the leader of this project, and he expressed his surprise to find a much older and considerably larger city of Gath below the one they had been exploring. The remains of the city walls and fortifications in the older, deeper section were constructed with these massive stones—bigger than anything they'd come across before. What they ended up finding was a huge fortified city built on about 124 acres dating back to the 11th century B.C. which would, in fact, go back to the time of David. Strangely enough, Dr. Maeir indicated ***"that since no giant skeletal remains have yet been found in Gath, perhaps the biblical record of Goliath being so large is a 'mythical story' that was based on the size of the city."***<sup>1</sup>

What an odd and biblically misinformed statement to make!—Goliath wasn't a myth, and neither was David! Dr. Maeir may be a good archaeologist, but he really needs to brush up on his reading of the Scriptures, because if he would simply refer to the passage that we read this morning, then he would realize that nobody is ever going to find the bones of Goliath in the City of Gath. Why?—because as we just read, David slayed him in the valley of Elah well away from Gath. Goliath was anything but a myth, and the Bible doesn't tell us that he was a 9' tall, really big guy simply because he came from a city that used big stones for construction purposes. That's ridiculous!

Fortunately, Scott Lanser, who is the director for an organization called *Associates for Biblical Research* offers a counter to any assertion that these important stories from the Bible are a myth. He

tells us: ***“For Christians, [these] archaeological discoveries of monumental [stones], along with the results of DNA testing, all help to provide important historical details and insights into this formidable ancient enemy of Israel. While many reporting on these archaeological discoveries like to suggest that the evidence simply ‘hints’ at supporting [the historical realities of the biblical] stories, we see the discoveries as adding important context and clarity to Bible’s plain intention to convey accurate, historical accounts regarding Israel and the Philistines.”*** He goes on to explain: ***“The Bible is clear that the issue was not just that extremely large stones were used in the construction of Philistine monumental architecture, but that a very large Philistine named Goliath was felled by a very small stone wielded by a rugged [and very real] shepherd named David . . . a shepherd who would become Israel’s first [true] king.”***<sup>2</sup>

And yet, there are some people who still will tell you that Goliath was a myth simply because nobody could possibly be 9’ tall. But that kind of height really isn’t unheard of. In fact, a man by the name of Robert Wadlow was born a little over 100 years ago in Alton, Illinois, and grew to the impressive height of 8’ 11.1” tall—within one inch of Goliath’s recorded height.<sup>3</sup> Even today, the world’s tallest man is fairly close to Goliath’s statute. Back in 2011, Sultan Kösen, who lives in Turkey, measured out at almost 8’ 3” inches in height. The only thing that stopped him from growing any taller has a connection to our own part of the world where he underwent an operation on his pituitary gland at the University of Virginia, which successfully halted his production of growth hormones.<sup>4</sup> So, for those who scoff at Goliath’s height as being *unbelievable*—well, there are certainly people on record who approximate his height.

And yet, even if you told these people that Goliath was a bit shorter, it’s likely that many of them still wouldn’t believe. In fact, there are a few biblical scholars who argue that the earliest known texts of 1 Samuel 17 may have indicated that Goliath was only 6’ 9” tall.<sup>5</sup> Yet, even if you pointed this out to those same unbelievers who claim that ***“the 9’ Goliath”*** is just too tall to be credible, I doubt if it would matter. Now let me clarify one thing. I actually believe that the best and earliest biblical texts document Goliath as being 9’ tall, not 6’ 9”. But, I’m not that tall to begin with. If you stretched me out pretty good, you might get something around 5’ 7”. And the people of the ancient eastern Mediterranean, including the Philistines and the Israelites, were not noted as being all that tall. In fact, if I’d come along back then, I would be considered on the tall side, because the average height of a male Israelite was about 5 to 5 ½ feet tall at that time.<sup>6</sup> So if Goliath were only 6’ 9”, and I were 5’ 7”—I’d still feel like I was fighting a giant—someone like Conan the Barbarian or the Terminator. I wouldn’t

stand a chance against Arnold Schwarzenegger—and he’s only 6’ 2”. So, even if Goliath were only 6’ 9” that was plenty tall back in ancient times. And that is still really tall today.

In fact, do you know what the tallest height of any player in the National Football League is today? Well, it just so happens to be 6’ 9” In fact, three offensive tackles, each weighing over 300 pounds—one from the Steelers, another from the Dolphins, and the last one from the Buccaneers—they are each 6’ 9” tall.<sup>7</sup> David was just a boy—probably weighing in at about 130 lb. and barely taller than 5’ or so. If Goliath was as big as the tallest N.F.L. offensive tackles—what a physical mismatch that would have been. And if Goliath went out to fight at his actual playing height of 9’ (or even 6’ 9” for that matter) and toting a spear with a 15 pound iron point, along with a sword the size of four bush hog blades—well, that would be a pretty tough thing for someone to face alone.

Of course, if I were in the Army of Israel standing across the valley from Goliath, I would have had a question that might have been on everyone else’s minds as well. I would have been wondering why King Saul wasn’t out there fighting Goliath. You see, the Bible tells us that Saul was “*head and shoulders*” taller than the rest of the Israelites.<sup>8</sup> That would make him about 6’ 6”. And if we take the smaller sized Goliath at a mere 6’ 9”—well then there would have been only a 3” height differential. Joe Frazier (6’ tall) gave up 3 inches in height to Mohammed Ali (6’ 3”), yet whipped him in a unanimous decision the first time they fought. So, why didn’t Saul get out there and give him a go? Well, Saul was likely very much aware of something. He was aware that he lacked something and it wasn’t height, or armor, or weapons. Saul lacked the Holy Spirit because the Scriptures tell us that the Holy Spirit had left him<sup>9</sup>—or rather that he had abandoned God, is another way of putting it. And there is a tremendous difference in the disposition of a person who is in tune with the Holy Spirit as opposed to one who is not in step with God’s will. One is fearful, indecisive and depressed, while the other walks with courage, confidence and joy. Old Testament scholar, Robert Vannoy, points to this great difference between Saul and David: “The contrast between the actions of David and Saul clearly reflects the difference between a person controlled by God’s Spirit and one who is not. . . So Saul and David, the two anointed ones, had two very different perceptions of the situation with which Israel was confronted. Saul, from who the Spirit had departed, could see only the physical power of the Philistine giant, while David, upon whom the Spirit had come, had a vision for the power of the Lord who was able to deliver him from the hand of the giant.”<sup>10</sup> ***That’s it!***—David had confidence and absolute faith in the power of God—the power of the Holy Spirit to protect and sustain him! Isn’t it strange how the kingly, handsome, tall Saul viewed the giant Goliath in such a different way than the lowly, short shepherd boy? It’s true—you look at the giants of life so very differently when you are lifted up and given a higher perspective by the Holy Spirit.

You might be the shortest person around from a physical standpoint. But, that doesn't matter. The question is: "**How tall is your faith?**" There are so many giants walking around in this world today trying to smother your faith in the shadows. They are giants wielding huge spears and long swords, waiting to cut you off at the knees, if you let them. The Giant of Pain slashes his sword into your health and leaves you reeling. The Giant of Despair plunges his spear into your assets and brings about financial ruin. The Giant of Fear screams out words of woe and doubt, and leaves you shaking and trembling. The Giant of Hopelessness seeks to chain you to the mistaken belief that there is nothing that can help you or make you whole again. What can you possibly bring to bear against such an awesome array of "**giants**" as these? What can you fight them with? Well, you need a weapon that will never fail you—one like David used to face his giant. David took something that many might consider to be merely the toy of a child—just a plain old shepherd's sling. Yet, when he ran toward Goliath, David didn't run alone. Someone else ran with him. You see, the Holy Spirit is a pretty good shot when it comes to slingshots.

But, Goliath was a giant of this world, and he neither knew nor cared anything about the God of Israel. So, when Goliath saw a short, frail boy with a sling in one hand and a shepherd's staff in the other bearing down on him, he scoffed at him in laughter.<sup>11</sup> And it is then that David tried to enlighten Goliath a bit and let him know what it would be that would drop this arrogant giant like a sack of potatoes. David told him that his weapon wasn't just a slingshot or a shepherd's staff. David assured him that he didn't need things like swords, or spears or javelins to confront worldly giants. Rather, David informed this giant that he would be overcome by the power of God. Now I don't know what Goliath's IQ may have been, but I am sure that David reduced it down to the simplest of terms just to make certain that if Goliath wasn't too brilliant that even he could understand who it was that was about to carry out his execution. And so David told him, "***I come to you in the name of the LORD of Heaven's Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. Today the LORD will conquer you.***"<sup>12</sup>

David was willing to trust in God and simply serve as the Lord's instrument in slaying this foe. And David wanted everybody to know that. He wanted his brothers, and he wanted Saul, and the Israeli army, and Goliath and the Philistine horde, and you and me to see that God can and will deliver those who are faithful to Him—no matter what challenges in life that they may be facing. And David wanted us to understand that God will often accomplish His purposes through the humblest and weakest of means, yet still faithfully deliver us from the Giants of Pain, Despair, Fear and Hopelessness—or any other giants Satan sends forth.<sup>13</sup>

That is one of the central messages of this battle that took place there in the Valley of Elah between a real shepherd boy named David and a very real, extremely huge giant of a man, with a decidedly worldly perspective, named Goliath. But there is another important message that we sometimes overlook and it is this: This passage from 1 Samuel 17 isn't only about a struggle between a boy and a giant. The message isn't simply limited to giving hope to the underdog. When I read that news article about the massive stone walls recently discovered in the ancient ruins of Gath, I realized that this biblical story transcends both David and Goliath. This is, indeed, a story about stones. It's about the arrogance of those pagan cultures of the world, like those of the Philistines who took such pride in their technological advancements—such as the means to construct those massive stone walls that surrounded their city. In that respect, the Philistine society was not unlike the one we live in today—one that trusts in technology like Philistines, but abandons God like Saul. And, it's a story about having the spiritual insight to compare those huge stones to something else. We need to compare them to those little stones that David picked up to confront Goliath—and in making the comparison to ask yourselves which stones will you rely upon—those of the world, or those guided by the power of God. And, beyond that, we need to consider an even more important Stone—the one that the builders rejected and cast aside, but in reality It is the cornerstone<sup>14</sup> of all life in existence and the capstone of all life eternal<sup>15</sup>—**THAT UNBREAKABLE STONE IS JESUS CHRIST!**

You see, this story in 1 Samuel 17 is truly a story that tells us about two ancient foes—but those foes are not just David and Goliath. This passage of Scripture points to an ongoing battle that is the most ancient one of all, going back to the creation of the world. But, it also points to a future battle yet to come as well. In **Genesis 3:15**,<sup>16</sup> it tells us of a battle in which the woman's seed (Jesus) will defeat another foe—again with a crushing blow to the head. Only in that battle it won't be Goliath's head that will be crushed, but the head of a serpent—the head of Satan. The battle has two points of climax. One came with Jesus' death on the Cross and His resurrection from the grave—when Jesus defeated death and sealed Satan's fate. The other climax is one in the not too distant future when Jesus will come again and claim His ultimate victory—bringing about his Heavenly Kingdom right here on earth. Until then, the skirmishes will be ongoing. They will continue to rage, but the outcome is absolutely certain when Satan, along with all his Goliath's and all his minions will be cast into a lake of fire where stones melt and the giants of this world will feel unending regret and pain—again and again, forever.

And that's the thing, this battle between David and Goliath—well, it's still going on today and will continue on until Christ comes again. The question is which side of the valley do you reside? In whose camp does your tent stand? Are you sleeping with Goliath and his Philistine buddies—content to

put your faith in their pagan world? I hope not. But, I am equally hopeful that you are not camping out with Saul either—mired in his doubts, fears and despair, living a life devoid of the power of the Holy Spirit. You see, there is a place reserved for you beyond either of those unholy camps, where you can join with those who, like David, place their hope in God—who are willing to go to battle with nothing more than a few small stones of faith. Do you have enough height to see that far? Is your faith tall enough to see over those giants of this world to the mountains beyond and into the eternal home God has prepared for you?

Let us pray.

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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor  
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<sup>1</sup> Heather Clark, "Mega Fortifications Dating to Time of David Found Below Dig Site at Gath, Philistine Goliath's Hometown," *Christiannews.net* (August 7, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Heather Clark.

<sup>3</sup> Wikipaedia.

<sup>4</sup> Wikipaedia.

<sup>5</sup> J. Daniel Hays, "Reconsidering the Height Of Goliath," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 4 (Dec. 2005), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: 701-714.

<sup>6</sup> J. Daniel Hays, "Reconsidering the Height Of Goliath," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 4 (Dec. 2005), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: 710. See also: <https://ourworldindata.org/human-height>; "Data on human heights in Early Europeans in the Eastern Mediterranean region was sourced from Hermanussen (2013)."

<sup>7</sup> Alejandro Villanueva—the 320 lb. tackle for the Pittsburgh Steelers; Zach Sterup—the 318 lb. tackle for the Miami Dolphins; and, Demar Dotson—the 315 lb. tackle for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Samuel 9:2 (NRSV) He had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Samuel 16:14 (ESV) Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul.

<sup>10</sup> J. Robert Vannoy, 1-2 Samuel, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 4a, Tyndale: Carol Stream, Ill. (2009), p. 167-169.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Samuel 17:43

<sup>12</sup> 1 Samuel 17:46

<sup>13</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Successful (1 Samuel)*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2003), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 253.

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 28:16 (HCSB) Therefore the Lord GOD said: "Look, I have laid a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; the one who believes will be unshakable."

<sup>15</sup> Psalm 118:22-23 (TLB) <sup>22</sup> The stone rejected by the builders has now become the capstone of the arch! <sup>23</sup> This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous to see!

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 3:15 (TEV) I will make you and the woman hate each other; her offspring and yours will always be enemies. Her offspring will crush your head, and you will bite her offspring's heel."