

# You Don't Stand a Chance

David and Goliath. It's probably the most famous and familiar of any Bible story—Bible *history*, to be precise. You heard a number of excerpts from the story as today's First Reading. It all started *before* the verses appointed for today's reading. To summarize the story before the reading, the Philistines and the people of Israel lined up in battle formation opposite one another, with a valley in between.

Then begins today's reading:

I. Goliath

## 1 Samuel 17:4-7

<sup>4</sup>A challenger who represented the Philistines came out from the camp of the Philistines. He was named Goliath of Gath. He was nine feet, six inches tall. <sup>5</sup>He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he wore scaled body armor, which was made of more than one hundred pounds of bronze. <sup>6</sup>He had bronze greaves on his shins and a bronze spear slung between his shoulders. <sup>7</sup>The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spearhead was made of fifteen pounds of iron. His shield bearer went out ahead of him.

The concept has been called "Battle by Champions," or a "duel." The duel, however, wasn't totally like the Old West, where two gunfighters had it out at the OK Corral. The duel had much higher stakes than that. It was a form of combat where two individuals fought as representatives of opposing forces to settle disputes. This form of combat was no longer a new or innovative idea, though it was to Israel; they had never faced anything like this before.

Goliath stepped forward confidently. "Pick your warrior," he challenged, "I'll fight any one of you that has the guts to step onto the field of battle."

How tall is the tallest individual you have ever seen in person? Long ago I seem to remember seeing a college basketball team roll into a fast-food joint. The men walking through the door all towered over me. I'm just under 6'. Most of them were well over the 6' mark. Take a look at this image of the comparative height of a number of NBA players throughout the years. Note the little guy way over on the left, at 5'4". Imagine him right next to the 7'6" man and looking up at him. That's how much taller Goliath was to the 7'6" behemoth all the way on the right. Goliath was huge!

The Bible describes King Saul as head and shoulders taller than the typical Israelite. Estimates say that he was about 6'6", about the middle of the picture. Imagine King Saul needing to tilt his head to look way up—3 feet higher—to see Goliath's face.

His armor was quite impressive, too. A bronze helmet and body armor weighing more than 100 lbs. His deep voice echoed throughout the valley as he challenged Israel.

## 1 Samuel 17:8-10

<sup>8</sup>He would stand up and shout to the armies of Israel, "Why have you come out to line up in battle formation? I am a Philistine, and you are servants of Saul, aren't you? Choose a man to represent you, and let him come down to me. <sup>9</sup>If he is able to fight with me and kill me, we will be your servants. But if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our servants, and you will serve us." <sup>10</sup>The Philistine would say, "I defy the ranks of Israel today! Give me a man, and we will fight each other!"

Goliath could step into the valley confidently. He had never seen anyone close to his height or his strength. He was the most impressive physical specimen any of the Philistines—or anyone else, for that matter—had ever seen.

His message for Israel was: "You don't stand a chance."

How *could* anyone stand a chance? He was huge. He was muscular. His weapons were formidable. His confidence was supreme.

II. King Saul and Israel

## 1 Samuel 17:11

<sup>11</sup>When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they lost their courage and were terrified.

*That's not hard to believe, is it? Goliath would have towered over King Saul, one of the tallest in all of Israel.*

We mentioned the “Battle by Champions” concept. Each champion was to represent his side in a duel to determine which side would win. There was another factor, however. The idea of the “Battle by Champions” was also to determine whose gods were superior.

King Saul was *supposed* to be the representative of the true God. He had been chosen by God to be the king over Israel. But he lost his courage. He was terrified, right along with the rest of the army lined up to listen to Goliath each day from their side of the valley.

King Saul, and the whole army of Israel with him, were apparently not thinking about Jaweh, the true God, the God who had promised to be with Israel. They took to heart Goliath's insistence that they didn't stand a chance. It was plain for anyone to see. Goliath was obviously invincible.

King Saul was quaking in his war sandals trying to concoct a way out of this mess. Was there any path to victory? It didn't seem possible.

Those lined up beside him and behind him were equally baffled. Goliath's “You don't stand a chance” mantra certainly seemed fitting. It seemed that the whole nation of Israel was doomed to be servants to the Philistines.

### III. Jesse

Today's First Reading skipped Jesse and his instructions to David. Jesse had apparently forgotten all about the prophet Samuel anointing David to be the future king of Israel. He was concerned most of all about David's brothers, who were among the soldiers lined up on the ridge across the valley from the Philistines. Jesse sent David to see how his brothers were doing.

By this time, Goliath had been shouting his challenge at Israel for many days. Over and over again he had been reminding Israel that they didn't stand a chance against him and the gods of Philistia.

### IV. David

David heard the taunts and jeers of the giant.

## 1 Samuel 17:32-37

<sup>32</sup>David said to Saul, “Do not let anyone lose heart because of this Philistine! Your servant will go and fight him.”

<sup>33</sup>But Saul said to David, “You cannot go against this Philistine to fight with him, because you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior since he was a youth.”

<sup>34</sup>David said to Saul, “Your servant has been taking care of his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, <sup>35</sup>I went after it and struck it and rescued the lamb out of its mouth. When the lion reared up against me, I grabbed it by its mane, struck it, and killed it. <sup>36</sup>Your servant struck both the lion and the bear. This uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has defied the ranks of the living God.” <sup>37</sup>David added, “The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul said to David, “Go then! May the LORD be with you.”

*David's attitude was completely different from anyone else standing on the ridge on Israel's side of the valley. He saw the reality that this was not just a huge man challenging the bravery of all the men on Israel's side of the valley, but that Goliath was also belittling the God of Israel—the only true God.*

This was unacceptable in David's eyes. Just the fact that he volunteered to go out there to be the champion for Israel in the Battle by Champions shows that he remembered that he had been anointed by the prophet Samuel to eventually be king over the people of Israel. Something *had* to be done.

Saul points out the obvious reality. David is young and inexperienced. David doesn't stand a chance.

David answers. He has fought wild animals before. David told Saul that it was *God* who had delivered him from the lion and the bear when he was defending the sheep. Did you catch David's most important words to King Saul? "This uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has defied the ranks of the living God" (1 Samuel 17:36, EHV). David recognized without question Goliath's affront to God.

V. Saul (round 2)

### **1 Samuel 17:37-39**

Saul said to David, "Go then! May the LORD be with you."<sup>38</sup> So Saul dressed David in his own gear. He placed a bronze helmet on his head and dressed him in scaled body armor.<sup>39</sup> David strapped his sword over his gear. David tried to walk around in them, since he had never trained with this kind of equipment before.

David said to Saul, "I cannot go in these, because I have never trained with them." So David took them off.

Should not Saul have understood what David said about the uncircumcised Philistine to be a gentle reproof? *Saul*, as King of Israel, should understand that Goliath had defied the living God. *Saul* should have determined that God himself would be with the champion of Israel in this "Battle by Champions" against a godless heathen who challenged the living God.

But no. Saul was willing to have someone else fight his battles.

In reality, Saul, and all the men lined up with him on the ridge, could not think beyond what they could see. They could not imagine the living God being on their side and fighting for them. What a sad state of a lack of faith.

Saul knew he didn't stand a chance, nor did anyone standing on the ridge with him.

The people of Israel needed a stand-in, a champion.

VI. David (round 2)

### **1 Samuel 17:40**

<sup>40</sup> Then David took his staff in his hand and picked five smooth stones out of the stream bed and put them into the pouch of his shepherd's bag. He took his sling in his hand and approached the Philistine.

I wonder what David thought as he descended from the ridge. For all practical appearances, he didn't stand a chance.

He remembered God's blessings to him in the past. That speech to Saul about the lion and the bear; he might have contemplated it again, as he prayed to the Lord to be with him, yet again.

David had rejected Saul's armor. It was unfamiliar. He had agreed to go into battle with the tools God had given him, with his shepherd's gear, and his faith.

He knelt at the stream bed. Smooth stones fly faster and more accurately than rough ones. He chose 5 of the smoothest stones he could find. He depended completely on God in this fight, but God wants you to use the tools you have been given.

As he walked beyond the stream bed, David looked at Goliath. He didn't view Goliath from the perspective of a short man in the 5' range, but from the perspective of God.

### **1 Samuel 17:43**

<sup>43</sup> The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come against me with sticks?" The Philistine cursed David by his gods.

Once more Goliath reminded David that this was a Battle by Champions. David didn't stand a chance against the mighty champion of the Philistines and their gods.

The reputation of God was on the line.

## 1 Samuel 17:45-49

<sup>45</sup>Then David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD of Armies, the God of the ranks of Israel, whom you have defied. <sup>46</sup>Today the LORD will hand you over to me. I will strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth. Then all the earth will know that there is a God in Israel, <sup>47</sup>and all those gathered here will know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear, for the battle belongs to the LORD, and he will deliver you into our hand.”

<sup>48</sup>Then, when the Philistine started advancing to attack David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. <sup>49</sup>David put his hand into his bag, took a stone from it, shot it from his sling, and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown to the ground.

David didn't stand a chance. Not from outward appearances. But he wasn't thinking of appearances. He wasn't on that battlefield alone. It was a Battle by Champions, and the Lord would win the battle—the battle was really the Lord's.

His sling was more than a sling, it was the means by which God himself would deal the fatal blow. All the power of God was on David's side. David represented the living God in this fight. Weapons of war like swords and spears would not win the day; not even rocks hurled from a sling would be the deciding factor. God would win.

The stone came flying out of the sling with unerring accuracy. It hit Goliath in just the right spot. While no human stood a chance against Goliath, the battle was the Lord's.

### VII. Jesus

There was another Battle by Champions. Sin and Satan and death stood on one ridge. Satan taunts us regularly and loudly. You don't stand a chance. Cowering in our spiritual combat sandals, we have to agree. No human alive can beat Satan and the forces that stand with him.

But a Champion steps forward. A champion with the same equipment any of us have. Let's rephrase today's Second Reading a little: “For we do not have a [Champion] who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15, EHV).

Our Champion, Jesus, did not flinch. In today's Gospel, he went out into the wilderness to do battle with Satan, and won. The last battle was fought on the cross. Our Champion won the final battle.

No towering giants remain. Every enemy has been defeated. We have the victory in our Lord Jesus Christ.

### VIII. You and Me

Now that the victory is won, *we* go into battle every day. We don't cower at the top of the ridge while Satan roars at us from the valley below. Jesus has won. As we sang moments ago, “Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill; they shall not overpower us. The prince of darkness still may scowl fierce as he will, his raging harms us none. He's judged; the deed is done; one little word can fell him.”

Use God's Word every day. Satan is already defeated. Every time he threatens you, use one little word from Scripture, right between the eyes, to fell him yet again. With the victory your Lord Jesus won for you, it's Satan who doesn't stand a chance. Amen.