

David and Goliath - No Contest!

1Samuel 17

The story of David and Goliath is one of the most well known stories of the Bible, yet it is also one of the most misunderstood.

Ask any Christian who knows their Bible quite well what David picked up as he went to engage with Goliath in battle and they are likely to say “Five small stones”. But that’s not what the Bible says.

The scene is set. The armies of the Philistines stand on one side of a valley. Facing them is the army of Israel - the people of God. Among the Philistines is a giant of a man, over nine feet tall, and apparently a stocky individual. Each day the Philistines had mocked the army of Israel inviting them to provide someone who would engage in one to one combat. Each day the Israelite soldiers stepped back from the line; no one was willing to volunteer.

Whether it was just fear of being slaughtered or fear of the consequences of defeat that held them back we do not know. But then David turns up with provisions for his three oldest brothers (there were four more at home) and hears the daily challenge. Since no one else has volunteered he offers his service to the king.

There is a tendency to think of David as a little boy but again the Bible does not say so. Certainly he is still youthful, but he is already old enough to carry responsibility. But he isn’t an experienced soldier.

Amazingly the king of Israel is prepared to let him have a go. I wonder what convinced him. Was it David’s testimony to what God had done through him before? Was it his bold faith? Was it just that no one else was willing to go? At this point we should note two things (see verses 32-37):

- David was concerned for the honour of God’s name. Goliath was defying and essentially mocking the armies of the Living God.
- David was confident in the power of God’s name (see also verse 45).

In these days when so many shrink back from engaging in mission I wonder whether we have a concern for the honour of God’s name. Other religions, secularism, and atheism stand arrayed against our testimony of faith. The Church is often the object of mockery

dishonouring the name of our Saviour. Do we really care? How much do we care?

Or could it be that fear hinders us? Do we believe that we can trust God in the face of opposition?

David shrugs off the offer of armour and chooses to go as he is. And with that he *runs (yes, runs)* towards Goliath. As he goes he chooses five smooth stones from the stream. These are not described as small but they are described as smooth. They were aerodynamically suitable for the purpose they were chosen.

Typically a stone used in a sling would be nearer to the size of a cricket ball rather than a pebble. In the hands of an experienced person it would leave the sling at around 100 miles an hour - quite a lot faster than a cricket ball from a fast bowler. But if one of those hit an unprotected head it could kill the receiver.

So here is a huge lumbering giant who is likely to be relatively slow in movement, carrying heavy armour and largely dependent upon short range weapons coming up against an energetic young man with expertise with a deadly long range weapon. One presented a small fast moving target; the other was impossible to miss!

The English navy once won a similar kind of battle defeating a mighty armada from Spain because the English had small manoeuvrable ships weaving between unmissable targets.

The Philistine soon went the same way as the lion and the bear before him. But as on previous occasions David's confidence was not in his own ability (though he might have had cause) but in God.

God's call to us to engage in mission brings a significant challenge - especially to small rural churches with limited resources. But we have the same God who will equip us for the task, and we might just find that the odds are not so unfavourable as might at first appear.

Barry Osborne 2010.