Victory

David fought against Goliath with God's power and for God's honor.

All kinds of difficulties we face might threaten our faith if we focus upon the wrong things. We face financial needs, emotional needs, physical needs, personal character issues such as deeply ingrained habits, issues from one's personal background, things that are far too big to handle under one's own strength and wisdom. But how a person responds to those difficulties determines where his or her perspective truly is.

Isn't it a shame when a lost and dying world hears our personal whining and complaining and can't even tell that we have a living God? People hear us tell all the bad news without a word of confidence and courage for what God can do in such circumstances. How can we claim, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31, KJV) and not have courage in the face of life's trials? How can we claim, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5, ESV) and fear any enemy that may be in front of us? How can we claim, "Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7) and still be anxious over the trials we are facing? But faith in an all-powerful and ever-faithful God will lead us into courage and confidence in what He can do. How we view the "giants" in life will reveal what we truly believe. Is the giant that God wants us to face beyond our own power and abilities? Of course. But is it beyond God's? That is the question.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 Samuel 17:1-58

The story of David's battle with Goliath covers the entire chapter of 1 Samuel 17 (58 verses). So, it is best if we gain the overall picture

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presented in the chapter before focusing upon our text of verses 32-47. We must note a few important things to understand the real point of the story.

The context of this story is extremely important. From the previous chapter we have been informed that Saul had been rejected as king (16:1). The Lord's Spirit had departed from Saul (v. 14), thus rendering him both powerless and completely unable to conquer the Philistines. David had been chosen by God as the new rightful king over Israel (v. 12). David had been empowered by God for service by receiving the Lord's Spirit (v. 13). We also learned that God cares nothing about outward physical appearance (v. 7).

In 1 Samuel 17:1-11 we see that Goliath made quite an impression on the Israelites. The writer spells this out in detail in verses 4-7, describing his height (9'9" tall), his armor (125 lbs.), the size of his spear, even the weight of the spearhead (15-16 lbs.). Goliath was clearly head and shoulders above the rest (see 10:23). If anyone in Israel was the best match for Goliath and was charged with defending God's people against such a foe, it was certainly to be Saul. This detailed description of Goliath's physical appearance suggests that the writer intended this story to serve as an object lesson for the truth taught in chapter 16, that physical appearance means nothing to God. But Goliath's appearance caused great fear among Saul and his army. They had a "godless" perspective.

David is finally introduced into the story in verses 12-23. As he was delivering food to his brothers on the battle lines, he heard what was going on. Goliath spoke one too many times, and David heard it (17:23). This was providential.

In verse 26, God is mentioned in the narrative for the first time. In fact, this is the first time in the entire story that David says something. David's words here bring an entirely different worldview. David brings a godly question into the episode, "Doesn't having a living God make a difference in all of this? This guy has mocked the armies of the living God! Isn't anybody going to do something?" For David, the living God gave a whole new view of things. David did not see a terrifying and seemingly invincible warrior; instead, he saw an "uncircumcised Philistine" (v. 26) who worshiped gods who were not even alive; for instance, Dagon of chapter 5.

David's probing questions and challenge brought him contempt from his own family (17:28), but David's words eventually led him before King Saul.

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David's Faith (1 Sam. 17:32-37)

When David volunteered to fight Goliath, Saul initially rejected his offer on the basis of David's inexperience. David responded by recounting how, with God's help, he had fought and defeated lions and bears. Eager to defend God's honor, David was confident the Lord would empower him.

VERSES 32-33

David said to Saul, "Don't let anyone be discouraged by him; your servant will go and fight this Philistine!" But Saul replied, "You can't go fight this Philistine. You're just a youth, and he's been a warrior since he was young."

David assured Saul, **"Don't let anyone be discouraged by him."** Literally, the phrase is "Do not let the heart of a man fall upon him." The idiom of a heart falling conveys a loss of courage. "Don't let a person's courage fail him!" By speaking of *anyone* or "a man," it was a veiled way of speaking directly to Saul, "King Saul, don't be discouraged by Goliath."

With words that probably meant little consolation to Saul at this point, David added, **"Your servant will go and fight this Philistine!"** David spoke of Goliath as *this Philistine* in a derogatory way. He refused even to give the Philistine enemy a name.

Saul responded, **"You can't go fight this Philistine. You're just a youth, and he's been a warrior since he was young."** Saul drew the comparison between David as a *youth* or "boy" as compared to the Philistine who has been a *warrior* or "a man of war" since he was *young*. David has had little or no military training or fighting experience, and Goliath had years of both.

VERSES 34-35

David answered Saul, "Your servant has been tending his father's sheep. Whenever a lion or a bear came and carried off a lamb from the flock, I went after it, struck it down, and rescued the lamb from its mouth. If it reared up against me, I would grab it by its fur, strike it down, and kill it."

David's answer to Saul reveals David's secret of how his faith was so strong that he dared to fight Goliath. **"Your servant has been**

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tending his father's sheep." A shepherd guarding a flock lived under constant threat to his life. In mentioning **a lion or a bear,** David referred to the two largest and most ferocious carnivores in the area. Israel at the time was populated by both African and Persian lions, neither of which are present today. But Syrian bears can be found directly to the north in the mountains of Lebanon today. This is not the only place in the Old Testament where lions and bears are mentioned together (Prov. 28:15; Isa. 11:7; Lam. 3:10; Hos. 13:8; Amos 5:19; see also Rev. 13:2).

If a lion or bear tried to kill a sheep, David **went after it** to rescue **the lamb from its mouth.** If the animal turned on him, David **would grab it by its fur** [lit. "beard"] and **strike it down, and kill it.**

VERSES 36-37

"Your servant has killed lions and bears; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God." Then David said, "The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you."

This uncircumcised Philistine would be the next foe David would defeat, **"for he has defied the armies of the living God."** Again, David stressed that the Philistine was *uncircumcised* (see v. 26) and did not know the God of Israel. David also stressed that Saul and his armies served *the living God*. The god(s) that Goliath worshiped were lifeless, but not the God of Israel.

Then David said, "The LORD who rescued me from the paw [literally "hand"] **of the lion and the paw** [literally "hand"] **of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine."** This is how David interpreted his experience. He did not attribute his escapes from danger to his luck, skill, or courage. Instead, he said the Lord had delivered him. David looked at his past experiences and recognized God's hand in his life. This gave him faith to look to the future. He trusted that God's hand would still be with him, "*The LORD . . . will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine*." The Lord did it in the past, and He would do it again in the future. David would be delivered because he knew the true and living God. The details of the circumstances may vary, but the Lord was the same whether David was in front of sheep, in front of lions and bears, or in front of the Philistines. As the writer quoted Hannah earlier in the book, "He will protect his faithful ones, but the wicked will disappear in darkness. No one will succeed by strength alone" (2:9, NLT).

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David fits into a pattern of faithful people facing foes, one only a few chapters back, and one earlier in Israel's history. Caleb, one of the faithful spies who scouted out the promised land, was not afraid of the giants in the land (Num. 13:30; 14:7-9). Caleb (and Joshua) could face the giants in the land with courage because of his faith in God.

Forty years later as the people of Israel finally entered the promised land, Caleb, whose faith had only been strengthened by decades of seeing the Lord's power and faithfulness, was the first in line to receive his piece of property (Josh. 14:6-15). Caleb asked for "the hill country," the very piece of property where the twelve spies had seen the giants. Eighty-five-year-old Caleb said, "Perhaps the LORD will be with me and I will drive them out as the LORD promised" (v. 12). He was not afraid of the giants because Caleb's God was far bigger.

As Saul and his army cowered before a Philistine garrison, his eldest son, Jonathan, said to his armor-bearer, "Come on, let's cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised men. Perhaps the LORD will help us. Nothing can keep the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6). As they approached the Philistine garrison, Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Follow me . . . for the LORD has handed them over to Israel" (v. 12). The two of them killed about twenty Philistine soldiers and sent the rest fleeing for their lives.

David was not filled with cockiness or adolescent idealism. He was a Spirit-filled servant with faith in a living God. Perhaps it was David's absolute confidence in the Lord's power that caused Saul to believe that this boy might have a chance against Goliath. There was a day in the past when Saul felt the empowering of God's Spirit upon him that led Saul to victory in battles, an empowerment that Saul no longer had. Saul was not willing to step forward with courage, but he was willing to risk the fate of the nation on this boy and his faith in God. Perhaps God might do something mighty through him. So, **Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you."**

Explore Further

Read "Deliverance, Deliverer" on page 411 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Recall a time when God has delivered you. Spend a few moments thanking Him and worshiping Him for doing so.

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David's Weapons (1 Sam. 17:38-40)

Saul tried to dress David in his own armor, but David refused. With nothing more than his sling and five stones, David approached Goliath.

VERSE 38

Then Saul had his own military clothes put on David. He put a bronze helmet on David's head and had him put on armor.

Saul appeared all too willing to loan his **military clothes** to **David,** especially since he was not prepared to use it himself. Saul had long since replaced his trust in the Lord for protection and, like Goliath, trusted his armor to be all the defense he needed. So he put these on David.

In Old Testament times *military clothes* or a "tunic" was worn under a soldier's armor. This **armor** was either the breastplate or was a coat of mail made of small scales. Either one of these would make the armor quite heavy. Both Goliath and Saul wore a **bronze helmet** (vv. 5,38), and helmets became a regular part of an Israelite soldier's protection (2 Chron. 26:14; Jer. 46:4). Goliath wore greaves, or shin guards, to protect his legs (1 Sam. 17:6). Greaves do not seem to have been used by the Israelites.

VERSE 39

David strapped his sword on over the military clothes and tried to walk, but he was not used to them. "I can't walk in these," David said to Saul, "I'm not used to them." So David took them off.

The main battle weapon was the **sword.** The Hebrew term describes both a sword and a dagger, distinguished only by their length. The weapon Ehud strapped to his side was probably a dagger (Judg. 3:16). Israelite swords were probably only about twenty inches long, so Goliath's long sword would have been quite unique (1 Sam. 21:9). In David's day the strongest swords were made of iron. They were carried in a sheath (17:51) and attached to the belt (2 Sam. 20:8).

David **tried to walk, but he was not used to** Saul's armor and could not walk in them. With Saul being so tall and David still a youth, one can imagine that a full coat of armor would have been quite heavy for him. With David's style of fighting, such weight would have also hindered his mobility and he *was not used to them*. **So, David took them off.** David would rather fight with the familiar and place his faith in God

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for protection. David had no intention of getting close enough to Goliath to need the armor.

VERSE 40

Instead, he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the wadi and put them in the pouch, in his shepherd's bag. Then, with his sling in his hand, he approached the Philistine.

David chose to fight only with his shepherd's **staff, his sling,** and **five smooth stones from the wadi** (a dry stream bed). David knew that worldly weapons could neither provide enough strength nor protection against his foes. David was always strongest when he did not rely upon sword and spear, bow and arrow, or even sling and stone. Only the Lord could provide the necessary defense (Ps. 18:2), and the Lord alone had the power to defeat his enemy (1 Sam. 17:45-47).

Explore Further

Read "Arms and Armor" on pages 118–121 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What were the major differences between the Israelites' and Philistines' weapons and armor?

God's Victory (1 Sam. 17:41-47)

Goliath ridiculed David's appearance and choice of weapons. David acknowledged Goliath's superior strength and weapons but declared his confidence that God would fight for him.

VERSES 41-42

The Philistine came closer and closer to David, with the shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he despised him because he was just a youth, healthy and handsome.

The Philistine dominates the scene for the first few verses (vv. 41-44). The **shield** was not the kind a warrior would carry himself but was a

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larger full-length shield carried by a **shield-bearer.** These shields were also used by a phalanx of soldiers to form an impenetrable barrier in a siege (Ezek. 26:8).

As is common in many sporting matches, "trash talking" was a means to gain a psychological advantage over the opponent. Goliath was quite skilled at this form of psychological warfare, having insulted the Israelites day after day (1 Sam. 17:8-11). Goliath **despised him because he was just a youth, healthy and handsome.** David's handsome appearance was readily evident, as even Samuel had seen earlier (16:12). David did not have the appearance of a rugged warrior. But Goliath would soon learn that physical appearance doesn't mean anything when Israel's God is in the picture.

VERSE 43

He said to David, "Am I a dog that you come against me with sticks?" Then he cursed David by his gods.

Mocking David, Goliath said, **"Am I a dog that you come against me with sticks?"** David's shepherd's staff, a *stick,* was the only weapon Goliath noticed. David's sling could easily have been hidden in his shepherd's pouch along with the five stones.

This is the third time in the story that David was demeaned. David's older brother Eliab in essence said that David was a pain in the neck. Saul basically told David that he was too young and inexperienced. Now Goliath was telling David that he was too puny to have a chance. Saul basically had the same mind as Goliath that only an experienced (v. 33) and heavily armed warrior (vv. 38-39) could win the battle. Goliath saw that David had no armor, and the only weapon he saw was David's *stick*.

Then he cursed David by his gods. At this point the battle became theological and personal. Goliath's god was probably Dagon, of whom we read in chapter 5 was a dead god and no match for the Lord.

VERSE 44

"Come here," the Philistine called to David, "and I'll give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts!"

Trying to lure David into his style of warfare, Goliath shouted, **"Come here!"** Goliath could fight David only if David got close enough. **"I'll give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts!"** Eagles and vultures, birds that feed on carrion, were common in the area. Other wild beasts would quickly dispose of any dead body left exposed

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to the elements. Israelites believed that death without a proper burial was worse than death itself (Deut. 21:22-23; 1 Sam. 31:8-13; Ps. 79:2-3; Jer. 7:33; 8:12).

VERSE 45

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with a sword, spear, and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD of Armies, the God of the ranks of Israel—you have defied him."

It was David's turn to confront his enemy and give a testimony as well. **"You come against me with a sword, spear, and javelin."** The *spear* was a bladed stick that could be thrown (20:33), but its primary purpose was for stabbing. A javelin was a throwing spear also used by Joshua (Josh. 8:18).

Having only his *sword*, *spear*, and *javelin*, Goliath stood grossly unarmed against David's God. **"I come against you in the name of the LORD of Armies, the God of the ranks of Israel."** The *LORD of Armies* or "the LORD of Hosts" was one of the most used titles for God in the Old Testament. "Hosts" is a military title referring to "armies" and is used both of earthly armies as well as heavenly armies.

Goliath had repeatedly **defied** the God of Israel. This is the chief reason that David went to battle. The Hebrew term for *defied* (meaning "to reproach," "defy," "despise," and "scorn") occurs six times in the story (vv. 10,25,26[2x],36,45). Being closely tied with His people, to curse God's people was to curse Him. The honor of God Himself was at stake, and someone needed to shut Goliath up. By expressing faith in Yahweh, David trusted in what His Lord could do. It was the Lord who would give the victory.

VERSE 46

"Today, the LORD will hand you over to me. Today, I'll strike you down, remove your head, and give the corpses of the Philistine camp to the birds of the sky and the wild creatures of the earth. Then all the world will know that Israel has a God,"

"Today, the LORD will hand you over to me." As David saw it, Goliath was outnumbered and would soon be overpowered because the Lord Himself would fight with David against the giant. **"I'll strike you down, remove your head, and give the corpses of the Philistine camp to the birds of the sky and the wild creatures of the earth."**

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David turned the insult back on Goliath (see v. 44). The defeat of Goliath would be the defeat of the entire Philistine army.

"Then all the world will know that Israel has a God." Everyone, the entire world, would know the truth: There is a God, a real God in Israel (see Josh. 2:10-11). The Lord of Hosts, the God Goliath had ridiculed, would show that any other gods were puny powers.

VERSE 47

"and this whole assembly will know that it is not by sword or by spear that the LORD saves, for the battle is the LORD's. He will hand you over to us."

"It is not by sword or by spear that the LORD saves." The Lord does not save His people by the instruments of human power but by His own arm. The Lord works through the weakness of His servants to show His power. **"The battle is the LORD's. He will hand you** [plural] **over to us."** For David, this armed conflict was fundamentally a religious event, to prove who served the true and "living God" (vv. 26,36). David's speech in verses 45-47 is given more space in the story than the battle itself described in verses 48-49. This shows that David's testimony is key to the story. It explains what the battle was all about.

The aftermath of the battle (vv. 50-54) makes it clear that David overcame the Philistine "with a sling and a stone," and "without having a sword" (v. 50). That's why he had to use Goliath's sword to finish off the giant (v. 51). Chopping off Goliath's head was undeniable proof to the Philistines that their hero was dead. The Lord gave the victory, but He gave the victory through what the world calls "weakness." The "important" people in this chapter regarded David as "weak." What matters is not whether we have the best weapons but whether we have the real God. It could be that recognizing one's inadequacy is the exact qualification for serving God (2 Cor. 12:9).

Explore Further

Read "Names of God" on pages 1143–1145 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What name of God speaks to you the most? Why?

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