

1 Samuel 17:40-49

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David fights Goliath

David ultimately chooses the items he is most comfortable with. A staff *in his hand*, also translated “stick,” and a *sling*. In ancient times, the *sling* was a highly effective military weapon. Most armies in that day had groups of soldiers trained as slingers. Like the bow and arrow, the *sling* could hurl a projectile effectively up to 350 yards. Many assert the *sling* was preferred over the bow because it was lightweight, and ammunition could easily be found rather than manufactured. We might think in modern terms of *David* being armed with a musket going up against Goliath with a sword.

Then *David* took his stick in his hand and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook and put them in the shepherd’s bag which he had, even in his pouch, and his sling was in his hand. It is likely that *David* chose smooth stones to aid in accuracy. A smooth stone will have a truer flight, and we can infer from *David*’s story about killing a lion and a bear that he was an expert marksman. After he was satisfied with his weaponry, *David* approached Goliath the Philistine.

Goliath also approached *David* with his shield-bearer in front of him. Having an assigned shield-bearer shows a position of importance and strength. Goliath was expecting a strong, seasoned warrior to be chosen by *Israel* for single combat. However, when the Philistine looked and saw *David*, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance. The Hebrew word for ruddy is “edomi” and means “red one.” The same title is given to Esau as “edom” (Genesis 25:30). *David* is also given this description in 1 Samuel 16:12. This probably means he had red hair or a reddish complexion. However, *David* also had a sling. And it is likely that when Goliath saw that, it struck fear in him. He is a huge, mostly stationary target. In 1 Samuel 16:18, one of Saul’s servants described *David* as “a mighty man of valor, and a warrior” indicating that *David* was much more than a mere youth.

Goliath answers as though he were feeling mocked and did not consider *David* a legitimate foe. Goliath said to *David*, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed *David* by his gods. The Philistines worshiped many gods from the Canaanite pantheon, but they seemed to focus primarily on Dagan, the god of grain. Goliath continues to taunt *David* saying, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field.” Perhaps by saying *come to me*, Goliath is hoping for hand-to-hand combat.

David replies by comparing Goliath’s physical weaponry to the spiritual asset he is appropriating by faith, the name of the Lord. *David* says, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of *Israel*, whom you have taunted.” *David* has confidence in his marksmanship. He has killed the lion and bear. But his primary confidence is in the Lord’s guidance. *David* has prepared. He put in the

time to be an expert marksman. He has had experience against fierce enemies and was victorious. But his primary trust is in *God's* provision.

David continues by claiming the victory before it occurs, even describing it in detail by saying, “*This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you.*” In saying this, *David* seems to have in mind the same basic experience he had with the lion. He apparently had chased a lion, struck its *head* with a *stone* from his sling to stun it, then killed it by slitting its throat. *David* has apparently already pictured knocking down Goliath with a *stone* from his sling, then “grabbing him by the beard” as he did the lion, and killing him by slitting his throat.

Then *David* tells Goliath that after he kills him he “*will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD's and He will give you into our hands.*”

David has a plan. *David* has prepared. *David* is the instrument of combat. But *David* frames this battle as a battle of the LORD's and gives all credit to *God* for the victory of which he is confident.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus encourages this type of faith speech.

“Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.” (Mark 11:23)

The fight begins with *the Philistine* Goliath rising and drawing *near to meet David*. *David* ran quickly toward the battle line to meet *the Philistine*. In running toward Goliath, *David* might have been generating momentum for his shot. *And David put his hand into his bag and took from it a stone and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone sank into his forehead, so that he fell on his face to the ground.* *David* had taken five stones, probably because sometimes it took several shots to hit the mark. But apparently *David* did not expect to need many since he took only five stones. However, it only took *David* one shot to hit the *forehead* of his enemy. Apparently Goliath's *forehead* was not protected by his helmet. It was a powerful shot: *the stone sank into Goliath's forehead, embedding itself into his flesh, perhaps even his skull, so that he fell on his face to the ground.*

At this point Goliath was likely stunned but not dead. But as he did with the lion, *David* will end Goliath's life with a blade, taking off his *head*.

Biblical Text

⁴⁰ He took his stick in his hand and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, even in *his* pouch, and his sling was in his hand; and he approached the Philistine. ⁴¹ Then the Philistine came on and approached David, with the shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴² When the Philistine looked and saw David,

he disdained him; for he was *but* a youth, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance. ⁴³ The Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴ The Philistine also said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field.” ⁴⁵ Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. ⁴⁶ This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, 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 deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD’S and He will give you into our hands.” ⁴⁸ Then it happened when the Philistine rose and came and drew near to meet David, that David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹ And David put his hand into his bag and took from it a stone and slung *it*, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone sank into his forehead, so that he fell on his face to the ground.