

Christ in all of Scripture

David & Goliath

1 Samuel 17:1-54

Read the Passage



“David”
by Michelangelo

¹Now the Philistines gathered their armies together to battle, and were gathered at Sochoh, which belongs to Judah; they encamped between Sochoh and Azekah, in Ephes Dammim. ²And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and they encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array against the Philistines. ³The Philistines stood on a mountain on one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side, with a valley between them.

⁴And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. ⁵He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. ⁶And he had bronze armor on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders. ⁷Now the staff of his spear was like a weaver’s beam, and his iron spearhead weighed six hundred shekels; and a shield-bearer went before him. ⁸Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel, and said to them, “Why have you come out to line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and you the

servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. ⁹If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.” ¹⁰And the Philistine said, “I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.” ¹¹When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

¹²Now David was the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, whose name was Jesse, and who had eight sons. And the man was old, advanced in years, in the days of Saul. ¹³The three oldest sons of Jesse had gone to follow Saul to the battle. The names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. ¹⁴David was the youngest. And the three oldest followed Saul. ¹⁵But David occasionally went and returned from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem.

¹⁶And the Philistine drew near and presented himself forty days, morning and evening.

¹⁷Then Jesse said to his son David, “Take now for your brothers an ephah of this dried grain and these ten loaves, and run to your brothers at the camp. ¹⁸And carry these ten cheeses to the captain of their thousand, and see how your brothers fare, and bring back news of them.” ¹⁹Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.

²⁰So David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, and took the things and went as Jesse had



commanded him. And he came to the camp as the army was going out to the fight and shouting for the battle. ²¹For Israel and the Philistines had drawn up in battle array, army against army. ²²And David left his supplies in the hand of the supply keeper, ran to the army, and came and greeted his brothers. ²³Then as he talked with them, there was the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, coming up from the armies of the Philistines; and he spoke according to the same words. So David heard them. ²⁴And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were dreadfully afraid. ²⁵So the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel; and it shall be that the man who kills him the king will enrich with great riches, will give him his daughter, and give his father's house exemption from taxes in Israel."

²⁶Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

²⁷And the people answered him in this manner, saying, "So shall it be done for the man who kills him."

²⁸Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab's anger was aroused against David, and he said, "Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle."

²⁹And David said, "What have I done now? Is there not a cause?" ³⁰ Then he turned from him toward another and said the same thing; and these people answered him as the first ones did.

³¹Now when the words which David spoke were heard, they reported them to Saul; and he sent for him. ³²Then David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

³³And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth."

³⁴But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, ³⁵I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. ³⁶Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God."

³⁷Moreover David said, "The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"



"David Slays Goliath"



³⁸So Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail. ³⁹David fastened his sword to his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. And David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them." So David took them off.

⁴⁰Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine.

⁴¹So the Philistine came, and began drawing near to David, and the man who bore the shield went before him.

⁴²And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him; for he was only a youth, ruddy and good-looking. ⁴³So the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴And the Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!"

⁴⁵Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with 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 defied. ⁴⁶This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. ⁴⁷Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's, and He will give you into our hands."

⁴⁸So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone; and he slung it and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. ⁵⁰So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. But there was no sword in the hand of David. ⁵¹Therefore David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it. And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. ⁵²Now the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted, and pursued the Philistines as far as the entrance of the valley and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell along the road to Shaaraim, even as far as Gath and Ekron. ⁵³Then the children of Israel returned from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their tents. ⁵⁴And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent.



Gospel Preview in the Text

The great battle between David and Goliath is a dramatic enactment of the struggle that characterizes the history of redemption as foretold in the Oracle of Destiny in Genesis 3:15. Goliath represents the seed of the serpent. David, in his youth, represents the seed of the woman. David **suffers** battle with the draconic giant and has a **glorious** triumph over him. He crushes the head of the serpentine giant, and stands victorious on the field of battle. Anticipating Christ and his single combat against the great red Dragon, David goes forth against Goliath with the destiny of the people of God depending upon his success alone.

GOLIATH AS THE SEED OF THE SERPENT

1. **Goliath comes forth** to challenge Israel to single combat. He is covered in bronze (Heb *nehoshet*) armor, **wearing a bronze helmet, bronze greaves and bronze corselets of scaled armor** (coat of mail), **giving him the appearance of a "serpent"** (Heb *nahash*) (1 Sam 17:5).
2. Goliath speaks great blasphemy against the God of Israel, defying her armies (1 Sam 17:10). He challenges Israel to produce a hero to answer his call to combat. **The hero will represent the entire people of the Lord God in a battle of life and death. The champion who is defeated will consign his people to perpetual servitude** (1 Sam 17:9).
3. Goliath goes into battle trusting in his sword, spear, and javelin (1 Sam 17:45). Goliath is insulted at a boy sent as a champion to answer his challenge, saying, "Am I a dog?" (1 Sam 17:42-43).
4. The battle commences when Goliath takes to the field with his shield bearer (1 Sam 17:41). David comes alone upon the field to answer the Giant. **The serpentine Goliath is defeated, his head crushed by the hero, just as the prophecy foretold** (Gen 3:15).

DAVID AS THE SEED OF THE WOMAN

1. **David answers Goliath's challenge. He is merely a boy**, the eighth son of Jesse and **too young to serve in Saul's army** like his three oldest brothers (1 Sam 17:33). **David is unable to wear the armor of a man** (1 Sam 17:38-39). He goes into battle dressed as a shepherd (1 Sam 17:40).
2. **David asks what reward the hero who answers Goliath on behalf of Israel will receive. King Saul pledges to make the hero who prevails over Goliath his son-in-law.** So David will fight to win a royal bride as well as to save his people (1 Sam 17:25). David secretly knows by faith he cannot die until he becomes king of Israel (1 Sam 16:1, 11-13).
3. David goes into battle trusting in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel (1 Sam 17:45). David knows that God has called man to rule over the beast, whether "dog" or "serpent" (Gen 1:28).
4. **David takes a stone for his sling and strikes the Giant, and the stone crushes his skull, lodging in his forehead.** David runs to Goliath and taking the Philistine's own sword, he beheads the Giant (1 Sam 17:50-51).



<p>5. The Philistines flee the field of battle before the advance of the armies of Israel. Many of Israel's enemies die, and Israel is delivered from the threat of bondage. The army of Saul plunders the camp of the Philistines (1 Sam 17:51-53).</p> <p>6. Goliath's head becomes a part of the plunder of David. David takes the skull (Heb <i>gulgolet</i>) of Goliath with him (1 Sam 17:54).</p> <p>7. King Saul grows jealous of David after his victory over Goliath, and yet he must keep his promise to give a royal bride to him. He offers Merab, but withdraws his offer, offering David his daughter Mikal instead, hoping David will find his bride a snare (1 Sam 18:21). David will have to overcome the jealousy of his brothers (1 Sam 17:28) and the king (1 Sam 18:6-9) before he wins the crown promised to him by Samuel the prophet (1 Sam 16:1).</p>	<p>5. David takes the plunder of Goliath. He takes the Giant's armor and sword and puts it in his tent (1 Sam 17:54).</p> <p>6. David takes the skull (Heb <i>gulgolet</i>) of Goliath of Gath to Jerusalem and buries it outside the gate,¹ almost certainly at the hill later known as Golgotha (Heb "the place of the skull") (Matt 27:33).</p> <p>7. King Saul takes David into battle against the Philistines again. As they return from battle, the women come out with tambourines to celebrate their heroes. They sing, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David, his tens of thousands" (1 Sam 18:6-7). Saul gives his daughter Mikal to David (1 Sam 18:21). David receives his royal bride in humility and gratitude (1 Sam 18: 23).</p>
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Prophetic Narrative of the Gospel in the Text

1. The chronicler gives much attention to Goliath's armor to show us the ground of the Philistine's confidence. The description of the giant, with his bronze and scaled coat of mail, depicts him as serpentine.² He represents "the seed of the serpent."

David is too young for the battle. While his eldest brothers are in the militia of Saul, David still lives with his mother and father. He represents "the seed of the woman."

2. The two champions describe the two juxtaposed characters in classical comedy. Goliath is the braggart (Gk *alazon*). David is the underdog (Gk *eiron*).³ The reader knows that David has been

¹ The Jebusite city is still in the hands of the Amorites.

² The Hebrew word for "bronze" is a homonym for the word for "serpent." Both bronze and serpent recall the bronze serpent Moses raised in the wilderness (Numb 21:4-9). The English equivalent would be "copper" and "copperhead."



anointed to be king in Israel by the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 16:1, 11-13). We are thus to understand with David that the hero, in spite of his apparent weakness, is invincible until he is crowned king. Against this background, Goliath's raging boasting is highly comedic.

3. Goliath trusts in his armor (1 Sam 16:4-7). Instructively, King Saul likewise trusts in his armor (1 Sam 17:38-39), which betrays his lack of faith. We have been told already that Saul was the tallest man in Israel (1 Sam 9:1-2). As such the king was the most likely champion to answer the giant's challenge. The chronicler is deliberately comparing Saul to Goliath to show the contrast with David's courageous faith. Saul is further likened to Goliath in that he hurls a javelin against David, trying to kill him (1 Sam 18:10-11). Saul's death, too, by beheading, recalls the death of Goliath (1 Sam 31:8-9).

Goliath is described as a serpent. He expresses contempt of the boyish David, asking if they esteemed him as only a "dog" (1 Sam 17:42-43). The bestial imagery recalls the blessing of God upon man in the beginning to rule over the beast (Gen 1:28). David is a better Adam, for he will rule over the "serpent" Goliath.

4. The decisive moment in the battle is the single shot of David's sling that crushes the head of the giant. The Oracle had foretold that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the seed of the serpent (Gen 3:15). The nature of David's victory satisfies the prophecy of the hero's victory, ironically by means of the giant's own sword which David uses against him. Irony is one of the devices characteristic of comedy. Comedy, we should recall, is the genre of redemption.
- 5-6. David's victory secures Israel's liberty from the Philistines. Israel plunders her enemies and David plunders the giant, securing his armor and sword (1 Sam 17:54).

David also takes the disembodied head of Goliath as booty (1 Sam 17:54). He takes the skull of Goliath to Jerusalem, where the text implies that he buries it. Why does he do this? David clearly understands that his victory is emblematic of the victory of the Seed of the Woman. He also understands that Moriah is the place where God revealed to Abraham that the Lord's redemption would be provided (Gen 22:2, 14). To anticipate that victory of the Seed of the Woman over the Serpent, David buries the skull of Goliath on Moriah, outside the gate of the Jebusite city. This trophy of David memorializes the victory of David over the beast. The skull (Heb *golgolet*) and the homonymic name *Goliath of Gath*, contribute to the name later given to Golgotha, the "place of the skull" (Matt 27:33). Golgotha is the decisive battle where the Serpent would be finally defeated by the Seed of the Woman, where the sting of sin would be broken and death would be swallowed up in victory (1 Cor 15:54-55).

7. It is the promise of a royal bride that in part encourages David in the battle (1 Sam 17:25). The same promise of a bride will encourage the Seed of the Woman in his great battle (Heb 12:2; cf. Matt 22:2).

³ See the icon "Peter Delivered from Prison" based on Acts 12, where Peter is the *eiron* and Herod is the *alazon*.



It is interesting to compare the song of the women of Israel, which they sang to celebrate Saul and David, with the song of heaven, which celebrates the Lord Jesus, recorded in Revelation. In fact, when we juxtapose them, we gain a new dimension of love for the Savior. What are the lyrics of this song?

The women sing that "Saul has *slain* his thousands and David has *slain* his tens of thousands (1 Sam 18:6-7). But the redeemed sing that "Jesus has *saved* his tens of thousands of tens of thousands and thousands of thousands, even all who sing 'Worthy is the Lamb who was *slain!*'" (Rev 5:11-12).

What a Savior!

Gospel Takeaways from the Text

The "gospel" means "good news" (Gk *euangelion*). In the classical world a herald (Gk preacher) brought the word of victory in the battle to the city.⁴ The good news of the Christian faith is that the suffering of Christ has won the glory of victory for us!

There is a cosmic war underway between the Lord God and Satan. We were born into the bondage of sin and death to the enemy. But God had promised the world a Redeemer, who would come as the Seed of the Woman (Gen 3:15). The history of redemption taught us that Israel was also promised a Redeemer, who would be the Christ. In David, the two Redeemer expectations converge. David's role is to anticipate the Messiah (Psa 2:1-2, 9). His royal line will beget the virgin-born Seed of the Woman (Psalm 110:1; Matt 1:1; Rev 12:4-5).

Christ's victory over the Seed of the Serpent on Golgotha delivered the world and Israel from bondage to sin and death. That is good news indeed! Jesus **suffered** death in order to reveal the **glory** of his resurrection. By these sacred and mysterious means, the Lord delivered us from death to life, from disfiguring sin to the beauty and virtue of our destiny to be a royal bride! This great story is our story! It is good news indeed!

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⁴ Pheidippides ran the 26 miles from Marathon to Athens to announce the good news of the victory of the Greeks over the Persians in 490 BC.

