DAVID *V*. GOLIATH (1 SAMUEL 17):
WHAT IS THE AUTHOR *DOING* WITH WHAT HE IS *SAYING*?

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When Tom Sawyer, the indefatigable and timeless young creation of Mark Twain, was pressed in Sunday School to identify the first two disciples of Jesus, he burst out exuberantly: "David and Goliath!"[1] Thus it was implicitly declared that the battle between these two biblical characters was the best-known story in the Bible, one that even Tom Sawyer had heard about.

Best known it might be, but not exactly the easiest one to unravel for its theological thrust, what with text-critical problems casting long shadows upon the narrative, eager preachers making analogies of Goliath to the terrorizing giants of daily life, and ambitious theologians extrapolating from David to Christ who conquers all his enemies. What is the interpreter to do, particularly the one desiring to move from the sacred page to a sermon that respects the nuances, details, and intricacies of the text?

First Samuel 17 is part of a larger portion of text, 1 Sam 16:14–2 Samuel 5, that depicts the rise of David—how and why he became the legitimate successor to Saul.[2] By the end of 1 Samuel 15, we discover that Saul has been rejected by God from being king; immediately thereafter, in 1 Samuel 16, his successor, David, is anointed by the prophet Samuel, and the Spirit of Yahweh comes mightily upon this young man (16:13). But why was he chosen? God obviously saw something man did not; he, looking at David's heart, seems to have observed David's qualifications (16:7). What were they? What was in David's *curriculum vitae* that fitted him for the task of being the regent of a nation under God? That is what 1 Samuel 17 is all about and, by extension, as we explore the theological thrust of this chapter, we will discover what it means for all of God's people to have a heart that God looks upon with approval.

Despite all the battle cries uttered and gauntlets cast, all the fearing and fleeing, all the interludes and turns in the story, all the taunting and defying, not to mention the description and use of impressive soldierly weapons and meager "shepherdly" contraptions, the actual battle-action is reported in a mere three verses (17:48–49, 51). But the narrative of 1 Samuel 17 takes all of fifty-eight verses in the MT (thirty-one in the LXX) to tell us one thing: David killed Goliath. There is

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[1] Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1917) 42.

[2] While the broader narrative that concerns this essay begins in 1 Samuel 16 and extends through 1 Samuel 18, we will limit ourselves to 1 Samuel 17, the account of the battle proper between David and Goliath (both 1 Samuel 16 and 18 will figure in the discussion, but to a limited extent).

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no doubt that this dilatation is with purpose. The author is *doing* something with all that he is saying, as is always the case with any narrative. Declared Tzvetan Todorov, the philosopher and literary critic: "No narrative is natural; a choice and a construction will always preside over its appearance; narrative is a discourse, not a series of events."[3] Any biblical narrator has the freedom to prioritize, schematize, synthesize, and organize his raw material for his express theological purpose; the author/redactor of 1 Samuel 17 is no exception.[4] Not everything about each character is portrayed; not everything that was said or done on any particular occasion is described; not everything that happened is revealed. Some things are expanded upon; some are artfully rearranged; some seemingly innocuous incidents are recounted. The author's theological agenda determined the choice of what was included and excluded in the narrative. And that theological agenda, portrayed in, with, and through the text, must be discovered by those who would preach Scripture for life change. Interpreters are therefore called to discern not only what the author was *saying,* but also what he was *doing* with what he was saying in any given pericope.[5] "History is therefore never history, but *history-for.*"[6] The writers of biblical narratives had ideological and theological purposes, primarily that of changing the lives of their readers. Thus, information was not the only goal of these authors; *transformation* was an essential aim of their writings. Block therefore calls for a "careful attention to the words employed and the syntax exploited to tell the story" and "a cautious and disciplined reading between the lines, for what is left unstated also reflects an ideological perspective."[7] In this essay, I seek to pay "careful attention" to the text, and attempt a "cautious and disciplined reading"—gaps and all—privileging the text in an endeavor to arrive at the theological thrust of the A/author, from which point alone valid application may be made in a sermon that seeks life change in God's people, for God's glory.

I. TRADITIONAL VIEWS

A small, unknown shepherd defeating a big, bad giant lends itself to the typology of the Isaiah 53 servant (Jesus Christ) defeating sin (and/or Satan). According to the sixth-century bishop Caesarius of Arles, Jesse sending David with food (1 Sam 17:17) becomes God sending his Son with the Decalogue (*ten* loaves) and the Trinity (an ephah of roasted grain, a quantity of *three* measures), to free his people from the power of the devil. Eliab, David's antagonistic older brother, "signified the Jewish people who jealously slandered Christ the Lord." And the lion and

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[3] Tzvetan Todorov, "Primitive Narrative," in *The Poetics of Prose* (trans. R. Howard; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977) 55.

[4] Indeed, such *doings* of authors are evident in every genre of Scripture, not just in narrative.

[5] This is the approach taken by the field of pragmatics. For a small portion of the text of Scripture—the pericope—this theological agenda of the author is the theology of the pericope. See Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2013) 48–65.

[6] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966) 257–58 (italics mine).

[7] Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (NAC 6; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999) 604–5.

the bear defeated by David typified the devil. "All that we read prefigured in David at that time, dearly beloved, we know was accomplished in our Lord Jesus Christ; for he strangled the lion and the bear when he descended into hell to free all the saints from their jaws."[8]

David's killing of Goliath was also not as it appeared on the surface, according to Maximus of Turin in the fourth century. "When Goliath is struck by a stone, he is struck down by the power of Christ [here Maximus cites Ps 118:22, which in its NT citations has Jesus as the "corner*stone*"]. … For although Goliath was protected by weapons on all sides, still his forehead was exposed to death because it did not carry the Savior's seal, and therefore he is slain in the spot where he is found to be bare of God's grace."[9] Even Jerome joined the fray, writing to Augustine: "Armed with these weapons [the items of divine armor in Ephesians 6], King David went forth in his day to battle: and taking from the torrent's bed five smooth rounded stones, he proved that, even amidst all the eddying currents of the world, his feelings were free both from roughness and from defilement."[10]

Modern-day interpreters have not been remiss in their speculative tendencies either. Goldsworthy asserts that 1 Samuel 17 "is a saving event in which the chosen mediator wins the victory, while the ordinary people stand by until they can share in the fruits of the saviour's victory. Preparation is thus made for the gospel events in which God's Christ (Anointed One) wins the victory over sin and death on behalf of his people."[11] Noting that 1 Sam 17:5 has Goliath wearing "*scale*-armor," Leithart goes further: "The fact that he is described as wearing 'scales' indicates that Goliath was a serpent. Once again there is a serpent in the garden-land of Israel. … David was the new Adam that Israel had been waiting for, the beast-master taking dominion over bears and lions and now fighting a 'serpent.'" And so, appropriately enough, "[Goliath] died like a serpent, with a head wound."[12] While agreeing that the story of 1 Samuel 17 tells of *God* winning this battle, as David himself affirmed, Greidanus declares that "it is a small chapter in the battle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent—a battle which reaches its climax in Jesus' victory over Satan. … In the sermon, then, one can travel the road of redemptive historical progression from the battle of David and Goliath to the battle of Christ and Satan."[13]

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[8] Caesarius of Arles, *Serm.* 121.1–5. Translation from *St. Caesarius of Arles: Sermons, Volume 2 (81–186)* (trans. M. M. Mueller; FC 47; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1964) 199–200.

[9] Maximus of Turin, *Serm.* 85.3. Translation from *The Sermons of St. Maximus of Turin* (trans. B. Ramsey; ACW 50; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1989) 205

[10] *Ep.* 75.2. Translation from *NPNF*¹ 1:333.

[11] Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian's Guide to the OT* (Oak Grove, MN: Winston, 1981) 73.

[12] Peter J. Leithart, *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 and 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2003) 98, 100.

[13] Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the OT: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 239. Martin Luther, "Prefaces to the NT," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 35: *Word and Sacrament I* (trans. Charles M. Jacobs; rev. E. Theodore Bachmann; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960) 358, also connects the victory of David over the enemy Goliath with the victory of "a true David who strove with sin, death, and the devil."

Then there are those modern understandings of David *v.* Goliath, which in most parts of the world is an accepted cultural meme signifying the smart and clever victory of the underdog. Malcolm Gladwell, in his book, *David and Goliath,* informs us that David's victory was all about being enterprising and energetic, knowing one's own strengths and the weaknesses of the enemy—a purely human enterprise, "substituting speed and surprise for strength." In fact, the word "God" occurs only once in Gladwell's introductory chapter, "Goliath," on the David and Goliath story.[14] This is not very different from the assessment of Moshe Dayan, the Israeli Defense Minister under whom the Six-Day War in 1967 was won:

> David fought Goliath, not with inferior, but with superior weapons. His feat consisted not in the fact that he was a little man ready to go out and fight a powerful enemy, but in that he succeeded in finding a weapon which gave him, the weaker man, the advantage [i.e., a sling]. The Bible also tells us of David's spiritual qualities. … But his faith did not express itself in reliance on miracles; he was also guided by faith in his own strength.[15]

All these intriguing interpretations notwithstanding, the interpreter seeking to move from text to sermon is caught in a bind. How can one respect the details of the pericope chosen, employing a hermeneutic faithful to the text and charitable to its author, in order to discover the thrust of the text—i.e., what the author is *doing* with what he is saying—and to move thence to valid application? I suggest that the interpreter privilege the text and its immediate context to figure out what the A/author was *doing* with what he was *saying* (pericopal theology).[16] Moberly's warning is sound: "If the Old Testament no longer says something to the Christian in its own right, to which the Christian still needs to attend and on which Christian faith necessarily builds, its actual role within Christian faith will tend to become marginal and optional, no matter what rhetoric is used to urge its importance."[17]

The Books of Samuel are problematic from the text-critical point of view. Particularly difficult are the issues concerning our chapter of interest, 1 Samuel 17. Almost forty-six percent of the Masoretic Text (MT) of 1 Samuel 17, about 27 out of 58 verses, is missing in the Septuagint (LXX[B]): 17:12–31, 41, 48b, 50, 51b, 55–

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[14] *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2013) 13.

[15] Moshe Dayan, "The Spirit of the Fighters," in *Tales of Heroism: Twenty Years of Independence 11* (Jerusalem: Israel Ministry of Defense, 1968) 50–52 [Hebrew]; translated in *Mission Survival: The People of Israel's Story in Their Own Words* (ed. Ruth Bondy, Ohad Zmora, and Raphael Bashan; New York: Sabra, 1968) 119.

[16] *Privilege the Text!* 89–150. For worked out examples dealing with whole books of the Bible in this fashion, pericope by pericope, elucidating the theology of each textual unit, see Abraham Kuruvilla, *Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012); idem, *Genesis: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, OR: Resource, 2014); and idem, *Ephesians: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015).

[17] R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 142.

58.[18] Were there two truncated Hebrew versions, with the LXX[B] reflecting the shorter original text, and the MT an amalgam of the two?[19] Or was a longer Hebrew text the original (similar to the MT, Targums, and Syriac and Latin versions), which was subsequently abridged to the precursor of the LXX[B] to preclude the seeming difficulties within the larger account (see below)?[20] Or was the MT a later expansion of a shorter original that is reflected in the LXX[B]?[21]

A standard reason for leaning towards the LXX version as the original is that there are (so-called) discrepancies or problems with the longer MT text, especially David's re-introduction in 17:12 (after 16:1–23), and Saul's ignorance of David's antecedents in 17:55–58 (after 16:16–18).[22] But it seems unthinkable that the writer (redactor?) of 1 Samuel MT would not have noticed some of these "discrepancies." That the seemingly inconsistent accounts of the two chapters, 1 Samuel 16 and 17, were retained in the MT suggests that "writers and the public of that time applied different standards of unity and created and interpreted texts on the basis of other consistency requirements."[23] Therefore, Fokkelman, too, dismisses the tendency of scholars to engage in "uncritically judging the old text [MT] on the basis of modern-day requirements of context and hyperanalytically setting parts thereof against one another."[24] He is of the opinion that the MT has sufficient "internal cohesion" to stand on its own.[25] It is certainly possible that the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX

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[18] Also missing from the LXX are 18:1–6a, 10–11, 12b, 17–19, 21b, and 29b–30 (these will not be considered in this essay). The LXX[B] is the Codex Vaticanus, the oldest complete Greek Bible (fourth century CE). All the "minuses" absent in the LXX[B] are, however, present in the LXX[A], the Codex Alexandrinus (fifth century CE), and in allied manuscripts, which tend to approximate the MT. Remnants of the Samuel text from Qumran, 4QSam[a] (mid-first century BCE), reflect the LXX[B] in its 1 Samuel 17 fragment that contains only 17:3–6 (regarding the height of Goliath; see below). However, the fact that there are significant differences between 4QSam[a] and the LXX in other locations, and the paucity of evidence with regard to 1 Samuel 17 in particular, render 4QSam[a] unreliable evidence for the originality of the LXX version of 1 Samuel 17. Neither 4QSam[b] (ca. 250 BCE) nor 4QSam[c] (first century BCE) contain 1 Samuel 17.

[19] Emanuel Tov, "The Nature of the Differences Between MT and the LXX in 1 Sam. 17–18," in Domenique Barthélemy, David W. Gooding, Johan Lust, and Emanuel Tov, *The Story of David and Goliath: Textual and Literary Criticism* (OBO 73; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986) 41–46; Johan Lust, "The Story of David and Goliath in Hebrew and Greek," in *The Story of David and Goliath* 5–18; A. Graeme Auld and Craig Y. S. Ho, "The Making of David and Goliath," *JSOT* 56 (1992) 24.

[20] Domenique Barthélemy, "Trois niveaux d'analyse (a propos de David et Goliath)," in *Story of David and Goliath* 47–54, 95–98; David W. Gooding, "An Approach to the Literary and Textual Problems in the David-Goliath Story: 1 Sam 16–18," in *Story of David and Goliath* 82; Alexander Rofé, "The Battle of David and Goliath: Folklore, Theology, Eschatology," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (ed. Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine, and Ernest S. Frerichs; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 117–22; Arie van der Kooij, "The Story of David and Goliath: The Early History of Its Text," *ETL* 68 (1992) 118.

[21] P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *I Samuel* (AB 8; Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1980) 306; Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (WBC 10; Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 174.

[22] David's going back and forth from Saul (17:15 MT) is not necessarily inconsistent with his becoming Saul's armor-bearer (16:21): he would likely have been only one of several armor-bearers in the service of the king, all of whose genealogies would not necessarily have been remembered by Saul.

[23] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, vol. 2: The Crossing Fates (I Sam. 13–31 and II Sam. 1)* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1986) 144.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid. 201.

may indeed have been the original version, but that does not necessarily rule out the MT's canonical status and its being the inspired final form. However the issue of the "original" text is resolved, the debate over the MT says "nothing about its status as scripture, nor does it, for that matter, imply the 'superiority' of whatever earlier strand may have gone into [its] making."[26] Therefore, this essay, without considering in excruciating detail the various arguments for textual precursors, will attempt to make sense of the MT account as it stands, privileging that text with a close reading seeking to discern what the author was *doing* with what he was saying.

II. DAVID AND HIS "GIANTS": THE AUTHOR'S *DOINGS*

The structure of the MT narrative of 1 Samuel 17 shows evidence of deliberate patterning:

1 Sam 17:1–24	*Mostly narrative*	
1 Sam 17:25–47	*Mostly dialogue*	
	David and army/Eliab (17:25–30)	
	David and Saul (17:31–39)	
	David and Goliath (17:43–47)	
1 Sam 17:48–54	*All narrative*	
1 Sam 17:55–58	*All dialogue*	

This essay essentially follows the structure above, particularly attending to the interactions of David—both direct and indirect—with Goliath, with Saul, and with Eliab: giant, king, and brother. For each of these characters (and for David, the youth, too), three items of interest are pointed out by the text: each one's stature, resources, and experience.

1. *The giant.* As soon as the action commences in our narrative in 1 Sam 17:4 with a *wayyiqtol* + subject ("And a champion came out from the camp of the Philistines"), it is immediately suspended with the details of the size of the giant, his implements of dominance, and the implied proficiency of the "champion" of warfare (17:5–7)—i.e. his stature, resources, and experience. After cataloguing these, another *wayyiqtol* then resumes the action in 17:8 ("And he stood …").

The man's *stature* is fearsome. Taking a cubit as approximately eighteen inches, and a span as nine, the MT's "six cubits and a span" (17:4) has Goliath at nine feet nine inches tall.[27] With average heights of those in ancient Israel likely ranging from five to five and a half feet, this is truly a formidable foe.

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[26] Robert P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1986) 65.

[27] Both LXX[A] and LXX[B] have a smaller Goliath—"four cubits and a span" tall—still a sizeable six feet nine inches in height. So also the Lucian recension of the LXX (third century), Symmachus (third century), 4QSam[a] (the oldest Hebrew manuscript of the books of Samuel available), Origen's Hexapla, and Josephus, *Ant.* 6.171. Multiple solutions have been proposed for this discrepancy of recorded heights in the MT and the LXX. Perhaps Hays's explanation is the best. He suspects a scribal copying error called parablepsis ("a looking by the side"). The Hebrew in 1 Sam 17:4 for cubit (אמות) is similar to the word in 17:7 for *hundred* (מאות). It is possible that the scribe's eye dropped from "four *cubits*" in

And then there is the list of his *resources* in 17:5–7, the longest description of military gear in the OT. These weapons must have intimidated a meagerly equipped Israelite army; in an earlier battle only the king and his son possessed swords and spears (13:22). This huge enemy is therefore well bedecked, overwhelmingly so. Assuming the biblical shekel to be 0.403 ounces, the giant's armor would weigh about 126 pounds (17:5), and his spear head 15 pounds (17:7).[28] Besides, the shaft of the Philistine's spear is compared to a weaver's beam (17:7). While the comparison may simply be between the mass of spear and that of beam, Yadin concludes that this analogy made the spear something like an Aegean javelin with a loop and a cord wrapping it, to enable long and accurate throws.[29] From the use of כִידוֹן in 1QM, the implement between Goliath's shoulders is best identified as a scimitar (17:6), a curved, flat sword with a convex cutting edge, perhaps an accessory of a chariot warrior (see 13:5; 2 Sam 1:6).[30] Then the "sword" (חֶרֶב) of 17:50–51 is likely to be the standard-issue long and straight weapon, employed for combat on foot.[31] "Greaves," found in the OT only in 17:6, were leg protectors, perhaps with a gap for the knee.[32]

All of this deliberate lingering upon bulk and paraphernalia (stature and resources) of the giant (17:5–7) emphasizes the force of his intimidation and builds suspense: Who would battle this armored hulk and how would he be defeated? But it was not only Goliath's stature and resources that were threatening; his considerable *experience* also rendered him a lethal enemy to tangle with. Being the individual chosen for one-to-one combat implied Goliath's mastery of this kind of warfare. In fact, Saul himself acknowledged that Goliath had been a "man of war *from his youth*" (17:33). And one cannot but notice Goliath's audacious taunts and defiance: he is

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17:4, to the "six *hundred*" in 17:7 (the weight in shekels of the giant's spear), and picked up the "six" and miscopied it into 17:4, converting "four cubits" into "six cubits" (J. Daniel Hays, "Reconsidering the Height of Goliath," *JETS* 48 [2005] 706). In any case, there are other unusually tall foes in the OT: 1 Chr 11:23 has Abishai killing a five-cubit-tall Egyptian (seven feet six inches), and Og's bed (Deut 3:11) was nine cubits long (thirteen feet six inches).

[28] Klein, *1 Samuel* 175.

[29] Yigael Yadin, "Goliath's Javelin and the מנור ארגים," *PEQ* 86 (1955) 58–69.

[30] Jeffrey R. Zorn, "Reconsidering Goliath: An Iron Age I Philistine Chariot Warrior," *BASOR* 360 (2010) 1–2. The shield-bearer (17:7) also might have been part of the chariot crew, protecting the archers and swordsmen in the vehicle (ibid. 14). In an interesting aside, Zorn also considers the אִישׁ־הַבֵּנַיִם (literally, "man of the in-between," usually translated "the champion") as the person between two others in a three-man chariot, i.e. the main warrior of the crew (ibid. 16–17). If this is correct, the absence of any mention of a chariot for Goliath was perhaps because the final battle was intended to be fought on foot.

[31] Molin, G. "What is a *Kidon*?" *JSS* 1 (1956) 334–37; also see McCarter, *I Samuel* 292. That Goliath carried two kinds of swords (the other one shows up in 17:54, 51 MT) is not inconsistent with period practice (Zorn, "Reconsidering Goliath" 14). In the LXX, the word כִידוֹן in 17:6 is translated as ἀσπίς, "shield" (17:6). But an actual shield (צִנָּה) is listed in 17:7, which, in the LXX, then becomes some sort of generic weaponry, τὰ ὅπλα. The "scimitar" is again converted to "shield" by the LXX in 17:45; that does not make much sense alongside the offensive weapons listed there—sword and spear.

[32] It might well be "greaves" that is referred to in 17:49, and not "forehead." See Ariella Deem, "'… And the Stone Sank into His Forehead': A Short Note on 1 Samuel XVII 49," *VT* 28 (1978) 349–51; and for an extension of her argument, Gregory T. K. Wong, "Goliath's Death and the Testament of Judah," *Bib* 91 (2010) 428–29.

twice recorded as demanding a "man" to come down and fight him (17:8, 10). No one accepts the invitation. No one apparently is "man" enough as Goliath is, a fighter of seemingly lifelong experience, mature and accomplished.

Having just read 1 Samuel 16, the chapter preceding our narrative of interest, and especially God's exhortation therein to the prophet Samuel that he not look as man does, but as God does—"for man looks at the *outside*" (16:7)—this extended description of the formidable and fearsome *outside* of the giant is telling: this is one with overwhelming stature, impenetrable resources, and redoubtable experience. Would Israel look as man does and take notice of the *outside*, or see things God's way? Unfortunately, both the nation's king and its soldiers, glimpsing only the outside—this colossal warrior—are terrified (17:11, 24).

One has to wonder why an entire army feared a single individual, albeit a huge and minatory specimen, well fortified and greatly skilled. Why did they need to accept Goliath's challenge to single combat—a rather unusual operation for the Israelites?[33] The answer lies in a theological presupposition. Garsiel points to the firm belief among the ancients of the role of gods in their battles. Their victories were the triumphs of their own gods and the defeats of their opponents' gods, idols of which were captured to be displayed in the winning god's shrine (5:1–2) or to be destroyed (2 Kgs 19:18). With this role of deities in mind, kings and peoples sought their gods' favor and their inclinations as to the outcome of imminent battles, with preliminary skirmishes serving as omens that foretold the ultimate result (Josh 7:7–9; 1 Sam 4:1–22). The single-combat challenge of Goliath was based upon a similar notion: a duel would reflect the supremacy of one god or the other, and presage the denouement of the larger conflict between the armies. Goliath, it seems, was sure that Dagon, the Philistine deity, was on his side; but Israel was not entirely certain that Yahweh was on theirs, as evident in their terror-stricken flight (17:11, 24). Thus the threat of the giant was far more than that of an overgrown, overdressed, belligerent local lout menacing his neighbors: this was a battle between the gods—entirely theological in its framing.[34]

The challenge of Goliath was that the loser and his side would become the "servants" (×2; from עֶבֶד) of the victor and his side, and "serve" them (from עָבַד; 17:9). "Service" has strong theological connotations, usually of worship, in the history of Israel, for the nation had often been called to decide for itself whom it would "serve"—their God, Yahweh, or other foreign gods (Josh 24:15; 1 Sam 7:3; 8:8; 12:10, 14, 24). This challenge of the Philistine implied that if the Israelite champion lost, the nation would serve not only the Philistines, but also their god, Dagon, for their defeat would be proof sufficient that Yahweh, acknowledging the

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[33] The battle between twelve Benjaminites and twelve Judeans in 2 Samuel 2 was not the kind of representative combat that was being proposed in 1 Samuel 17.

[34] Later, Goliath's attempt to curse David by his gods (17:43) confirms that this military encounter had turned into a theological battle. See Moshe Garsiel, "The Valley of Elah Battle and the Duel of David with Goliath: Between History and Artistic Theological Historiography," in *Homeland and Exile: Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Bustenay Oded* (ed. Gershon Galil, Mark Geller, and Alan Millard; Leiden: Brill, 2009) 413–15.

superiority of Dagon, had abandoned his own people.[35] The Israelite king and his army were thus trapped: they had to put up a champion—who might, by all *outside* appearances, be vanquished—or they had to flee and thus reflect the impotence of their God. The text twice reports the army's panic-stricken status (17:11, 24). Running away faithless in Yahweh, they were, in effect, running towards Dagon to serve him. Not much of an alternative in this Hobson's choice.

In sum, Goliath assumed that his considerable size, his formidable panoply, and his indomitable virility would give him victory over anyone and anything, with his gods backing up his pugnacity. It had become theological warfare, but with ultimate reliance of all parties not founded upon any supernatural entity (as we will see—indeed, there is no mention of God till David appears on the scene) but upon one's own stature, resources, and experience.

2. *The king.* It is not happenstance that throughout the account in 1 Samuel 16–17, one sees a comparison between Saul and David.[36] That in the end David succeeded (killing Goliath, 17:50–51) where Saul was impotent, running away in fear (17:11, 24), adds to the discomfiture of the latter and the heroism of the former.

From the beginning of the story, Saul's failure is foregrounded. Goliath's challenge to the Israelites to produce a champion for themselves was exactly the job description of the Israelites' king (1 Sam 8:20—"our king will go out before us and fight our battles"), a responsibility Saul declined to accept.[37] Not only was it the monarch's duty, Saul also had the *stature* for that job. If Goliath was sizeable, so was Saul: "from his shoulders and up [he was] taller than all the people" (9:2; also 10:23)—literally, head and shoulders above his compatriots. In other words, Saul had the requisite stature to take on the giant.

Besides, if Goliath had intimidating weapons, so did Saul (17:38–39); his *resources* were considerable too. Saul's weapons were likely to have been the best in the land, ones that only the royal family possessed (13:22). And, rather ironically, the Philistine's belief in the ideology of weapons appears to have been shared by

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[35] Mark K. George, "Constructing Identity in 1 Samuel 17," *BibInt* 7 (1999) 397–98.

[36] In fact, the comparison between the first two kings of Israel appears to be an element of deliberate design in 1 Samuel. Both Saul and David are represented in parallel structure as sons of fathers (9:1–2 and 17:12–16 [only in the MT]). Both Saul and David are given minor tasks (finding donkeys and feeding brothers, 9:3 and 17:17–18 MT) that ultimately bring them into contact with the leader/ruler of the country: Saul comes to Samuel's hometown (9:1–27), and David goes to Saul's presence (17:55–58 MT). Each of these task-driven stories of Israel's first two kings concludes with "on that day" (9:24 and 18:2 MT) and, thenceforth, both remain with the leader/ruler, whom each candidate subsequently succeeds. With regard to the tasks they fulfill, Saul is shown rather unfavorably in his quest for those lost animals: it is up to his companion to lead him to a solution (9:5–10). David, on the other hand, acting unilaterally and alone, appears to be very much in control of the situation (the entire narrative of 1 Samuel 17). Curious also is the note that David leaves his things in charge of the keeper of "baggage" as he went to the frontlines of the battle (17:22), an ironic contrast to what Saul did when he became king: he hid himself among the "baggage" (10:22)—people had to check with Yahweh to figure out where Saul was!

[37] Later, in 1 Sam 18:17, 19, Saul would offer David royal status—as his son-in-law, no less!—to "fight Yahweh's battles" (18:17): virtually an abdication by Saul and an adoption of David (also see below for more on this theme).

Saul, too: the king tries to clothe David in his own royal armaments, the description of which is uncannily similar to the inventory of Goliath's weapons.

Goliath's Armor (17:5, 51)	Saul's Armor (17:38–39)
"and a bronze helmet on his head"	"a bronze helmet on his head"
"and scale-armor for his clothing"	"and he clothed him with armor"
"sword"	"sword"

Saul considers David inadequate for combat with the giant without appropriate resources. He figured that, for victory, David needed to match helmet for helmet, armor for armor, and sword for sword. Weapons apparently have to be countered with more weapons, an ideology of arms.

But it was not only in stature and resources that Saul was up to the task of fighting Goliath; his military *experience* was nothing to be sniffed at either. In 17:10, the Philistine giant explicitly "defies" (חָרַף) the armies of Israel. Curiously enough, the last time "defiance" had shown up in 1 Samuel was in 1 Sam 11. There, Nahash the Ammonite king threatened to make a "reproach/defiance" (חֶרְפָּה, the cognate noun from the verb, חָרַף, "defy") upon Israel by gouging out each person's right eye (11:2). In response, Saul had to step in and lead the Israelites to victory against Ammon (11:1–15). In fact, it was after this very demonstration of valor that Saul is crowned king (11:15). One might have safely expected that in response to Goliath's "defiance" in our story, Saul, with his experience against such defiances, would once again rise admirably to the occasion. Alas, he does not.

Should anyone have been picked for the task of fighting the giant, it ought to have been Saul, whose biodata, accouterments, and résumé fitted the bill exactly. Saul had it all: stature, resources, and experience. But, unfortunately, this king of Israel fails to lead his people to victory. He and his army are "terrified and greatly afraid" at the sight and sound of the giant (17:11), and they flee (17:24, presumably with Saul at their head).[38] All this to say, it was not only Goliath who had stature, resources, and experience; Saul had them too, and he—no different from Goliath—placed great stock in them. However, he realized that his stature, resources, and experience were inadequate when compared to those of his foe: he took to his heels. Looking only at the *outside*, Saul had neglected to see with the eyes of God, with the fear of God, and with trust in God. Therefore, despite the fact that his stature was considerable, his resources extensive, and his experience in war remark-

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[38] Incidentally, this was not the first time he had failed. In Israel's most recent confrontation with the Philistines before 1 Samuel 17 (the battle of Michmash, 1 Samuel 13), Saul had not performed creditably at all. While he fails both there and here in 1 Samuel 17, two younger men—Jonathan in 1 Samuel 14, and David in 1 Samuel 17—take up the slack and fulfill the military leadership duties of the king (8:20). Both Jonathan and David are, unlike Saul, quite conscious of their divine empowerment in battle (14:6, 12; and 17:37, 45–47). And both these enterprising souls are sought to be killed by Saul (14:38–44; 20:30–33; and 18:10–11, 25; 19:9–10). Ironically, then, two young men under the king demonstrate to him that God can provide victory no matter how dire the circumstances may look to the human eye—the *outside*.

able (at least in 1 Sam 11), Saul fails to lead his people as a king should have, under the hand of God and trusting wholly in him. He, instead, can only decamp shamefully from the scene of the battle.

3. *The brother.* As a matter of fact, Saul was not the "biggest" guy around. David's own brother, his oldest sibling, Eliab, was another of sizeable build. It therefore comes as no surprise that this hefty character, like Saul, also features in the narrative of the battle against the Philistine giant.

Eliab is the one with the most striking appearance and—importantly for our reading—the one with the tallest *stature* of all of Jesse's eight children. In 16:7, God expressly forbids Samuel to look at "the height of his [Eliab's] stature"—the way man sees. In other words, Eliab had the requisite stature to tackle the giant.

As the "oldest" (17:13, 14, 28 MT), Eliab is among those with the most *experience* of battle in his family, ostensibly also with the all the *resources* appertaining to a soldier. He is one of only three of Jesse's eight children to enlist in Israel's army: "they *went*, the three older sons of Jesse, *going* after Saul to the battle, and the names of his three sons, who *went* into battle were …" (17:13); and the fact is repeated: "and the three oldest *went* after Saul" (17:14). Indeed, the contrast with the introduction of David could not be more striking: in 17:12–14, this younger one is a verbless person, while his brothers get a form of the verb הָלַךְ *four* times ("to go"; italicized above).[39] No doubt, Eliab, the "goer"—unlike David—had both the experience of war and the resources of a regular soldier.

So this oldest sibling disdainfully questions David—"Why this coming down?"—and then answers his own query. David, Eliab accuses, is demonstrating a dereliction of duty, leaving his "*few* sheep" in the wilderness, where he belonged and where he should have remained (17:28). After all, what experience could a shepherd have in tackling perilous foes?[40] Interestingly enough, as he disparages his youngest sibling, Eliab claims to know the state of David's "heart." Now God had made it clear that *he* was the one who saw "hearts"—not men—and that *he* had seen David's heart and found him fit for anointing as the next leader of God's people (16:7, 13). So here Eliab is countering God's view of hearts with his own: "I know … the wickedness of your heart" (17:28). He certainly is not seeing things the way God was: clearly Eliab is mistaken in his diagnosis of David's cardiac condition.[41]

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[39] Later on, David himself will get a shot at "going": his dialogue with Saul contains the same verb הָלַךְ five times (17:32, 33, 37, 39 [×2]).

[40] Eliab's pejorative reference to David's sheep herding contrasts powerfully with David's own recounting, later to Saul, of his valorous exploits as a shepherd (17:34–35).

[41] Nevertheless, Eliab's defensive derision is understandable. He was aware of David's anointing in 1 Samuel 16; that was when his own candidacy for high office in the land had been disregarded, explaining his bitterness here when the impertinent David shows up ready to rumble (17:28 MT). The careful naming of David's three older brothers in 17:12–13 is therefore not a meaningless repetition of 16:6–9, but a clever allusion to the earlier scene of anointing that also had the same named trio on stage, thus enabling readers to catch the thrust of what the author is *doing* in 1 Samuel 17: bringing out the jealousy of the "giant" Eliab. Here is this young whippersnapper, David, ready to take on the Philistine, upstaging everyone else, planning to do what Eliab himself (and his compatriots) dared not even attempt

So here is Eliab, possessing more stature, resources (implied in his enlistment in the army), and experience than David. Yet, neither he nor his fellow-soldiers—or even their king!—dares to do what David himself intends. Thus, in the camp of Israel, there was not just one, but *two* tall candidates possessing the qualifications for battling a giant: King Saul (9:2; 10:23), and David's brother Eliab (16:6–7). Both implicitly subscribed to the anti-God ideology that the *outside* alone is real, and that the *outside* alone matters, and that the *outside* alone secures victory. And, putting their bets on the "might-brings-victory" philosophy—and not at all on God—both flee in terror, knowing their own deficiencies in matters of the *outside* (17:11, 24).

In this narrative, then, there is a sharply demarcated and recognizable conflict between the manliness of the big boys (Goliath, Saul, and Eliab) and the seeming inexperience and incapacity of the substandard youth (David). In fact, thus far, everything in the account tends to emphasize the insignificance of the latter. This is, indeed, a conflict-story of *three* "giants" versus David, a battle between three who possess stature, resources, and experience, and one bereft of any of those seeming essentials—the youth, David.

4. *The youth.* After all these giants, we now have David, the youth. As he is introduced into our narrative for the first time, the word וְדָוִד ("And David") commences the respective sentences in 17:12, 14, 15, identifying him to the reader as a "son," the "youngest," and one who "tended his father's flock"—merely a shepherd boy. Surely he will not be able to accomplish anything noteworthy on the battlefield: this lad has no stature, no resources, and no experience, when compared to the three "giants" in the story, Goliath, Saul, and Eliab. Conspicuously it is noted that the three siblings of David who went to war were *older* (17:13, 14), and that he was the *youngest* (17:14). All of this information had already been made available to the reader in 16:10–11. So a point is being made with all these reiterations here in 1 Samuel 17: the *older* ones alone were fit to go into battle, and not the *younger* David, the one with negligible stature, resources, and experience!

That Eliab was the one who had the "height of stature" (16:7) that impressed Samuel also suggests that David's height was not comparable and that he lacked the respectable *stature* that Eliab and the two other "giants," Goliath and Saul, possessed. Later on, as David moved into face-to-face combat with Goliath, the Philistine "looked" (נָבַט) and "saw" (רָאָה) the *outside*: a ruddy and fair-complected David (17:42).[42] If only Goliath, like God, had seen the inside: "Do not look [נָבַט] at his appearance [from רָאָה] … for [God sees] not as man sees [רָאָה], for man looks [רָאָה] at the outside, but Yahweh looks [רָאָה] at the heart" (16:7). The congruence of vocabulary here reminds the reader of the anointing scene of 1 Samuel 16—this youth is the youngest and the most unassuming of the tribe of Jesse's children. Indeed, on that occasion, Samuel, too, had only seen Eliab, the impressive one on the *outside*. But at the bidding of Yahweh the heart-looker, Samuel proceeded to

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(17:11). Indeed, the shepherd has the gall to recommend that no soldier's "heart" should fail because of the threat posed by Goliath (17:32). See Gooding, "Approach to the Literary and Textual Problems" 59.

   [42] As a practicing dermatologist, I am suitably impressed by this description of David's cutaneous attributes.

anoint the stripling, David (16:12). For all outside appearances, then, David has no stature.

David not only is lacking in stature, he is deficient in *resources*, too. His inadequacy was explicitly diagnosed by the king: "You are not able … to fight with him" (לֹא תוּכַל … לְהִלָּחֵם עִמּוֹ ;17:33), quite similar to Goliath's challenge as he dared a man to approach him, "if he is able to fight with me" (אִם־יוּכַל לְהִלָּחֵם אִתִּי ;17:9). More out of pity for this puny lad, king Saul feels obliged to donate his own resources (armor) to David, proclaiming that David is incapable of tackling Goliath without adequate equipment (17:33). Goliath is even more blunt: "Am I a dog that you come to me with *sticks*?" (17:43). David, for all appearances, has no resources, either.

The extended focus on "men"—and presumably the *experience* of men—in 17:23–25 is remarkable, especially coming right after the youthfulness (inexperience?) of David has been duly noted in 17:12, 14, 15. While David was speaking with his brothers, the "*man* of the in-between" (אִישׁ־הַבֵּנַיִם, i.e. the champion) reappears on the scene in 17:23 (see also 17:4). The "*men* of Israel" see the "man," Goliath, and flee in fear (17:24). Then the "*men* of Israel" remark to themselves about "this *man*" coming up (Goliath) to defy Israel, and how the king will enrich the "man" who defeats him (17:25). David then speaks to the "men," asking about the rewards for the "man" who kills the Philistine (17:26), to which the people respond, describing what will be done for the "man" who slays Goliath (17:27). In 17:28, David's older brother, Eliab, overhears David's conversation with the "men." And Goliath, himself a "man" (17:4, 23)—in fact, he is a "*man* of war (אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה, 17:33)—had dared a "man" to come fight him (17:8, 10).

In contrast, David is merely a juvenile, only a "*son* of a man" (17:12), not a man himself, and just a "youth," as Saul was quick to point out.[43] Goliath agreed; later, the giant is peeved to see that the one who accepted his dare was just a "youth" (17:42). Evidently the dispatching of the giant was a task fit only for a virile man, not a raw adolescent—a youth who lacked, at least on the outside, the necessary qualification of experience.[44]

Thus there is a congruence of ideology: the three "giants," the Philistine heavyweight, the older brother, and the Israelite king, are virtually colluding, united as they are in placing their trust in stature, resources, and experience, all of which David seems to lack. And swearing by the notion that stature plus resources plus experience equals triumph, Saul and Eliab are scared of their own deficiencies in these departments, being completely insensible to the workings of God and the empowerment of God. They see only the *outside* and they fail dismally (17:11, 24). But David—he was different ….

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[43] The word for "youth" is נַעַר. The king uses the same word twice more, in 17:55, 58 (the word in 17:56 for "young man" is עֶלֶם). David, the "youth," is unfavorably compared with Goliath who, from *his* "youth," had been a "*man* of war" (17:33).

[44] Notice also the multiple recurrences of "men" throughout the narrative: 17:2, 19, 24, 25 (×3), 26 (×2), 27, 28, 41, 52.

III. DAVID AND HIS GOD: THE AUTHOR'S *DOINGS*

Now these "giants" were absolutely right in their assessments: David had no stature, no resources, no experience. But they were absolutely wrong in assuming that victory came with an exclusive reliance upon stature, resources, and experience. Deity did not figure in the calculus of any of these "giants." But in David's arithmetic, it did—his stature, resources, and experience were founded upon God. The rest is history.

1. *David's stature: the heart of God.* As we saw, Samuel, when he went to Bethlehem to anoint Israel's next king, was taken by the stature of Jesse's oldest son, Eliab (16:6–7). Yahweh intervened, forbidding the prophet to look at "his appearance or at the height of his stature," instead declaring that though man looks at the "outside," "Yahweh looks at the heart" (16:7). He then pointed out David (16:12). Here was a candidate whose stature was not visible on the *outside.* His was an eminence that was an inside reality, a character that was internal, a solidity that was inward—a stature of the "heart." Only such a person was ever described in Scripture as having been "a man after his [God's] heart" (13:14; also Acts 13:22). Only such a one could, in the face of imminent danger, exhort his fellowmen in our narrative not to lose "heart" (1 Sam 17:32). This was the stature of David: he had a heart that God saw and approved, that of God himself.

2. *David's resource: the name of God.* And David's resources? Saul declared that David was "not able to go" against the giant without appropriate resources (17:33). To that David countered that he was actually "not able to go" *with* armor and helmet and sword (17:39). And so he proceeded to take them all off. The interlude of 17:38–39, David's donning and doffing of Saul's armor, comic though it is, conveys an important facet of the theological thrust of this pericope: the repudiation of the ideology of arms: impressive firepower would not be the objects of his trust.[45] What, then, would be David's resources to fight the giant?

At the start of the story, the narrator was careful to describe Goliath's armaments, *five* in number: helmet, armor, greaves, scimitar, and spear (17:5–7). David, rejecting Saul's donation of similar equipment, opts, instead, for the shepherd's paraphernalia. Undertaking the role of the protective regal-shepherd of the nation (the duty of the king, 8:20), he was going to defeat its enemies with the implements of a sheep-herder. And David goes into battle with *five* items himself: stick, stones, bag, pouch[46], sling[47] (17:40)—in other words, an ironic rejection and reversal of the catalogue of weapons possessed by Goliath (and by Saul). And the number of

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[45] Unwittingly, in giving David his royal armor here, Saul was effectively handing over his kingly status as protector of the nation to David. David would now assume the role of the king—but not that of a king "like all the nations [have]," as Israel had demanded of Samuel (1 Sam 8:5). By removing Saul's armor, David was rejecting this typical approach of monarchs altogether. See George, "Constructing Identity" 405.

[46] The word יַלְקוּט is a *hapax legomenon* (17:40) and likely indicates a shepherd's pouch, here a receptacle for David's stones.

[47] The "sling" was not merely the weapon of a shepherd; it was also employed on occasion by armies (Jdg 20:16; 1 Sam 25:29; 1 Chr 12:2; 2 Chr 26:14).

stones David picked up? *Five!* This narrative thereby pillories the ideology of resources as nothing but "weapon fetishism."[48] That it would not be the standard kingly resources that would down the giant is made abundantly clear. And neither would it be stick, stones, bag, pouch, and sling by which David triumphed. Instead, it would be his God who would provide the victory—*that* was David's resource.

David's theological perspective is evident in 17:26–31. With his first words recorded in Scripture, David demonstrates a concern about God (17:26): How dare someone defy the armies of the living God? Indeed, it is also the first time deity shows up in this narrative—God's viewpoint is injected into a situation of hopelessness, as David centers the affairs around deity, not around the giant: this was theocentric thinking. Despite all the terror and dismay on display (17:11, 24), no one else in the narrative was thinking of God, and no one else was considering the perspective of God. But David, from God's viewpoint, is oblivious of Goliath's stature, resources, and experience. The youth is simply focused upon God, evident in his labeling the giant, in his opening salvo, as an "*uncircumcised* Philistine" (17:26; also 17:36).[49] David thus reminds his Israelite compatriots—the *men* of the army (17:2, 19, 24, 25 [×2], 26 [×2], 27, 28, 52), those *circumcised* soldiers—of the God who had covenanted with their nation. The shepherd boy is also keenly aware that his God is a *living* God (17:26, 36), in dramatic contrast to the god of the Philistine, by whom Goliath later curses David (17:43). Unfortunately for Goliath, his god, Dagon, had already perished way back when, falling on his face (5:3) before the ark of Yahweh, a posture Goliath would soon be adopting himself—and it would be described in the same words (17:49)! And, just as Dagon's head and hands were "cut off" (כָּרַת, 5:4) when he fell before Yahweh's ark, so also Goliath's head would be "cut off" (also כָּרַת, 17:51) by David as the giant fell prostrate.

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[48] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry* 177. The enumeration of the items of weaponry in this narrative is detailed and nuanced. Goliath has *five* pieces of equipment (17:5–7; his sword, which David employed in 17:51, is not mentioned, perhaps to retain the balance of numbers, or perhaps to ignore its ambiguous status—after all, it did end up being of use to David). Saul, even though he attempts to fight fire with fire and bronze with bronze, can muster only *four* items (evidently inadequate; 17:38–39). David promptly rids himself of them all (17:38–39), and picks up *five* other seemingly innocuous things (17:40). Later, Jonathan, donates his own princely pieces of equipment—not surprisingly, they too are *five* in number (18:4 MT)! That not every piece in these lists is an armament per se is inconsequential; the motif of clothing for battle is what the narrator develops, comparing the outfits of the various agonists of the story. The final granting of clothing to David by the king's own son further signified the right of David to be the next on the throne. That the love of Jonathan for David was that of a brother is also telling (2 Sam 1:26; also see 1 Sam 18:1; 20:17); indeed, later, Saul would call David his "son" (24:16): truly an adoption into the royal household had taken place! David the one chosen sovereignly by God, was providentially—and ironically!—chosen by human agents, too!

[49] Indeed, Goliath is actually named only in 17:4, 23 (also 2 Sam 21:19 and 1 Chr 20:5); but he is called the "Philistine" twenty-seven times in 1 Sam 17:1–18:5. Another interesting feature of 1 Samuel 17 is the high frequency of demonstrative pronouns, twenty-five of them in fifty-eight verses. Often "this" is used derisively, particularly when referring to Goliath as "*this* man," "*this* Philistine," or "*this* uncircumcised Philistine" (17:25, 26 [×2], 32, 33, 36, 37). See Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of Deuteronomic History, Part Two: 1 Samuel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989) 164, 172–73.

And so, David, full of confidence in his God, is disinclined to flee in panic as Saul and his army did (17:11, 24). Instead, the young man's entry into the front edge of the battle arena is accomplished with a breathless staccato of nine *wayyiqtol* verbs in two verses: he rose, he left, he took, he went, he came, he left, he ran, he entered, and he greeted (17:20, 22). This is in contrast to the actions of the terror-stricken men of Israel and their king.[50] While Saul and his company flee *from* Goliath (17:24), David runs *towards* him (17:48). The shepherd boy is showing plenty of moxie. And why not? His trust is in the true resource, God, and in God alone. Not only does David by his actions categorically dismiss humanly contrived paraphernalia (17:39), he explicitly asserts the absence of any value in them (17:45): he declares he has another weapon with which to face Goliath. And so all of these nuanced details point to David's ultimate weapon and resource: Yahweh, himself.

Even as David engages Goliath directly, the question of weapons is a big issue in their mutual face-to-face taunts. Right away, Goliath is indignant that David would fight him with *sticks* as if he were a dog (17:43): his first words to David reveal the ranking of weapons in his list of priorities (17:43). David reflects Goliath's statement and produces a deft countercoup as he describes his own "weapon" (17:45). Goliath's sword, spear, and scimitar (a list of three) would do him no good (17:45a), for David wielded a superior weapon: the name of Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of the armies of Israel, the one Goliath dared to defy (17:45b; a reciprocation with another list of three, defining David's "weapon").[51] A neat bipaneled arrangement sets out the contrast[52]:

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[50] One will notice that, later, each verse of 17:41–44 begins with a *wayyiqtol* + הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי ("the Philistine"), describing Goliath's rather ponderous, heavy-footed, and sluggish movements. Again, this is in dramatic contrast to David—agile, sure-footed, and nimble. In preparation for battle, the latter's operations are described with a rapid sequence of five *waw*-consecutive imperfects: David removed, took, chose, put, and approached (17:39b–40). See David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 461.

[51] The progression of "defiances" in the narrative is also instructive: Goliath was expressly *defying* the "armies of Israel" (17:10). The Israelite soldiers believed he was *defying* the nation of "Israel" (17:25). David initially accused the Philistine of *defying* "the armies of the living God" (17:26, 36). But his final conclusion was the most precise and accurate assessment of all: the giant was *defying* God himself— "Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of the armies of Israel" (17:45). In fact, Goliath is, himself, a "defiance" (or "reproach," חֶרְפָּה, the noun from the cognate verb חָרַף, "to defy"; 17:26). And the verb David employs to ask who would "remove" the defiance/reproach of Goliath from Israel (17:26) is the same one he uses to describe what he would do to Goliath—"remove" his head (17:46). Indeed, that verb is also used by the narrator to describe David "removing" Saul's armor off himself (17:39). Thus the freeing of Israel from this gigantic threat involved the avoidance of human devices, the taking away of the reproach, and the slaying of Goliath—all three being "removals" of one sort or another.

[52] Gregory T. K. Wong, "A Farewell to Arms: Goliath's Death as Rhetoric against Faith in Arms," *BBR* 23 (2013) 50–51.

	David's Reply to Goliath (17:45)	
	Panel 1 (17:45a)	Panel 2 (17:45b)
Pronoun	אַתָּה ("you")	וְאָנֹכִי ("but I")
Qal participle verb	בָּא ("come")	בָא ("come")
Preposition + suffix	אֵלַי ("to me")	אֵלֶיךָ ("to you")
Preposition	בְּ ("with")	בְּ ("with")
Object	Three weapons: *sword* *spear* *scimitar*	Three descriptors: *Yahweh Sabaoth* *God of Israel's armies* *The one Goliath defied*

Goliath's instruments are sword, spear, and scimitar. One would have expected David's staff, stones, and sling to be the perfect counterbalance for the giant's trio of implements. But they are not even mentioned. Rather, the real "weapon" belonging to David is emphasized by a balanced trio of descriptors for his God: he sets the giant and his accouterments against Yahweh and Yahweh alone. That was his "weapon."

The threat of the giant to feed David's corpse to "the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field" is horrifying (17:44; see Ps 79:2–3; Isa 34:2–3; Jer 7:33; 8:1–2). But neither curse nor threat, or even the absence of helmet, armor, greaves, scimitar, and spear (1 Sam 17:5–7) would deter the youth. For, unlike the god of the Philistine—never named by Goliath—this Israelite came "in the name of Yahweh Sabaoth [in heaven], the God of the armies of Israel [on earth]" (17:45). And the result would be the death of the giant. And not only Goliath's corpse, but the corpses of his fellow Philistines also would be carrion for birds and beasts (17:46a). And in keeping with his recognition that this was a theological battle, David asserts that the ultimate outcome of the combat will be that "all the earth" and "all this assembly" will know there is a God in Israel, Yahweh who delivers not by weapons wielded by mankind (17:47). For deity has no need of such implements. Instead Goliath would be given into the Israelites' hands by divine empowerment. David, it appears, does not need to teach Israel that Yahweh *delivers,* but only that he delivers *without sword or spear* (17:47). What God's people must abandon is the ideology of weaponry and power—a call for "deconstructing faith in arms."[53]

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[53] Ibid. 45. The employment of a stone by an otherwise unarmed and unprotected youth, to kill a formidable and fearsome giant, should not be misconstrued as violating the "farewell-to-arms" theology propounded in this narrative. In fact, the pungent irony of this coup actually emphasizes the negation of the ideology of weapons. On that note: the stone was likely the distal cause and the sword the proximal cause of death (17:50–51 MT). In other words, the wound inflicted by the sling-and-stone was fatal enough and the giant would have expired as a result. But David proceeded to administer the final coup with Goliath's own blade. On the other hand, the LXX's version—lacking the statement of 17:50 that David killed the giant *with the stone,* and without possessing a sword of his own—suggests, in 17:51, that, after all, a sword was indeed necessary to dispatch the giant, spoiling this motif of the rejection of weapon ideology. The "killing" in 17:50 (וַיְמִתֵהוּ, hiphil) may also be seen as a précis of the overall action (the

3. *David's experience: the deliverance of God.* In one sense, Saul was right: David *was* inexperienced … but with the paraphernalia of battle, which he proceeded to cast off promptly (17:38–40). One wonders if Saul had not heard—or, if he had, had he forgotten?—that David himself was a "*man* of war," not to mention "a *man* of form" (i.e. "a handsome man"; 16:18).[54] This Israelite youth, son of a Bethlehemite, youngest of the brood, was no little boy: he was a *man,* and a substantial one at that. Indeed, later in 18:5 MT, Saul sets David over the "*men* of war"— David was a man's man! Where did that experience of manhood come from? The answer is found in David's testimony to Saul about his shepherding past (17:34–37). "In essence, David takes on the role of the king in this battle, trading the literal flock of sheep of his human father for the figurative flock of sheep (the Israelites) of his heavenly father, and then slaying the one who threatens the flock." Of course, the metaphor of a shepherd was frequently extended to kings in the OT and in the ancient Near East. With that comparison, it almost seems as if David is snatching the royal prerogative from the hands of Saul, as he takes upon himself the responsibility of protecting the nation from its foes.[55]

The verbal parallels between David's experience of divine deliverance as a shepherd (in the past) and as a warrior (in the future) are striking. David testified that he had "gone out" (יָצָא) after the lion/bear (17:35); later, he would "go out" (also יָצָא) after Goliath. (17:55). David "smote" the lion and the bear (נָכָה; 17:35 [×2], 36); he promises to "smite" Goliath (17:46) and later actually does so (17:49, 50). The lion/bear "rose" against David (קוּם; 17:35), and Goliath "rose" to attack David (קוּם; 17:48). David "forcibly [seized]" the beast (from חָזַק; 17:35), and David "prevailed" over Goliath (also from חָזַק; 17:50). He "kills" the animal (מוּת; 17:35), and he "kills" Goliath (מוּת; 17:50, 51). Truly, then, "the uncircumcised Philistine" would "be like one of them [i.e. like the lion/bear]" (17:36).[56]

That comparison between animal and human foe is made abundantly clear in the chiastic structure of 17:36–37[57]:

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result of the distal cause of death—the stone), anticipating the subsequent specific details of the "killing" in 17:51 (וַיְמֹתְתֵהוּ, polel), the result of the proximal cause of death—the sword.

[54] The term "man of war" also described God himself (Exod 15:3). In 1 Sam 16:18, David is also described as a "*mighty one* [גִּבּוֹר]"; the same Hebrew word describes Goliath in 17:51. Of course, Goliath himself was labeled a "man of war" in 17:33.

[55] Hays, "Reconsidering the Height of Goliath" 712–13.

[56] Goliath later contributes an animal comparison of his own—that of a canine (17:43). One wonders at the subtle irony—perhaps Goliath was correcting David: "No, I am not a bear or a lion—I'm only a dog!" This issue of Goliath's identity is another curious motif. Three times the question is raised: twice by Goliath himself (17:8, 43; "Am I …?"), and once by David (17:26, "Who is this …?"). Perhaps it is not coincidental that we see Saul asking three questions about the identity of David, too (17:55, 56, 58).

[57] Modified from Anthony R. Ceresko, "A Rhetorical Analysis of David's 'Boast' (1 Samuel 17:34–37): Some Reflections on Method," *CBQ* 47 (1985) 66.

A	Lion, bear, uncircumcised Philistine (17:36ab)
B The living God (17:36c)	
C David (17:37a)	
B′ Yahweh (17:37b)	
A′ Lion, bear, Philistine (17:37c)	

Notice the equation of the beasts of prey in *A* and *A′,* animal and human. Though David began by asserting that he had "delivered" the lamb taken by the bear (17:35), he ends by acknowledging that it was *Yahweh* who had "delivered" him from the "hand" of the lion and the "hand" of the bear, and that it would be *Yahweh* who would, likewise, "deliver" him from the "hand" of the Philistine (17:37). One sees that the shepherd boy's focus is not at all on his own deliverance of his flock as much is it is on his God's deliverance of him from his foes. David praised Yahweh who delivered him from wild beasts—his prior experience; he was now trusting that God would deliver him from another of the same ilk—his future expectation. Later, to the Philistine (and to the listening armies of Israel) David declared that God would "deliver" Goliath into his (and their) "hands" (17:46, 47).[58] This was the crux of his experience—it was Yahweh who did the fighting through David, who gave his enemies into his hand, and who protected him. That David's confidence was well placed is powerfully demonstrated to the reader: in the chiastic structure shown above, while David (*C*) is literarily surrounded by enemies (*A, A′*), he is at the same time protected by a divine cocoon from them (*B, B′*)! David's confidence in his God, built by his experience of divine deliverance, is rightly directed.

The word "trust" is not employed anywhere in the narrative, but David's faith is amply evident in the story: "I come to you in the name of Yahweh Sabaoth, the God of the armies of Israel. … This day Yahweh will deliver you up into my hands" (17:45b–46a). Indeed, "the battle was Yahweh's," not David's, not Saul's, not Goliath's (17:47). And 17:50 goes on to describe how David "prevailed," i.e., by "smiting" and "killing" the Philistine. These three *wayyiqtols* (וַיְמִיתֵהוּ, וַיַּךְ, וַיֶּחֱזַק) precisely parallel the three *weqatals* in 17:35 where David is said to have "prevailed" (also translated "seized"), "smote," and "killed" lions and bears (וְהֶחֱזַקְתִּי, וְהִכִּתִיו, וַהֲמִיתִּיו). The treatment of the marauders of sheep was thus exactly paralleled by the treatment of the giant threatening Israel—all divine deliverances.[59] Thus all foes, animal and human, are eliminated by the one with the right kind of stature, re-sources, and experience: the stature of God's heart, the resources of God's name, and the experience of God's deliverance.

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[58] And, incidentally, God did deliver Goliath into David's hand—a hand that had no sword (17:51, "he killed him [Goliath], but there was no sword in David's hand").

[59] The verb נָכָה ("smite") shows up three times in David's conversation with the soldiers of Israel (17:25, 26, 27), and three times in the final confrontation between David and Goliath (17:46, 49, 50). In parallel, מות ("die") also occurs thrice in the conclusion of the battle (17:50, 51 [×2]).

IV. CONCLUSION

In sum, this is not a story of an underdog versus a top gun. Rather, in this intriguing story of David *v.* Goliath, we have a remarkable example of authors *doing* things with what they are *saying*. In, with, and through the narrative of 1 Samuel 17, a theological thrust is conveyed, that the outcome of all battles depends upon God, no matter what the stature, resources, or experience possessed by the warring entities. The nuances, and the delicate turns and negotiations of the story, all contribute to the artful depiction of this theological truth—what the author is *doing*. I submit that, as with any communication, spoken or scripted, catching this thrust of the biblical text is essential before one can move to valid application for life change.[60] Here in 1 Samuel 17, the theological thrust deals with an abiding trust in God, manifest in the abandonment of reliance upon stature, resources, and experience, as the Christian engages in battle for God.[61] God's people, therefore, must develop the *stature* of a heart for God, exercise faith to engage enemies in the name of God (the ultimate *resource*), and gain the *experience* of the deliverance of God. May God help us to develop the status, resources, and experience of those who trust in God and in God alone—after all, "the battle is Yahweh's" (17:47).

> "For he [David] called on the Lord, the Most High,
> and He gave him strength in his right hand
> to remove a mighty man of war,
> and to exalt the horn of His people."
> Sirach 47:5

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[60] Elsewhere, I have proposed a Christiconic interpretation of texts, a theological hermeneutic that sees the pericopes of Scripture pointing to facets of the image of Christ. Alignment with these aspects of Christlikeness (by the power of the Spirit), pericope by pericope and sermon by sermon, accomplishes the goal of bringing about the will of the Father. In this narrative as well, part of what it means to be Christlike is to have the stature of God's heart, the resources of God's name, and the experience of God's deliverance. After all, God's goal is to conform his children to the "image" of his Son, Christ (εἰκών; Rom 8:29). See my *Privilege the Text!* 238–68; and idem, *A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015).

[61] When it comes to preaching this text, a pastoral decision must be made about the context and nature of these "battles" and their relevance to modern listeners. The narrative of 1 Samuel 17 is about situations where God's name is at stake, where his reputation is on the line—at work, in academic environments, in ministry, in missions, …. When you think about it, this means *every* situation, big or small, *every* facet of the Christian's life, for does not everything affect God's glory? Does not everything fall into the realm of the sacred? Nevertheless, one must one must be careful not to trivialize the battles that deal with God's name, reputation, and glory.