



Illustrations created with Grok (AI) and reviewed by our team

David and Goliath

1 Samuel 17:1–58 · Harvest · Adults

David and Goliath has become a cliché for any underdog. Reading 1 Samuel 17 closely gives a richer story about fear, identity and where real strength comes from.

Context: the Philistines, a sea people settled on the southern coast, were pushing into Judah's foothills. The armies face off across the Valley of Elah. Single combat between champions was a known custom in the ancient world, a way to settle a fight without full battle. Goliath's equipment, a bronze helmet, scale armor, a heavy spear and a shield-bearer, is described in detail to make one point: by every human measure, he is unbeatable. Israel's own king, Saul, chosen partly because he was tall and impressive, hides with everyone else for forty days.

David is the youngest son, sent to deliver cheese and bread. He has been anointed in secret by Samuel (1 Sam 16), but nobody treats him like a king. His brother Eliab mocks him. Saul doubts him. David's confidence isn't bravado. He remembers that God protected him against lions and bears while he guarded the flock. Saul tries to dress him in royal armor; David can't move in it and takes it off. He goes with his staff, his sling and five stones, the tools of his ordinary work.

Goliath scorns him. David answers that Goliath trusts his weapons, while David trusts the Lord. He is counting on God, not his own strength, to win, and he wants the nations to see the God of Israel at work. The stone strikes Goliath's forehead and he falls. David, who brought no sword, uses the giant's own to kill and behead him, a common way for ancient armies to prove a champion was dead. The Philistines flee.

A historical note: the standard Hebrew text makes Goliath about nine and a half feet tall, while the Greek Septuagint and a Dead Sea Scroll make him about six and a half. Elsewhere, 2 Samuel 21:19 credits a warrior named Elhanan with killing Goliath of Gath, and 1 Chronicles 20:5 says Elhanan killed Goliath's brother. The Church reads Scripture with attention to such details of transmission and literary form (CCC 110).

The Church's reading: David is the shepherd-king devoted to God and a model of trusting prayer (CCC 2579). Christ is the Son of David promised to Israel (CCC 439), and he wins the decisive victory over sin and death by trust and self-gift, not force.

For adult life:

Every adult has giants: a diagnosis, a failing marriage, a career collapse, a habit that won't let go. David's first move was to remember what God had already done.

Notice the armor. Saul's equipment was impressive and useless to David. Many of us try to live someone else's vocation or career. God usually works through the gifts and history he has actually given us.

And notice Eliab. Sometimes the strongest discouragement comes from family. David stayed courteous and kept his eyes on God.

A real-life step: write down three times God has carried you, your lions and bears, and read them before facing your giant this week. Ask the intercession of a saint who faced fear with trust, such as St. Joan of Arc.

Church teaching note

Church teaching: David as model of prayer and the king devoted to God (CCC 2579); Christ the Son of David (CCC 439); reading Scripture with attention to literary forms and transmission (CCC 110; Dei Verbum 12). Goliath's height (Masoretic text vs Septuagint/4QSam(a)) and 2 Sam 21:19 / 1 Chr 20:5 are textual-historical context, not Church teaching.

Talk about it

1. What giant are you facing right now, and what lions and bears from your past can you remember?
2. Whose armor have you been trying to wear instead of your own gifts?
3. How do you respond when people close to you discourage you?
4. Catholic connection: read CCC 2579. What makes David a model of trust in prayer?

Key verse: 1 Sam 17:47. Look it up in your Bible.