

Israel's True King

By Brad Allison on 4/9/2006

Scripture Reference *1 Samuel 17*

In our survey of the Bible, we are only going to be able to have one sermon on the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. It is the burden of these two books to show that David is the true king of Israel. Even the early major figures of Samuel and Saul are described in relationship to David. Samuel is the true prophet who anoints the true king. Saul shows what a false king is and does. In this well-known passage of the battle between David and Goliath, the first half of the chapter serves to show that David, and not Saul, is Israel's true champion, her real king. Goliath came forth to challenge an Israelite champion to come and do battle with him, and Saul was completely silent and powerless. He was Israel's "giant", "from his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people" (9:2). Yet this supposed champion of Israel, when he heard the taunts of Goliath, was "dismayed and greatly afraid" (v. 11). It was only when Israel's true king came along that this enemy could be defeated.

This passage is a challenge for American readers, simply because America hasn't had a king since 1776, when we renounced the rule of King George III of Britain. American democracy believes that every individual voter is a little king to whom our political leaders are to be held accountable. But that is not at all the worldview of the Bible. The king was the glory of the entire nation. If he was victorious in battle, the entire nation was victorious. If he was just in his reign, the entire nation benefited. If he was prosperous, everyone shared in that prosperity. In the biblical worldview, much of life depended on having the right king. So how do we approach a passage like this one, which is all about having the right king, in a world without kings? We have to broaden our understanding of a king to refer to anything or anyone to whom we give our ultimate allegiance. For example, a Junior High student wants to become part of the popular group at her school. It is expected of the members of this group that they not associate at school with those who are not members of this group. Will our Junior High student give allegiance to the values and commands of this group? Who will be her king? Or take the example of the young man who wants to please his boss and succeed in his work. But his boss one day asks him to do something unethical. To whom will he give his ultimate allegiance? Who will be his king? What about the young college student who gets in with a group who think of themselves as intellectuals. They adopt a cynical attitude toward everyone else, and make it clear that if you are to be one of them, you have to adopt the same attitude. Will you do it? If so, the expectations of this group have become your king. There is far more at stake in this matter of a king than you may know. There is a real sense in which everything in your life depends on the one to whom you give ultimate allegiance. That was certainly the case in our chapter. Everything depended on whether you were behind David or Goliath. So let's look at the following three truths about Israel's true king, and learn about our true King as well.

I. Life without a True King

The narrator is clear in showing us that until David shows up, Israel is without a true king. In Saul, they had someone who was supposed to be their king, but he was no true king. A king is supposed to defend his people from their enemies, and Saul is completely helpless before Israel's enemies. For forty days, Goliath comes out with his defiant challenge for Israel to produce a champion, and for forty days Saul's fear keeps him silent. David's first major speech before Saul makes a point that is easy to miss. Did you notice that David speaks first? That is significant, though easily lost on American readers who are unfamiliar with the protocol for meeting with royalty. If you ever have the chance to meet with a king, remember that the proper thing to do is to let the king speak first. But notice who speaks first in this conversation

between David and Saul. It is David, who says, “Let no man’s heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine” (v. 32). Until David shows up, Israel lacks a true king.

Notice what life is like without a true king. Israel is melting in fear before Goliath. It is interesting to read the description of Goliath and his speech. Like any good storyteller, the author doesn’t just tell us that Goliath was fierce or scary. Rather, he describes him in such a way that the reader can feel the fear. Though there is some doubt as to the accurate reading of his height, it’s clear that he is a very tall man. Our text says that he was six cubits and a span, which translates to over 9 feet tall. His weaponry was intimidating, including a coat of mail weighing 125 pounds, a spear with a 15 pound head and a shaft the size of a weaver’s beam, as well as armor covering his legs and a helmet on his head. He was like a walking tank. It was not just his appearance that was so frightening, but his words as well. His speech wasn’t just for the purpose of imparting information about the challenge; it was designed to intimidate. He said, “Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? (v. 8). He was attacking them at the core of their identity, even questioning their masculinity. He was mocking them, and no answer was given. Their only response was to be “dismayed and greatly afraid” (v. 11).

Life without a true king is filled with discouragement and fear. Before we go any further, I need to tell you that this text is not just about David as the true king. As we’re going to see, it points forward to David’s greater Son, Jesus. He is our ultimate true King. What is life like without that king? It is full of great fear and discouragement. It is not just living with some fears in life, it is the kind of fear that immobilizes us. Do you know that kind of fear?

Illustration: I read in the latest issue of *Christianity Today* the story about a man named Dennis Belkofer. He had battled with homosexual tendencies in his youth. After graduating from college, he thought God was calling him into full-time ministry working with college students. He was filling out the application when he got to the last question, which asked, “Have you ever had homosexual tendencies? If so, please explain.” He was too fearful to answer honestly, and ended up tearing up the application and throwing it away. Homosexuality was his Goliath, producing in him such oversized fears that he was paralyzed.

Haven’t we all experienced a paralyzing fear like that? It may be a fear of talking to someone about that hard subject that needs to be addressed. Or it may be a fear of failure in a relationship or in a job. What may not be so clear to you is the truth of this passage. Those fears result from trying to live life without the true King, without Jesus. You were not meant to fight Goliath. That’s the King’s job.

II. The Heart of the True King

A person’s heart is revealed by his words. David gives three speeches in these verses, and all three clearly reveal his heart for God. His first speech was a conversation he had with some of the Israelite soldiers around him after he first heard Goliath’s mocking challenge. David asked, “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?” (v. 26). His second speech, spoken to Saul, strikes the same theme. “Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God” (v. 36). And finally, he says to Goliath, “I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied” (v. 45). He goes on to add that he will certainly strike down Goliath “that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel” (v. 46).

Do you see the theme evident in all those speeches? David seems to be the only one concerned for God and his glory. He is the first one who calls on the name of God and the only one who sees Goliath's challenge as a defiance of God. David's heart is God-centered, and so his concern is first of all for the glory of God. He doesn't think like this: "Somebody needs to defeat Goliath because if the Philistines come and take our land it will make things difficult for me, my family and my fellow Israelites. But he sure is a big one. I hope someone will step up and defeat him so my brothers and I can go home." That would be a self-centered reaction in that every part of this event is related to its effect upon David's self. But that was not his reaction. He had a radically theological response to this, seeing everything from the perspective of its relationship to God.

Let me say this differently. David had a grid through which everything entering his life passed, and his grid was radically God-centered. When I was a child, I remember seeing TV commercials for a kitchen product called the "Vegematic." Our family ended up ordering one. It had a number of different grids with sharp blades. One of them was a square grid pattern that would produce French fries when the potatoes were passed through the grid. Turn it another way, and it would produce sliced fruit, and still other patterns when the grid was changed. David's grid was God-centered instead of self-centered, so that everything came out relating to God. For David, God was this weighty presence dominating everything in his life. A couple of details of this story bring out this truth more significantly. The text reports that David left all the things he had brought from home with the keeper of the baggage. I don't know if David was task-oriented or people-oriented, but if he were task-oriented, it would be a difficult thing to leave so many valuables with someone else. Task-oriented people are normally very conscientious and very careful with their things. But David's heart for God's glory easily overcame any concern for his things. Or he may have been people-oriented. If so, one of the things very difficult for people-oriented people is to incur the disapproval of others. That's exactly what happened to David when his brother interpreted his questioning about Goliath as the annoying inquiries of a bothersome little brother. Eliab said to him, "Why have you come down? With whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness?" (v. 28). For a task-oriented person not to care about tasks and a people-oriented person not to care about people's opinions of them takes a powerful motivation. David's heart was motivated by his desire for God's glory.

Sometimes this passage is read simply as a way to have courage like David. It is not wrong to read it like that, unless it is read only like that. David was a man of courage, and his courage came from this God-centered grid in his life. The opposite is also true. A lack of courage is the result of a self-centered grid.

Illustration: There's an old Groucho Marx movie where Groucho is talking to a friend and telling his friend all about himself. He finally says, "That's enough about me. Let's talk some about you. Tell me, what do you think about me?" Some have a self-centered grid where everything comes out in its relationship to me. In the gym where I work out, there are mirrors on most of the walls. The purpose of the mirrors is to allow you to see your form in the exercise you're doing so that you can do it with the proper form. Though I can't read people's minds, I can't help but think that there are some there who use the mirrors for another purpose. They are used to admire one's physique if it is good, or to chastise oneself into greater activity if the physique is not so good. Do you live your life as if there are mirrors everywhere? Are you always asking, "How am I looking to others in doing this?" David's focus was just the opposite, leading him always to ask, "How is God looking in this situation?" We're going to apply this in a little while, but before doing so I want to inform you that you will never be free from fear until you learn to center your life on God. You will never have courage until you learn to pass everything through a theological grid instead of

the grid of self.

III. The Victory of the True King

David's victory was unexpected and influential. Imagine what both the Israelites and the Philistines must have thought when they saw David approaching this walking tank of Goliath with only a slingshot and five stones. The early part of the chapter makes it clear that David wasn't even old enough to be a soldier. He had no training or experience in this. Israel must have felt like defeat was certain, and the Philistines must have felt that victory was assured. But it didn't turn out the way they all thought it would go. The stone from David's slingshot found one of the only unprotected parts of the giant, where his helmet opened to allow him to see. It came with enough force to knock him out. Then David went to him, removed his sword, ran him through with it, and then, to end all doubt, decapitated the Philistine champion.

The same is true of Israel's ultimate king, Jesus. Defeat looked even more certain for him, particularly as he was hanging on a cross. All the forces of evil were gloating over their defeat of him, mocking him and celebrating their certain victory. But it didn't turn out as they anticipated. The resurrection brought victory where there had been certain defeat. This victory turned out to be the defeat of God's enemies.

David's victory, again like the victory of our ultimate King, Jesus, was also influential. David's victory was Israel's victory, leading to the routing of the Philistines. Though they did nothing to secure the victory, they shared completely in its benefits, driving out their enemies and even taking vast amounts of plunder from them. It is the same with King Jesus. We did nothing to secure his victory over sin and death, but we share in its benefits. In his victory, we have forgiveness of sins, eternal life, a cleansed conscience and a reason to live.

CONCLUSION:

Let me close with an application. Who's your king and champion? In David's day, everything depended on the answer given to that. If Goliath was your champion, everything was lost that day. If David was your champion, everything was gained. So it is with Jesus. If he's your king, everything is gained. Is Jesus your king? You understand that to have Jesus as your king means that there is no room for another king. He will brook no rivals. That means you have to give up being your own king if Jesus is to be king. It feels like death to do so, but it is actually the beginning of life. So the application is to surrender yourself gladly to Jesus. He is the true King.

If Jesus is your king, let me remind you that you are to live for him. There is a story in 1 Chronicles 11 of David's mighty men. One particular group of these men once heard David long for water from the well in Bethlehem. The only problem was that Bethlehem at that particular time was behind enemy lines. Though David never ordered them to do so, they risked their lives in order to fight and gain access to that well just so they could satisfy an idle wish of their king. Their lives were dominated by the desires of their king. To be a Christian means that our King has gained us the victory over sin and death, and that we live for that King in every part of our lives. We worship him today on Palm Sunday as our humble King, the one who rides into Jerusalem to secure our salvation by his death and resurrection. Let's worship him now.