

1Samuel 17:1-10;39-51 Avoiding the Goliath Mentality

The Philistines undoubtedly would have viewed Goliath as their weapon of mass destruction. His size is given to us in v. 4 – *whose height was six cubits and a span*. A cubit was the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger – that would make about 18 inches – a foot and a half. A span was the distance from the thumb to the little finger when a man's hand was stretched out. This would be about half a cubit or 9 inches.

Based on these calculations we would say that Goliath stood about 9ft. 9 inches tall – just short of 10 feet. You can picture his height using a modern day analogy. You know how tall some basketball players are in the NBA. Well the basket itself stands at 10ft. If you can picture someone who nearly would bump his head on the rim you've got an idea of how tall Goliath was.

But not only did he stand this tall – but as the text indicates he was fully armored. He wore a helmet of brass. He was armed with a coat of mail. He had greaves of brass upon his legs. And as if this wasn't enough there was assigned to him a man who bore a shield.

It was as if he could get to you but you couldn't get to him. He undoubtedly had a long reach and could do great damage with his spear which was as thick as a weaver's beam. It's no wonder that every time he appeared the children of Israel scattered. Who could deal with such a warrior? Who could take on one so large, and so well equipped, and so experienced? The presence of this man certainly gave the Philistines the confidence to practice bragging rights. And it is these bragging rights that I refer to when I make reference to *The Goliath mentality*. It was this mentality that convinced the Philistines that they were invincible. They were bigger; they were stronger; they perhaps had a numerical advantage; but most importantly – they had a 10 ft. fully armored giant.

And so they taunted – Goliath in particular, taunted the children of Israel and challenged them to send out one who could do battle against their champion. Unknown to Goliath or the Philistines there was One mightier than Goliath who oversaw the whole thing. It was God Himself who looked down from above and I think it's safe to say that God didn't feel too threatened by this 10ft tall armor-bearing giant.

And the Lord saw fit to demonstrate on this occasion that the battle did belong to Him. *All the earth will know that there is a God in Israel* – David announced. How often is that the reason the Lord gives the victory – so that all those on hand and all those who would read the account in succeeding generations would know that there was a God in Israel. This as the reason the Lord dealt with the Egyptians the way He did in the book of Exodus. This is reason that the Lord sent fire from heaven when the prophets of Baal were gathered against Elijah.

And here now, in this instance we have the account of the Lord who saw fit to grant victory to His servant David who stood in stark contrast to this fortified giant in every conceivable way. The reason again for this victory was for that stated purpose that they would know that there is a God in Israel.

When I contemplate this familiar story in the light of what we face as a nation it stirs in my heart a dread of the Goliath mentality – that mentality that says our nation is mightier than any nation in the world – our nation is more prosperous than any nation in the world. And especially do I tremble when the notion is suggested that our nation is more righteous than any nation in the world.

It would be easy in our pride and self-righteousness to say – surely God will favor us in anything we venture to do. So we never need fear any consequences to our military actions or our economic policies. The mindset seems to be the same mindset that justified the government bailing out General Motors from years of careless management policy and spending – *They're too big to fail*. So is the notion commonly held with regard to our government – we're too big to fail. You begin to see what I mean by the Goliath mentality?

On the other hand – the Lord has been pleased at times to demonstrate to a people the truth that they've forsaken Him. And He does this by giving them over to their godless enemies. In an earlier part of this book – back in chp. 4 we have the account of another battle between the Philistines and the Israelites. The Israelites are smitten – 4,000 men are slain. And so they adopt the strategy of bringing into their midst the ark of the covenant. This time it's the Israelites that are governed by the Goliath mentality. The presence of the ark in their midst led them to think that they were invincible and could not be defeated.

And when the ark of the covenant is brought into the camp, Israel shouts with a great shout. And the Philistines learn what has happened – and for a moment they're intimidated but when the battle actually breaks out the Israelites are defeated again and the ark of the covenant is captured by the Philistines.

What had happened? Israel thought they were invincible. They made all the associations between victory and the ark of the covenant. But they gave no thought to their current spiritual condition. They took no thought for the sins that permeated the priesthood through the immorality of Hophni and Phinehas. And so at the time they thought the victory was assuredly theirs they were given to defeat.

I'm reminded also of another instance in the history of Israel where you could say that something very near to the Goliath mentality grips the heart of a prophet. This incident occurred much later in Israel's history. You find the prophet Habakkuk in the first chapter of the book that bears his name complaining to God about the lawlessness in the land – *Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance?* – he asks in 1:3 *for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and*

contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

And in the verses that follow God makes known to the prophet that He agrees with the prophet. So far so good until God announces what He's going to do. He announces that He is going to raise up the Chaldeans – *a bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves* (1:6,7)

This sets the prophet back and demonstrates that as bad as he thought Israel was he still viewed them as more righteous than the surrounding nations. The Goliath mentality was held by the prophet in terms of self righteousness. And so Habakkuk wants to know – How can this be? Why would the Lord use a nation that is altogether ungodly and wicked to march through the nation of Israel and destroy it? The prophet has been complaining about the wickedness of his own nation – but he doesn't consider his nation to be anywhere near as wicked as the Chaldeans. And yet they would be the tool of God's judgment.

And the solution to the seeming dilemma is to measure a nation's wickedness against the light it has received. The Chaldeans may be a more wicked nation – but they were also a more darkened nation. They didn't have prophets preaching to them. They didn't have the commandments of God given to them. They didn't have a heritage of God's power and provision and protection. The Israelites did. But such was the extent to which they had forsaken their heritage that it pleased God to deliver them to the hands of a people that were worse than they. Where do you suppose our nation stands with God based not on the comparison you might make with other nations but based, rather, on the light that our nation has received?

The Goliath mentality, then, is the mentality that says we're bigger, we're more powerful, we're more righteous and therefore we'll prevail. Our enemies are wicked. They don't follow the true and living God; Therefore they cannot prevail. Old Testament history reveals the truth of Proverbs 16:18 *Pride [goeth] before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*

The need we face, then, as a nation, is to avoid the Goliath mentality. And this we can do by humbling ourselves and confessing our sins as a nation before God and pleading with Him for mercy. This is one of the reasons we meet on Wednesday nights. When a nation is in dire straights the people of God are summoned together to call upon God. We find a vivid description of this calling together in one of the minor prophets.

Listen to the words of Joel 2:15 – 17 *Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD,*

weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?

Do you see how prayer is called for – and how corporate prayer is called for and how such praying must be assigned a place of very high priority? Not even something as important as the joining together of husband and wife should take precedence to the assembled time of prayer. *Let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet* we read in Joel 2:16. The thought is plainly – postpone the wedding! The nation is about to be destroyed! It's time to sanctify a fast and call a solemn assembly. It's time for the people to gather and seek the Lord for mercy.

That kind of spirit holds out hope for a nation. Indeed in the very next verse in Joel 2 we read in vv. 18, 19 *Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people. Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen.*

And do you see how such praying and humbling of ourselves stands in contrast to the Goliath mentality? A people that see the need for revival are a people that see something of their own sin. And they see something of the greatness of our God and our Savior. They acknowledge that the outcome of the battle is in the Lord's hands. And it matters not to God how well equipped or ill equipped one army may be against another.

God could bring down the giant through a shepherd boy with a sling and a stone. We would do well to pray therefore that the Lord would grant to our nation a sense of humility and a spirit of repentance from our own sins. We may think we can build strong cases against nations around us that warrant the removal of men we perceive to be petty tyrants and dictators. But on the other hand – I wonder how many of these nations allow the murder of unborn babies or sanction sodomy? We know they don't countenance the same kind of lewd and immoral entertainment that we bask in here in America.

These are days, therefore, that we do well to heed the familiar text we know from 2Chron. 7:14 *If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*