

# Goliath

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## The Vulnerability of Irreligion (17:1-54)

One of the greatest heroes of Greek mythology is Achilles. He played a major role in the Trojan War when Greece defeated Troy. Homer described him in *The Iliad*. Soon after his birth his mother dipped him in the River Styx to protect his body from harm. But in holding him by his heel the water did not touch that part of his body, and consequently he had one vulnerable spot. During the Trojan War, Achilles was struck in the heel with a poisoned arrow shot by his foe Paris. Achilles died of that wound.

This picture of Achilles and his seeming invincibility is an apt illustration of irreligion—that which stands opposed to God, the Bible, the church, and all that is Christian. The taunts and jeers of irreligion seem invincible, but in reality they harbor a tragic vulnerability.

In 1 Samuel 17, there is an excellent illustration of the vulnerability of irreligion. We are introduced to the giant from Gath, Goliath. He personified every aspect of irreligion. He was vain, godless, inhumane, and self-serving. In this chapter, an amazing lesson surfaces regarding irreligion.

The defeat of the Philistines at Michmash began a series of conflicts that lasted throughout Saul's reign (14:52). In 1 Samuel 17, one of the more important battles fought during this war was taking place. Israel was facing the Philistines in the Valley of Elah. The natural setting made this battle unique. The valley was

about one mile wide. In its middle, erosion had worn away a ravine twelve feet deep and twenty feet wide. A small brook ran through the bottom of the ravine in the summer, and it was filled with rounded, water-worn pebbles. The extraordinary formation of the valley made it impossible for either army to charge the other, for the charging army would be slaughtered as they climbed the opposite banks of the ravine. The only answer was a one-on-one confrontation. For forty days the two armies would gather on their side of the ravine, hear the challenge from Goliath, and retire. Twice each day this took place (17:16).

Provisions for the troops were supplied from each soldier's home, and this is where young David entered the scene. David was probably eighteen years old, too young for military service (Numbers 1:3). He was called a "young man" (17:58) which refers to a fully grown youth at the age of marriage. He was sent by Jesse with food and to bring news home concerning his three brothers.

The youthful eagerness of David brought him to the Israeli camp early (17:20), and he heard the giant's first challenge of the day. He was struck at the lack of response to Goliath's challenge. Seeing that no one was answering Goliath, David took steps on the forty-first day of the stalemated war to answer the giant from Gath. On that fateful day young David won a

giant victory for God as he found and exploited the vulnerability of irreligion!

### **THE HOLLOW BOAST OF IRRELIGION**

For forty days Goliath had appeared invincible (17:4ff.). It seemed unanimous on both sides of the ravine that Goliath was the undisputed “champion” (17:4, 23). Literally, this title referred to the one who was going to win the fight. The presence of Goliath was impressive, and evidently that was what led to Israel’s fear. The giant was over nine feet tall; he towered over the average Israeli. He was a survivor of the infamous Anak (Numbers 13:28).

Besides his physical physique, Goliath’s armor was an awesome sight. He had a coat made of brass plates, one lying on another like scales. It alone weighed over two hundred pounds. His lower legs were covered with greaves of brass. He carried on his back a javelin of bronze. His spear was immense, having a head of iron that weighed twenty-five pounds. He wore a helmet of brass, and a large shield was carried before him.

In addition to the physical sight Goliath stirred Israeli fears with his arrogance (17:10). At his words all Israel trembled. This included her king who stood head and shoulders above the rest. Terror struck Israeli hearts every time Goliath uttered his challenge.

This hollow boasting of Goliath is similar to modern skeptics facing God’s saints today. The infamous Voltaire boasted that he would live to see the day when the Bible would only be found in museums. After his death Voltaire’s printing press published Bibles, and his house stored them until delivery! On October 20, 1980, in *Time* magazine, Carl Sagan challenged creationists to defend their belief in God.<sup>1</sup> When confronted with an acceptance of the challenge, Sagan never responded!<sup>2</sup> Sagan and others like him decry the existence of God, but like the words of Goliath, such boasts are quite hollow!

Let modern believers pay attention. There is no substance to the boasts of irreligion (cf. 2 Peter 2:12, 17-19). Some argue that the Scripture has fantastic problems, but these boasts are never supported with factual evidence! The challenge of atheism, agnosticism, and skepticism often appear overwhelming, but like Goliath, irreligion is filled with hollow boasts! (17:49, 50).

### **THE OBVIOUS VULNERABILITY OF IRRELIGION**

As indestructible as Goliath appeared, he had an Achilles’ heel that proved fatal. As soon as Saul agreed for David to meet Goliath, he tried to give the youth his armor (17:38). The armor is literally a “war dress,” a protective coat worn by soldiers. But David preferred the “shepherd’s dress” (17:40). No sword was in his hand; no armor was worn; no weapon was carried. All he had was the simple sling. It was David’s faith in God that was *his* greatest weapon!

The two armies had already retreated to their normal stations. Resting there they saw young David descend the slopes of the ravine. In a calm and quiet manner, he stopped at the stream and selected five smooth stones. Then, to the amazement of the Philistines, David climbed the ravine and stood on the Philistine side! Apparently, Goliath had been sitting down, and when he realized David was answering his challenge, he got up walking toward David with threats and cursing. David’s reply showed no fear, only faith. One stone was selected, and with God’s help the giant fell and was beheaded!

Although centuries separate modern man and the giant from Gath, the same elements unite to destroy the hollowness of irreligion. The vulnerability of Goliath and irreligion is evident in these points: a rejection and contempt for God (17:43, 45); trust in self for protection (17:10, 45; Jeremiah 10:23); failure to see the danger of the simple things (i.e., a sling, 17:43; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:27); pride and arrogance (17:44; Proverbs 16:18).

### **THE ULTIMATE DESTINY OF IRRELIGION**

Believers will continue to be confronted with the challenge of irreligion. It may come from teachers, close friends, work associates, or even family members. Believers will face ridicule and questioning. Satan will never relent in his attacks (2 Corinthians 4:8, 9; 10:3-5). Far too many saints are like Saul and the people of Israel—when they face irreligion they cower (17:24). Far too few saints are like David, who refused timidity (17:36, 48). Victory is certain if believers face the irreligious foe with a firm faith! (17:45-51; James 4:7).

To win the confrontation with irreligion in our lives, we must realize the following:

First, irreligion wants its challenges to appear overwhelming, and those challenges are designed to stir fear in our hearts (1 Timothy 1:7, 8; Ezekiel 2:6; 3:9; 1 Corinthians 16:13; Philippians 1:27, 28).

Second, we must stand up for God even if we have to stand alone! David refused to stand with the silent majority (17:32). As long as God was with him, David was perfectly willing to bear the burden of the battle (17:37; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:58).

Third, the only way to overcome the taunts and arrogance of irreligion is to place our trust in God (17:37, 47; cf. Psalm 27:1; 35:1-7; Isaiah 65:24; 2 Samuel 22:1ff.; Psalm 18:29-35).

Fourth, when irreligion is confronted with steadfast *and* consistent faith, it will turn and run! (17:51; Matthew 4:11). Saul could not face irreligion because he had severed all ties with God through disobedience. All Saul could do was offer promises to the one who killed Goliath (17:25). But let us, as David, have faith in God and a life that is pure, and we will vanquish irreligion! The weakest child of God who has faith in his heavenly Father is strong enough to overcome the world! (John 16:33).

## CONCLUSION

Is it not amazing how typical Goliath is of so many people in our time? He is the epitome of those who are irreligious. His failure to win that battle signals that Christ's way is the only way! Let us follow David's faith and overcome irreligion as well.

Colonel Ethan Allen, leader of the Green Mountain Boys, was a notorious infidel. His wife was a pious woman and taught their daughter the gospel. The daughter became ill, and her father was sent to hear her dying words: "Father, I'm about to die. Shall I believe the principles which you have taught or which Mommy has taught?" After waiting a moment to gain control of his emotions, he answered, "Believe what your mother has taught you." The vulnerability of irreligion is clear. How can anyone refuse obedience to the gospel's commands?

—John Kachelman

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Frederic Golden, "The Cosmic Explainer," *Time*, 20 October 1980, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas B. Warren, "Will Prof. Carl Sagan Face Up to an Acceptance of His 'Open Challenge' to Biblical Creationists?" *Spiritual Sword*, October, 1981, pp. 28-31.

## *The Cause for Success*

Dr. Marie Ray, a psychiatrist, made a wide study of the relation between handicaps and achievements. Going down the list of notable men and women, she reached this conclusion: Most of the shining lights of history were made so by their struggles with either some disability or some responsibility that seemed beyond their powers. She put down this definite rule as the result of her research: "No one succeeds without a handicap. No one succeeds in spite of a handicap. When anyone succeeds, it is because of a handicap."

## *Our Attitude Makes the Difference*

Two men looked out of prison bars.  
The one saw mud—the other, stars.  
Same facts—different attitudes.

J. Wallace Hamilton,  
*Where Now Is Thy God?*

## *"It Didn't Touch Me"*

One day a fire broke out in Thomas Edison's laboratory, burned it down completely and destroyed many valuable and unfinished experiments. Later, walking through the water-drenched wreckage, he found a little package of papers tied tightly together with a string. The package was water-soaked and fire-scarred, but some freak of chance had left it intact. Mr. Edison opened it, and at the center of the package was a photograph—a picture of himself, scorched around the edges but still undamaged. He looked at it for a moment, then picked up a piece of charcoal from the floor and wrote across the face of the picture: "It didn't touch me."

When all seems to have crumbled around us, never give up.

## *There's Never a Time to Quit*

There's a time to part and a time to meet,  
There's a time to sleep and a time to eat.  
There's a time to work and a time to play,  
There's a time to sing, and a time to pray.  
There's a time that's glad, a time that's blue,  
There's a time to plan and a time to do.  
There's a time to grin and show your grit,  
But, there never was a time to QUIT!