

DAVID AND GOLIATH

I Samuel 17

The Word gives us many events in the history of the three great kings, but in our course we have only four lessons on each of the three. We need therefore to keep in mind their relative significance rather than the various events of their reigns. They represent three stages in our regeneration as adults, the rule of truth on three different planes. Saul is the truth seen and applied according to external appearances. This is a hasty, superficial, and imperfect judgment. Saul's failure came from his desire to get things done in a hurry and his unwillingness to obey the Lord's commands when his own judgment did not coincide. David represents the same truth but seen in its deeper application to motives and thoughts, with the recognition of our own inherent weakness and need of the Lord's guidance and help. Solomon represents the same truth after it has been obeyed until it has come to be written on our hearts. Keeping this outline in mind will enable the teacher—even with little children—to put the emphasis in each story where it belongs. This is especially necessary in our story for today, in which there are so many interesting details for the children that the point of the story is apt to be lost sight of.

Doctrinal Points

True reasoning must be based on spiritual principles.

Our self-esteem is a "giant" which stands in our way spiritually.

Notes for Parents

Children always love the story of David and Goliath. Boys love to imagine themselves to be David. This is good, if only we can lead them to realize that David overcame Goliath not by his own physical strength or by the use of weapons like Goliath's, but

because he trusted in the Lord's help and chose the weapons with which the Lord provided him.

We ourselves are so familiar with this story as one to tell to our children that sometimes we forget that it was not written just for children. Our own souls are the battleground on which the forces of the Lord and the forces of evil are drawn up against each other. The Philistines are in us, the temptation to be satisfied with ourselves and with what we know without trying to learn and do better all the time, the temptation to overestimate our own ability and to underestimate the importance of obedience to the Lord. The giant Goliath is our self-esteem, and his heavy weapons and armor are all the arguments we use to defend what we like to do. But the Lord sees to it that David is in us also, the shepherd boy who gained his wisdom and strength by defending his father's sheep, and who knew that if he obeyed the Lord, the Lord would give him victory. We all have some knowledge of the Lord and of His commandments, which we learned in childhood, and we all have some experience of the strength which comes from doing right.

And we all have David's weapons, the five smooth stones from the brook and the sling with which to use them. The brook is the Word of God and the stones are the simple statements in it which we have learned to believe because we have tested their truth. The sling is the power which the Lord has given each one of us to see how these truths apply to life and how we should direct them against our evils.

We have the Lord's own example to help us in understanding this story. When the Lord was tempted by the devil in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11), He did not argue with the devil. He used three quotations from the Word, three "smooth stones from the brook," and with each one He hit the particular temptation squarely "in the forehead." No matter how big and unconquerable our own special faults seem, every one of us can overcome them just as David overcame Goliath, if we have trust in the Lord instead of in self, knowledge of what the Lord teaches us in His Word, and courage to use that knowledge.

Primary

The story is an easy one to tell. Be sure to tell the children that David was a shepherd and that his home was in Bethlehem, and to connect this with the Christmas story. Point out that Goliath was self-confident because of his size and equipment, but David conquered because he trusted in the Lord.

Who was the first king of Israel?

Why did the people like him?

Who anointed Saul to be king?

What was wrong with Saul?

What did Samuel tell Saul?

The Lord told Samuel to anoint a new king.

This man was David. He lived in Bethlehem. Do you know who else long afterward was born in Bethlehem? It was the Lord Jesus. Do you remember how the angels gave the news of the Lord's birth to the shepherds at Bethlehem? David was a shepherd, too. He was only a young boy when Saul anointed him, and it was to be many years before he actually became king.

The Philistines were still fighting the Israelites. They had with them a great giant named Goliath. He came out every day and offered to fight one of the Israelites, and the Philistines said that if anyone could kill Goliath, they would all serve the Israelites. But for a long time no one dared fight him.

Three of David's older brothers were in the army, and one day his father sent him to see how they were getting along and to take them some food from home. David saw Goliath come out and dare any Israelite to fight him. So David offered to go out against him. He was not afraid like the others because he trusted in the Lord. The Lord had already helped him to kill a lion and a bear which had been stealing some of his father's sheep, and he knew the Lord always helped those whose intentions are good.

What did Saul offer David to fight with?

Why could he not use Saul's armor?

What weapons did he have?

Did David or Goliath attack first?

How did David overcome Goliath?

With whose sword did he cut off Goliath's head?

Junior

The Juniors needed the lesson about Saul's impatience and self-confidence. Point out that Goliath was self-confident, too. They will easily understand the correspondence of Goliath and of the smooth stones from the brook, and will be interested in the origin of the giants. Have them locate the places on a map, and look up all the Bible references. This class especially might easily be absorbed in the fascinating details of the story; so its broad connections and application to their own lives need to be emphasized.

The man to be king after Saul was to be a very different kind of person; Samuel said, "The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart." The new king was to be David. He was to prove himself a great warrior also, but he had other qualities which Saul did not have.

David's home was at Bethlehem. Long afterward someone else was to be born in Bethlehem.

Who was it?

Joseph and Mary were both descendants of David and that was why they went to Bethlehem to be enrolled for the Roman taxation. The Lord was also called "the son of David." When Samuel went to find David to anoint him, David was keeping his father's sheep. You remember that it was the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks near Bethlehem who first received the news that the Savior had been born. The Lord afterward called Himself "the good shepherd." Sheep are gentle, trustful animals, and whenever a shepherd is mentioned in the Word, we should think of one who protects and cares for the virtues of gentleness, trust, and innocence. This is what the Lord wishes to do for us, and when we are in these good states, we may be sure that He is near us.

The anointing of David by Samuel was a sign that the Lord's support was transferred from Saul to David, but David was to have many experiences before he actually became king. Saul continued on the throne for many more years and David did all he could to help Saul, but Saul soon came to hate David because he saw that the Lord was with David instead of with himself. I Samuel 16:14-23 tells of the first association between Saul and David, when David

was able to soothe Saul with his harp. David was called “the sweet psalmist” of Israel. Many of the Psalms were written by David under inspiration from the Lord. A psalm is a song of praise.

In our chapter for today what enemy is still attacking Israel?

Find on a map the valley of Elah where the two armies were drawn up.

How did the Philistines propose to settle the conflict?

We have heard of giants before. Read Genesis 4:4. Some of the descendants of these giants from the Most Ancient Church were still living in the Holy Land when the children of Israel came back to it from Egypt. You remember the report of the spies (Numbers 13:22-23, 33). Read also Joshua 11:21-22. The giants picture the selfishness which is born in each one of us as a result of all the evils in our ancestors from the beginning. We usually think of selfishness as not wanting to share things with others. But this is only one rather obvious kind of selfishness. A much more common and serious kind is thinking of oneself as the most important thing in the world, wanting our own way, and blaming other people if we don't get it.

This selfishness, which Goliath pictures in our story, seems very big and powerful, and it is hard for us to make up our minds to face it. We say, “I can't help it; I was born that way.” The Israelites were afraid to go out and fight Goliath. But David was not afraid of Goliath. Why wasn't he?

David could not wear Saul's armor because he had not “proved” it. Do you know that each of us gets for himself a kind of spiritual armor? (See Ephesians 6:11-17.) The truths which we learn and use are our armor. They protect us against evil and help us to resist it when it attacks us. But we hear many truths which we do not yet understand and which we have not tried to practice—they are of no immediate use to us because we have not “proved” them in our own lives. Evil, or selfishness, also uses truths to defend itself. We do this every time we argue in favor of something we want to do which we really know is wrong. Goliath had very powerful armor and weapons, didn't he?

What were David's weapons?

The stones had become smooth by long action of the water of the brook. They picture those truths from the Word which we have tried out and found effective and have stored up in our memories, as David put the stones in his shepherd's bag. Read Matthew 4:1-11 and see if you can pick out the "three smooth stones" which the Lord used against the devil when He was tempted in the wilderness.

Notice that David did not wait for Goliath to come to him. He ran to meet him boldly and attacked first.

What story have we had in which the men who were eager for the battle were the ones chosen?

David's first stone struck Goliath in the forehead, just as the Lord's quotation to the devil in each case hit right at the principle involved in the temptation.

Whose sword did David use to cut off Goliath's head?

This teaches us that after we have used the plain "Thou shalt not" of the Scriptures to stop our temptation short, we can pick up the arguments with which we were defending our selfishness and see how they really work just the other way.

Intermediate

The correspondence is clear and interesting throughout. The lesson may well be centered around the meaning of the weapons of Saul, David, and Goliath.

The change from the Judges to the kings in Israel pictures the time when we realize that we must have the Lord's truth as a general ruling principle in our lives, instead of just going to the Lord for help when we are in serious trouble. Saul pictures our first efforts to use this truth as a ruling principle. Our first idea of it is natural and superficial; so it fails at crucial points. Judging things by their outward appearance and looking in everything to immediate external results seems to us "common sense," but we soon find that common sense cannot solve any of our real problems. This is because common sense deals with material things and the Lord's commands have our spiritual development in view, and our com-

mon sense does not trust the Lord's wisdom. This was Saul's failing and so his rule was not a victorious one and had to be terminated.

David as king also represents the rule of the Lord's truth, but it is truth understood in a deeper and more spiritual way. When our natural reason is seen to be faulty, we look for some deeper understanding to guide us. The character of this deeper understanding, which is pictured by David, appears from his occupation. He was a shepherd. That is, a deeper understanding of truth is founded on the desire to be good inside as well as out, for sheep picture the innocent, trustful affections which come to us from the Lord and are necessary if we are to keep close to Him. The Lord called Himself the "good shepherd." We need to remember also that David was born in Bethlehem, and that Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem on the night of the nativity because they were "of the house and lineage of David." And the Lord was called "the son of David."

As soon as David was anointed, the power from the Lord departed from Saul. Just as soon as we have seen that we must think from spiritual principles, we begin to find a great deal wrong with mere common sense. But Saul is still acting as king. It is not possible to change our habits of thought in a moment. David, however, was able almost immediately to help Saul by playing his harp for him (I Samuel 16:14-23). You may recall from our lesson on the first days in the wilderness, when Moses sang a song of triumph and Miriam used her timbrel, that Swedenborg says of the musical instruments mentioned in the Word that they picture different ways of expressing our love for the Lord. Wind instruments symbolize simple and direct expressions of the affection, but stringed instruments stand for expression of affection by means of truths. David was later to be called "the sweet psalmist of Israel." We might say that David's music was a form of reasoning from love.

When David went out to fight Goliath, he could not fight in Saul's armor because he had not "proved" it. Saul's armor pictures reasonings which up to this time have seemed sensible to us. David relied on the Lord instead of on his own strength. He used only his

simple sling and the stones from the brook which he had put in his shepherd's bag. These picture a few truths from the Word which have been proved by experience and stored up in the mind for use.

Goliath, descendant of the giants of the Most Ancient Church (Genesis 6:4), symbolizes the deep-seated tendency to self-love and self-esteem born in each one of us. He was the champion of the Philistines, who picture our tendency to be satisfied with ourselves as we are and with knowing truth without using it to recognize and fight our evils. Goliath's defiance makes us think of the common expression: "You can't change human nature."

David's first shot struck the giant in the forehead, so that he fell on his face to the ground. When the Lord was tempted in the wilderness, He did not argue with Satan. In each temptation He chose the one right verse from the Scriptures which struck straight at the ruling idea of the temptation, and said, "It is written, Thou shalt not . . ." This is the way we are to meet temptation, and if we do we can overcome it, no matter how strong it seems. Afterward we can see how foolish the arguments were with which we had been trying to defend our selfishness. David cut off Goliath's head with Goliath's own sword. After Goliath was out of the way, the Israelites could pursue and conquer the Philistine army. Once we really get rid of our self-satisfaction, the way will be open to spiritual victory. Our pride in self is the "giant" that stands in our way every time.

Basic Correspondences

- David = the rule of divine truth as seen
by our spiritual reason
- Goliath = our deep inherited tendency to
self-esteem
- sheep = innocent, trustful affections
- smooth stones from the brook = truths from the Word proved
by experience
- musical instruments = means of expressing our affections



Senior

Here the meaning of the Philistines and of Goliath is the central point to emphasize. Young people need to see clearly the subtle temptation to self-esteem which is in all of us, and the difference—in origin and in effect—between trust in self and trust in the Lord.

With every one of us who is developing spiritually, the time comes when we see clearly that we can be satisfied no longer with the rule of our natural reason. We must have a new “king,” a deeper and more spiritual understanding of truth to direct our lives. For we deeply want to “be good.” We do not want to do harm, as we are always unintentionally doing when our natural reason is on the throne. This desire to be good, not to do harm, is represented by the fact that David, when he was called, was tending his father’s sheep—just as the character of Saul’s kingship was pictured by the fact that when called he was searching for his father’s asses (I Samuel 9). The ass pictures the affection for natural reasoning, but sheep picture the affection of innocence.

David’s home was in Bethlehem, the “house of bread,” which Swedenborg tells us represents “truth from good.” That is, the primary desire to be good enables us to see the truth more deeply and so to detect and dispel those deeper evils which the natural reason overlooks or condones. Living under this new principle we shall not say, when we face a decision, “What will produce the most immediate external results?” but “What will be really right in the Lord’s sight?”

The anointing of David pictures our first recognition that this deeper rational is our true king. But there is a long way to go before David becomes king in fact. Habits of thought are hard to change. Saul is still on the throne. The spirit of the Lord had departed from him, but he still directs Israel. There is a long struggle ahead between Saul and David, in which Saul is jealous of David and tries to destroy him whereas David is always kind and helpful to Saul. This is characteristic of our period of transition from very young manhood and womanhood to maturity. The habits of youth cling to us and let go with great reluctance. The familiar story of David

and Goliath pictures one of the earlier steps in this transition, our first successful attempt to judge the fallacy of the grosser arguments which exalt self, in the light of our new deeper understanding of the meaning of life.

The giant Goliath, one of the last survivors of the perverted Most Ancient Church, pictures our deep-seated inherited self-esteem, and his armor and weapons the reasonings which favor it. Goliath comes out in avowed defiance of the living God. He is the champion of the Philistines, those ever-present tendencies to imagine that our knowledge of what is right makes us superior to others, without any real effort to apply that knowledge to the correction and improvement of our own motives and thoughts. David, putting his whole reliance on the Lord, uses as his weapon only a smooth stone from the brook, a simple truth from the Word proved by experience and stored in the memory with a view to use. Slung with all his might it strikes the giant in the forehead, the governing principle of selfishness. After Goliath had fallen, David was able to stand upon him and cut off his head, using Goliath's own sword, the very reasonings which had seemed to favor self.

This story is very important for all of us, for it shows us our most persistent enemy (Israel never fully conquered the Philistines), the nature of the giant which acts as "front" for this enemy, and the one effective means of conquering both. If we think the Philistines are not in us, let us keep their meaning in mind and watch our thoughts and words, and especially our unconscious reactions for even one day. We are all prone to the feeling that our weaknesses are minor ones and after all excusable because in general we are "pretty good people," and to carry on arguments not for the sake of finding out the truth but in order to prove that we are right and the other fellow is wrong. We likewise tend to shrug off people who are different from ourselves as not worth much, and to be on the watch for opportunities to display our superior knowledge or ability. So the giant of self-esteem comes out morning and evening and opposes every step of our spiritual progress. But if we have David's courage and trust in the Lord, we shall find plenty of

plain statements in the Word with which we may strike him in the forehead. Read Matthew 4:1-11.

Adult

Perhaps the most important thing for this class is to realize the psychological and spiritual depths in this story which is so often thought of only as “one of the Bible stories children love.” It is essentially a story of adult experience.

In the history of Israel the Philistines play an important part. They represent “those in faith separate from charity,” those who know the truth and are proud of their knowledge, but have no desire to live according to it. But we need always to remember that our concern is not with others whom we may think to be Philistines, but with the Philistines within ourselves, an ever-present enemy. Every time we excuse ourselves from doing what we know is right, every time we twist the truth in such a way as to support our desires, every time we are contemptuous of another who differs from us, the Philistines are upon us.

Saul is unable to wage a successful war against the Philistines. He is afraid of them, and his men are constantly deserting him for fear of the Philistines. This is because a mere external understanding of truth, being superficial, is easily confused by clever arguments. It cannot see the real fallacy behind their plausibility. It relies upon its own strength in argument, as Saul relied upon his army and his armor, and when it meets an adversary more clever in the use of the same weapons, it has no further strength. We recall that the Philistines had prevented the Israelites from practicing the trade of smith, so that they had no means of making weapons themselves or of sharpening those they did have. The Philistine in us tries to keep control of the truth. When we are trying to justify ourselves in self-seeking and self-exaltation, we do our best to use truths for our purpose, sometimes almost convincing ourselves in the process that wrong is right. This is what Swedenborg means by the falsification of truth. When we are in this Philistine state, our own reasoning is very pleasant and convincing to us, and we will

go to any length rather than be proved wrong. This “conceit of self-intelligence” is what is meant by Goliath. We have all had the experience of arguing endlessly, twisting the truth this way and that, rather than admitting ourselves mistaken. This is Goliath coming out morning and evening for forty days to deliver his challenge against Israel.

Throughout the Word weapons of various kinds in a good sense represent truths with which we defend ourselves against evil or attack our spiritual enemies. In the hands of the evil, weapons represent these truths falsified by being used in the defense and support of evil. This makes it easy for us to see the correspondence of the armor of the three chief figures in our lesson. Remember that brass represents external goodness. Have we ever, when trying to defend ourselves in a wrong course we have chosen, or when criticizing someone else whose views did not agree with ours, pointed complacently to certain good deeds of ours and to knowledge and abilities which we possess? Have we ever justified a questionable course on the ground that it was the only “practical” method of accomplishing results? Have we ever in argument said or implied, “If you knew as much as I do, you would agree with me”? This is the heavy brass armor and weapons of Goliath. It is terrifying to Saul and his soldiers.

Saul’s weapons and armor are literal truths. The mere external understanding of truth, in the face of attack by apparently stronger reasoning, feels helpless because it has relied on a literal acceptance of the truth and has not felt the Lord’s love and power within it. We see this in the fact that often young people who have been strictly brought up at home but have not been made to feel the loving purpose behind their parents’ rules fall easy victims to the persuasion of schoolmates who pose as more emancipated. It is hard to face ridicule for something which we have been taught is right but which we ourselves do not see to be right. David the young shepherd could not use Saul’s armor because he had not “proved” it. But with his own weapons he had already delivered a lamb of his father’s flock from a lion and a bear. He used the

weapons he had proved.

David's weapons were his shepherd's staff, his sling, and five smooth stones from the brook. The staff was his reliance on the Lord; the smooth stones from the brook, particular truths of the Word readied by experience (five meaning a few but sufficient); and the sling, the understanding—also gained by experience—which enabled him to direct the truth against a particular evil and to communicate to it the force of his zeal. We all may have David's weapons. The Lord promises support to all who obey His commandments. We all have the Word, the clear stream of truth, and we all have the power to find in it truths which we may prove by experience. We make a sling for ourselves by meditating on the truths of the Word and their application to life and conduct. We should be constantly choosing "smooth stones from the brook" and putting them in our "shepherd's bag" ready for use when an enemy attacks any of our innocent affections.

Another point in David's method is suggestive. "And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistines." We should not sit down and wait until temptation has launched its weapons, but we should see it coming, go out to meet it, and strike the first blow ourselves. This is one of the things a knowledge of the internal sense of the Word prepares us to do by giving us an understanding of all sorts of temptations, their origin, and the truths with which they may be overcome. We should see to it that our children have as much as possible of this advance preparation for life; for the Christian life demands not mere passive resistance, but active attack upon evil. David's aim was true because his eye was clear. He saw his enemy distinctly and was able to strike him in the forehead. This teaches us the lesson that if we are to overcome a temptation, we must be able to recognize and destroy the governing and directing false principle which is its head. When this is done, the enemy falls, and it is easy enough to examine the arguments it used and to turn them against it, as David, standing upon the giant, cut off his head with the giant's own sword. "And

David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armor in his tent.” The evil principle which has falsified truths must be rejected as contrary to the teachings of the church, but the truths it has used, when separated from it, become ours, part of the wisdom of experience.

It was by a succession of small victories, won through reliance on the Lord, that David gradually won the confidence of the people. At first, even when we are trying to fight the Lord’s battles, we rely upon ourselves, form hasty judgments, and often take hasty action, as Saul did. But experience teaches us the folly of self-confidence, and there grows up gradually within us a deeper understanding of the Lord’s truth, which is David. The Lord begins to give us power through a higher principle. Yet it is a long time before our self-confidence is altogether replaced by reliance on the Lord. Saul continued to reign as king for many years. Even after Saul’s death David was first made king in Hebron, and it was another seven years before he was accepted by all the people and came to reign in Jerusalem. Full confidence in the power of the truth as the Lord gives it to us must become established in our hearts before it can become the ruling principle in our minds.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 781¹²: “Power was given to David to smite the lion and the bear that took away the sheep from the flock, because ‘David’ represented the Lord in reference to Divine truth in which those who are of His church are instructed; and a ‘lion’ signifies the power of spiritual Divine truth, and in the contrary sense, as here, the power of infernal falsity against Divine truth; while a ‘bear’ signifies the power of natural Divine truth, and in the contrary sense the power of falsity against that truth. But ‘a sheep from the flock’ signifies those who are of the Lord’s church. And as this was represented, the power was given to David to smite the bear and the lion, to represent and signify the Lord’s power to defend by His Divine truth His own in the church from the falsities of evil that are from hell. . . . But ‘Goliath,’ who was a Philistine and was therefore called ‘uncircumcised,’ signifies such as are in truths without good; and truths without good are truths falsified, which in themselves are falsities.”

Apocalypse Explained, n. 817⁶: “All the wars that the sons of Israel waged against the Philistines represented the combats of the spiritual man with the natural man, and thence also the combats of truth conjoined with good against truth separated from good, which in itself is not truth but falsity. For truth separated from good is falsified in the idea of the thought respecting it, and for the reason that there is nothing spiritual present in the thought to enlighten it. For the same reason those who are in faith separated from charity have no truth, except merely in their speech or in their preaching from the Word, the idea of truth instantly perishing as soon as truth is thought about. Because this religion exists in the churches with all who love to live a natural life, so in the land of Canaan the Philistines were not subjugated, as the other nations of the land were, and consequently there were many battles with them. For all the historical things of the Word are representative of such things as pertain to the church; and all the nations of the land of Canaan represented things heretical confirming either the falsities of faith or the evils of the love; while the sons of Israel represented the truths of faith and the goods of love, and thus the church.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Where did David live? *Bethlehem*
P. What was his occupation? *shepherd*
J. Where were the armies of Saul and the Philistines facing each other?
Valley of Elah
P. Whom had the Philistines chosen to be their champion? *Goliath*
J. What can you tell about Goliath? *nine feet tall, heavily armored*
J. What challenge did he shout to Israel? *“Give me a man . . .”*
J. How had David happened to come down to the army? *to bring food to brothers*
P. What offer did he make to Saul? *“I will fight Goliath”*
P. Why did he think he could overcome Goliath? *trusted God*
J. Why could David not use Saul’s armor? *had not “proved” it*
P. What were David’s weapons? *sling, five smooth stones*
J. How did he kill Goliath? *sling and stone*
J. With what did he cut off Goliath’s head? *Goliath’s sword*
S. What do the Philistines represent? *thinking we are better than others because of our superior knowledge*
I. What does Goliath stand for? *inherited pride*
I. What are the smooth stones from the brook? *truths from the Word we have tried and found to be effective*