

THE MASTER'S SEMINARY

PREACHING DAVID AND GOLIATH REFLECTION ESSAY

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SUN VALLEY, CALIFORNIA  
OCTOBER 2023

## **Reflection on Preaching David and Goliath**

In the book, “Christ-centered Preaching and Teaching,” editor Ed Stetzer records a panel discussion in which the participants discussed how they would preach the narrative of David and Goliath from 1 Samuel 17. This essay aims to critique the methods of the panelists and suggest a more appropriate way of handling the text.

### **A Panel Discussion**

The discussion began with the panelists voicing concern over a moralistic understanding of the text. Often this text is used to encourage listeners to be brave and look to the character of David as their motivation for doing so. This type of reading of this story flattens the narrative and is certainly a pitfall to be avoided. The panelists were rightly concerned about such a misuse of the biblical text.

The discussion then proceeded with the first panelist, Jonathan Akin, being asked where he would go with the story of David and Goliath. Akin answered that he had a problem with a strict historical grammatical method because in his opinion that flattens the text of the story. He claimed that such an approach misses something and that one should not just jump from David to your church member. Then Akin continued to make an interesting assertion. He stated that, “There’s one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, so this text applies to me in Christ or outside of Christ. But, it’s mediated through Christ.”<sup>1</sup> While it is certainly true that there is “one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5), one is left wondering what that has to do with the text of 1 Samuel. Christ is the mediator between God and

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<sup>1</sup> Citations from PDF text provided in class on Canvas.

man, not Scripture and man. What does it even mean that the text of 1 Samuel is mediated through Christ? With such a strange application of 1 Timothy 2:5, optimism for Akin's handling of the David and Goliath text is not high.

Akin went on to describe how he would handle what one would assume is the David and Goliath narrative, although with a little reference as he gives to the narrative, it was difficult to discern if that was his text. Akin began to speak of the Holy Spirit anointed one going into the wilderness for forty days and nights, crushing the enemy's head while said enemy was wearing snake armor. After reciting this tale, he posited the question, "That sure sounds familiar doesn't it?" Well, no, it doesn't.

In his presentation of the details of the story, Akin is leading the reader to jump to conclusions that are not in the text. David had been anointed as the future king in the previous chapter, but such anointing is not presented as relevant to the story in the text. David went out to the battlefield in the valley of Elah, not the wilderness. While Goliath did present himself to the Israelites for forty days, his head is not crushed as Akin describes. Furthermore, the Hebrew text says Goliath was wearing "scale armor," not snake armor. Such a stretch to tie Goliath's armor with the serpent in the Garden is unwarranted.

Akin then, predictably, jumps to the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness. He then compiles the details of the cross, crushing the serpent's head in the garden, and the victory through the blood of the Lamb in Revelation 12. Again, the reader needs to be reminded that the original text for discussion is 1 Samuel 17.

Next, Akin fittingly says that "we are not David." Good, right. But then immediately proceeds to assert that "We are the Israelites cowering in fear." Apparently, the eisegesis that Akin objected to merely had the wrong character in focus. Akin closed with a catch phrase

worthy of a Christian fortune cookie by saying that “we don’t fight for victory in the Christian life we fight from victory.” Naturally one would then assume that the audience would go charging out to find some Philistines to slaughter?

Up next, Eric Hankins commented that he was uncomfortable with Akin’s allegory. He critiqued Akin’s comparison of the snakeskin armor and crushing of the head of the serpent as unwarranted in the text. However, Hankins did agree that the story is about a “savior who stands before the enemy and acts and saves.” Hankins voiced his concern over using symbolism and allegory to preach the text while asserting that typology was the better way to handle the David and Goliath narrative.

It is true that David is a type of Christ at some times and in some ways. However, the preacher should be careful not to try to force everything that David did into some sort of typology fulfilled in an episode in the life of Christ. The typology that Hankins employed seems to be a scaled back version of the same errors made by Akin in his allegory.

Stetzer went on to summarize the approach of several other men. He explained that Michael Williams views the story as highlighting the theme of God exalting the weak and humbling the proud. Stetzer then described Graeme Goldsworthy’s approach as seeing David and Goliath as a picture of one standing in the place of many to save Israel. Goldsworthy asserts that the chosen mediator wins the victory and harvests the fruits of victory for the people to enjoy which paints the picture looking forward to the work of Christ. Finally, Stetzer closes with Peter Leithart’s assessment of the passage. Leithart focuses on how the details of the narrative connect to the larger story of Scripture. Leithart’s account mirrors the allegorical approach of Akin as he highlights the “serpent” like armor, “crushing Goliath’s head,” and “great victory” on behalf of

the people. Each of these accounts fails to fully address the meaning of the text as it would have been understood by the original audience.

### **A Better Way**

One author that has presented a more text driven approach to 1 Samuel 17 is Dale Ralph Davis. In his commentary on 1 Samuel 17, Davis carefully walks through the details of the passage and keeps the reader focused upon the intent of the author and the meaning that the original audience would have understood. Davis does not immediately jump to Christocentric applications or types as the above commentators did. In concluding his comments on this text, Davis asserts that the driving concern of 1 Samuel 17 is “the honor of Yahweh's name, his reputation, his glory.”<sup>2</sup> Davis further states that “David is driven by a passion for the honor of God.” By keeping the focus of the text at the forefront, Davis correctly concludes that this “should keep us from going around talking about the cleverness of David or the bravery of David. The focus of the chapter is not on David's courage but on Yahweh's adequacy in David's weakness.” Davis rightly keeps the focus on what the text reveals to the reader about God. David's character is only deepened when he is seen as more than just a stand-in pointing to Christ, but as a devoted follower of Yahweh whose passion for the name of his holy God drives him to defend that name at all costs. Davis concludes the chapter by asserting that, “Yahweh's honor, his glory, must be upheld; if Yahweh is to have his glory his enemy must be silenced.” This is an exposition of the text that remains faithful to the author's intent and still communicates a message that is both relevant to the original audience and the audience of today. God's Word and His message are timeless. It should be preached as if it is so.

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