

The Bigger Man

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1 Sam 17:4

(BHS)		(NAB)
		1 A champion
		2 named Goliath of Gath
וַיֵּצֵא	3	came out
אִישׁ־הַבְּנִים	4	
מִמַּחֲנֵי פְּלִשְׁתִּים	5	from the Philistine camp;
גְּלִית שְׂמוֹ מִגַּת	6	
גָּבְהוֹ שֵׁשׁ אַמּוֹת וְנֹרֶת:	7	he was six and a half feet tall.

Note that lines 1 and 4 relate, as do lines 2 and 6. To make a good, clear English sentence, the New American Bible rearranged it. Line 4 reads, “(the) man, the champion.” *Benayim* (“champion”) occurs only here and v23 in the Bible. It seems to be from the word, “between.” Perhaps it means, “the man who stands between.” By inspection you can make out “Goliath” and “Gath” in line 6. But it is just for fun that I made “six” red in both Hebrew and English. Although they both say “six,” it is by sheer coincidence. The Hebrew actually says, “six cubits and a span.” NAB converted this into, “six and a half feet.” Most of this essay is from Hays’ 2005 article in *JETS*. You can email me for it.

A cubit is 18 inches. A span is 9 inches. Six cubits and a span make Goliath 9 feet and 9 inches tall. Take a look at any other version (including the revised NAB) and you will see this. Goliath’s spear was like a weaver’s beam, and his armor weighed a lot. But Hays persuasively argues that those things need not require a giant. Just a big, muscular man.

The Old Greek and Dead Sea Scroll Samuel (4QSam^a) read, “four cubits and a span.” Without getting into the details, we are going to assume for the sake of the argument that the true figure is preserved in these texts, and the NAB is right. The average height of men in David’s time was a little over five feet. Goliath was quite big and tall for his time, but not what we would call a giant. Hays compares him to “Flozell Adams, the 6'7" 345 pound offensive tackle for the Dallas Cowboys.”

Now consider King Saul. He is introduced as a head taller than everyone else (1 Sam 9:2, 10:23)—his size rivaled Goliath. David, however, was of ordinary height. Also, Saul had armor that probably matched Goliath’s (17:38 – 39). Maybe Saul was the only man in Israel with such armor (13:19 – 22). Hays points out all of this and concludes in italics, “*So Saul is the only logical choice to go and fight Goliath.*”

David tried on and rejected Saul’s armor. He refused Saul’s sword. David the untrained youth, who was not even in the army, without armor or sword, in the name of the LORD fearlessly ran into the Elah Valley toward the experienced and formidable warrior—while Saul cowered in fear. David proved to be the bigger man.

Goliath’s “coat of mail” (v5) uses the word *qasqaset*, which elsewhere means “scales,” as on a snake. It is as if David struck the head of the serpent by beheading him.



Goliath was from Gath, where the Anakim were (Josh 11:22). The Anakim had inspired fear in Israel when the spies encountered them. This incited God to condemn that generation to wander 40 years.

The Anakim came from the Nephilim (Num 13:32 – 33). The Nephilim (“fallen ones”) were mighty men of old, who perverted the world and provoked God to bring the flood (Gen 6:4). So Goliath represented a powerful and ancient evil, which repeatedly would dismay God’s elect until God had to chastise them. This is the evil David stood against.

Yet there was a more elemental and deeper serpentine evil that empowered the Nephilim and Goliath. It is this primal evil that David’s greater son defeated by standing between man and God, willingly giving his life as the champion of his people. Yet, like David, the people did not choose or want him. In fact, Jesus was largely rejected by his own.

In this world we look to Sauls, who are impressive and seem capable to accomplish great things. But Jesus chose to bring salvation to the house of Zacchaeus the hated tax collector (Luke 19). It was the outcast woman at the well who brought the gospel to the city of Sychar (John 4). Paul wrote, “Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth” (1 Cor 1:26).

You may not be an impressive Saul. You may not be as big as the problem you face. But if you believe like David, nothing is impossible (Mark 9:23). You can go forward in confidence knowing that God is with you. And that is what a relationship with Jesus the son of David is all about.

Something to think about.