

Introduction to the bible

[Religion](#), [Bible](#)



The Message within the Message David R. Hayes Introduction to the Bible
RELS311, Section B001 Win 13 Mark D. Wessner February 10, 2013 The
Message within the Message Even though some may say that there is
nothing more to a narrative than what one may see and read on the pages
before them, I believe that some stories are more than just historical
narratives. For example, in the story of David and Goliath I believe that the
example David sets by his faith and trust in God to give both him and Israel
the victory against this ominous foe as well as David's words of wisdom to
combat the menacing taunts from Goliath are more than meets the eye.

In this paper, I intend to dissect this passage from the Bible by explaining
where it is located, I will analyze the literary style and characteristics of this
passage, and I will give a detailed and thoughtful interpretation of this
passage by using the appropriate exegetical approach. The story of David
and Goliath is found in the first book of Samuel which is located between the
book of Ruth and the second book of Samuel in the Old Testament.

This narrative encompasses the entire 17th chapter of this book and is made
up of fifty-eight verses. The first book of Samuel is one of thirty-nine books
that make up "the canon of the Old Testament", taken from the Greek word
kanon which "means a rule—[or] a standard for measurement", and is part
of the Christian "authoritative list of the books belonging to the Old
Testament or New Testament (Comfort, 2003, p. 51). In this case, it is part of
the Old Testament canon.

This narrative is just one of many that make up "over 40 percent of the Old
Testament... [which] constitutes three-quarters of the bulk of the Bible" (Fee,
2003, p. 89). Besides the writings of Moses, a major prophet and author of
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the first five books of the Bible, also known as the Pentateuch, it is believed that after Moses and the other prophets and prophetesses during his lifetime: the great outbursts of prophetic activity began with Samuel... and the earliest kind of writing in which they seem to have engaged extensively was history, which afterwards became the basis of the books of Chronicles... and probably of Samuel and Kings too, which have so much material in common with Chronicles. (Comfort, 2003, p. 53) Additionally, “[i]t is noteworthy [to point out] that in Jewish tradition Samuel, Kings, the Minor Prophets, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles are each reckoned as a single book” (Comfort, 2003, p. 57).

The narrative begins with the gathering of two armies: the Philistines in Ephes-dammim and Israel on the other side of the Valley of Elah, which was between them, both on mountains separated by this valley (1 Samuel 17: 1-3). Ephes-dammim, which is called “Pas-dammin” in the first book of Chronicles (1 Chronicles 11: 13), meaning “boundary of blood” which is believed to possibly have come from “[t]he deep red color of the newly plowed earth in this [location]... and may have given origin to the idea of “blood”, but the location is not absolutely certain (Masterman, n. .). The Valley of Elah, on the other hand, is located just north of where the Philistine armies are believed to have gathered with, which most likely was, the dry creek bed of the Wadi es-Sant dividing them from Saul's armies in the Judean mountains, though a more accurate description would be hills (Wilson, n. d.). The valley between them “ is a triangle-shaped flat valley, located on the western edge of the Judean low hills or Shepelah... [o]nly in the rainy season does water flow in the creek bed... from the hills to the east to the

Mediterranean on the west” (Wilson, n. d.). This narrative ends with the devastating loss of the Philistines' champion, Goliath, followed by the massacre of the Philistine armies, and the victory of God's chosen people, the Israelites. This narrative, like all narratives, is a story which retells us a historical event which was written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and is “intended to give meaning and direction for a given people in the present” (Fee, 2003, p. 0). Fee points out that the major difference between a biblical narrative and other narratives is that “the story they tell is not so much our story as it is God's story—and it becomes ours as [H]e “writes” us into it” (2003, p. 90). But like all narratives it has three main characteristics: characters, plot, and plot resolution (Fee, 2003, p. 90). The characters consist of protagonists (e. g. God), antagonists (e. g. Goliath), and agonists (e. g. David) (Fee, 2003, p. 90).

The conflict in this plot would be the imminent battle between the Philistines and Israelites as well as the daily challenge given to the Israelites by Goliath which subsequently leads to fear and inaction by Saul's armies. The plot resolution, or denouement, would be the devastating defeat of Goliath at the hands of David which reverses roles between the Philistines and Israelites, instills fear into the hearts of the Philistine armies, and completely overturns the expected outcome of this battle.

In the Bible most narratives are also historical and/or biographical accounts and include accounts in the following books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jonah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts (“Literary

genres... ", n. d.). Though there are many narratives in these books it does not mean that each book is strictly narratives or any other genre for that matter.

One thing that puzzled me was when Fee appears to contradict himself when first he states that narratives " are intended to give meaning and direction", but later states that " Old Testament narratives are not allegories or stories with hidden meanings, are not intended to teach moral lessons, and do not necessarily teach directly" (2003, pp. 90, 92). So which is it? This leads into the characteristics of Hebrew narratives: the narrator, the scene(s), the characters, dialogue, plot, features of structure and a final word (Fee, 2003, pp. 3-99). For this passage the narrator is Samuel, I believe, but cannot be certain because later in this book his death is recorded (1 Samuel 25: 1). The scene is set around the Valley of Elah. The characters in the order they are mentioned are: Goliath, King Saul, Jesse, Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah, David, and Abner. The primary dialogue is between David and Goliath but there is also a dialogue between David and Jesse, David and his brothers, David and King Saul, and King Saul with Abner.

The plot starts off with the gathering of armies for battle which leads into the conflict presented by Goliath's challenge to the Israelite armies, the acceptance of this challenge by David, the slaying of Goliath by David, and the defeat of the Philistine armies. The feature of structure in this particular narrative is the repetition of the power and authority of God. This narrative, in my opinion, connects the dots from David's anointing to be the next king of Israel to his establishment of his kingdom.

Then, to even further define a narrative one can separate biblical narratives into three different levels which creates a “ hierarchy of narrative[s]” (Fee, 2003, p. 91). The top, or third level, is “[o]ften called the “metanarrative”... [and] has to do with the whole universal plan of God worked out through [H]is creation”, e. g. the creation and the fall of humanity (Fee, 2003, p. 91). The next, or second level, “ is the story of God's redeeming a people for [H]is name”, e. g. the first and second covenant (Fee, 2003, p. 91). Finally, the last and first level is comprised of “ all the hundreds of individual narratives that make up the other two levels”, e. g. the individual narratives of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Joseph) (Fee, 2003, p. 91). This covers the basics of a narrative, but to fully understand a narrative or passage the reader must take an exegesis approach to carefully and systematically study the Scriptures “ to discover the original intended meaning” (Fee, 2003, p. 3). The most important part of exegesis is knowing what questions to ask while reading to determine the context, whether historical or literary, and the content (Fee, 2003, pp. 24-28). After taking an exegesis approach the reader must then take a hermeneutics approach which can include exegesis but in this case is referring to “ seeking the contemporary relevance of ancient texts” (Fee, 2003, p. 29). Fee, however, says that this approach is much more difficult to define than the exegesis approach (2003, pp. 29-31).

For either, you do not have to be an “expert” but you must understand the meaning of a passage in reference to the meaning of the sentences or passages before and after it (Fee, 2003, p. 27). Fee points out that “[t]he most important contextual question you will ever ask, and it must be asked over and over of every sentence and every paragraph [while reading] is, “

What's the point? " (2003, p. 27). We must, however, understand that "[t]his question will vary from genre to genre, but it is always the crucial question [emphasis added]" (Fee, 2003, p. 7). Interestingly, according to Fee, Bible translations like the King James Version and the New American Standard both are generally written in paragraph form which can interfere with the exegesis approach because it can "obscure the author's own logic" (2003, p. 28). It does not mean it is impossible but should definitely be accounted for when studying exegetically. For my exegetical approach towards better understanding this passage I turned to the help of commentary from theologians like Matthew Henry and John Gill as well as a few other websites.

According to the commentary of Matthew Henry, the Philistines were setup in Israel's territory, not their own, and this could have been due to the knowledge of God's departing from Saul as king, the end of Samuel and Saul's relationship, and/or Saul's inability to be the king his people needed him to be (Henry, n. d). According to Josephus, in John Gill's exposition of the Bible, this all occurred because the Philistines sensed weakness in Israel and saw their chance to further expand their own territory not to mention the opportunity for retribution for previous defeats at the hands of Israel (Gill, n. d). I would have to agree with both suggestions as possible answers to the question, "What is the point?", of this narrative. I believe, nonetheless, that the main point is that David was just a shepherd, but by God's strength he was able to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines just as he had done in the past delivering sheep from his flock from a lion and a bear (1 Samuel 17: 34-37). David's words are inspirational: Thou comest to me with

a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands. (1 Samuel 17: 45-47)

In this passage, when David proclaims the name, or shem, of the Lord he invokes “ something like our power of attorney, where one person can act with the legal authority of another... [therefore it really] means to come with Yahweh's presence, power, authority, and divine appointment” (Wilson, n. d.). Just as Christians pray in Jesus's name David was claiming the victory over Goliath and the Philistines in the name of the Lord. David sets a great example of faith and obedience throughout this passage by trusting in God and by defending God's reputation and glory.

More importantly, he points out that the battle is still ultimately the Lord's (Wilson, n. d.). This is not the only example of the faith of David, a man after God's own heart, or others similar to him in faith. Several examples of “[t]his same principle is reiterated time after time throughout scripture, e. g. 1 Samuel 14: 6b; 2 Chronicles 20: 15, 32: 8; Psalm 33: 16-18, 20, 44: 6-8; Proverbs 21: 30-31; Hosea 1: 7; Zechariah 4: 6; Romans 8: 31, 37; and 1 John 4: 4 (Wilson, n. d.).

In conclusion, the majority of the Bible is made up of many narratives which are both historical and biographical that by God's infinite wisdom serve a purpose for us all today. There are those that would say that you should not read too deep into these narratives because what you read is what you get. There are others that distort these narratives to make them mean what they want them to for their own ulterior motives. I, on the other hand, fall in between these two very different schools of thought.

I believe that ultimately there is a message within the message that God wants us to understand, but without the right questions you will never get the right answers. I hope after reading this research paper that I have achieved my goals: to dissect this passage from the Bible by explaining where it is located, to analyze the literary style and characteristics of this passage, and to give a detailed and thoughtful interpretation of this passage by using the appropriate exegetical approach.

In closing, I would like to quote a very true, but enlightening just the same, statement that I came across while researching: Even though we rely on the Spirit, we are not so foolish as to make no preparation. As St. Augustine once said, " Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you. " Faith and preparation are not mutually exclusive. (Wilson, n. d.).

References

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