

The Internal Sense Of The Word Part 2: David and Goliath

Last week I spoke of the presence within the Bible of an inner, spiritual, meaning, and illustrated this by reference to the Exodus story of the liberation of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and their wanderings in the wilderness, under the leadership of Moses, prior to their conquest of the Promised Land. Few Biblical stories so obviously treat deeper things than this one does. And it is these deeper things that are important to us. In itself the story is a parable, a parable which speaks of the possibility of every person's deliverance from the dominion of the worldly, external and essentially selfish side of their nature, represented by Egypt. As we saw, deliverance isn't effected easily. And even when it has been there is much to be encountered and many obstacles to be overcome before we finally come within sight of our destiny, the promised land, by which is meant the life of heaven. Externally, the story treats of an event of long ago. Internally, it treats of something which deeply concerns and involves us all.

And that can be said of the whole of the Divine Word. Externally it treats of events of long ago, of events, happenings, and even of the politics of the time, all of which are of no great concern to us. However, internally and within, it is a different matter. For within there is this deeper meaning which treats of the spiritual growth and development of every one of us. Take the frequent descriptions in the Old Testament of war and conflict, for example. Many people are bored and some are even offended by them. They wonder why so much of this had to find its way into the Scriptures. But if we look within we find that what is treated are the spiritual enemies which attack and would destroy a person spiritually.

At one time it was the Moabites, at another the Amalekites or the Midianites, and later on the Assyrians, and the Babylonians. Different enemies at different times. And so with us. At one time our spiritual life and well being is threatened even to the point of being overwhelmed because of a particular evil which seems to be getting the better of us. At another time it will be another evil. Just as there were nations which attacked and would have destroyed Israel so there are evils, of many different kinds, which attack and seek to destroy us. And this is why there are these descriptions of war and conflict, for within they warn us of these things.

It is in fact an incident of war, taken from the Old Testament, of which I would like to speak in particular: the well known and, with many, much loved story of David and Goliath. You may remember it well, David was little more than a boy at the time and had been too young to join his brothers and go to war against the neighbouring Philistines. Yet he visited those brothers to bring them provisions, and then it was that he heard the taunts and jeers of the giant Goliath, challenging any one of the Israelite soldiers to come and fight him. "And there came out from the camp of the Philistines" we read, "a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. And he had armour of bronze on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders." (1 Samuel 17: 4-7). But none dared take up his challenge. The fact was that "Saul and all Israel were greatly afraid."

His brothers mocked David when he offered to fight Goliath and were even more amazed and disdainful when he declined armour of any kind. He had selected five smooth stones from a nearby stream and along with his sling this was all that he wanted. No one seemed to sense his purpose or read his mind, least of all Goliath. None gave him any chance. And all thought of the grossly uneven combat which was certain to ensue. But David was totally undeterred. He was convinced both that the Lord would be with him and that he would win. And he did. Expert as he must have been with the sling, he felled Goliath with only one stone. It had never got to the stage of hand to hand combat, and in the end it proved of no consequence that Goliath was so well and so frighteningly armed.

I said earlier of the descriptions of war and conflict in the Divine Word that their great importance lies in the fact that they treat, within, spiritual enemies which have to be overcome in our own lives; evils that need to be resisted and driven out of our hearts and minds. Here in the story of David and Goliath, we have the description of an inspiring victory won against seemingly impossible odds; a victory which can, and hopefully, will be reenacted in our own experience.

A victory, though, against what?

Swedenborg wrote of the Philistines that they represent an attitude which places heavy emphasis on knowing the Lord's teaching but little or none on actually doing it. To think and believe and trust that knowledge is enough, this is what is meant by the Philistines, and it is something we have to be on our guard against all the time.

The Philistines harassed the people of Israel for generations and were ever ready to swoop on them when opportunity offered itself. So too this attitude which they represent is ever ready to swoop on us; this attitude that to know and have faith is the important thing, and that the way one lives doesn't really matter. It is easy to pay lip service to religious ideals, and we often do. We say we believe things and can talk about the need to obey them, but often don't. This is the enemy represented by the Philistines. This is the evil which is so ready to attack and destroy us.

Goliath was of course the champion of the Philistines and he represents the well armed arguments which come to us in defence of such an attitude. We may pay lip service to the Commandments and yet when we want to break one all sorts of arguments and reasonings in favour of what we desire present themselves. And on the surface they seem such strong arguments, just as Goliath seemed such a strong individual. You may perhaps have been tempted to lie, as all of us are at times. And the strongest possible arguments for doing so have presented themselves; arguments which seem so powerful and against which, at first, there is no come back.

David declined to wear armour to meet Goliath for he had decided not to do battle with him in the conventional way. Instead he took five smooth stones from a nearby stream. Apart from his unbounding confidence that the Lord would be with him, these were his only weapons. And they represent the well worn and ancient truths of the Divine Word which when called upon, can have a devastating impact on the reasonings and arguments which present themselves to us in favour of evils and disorders in our lives. The running stream represents the Divine Word; the water of Life; looked upon as a living thing; from which we must take those most obvious precepts against which false reasonings and specious arguments cannot stand.

Evil can seem so strong at times and the arguments which favour it so terribly convincing. We wonder how we will cope and overcome them. Evil thoughts even taunt and jeer at us, just as Goliath did, telling us that we are fools and missing much; that life demands a selfish approach. But this is not so. Evil can be overcome and the arguments which favour it, destroyed. If we have the spirit of David within us; are confident in the Lord that He will help us; however attractive the evil; however strong the reasonings which support it; it will be overcome. Just five stones from the brook is all that David took. The well worn, ancient truths of the Word. These are what will give us the victory.

There is, without question, one other thing we can learn from the story before leaving it, particularly from David's attitude. His total lack of concern about the consequences. David was certain that if he did what he knew to be right then the Lord would be with him and all would be well. If only we could adopt a similar attitude and had the same determination and confidence! If we do what we know to be right then the Lord will be with us because He can be with us and He will look after the consequences whatever they may be.

The Swedenborg Program – Number 58.

<http://www.swedenborg.com.au>