

5

Acts of the Apostles

Living Praise Presbyterian Church - Home Cell Group Bible Study Feb-Jul 2001



FACING ATTACKS

.....

The Shadow of the Giant

Goliath reminds me of the cross-eyed discus thrower. He didn't set any records...but he sure kept the crowd awake!

Day after day, he paraded along the slopes of the Valley of Elah throwing out threats and belching blasphemies across the creek with a basso-profundo voice like twenty out-of-tune tubas. He was not only ugly, but he was huge, well over nine feet tall in his stocking feet. His armor included a bronze coat of mail weighing two hundred pounds, a solid-iron spear (the head alone weighed 25 lbs), and a big bronze helmet. Add another club, bronze leggings and boots, plus that face of his...and you've got the makings of an American football player. Pity the poor private who drew duty as Goliath's shield bearer! It was about as suicidal as a novice drifting into the Devil's Triangle on a hang glider. Goliath, you see, was the pride of the Philistia, and if you didn't believe it, all you had to do was ask him, or ask Saul's army (if you could find them).

Paralyzed and hypnotized, the camp of the Israelites sat galvanized in their tents. The only noise heard from the Israeli troops was the knocking of their knees or the chattering of their teeth – in unison. Goliath was, up to that point, eminently successful with his basic strategy of intimidation. His threats boomed across the valley with chilling regularity, producing the desired result: fear. The inspired record informs us that those monotonous blasts from the giant's mouth sounded forth every morning and every evening for 40 long days. The dawn of that 41st day, however, was the beginning of the end for the giant from Gath.

Some ten miles away, a handsome, muscular teenager – the runt in a family of eight boys – was sent on an errand by his father. That innocent errand proved to be an epochal event in Jewish history. Fresh from the wilderness the sheep trails, and the more important, from the awesome presence of God, David stopped and stared in disbelief when he reached the battlefield. For a young man whose unsullied character had been nursed in solitude and spawned in secret acts of bravery, the scene before him was staggering. The young shepherd simply could not believe his eyes. Refusing to accept his brother's rationalizations or listen to the giant's threats, David saw through sheer solid faith.

You know the outcome. With a well-worn leather sling and a smooth stone, and unbending confidence in his mighty God, David introduced Goliath and all the Philistine hordes to the Lord of hosts, whose name they had blasphemed long enough. You can read about it in 1 Samuel 17.

What an interesting counterstrategy! To this day two timeless truths of giant warfare live on.

Prevailing over giants isn't accomplished by using their technique. David didn't even carry a sword, made no noise and wore no armor. He carried with him the most lethal weapon, the *shield of faith* that kept him from fear and gave him cool composure amidst chaos. It cleared his vision.

Conquering giants isn't accomplished without great skill and discipline. To be God's warrior, to fight His way, demands much more expertise and control than one imagine. Using the sling and stone of the Spirit is a far more delicate thing than swinging the club of the flesh. And for David, he had had numerous practices day after day, month after month. But oh, how sweet is the victory when the stone finds its mark...and how *final*.

Are you facing a giant?

from *Come Before Winter* by Chuck Swindoll



In 1956 tragic news spread across the world. Five American men - sons, husbands and fathers - were massacred by a tribe of Aucas Indians. Their purpose was to take the good news of Jesus Christ to the Aucas. The opposition to this endeavor cost them their lives.

That agonizing loss, which seemed at the time to be such a waste, has turned into great fruit for the kingdom of God. Over the years that same tribe of Indians has been transformed by the power of God. The message of Jesus was taken to them by the loved ones of those five young men. Another visible fruit of this great loss is the

many who have gone into the world with the gospel, having been inspired by the lives and deaths of these missionaries. The church of Jesus Christ continues to expand today in spite of great persecutions, even as it did in the day of the apostles.

REFLECTION:

Think of someone who has boldly stood up for what is right. What made that person's stance so courageous? Could you recall the last time you did something similar? How did you feel?

DISCOVERY:

1. What have Ananias and Sapphira done that is not consistent with Christian community (5:1,2)?

- a. Imagine you are watching the interaction between Peter and Ananias and Sapphira (5:3-9). How would you report this incident?



On God's anvil. Perhaps you've been there.

Melted down. Formless. Undone.

I know. I've been on it. It's rough. It's a spiritual slump, a famine. The fire goes out. Although the fire may flame for a moment, it soon disappears. We drift downward, downward into the foggy valley of questions, the misty lowland of discouragement. Motivation wanes. Desire is distant. Responsibilities are depressing.

Passion? It slips out the door.

Enthusiasm? Are you kidding?

Anvil Time.

It can be caused by a death, a breakup, going broke, going prayerless. The light switch is flipped off and the room darkens. "All the thoughtful words of help and hope have all been nicely said. But I'm still hurting, wondering..."

On the anvil.

Brought face to face with God out of the utter realization that we have nowhere else to go. Jesus, in the garden. Peter, with a tear-streamed face. David after Bathsheba. Elijah and the "still, small voice." Paul, blinded in Damascus.

Pound, pound, pound.

I hope you're not on the anvil. (Unless you need to be and, if so, I hope you are.) Anvil time is not to be avoided; it's to be experienced. Although the tunnel is dark, it goes on through the mountain. Anvil time reminds us of who we are and who God is. We shouldn't try to escape it. To escape it could be to escape God.

God sees our life from beginning to end. He may lead us through a storm at age thirty so we can endure a hurricane at age sixty. An instrument is useful only if it's in the right shape. A dull axe or a bent screwdriver needs attention, and so do we. A good blacksmith keeps his tools in shape. So does God.

Should God place you on his anvil, be thankful. It means he thinks you're still worth reshaping.

(from *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

3. In 5:11, it's said that "great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events." How do you think the church was affected by this fear?

4. How does this story demonstrate the high value that God places on truth and unity within the body of Christ?

b. In what ways do we lie to each other today within our Christian communities?

c. How do these practices of untruth bring about death, in a spiritual and emotional sense, within our communities?

d. What difference would it make in our witness to the world today if believers were "highly regarded by the people?"

e. What characteristics does your Christian community share with the believers in Acts? How are they different?

5. How could you begin to help others in your church or fellowship to understand what Christian community is about?



Topical Study: SATAN

How is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit? (Acts 5:3)

Many Christians are not aware that the Bible has so much to say regarding Satan. Many doubt the existence of a real, personal devil, and clear views as to his nature, power, work, and destiny are held by comparatively few.

Satan is man's worst enemy. He is a fearful being, powerful, cunning, malignantly wicked, seeking constantly the ruin of soul and against whose devices we are warned in the strongest language throughout the Bible. Many things about the devil are not clearly revealed, for example, his origin and why his power is permitted. But we should diligently search out and ponder all that God has been pleased to tell us about our archenemy. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Deut 29:29). R.A. Torrey said, "The bible doctrine regarding Satan is a very practical doctrine. There are certainly few doctrines that will go further than this in teaching us our utter dependence upon God and in driving us to prayer."

Here are some of the main biblical facts about Satan.

1. SATAN'S NAME AND TITLES

The Hebrew, Greek, and English names are all the same: Satan. The word means "adversary," which accurately identifies this enemy of God and man. Titles ascribed to him include: the devil (slanderer) in Matt 4:1; accuser in Rev 12:10; Beelzebub in Matt 12:24; deceiver in Rev 12:9; great dragon in Rev 12:9; the wicked one in Matt 13:19; father of lies in John 8:44; god of this world in 2 Cor 4:4; murderer in John 8:44; the old serpent in Rev 12:9; prince of this world in John 12:31; prince of the power of the air in Eph 2:2; and tempter in Matt 4:5.

2. SATAN'S EXISTENCE AS A PERSONALITY

That Satan is a being with personality is taught by many passages in both the Old and New Testaments. Compare the first reference to him, in Genesis 3:1, with the last, in Revelation 20:2, 10. The following activities assigned to him indicate he has personality.

Acting (Job 2:7; Acts 5:3; John 13:27)
Speaking (Job 1:9-11; Matt 4:8-11)
Moving (Job 1:7; 1 Peter 5:8)
Suggesting (1 Chron 21:1; John 13:2)
Deceiving (Eph 6:11; 2 Cor 2:11)

Sources:

Chuck Swindoll, **Come Before Winter**.
Irving Jensen, **Acts - A Self-study Guide**.
Phyllis J. Le Peau, **Acts**.
Max Lucado. **On the Anvil**.

Tempting (Gen 3:1-5; Matt 4:8-11)

These things could only be done by a being with personality. The personality of Satan is just as real as the personality of Jesus Christ.

3. SATAN'S SPHERE OF ACTIVITY, POSITION, AND POWER

Satan moves in two realms. He is the head of the domain of evil spirits (Luke 11:14-18; Matt 25:41), and he is lord over the world of lost humanity (Eph 2:2; 1 John 5:19). He also is permitted to tempt, hinder and accuse the children of God (cf. 1 Peter 5:8; Eph 6:11-18; 1 Thess 2:18). Though he has all his power, it is only as permitted by God, within bounds (cf. Job 1:12; 2:6; Luke 22:31). Satan's chief method is deception (2 Cor 11:3; Rev 12:9), and his major purpose is to be worshipped (Matt 4:9; 1 Cor 10:20). He has under him beings so great in power and dignity as to be spoken of as principalities, powers, world rulers, and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (see Eph 6:11-12). Satan has vast power, far exceeding that of unaided man. The conflict we have on hand against Satan and his hosts is terrific. It is only in God's strength that we can hope to successfully meet him. In Jude 9 we see that even the archangel Michael did not dare to bring a railing accusation (judgment) against him.

4. SATAN'S WICKEDNESS

This is seen in verses cited above, in addition to the following:

He "has been sinning from the beginning" (1 John 3:8). Concerning his origin, John 8:44 implies that he is a fallen being (cf. 1 Tim 3:6).

He was a murderer and liar from the beginning (John 8:44).

He blinds men's minds (2 Cor 4:4).

He takes away the saving Word of God from men's hearts (Luke 8:12).

5. SATAN'S DOOM IS SURE

Throughout all of this world's history, Satan has been deceiving and trying to ruin mankind, but at Calvary his dominion received its deathblow. BY Christ's death Satan's power was utterly undermined and doomed (Heb 2:14). Eternal fire is prepared for him and his angels (Matt 25:41), and eventually he will be cast into that lake of fire together with all those who are not found written in the book of life (Rev 20:10, 15; 21:8).

A Final Thought:

Satan today continues his attack on God's work, even as he did in the days of Acts. We who have been delivered from the power and kingdom of darkness (Col 1:13) should be alert to the fact that he still is permitted to hurl his fiery darts against us. Ours is the promised victory, but we must heed the clear commands of God as given in these verses (read them): 1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 4:27; 6:11; James 4:7.