

# THE MOST MISUSED STORIES IN THE BIBLE

SURPRISING WAYS POPULAR  
BIBLE STORIES ARE MISUNDERSTOOD

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To those who hunger and thirst for truth,  
may this book merely be an appetizer that leads you  
to the main course—the inerrant, infallible,  
timeless, and eternal Word of God.

I wish to also dedicate this book to the memory of Dr. Donald Rinehart, my religion professor at Ashland University in Ashland, Ohio. Don's passion for the Word, his love of college students, his perpetual smile, and his Barnabas-style spirit were a blessing to everyone who met him. Grace flowed through his life to so many. Thank you, Dr. Rinehart. The fact that you now see the Savior brings us great joy.

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## INTRODUCTION

**E**verybody loves a good story, and the Bible has plenty of them. Some are shocking, some convicting. Still others are powerful in that they communicate truths about God and us like nothing else can.

But stories can often be misunderstood. They can be taken out of context. Details missed. Personal agendas read into them. Human traditions can cloud facts. Main points can be sidestepped or overlooked. Pertinent information from reliable and biblically accurate resources that could bring clarity can be ignored. Language can be misunderstood. Mistakes made.

This is why it is important for every Bible reader, from the serious student to the casual reader, to learn how to interpret the Bible in context, using all the aids and guides to faithful study. This—along with the accompanying power of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit-filled community of the church—will help us read and apply God’s Word faithfully.

This book takes some of the most commonly misused stories of the Bible and puts them in context with the hope

of bringing clarity and light to what God wants for our lives. It could be considered a companion to my previous book, *The Most Misused Verses in the Bible*. To be sure, there is commonality and overlap in the principles that I seek to teach, but the stories and texts of Scripture I deal with are different in each book.

I realize some may want to argue that this or that story should not have been included over others. All of this, of course, is a subjective decision pertaining to one's experience in life and in the church. By no means are these the most misused stories for *everyone*.

I do believe, however, that pointing out the common misuses and misunderstandings of these stories can lead to similar discoveries and application points to other Bible stories not covered in this book.

It is increasingly evident that we now live in a biblically ignorant culture that sees the Bible as outdated, old-fashioned, biased, political, and offensive to modern-day sensitivities and views. It may be surprising to hear that this is no different from the worldview of the Roman Empire, where paganism, immorality, and relativistic philosophy were commonplace. In many ways, the church is moving back toward the culture of the first century, where the persecuted church thrived.

For us, this means the light of the Bible and its message stand in contrast to the darkness prevalent in today's culture. We seem to be in Babylon once again. Biblical Christians will stand out against the prevailing tide of culture in ways that will naturally invite hostility and ridicule, perhaps even physical suffering at some point. But Christians who long to please and be faithful to God know that we have no choice

but to follow the Bible's teachings as we seek to deliver the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world.

At times it may be tempting to smooth the rough edges of biblical truth so that we are more readily received by the world. But to do so would be to compromise the timeless and eternal truths that set God's people apart from a perishing world. To do so would mean to forfeit the blessing of God that comes from obeying these truths in his Word. We must remain faithful to his truth no matter the times or the climate we find ourselves in. The Bible is not merely a historical record of God's redemption, but a living and active means of appropriating that redemption.

I invite you to read this book with a humble willingness to be challenged. Perhaps you will learn something new, or maybe I will simply be reinforcing what you already know and do naturally when it comes to reading the Scriptures. Maybe you will want to argue some point. Either way, may you read these stories anew with fresh eyes and may your heart be encouraged to hunger for and dive deeper into the Word of God.

If on some point you think differently than I do, I ask that we be mutually charitable while seeking more light on the subject. In the course of my life, I have misused a verse or story myself, and thankfully there was someone with a willing, graceful spirit to show me new insights that clarified God's Word for me. We are all students of the Bible, even those who have been trained and hold advanced degrees in Bible and theology. There must be what my dissertation mentor, Kevin Vanhoozer, calls a "hermeneutical humility" when reading ancient and sacred texts. In other words, if we are using a consistent, literal, historical, grammatical approach

to interpretation and God brings new understanding to his Word, we all must be willing to learn and grow and even change our minds.

This means, knowing our own philosophical and cultural biases, we seek to interpret Scripture without those biases becoming a hindrance if they conflict with biblical truth. It means we learn to interpret the text in the context of a Spirit-filled community, the body of Christ. It means we allow God's Word to master us more than we seek to master it.

We stand on the shoulders of church tradition and thousands of years of interpretation. It would be chronological snobbery to think we are the only ones who have the best insights into the truth. Some of the greatest and most insightful discoveries have come from theologians, pastors, and laypeople who have lived out, taught, preached, and written about these truths throughout the centuries. We would do well to become acquainted with them in our task of interpreting and applying the unchanging truth of the gospel to our lives today.

Like my previous book, this book can serve as a daily devotional guide, a book for small-group study, or as a side text for courses on how to interpret the Bible. I've seen some pastors use the idea for a sermon series, and I have seen people simply read it for a quick, casual read. Either way, my prayer is that it will be profitable for you on your spiritual journey.

The Bible is a life-changing book, but if misinterpreted and misused, it can become a dangerous book. How we view God has a direct impact on how we live, what we think and believe, how we feel, and how we treat others. So it is all the more important that we seek to understand who God is

and what his will for us is in keeping with the truth he has revealed in his Word.

Now let's look at some of the most misused stories in the Bible, reading stories that are all full of grace and truth, stories that ultimately point to Christ and his redeeming love for you and me.

# 1

## David and Goliath

“You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts.”

—1 Samuel 17:45 NASB

**G**rowing up, my friends and I loved to play Little League baseball. One advantage of living in a small town was that I could ride my bicycle to and from the ball field for practices and games. I would slide my mitt over the handlebars and pedal my way through town, proudly wearing my multicolored Astros uniform.

When I played, I was never afraid of the baseball and getting hurt. But before or after games, it was a different story. My bike ride always took me by a house that had a rather large Doberman pinscher with a huge bark and equally large

teeth. I'm not sure if it was me, the color of my uniform, the bike I was riding, or the feeding schedule he was on, but whenever he saw me, he ran to the full length of his chain and practically choked himself, ready to tear me to pieces. You can imagine how fast my heart beat and pedals moved whenever I neared his yard.

Now, generally speaking, dogs don't scare me—but this guy was the exception. He was looking for a steak, and I fit the profile. But as long as he was on that chain, I was fine. I actually came to enjoy the adrenaline rush as I rode past his yard, and occasionally would even give a few fake barks of my own in his general direction. (We all have our ways of dealing with fear.)

But on one occasion, the man-eater's owner happened to be untying him from the chain at the very moment I came by. It was then that my worst nightmare became a reality. With unbridled speed and red rage surging through his eyes, that Doberman broke free from his master's grip and charged at me with fury in his bark and saliva flying from his mouth.

The words *panic*, *terror*, *horror*, and "*I'm too young to die*" don't begin to describe the fear that instantly gripped my soul as my eyes grew big and my stomach grew nauseated watching this beast approach. In a flash, the dog was biting at my pedals and barking at full volume. I let out such a blood-curdling yell that I'm sure the entire population of Mexico, Indiana, heard it.

With my feet dangling and kicking, my handlebars out of control, and my hat flying off my head, the dog's owner yelled not at the dog but at me to stop the bike and be still!

What was he thinking? I wasn't about to stop and become this animal's dessert. But I had no choice because my feet

slipped off the pedals and my bike came crashing to the ground. I hit the ground hard and covered my head with my hands. But to my surprise, the black beast pulled up from his jet-fighter attack and sprinted back to his owner with a stride of fulfillment that undoubtedly made him a hero in his own mind.

The owner asked if I was okay, but I couldn't say a word. I quickly grabbed my hat, picked up my bike, and raced down the street while trying to catch my breath and restart my heart. It was the closest I had ever come to dying in the short twelve years I had been alive.

It is, as they say, a memory and a feeling I will never forget.

Fear is a powerful reminder of our mortality, and it is the very thing that can render us paralyzed and numb when faced with important decisions or interactions with intimidating people (and Doberman pinschers).

Many will tell us that when we are afraid, we should simply pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and face “the giant” before us with the confidence we muster up from deep within—whether the giant is a roller coaster, a final exam at school, or a relationship gone sour. And if there was ever a biblical story that would seem to fit that mandate, it is the story of David and Goliath.

The story of the shepherd boy versus the giant Philistine warrior in 1 Samuel 17 is known worldwide. From Sunday school to sermons, we are taught to face our fears like David did and stare down the giants that wage war against our souls. But is this the best way to understand and apply the story of David and Goliath?

I say the story is not about David overcoming fear. If you look closer, you see that he shows no signs of fear at all. In fact, David is quite confident (and quite perturbed) when he

hears about this unusually large warrior who seemingly has lassoed the armies of Israel with his thundering voice and intimidating presence.

The Israelites, led by their first king, Saul, were encamped in a valley. They had drawn up battle lines against their arch-enemies, the Philistines, who were led by a “champion named Goliath of Gath” (17:4 ESV). Estimated at nine feet nine inches tall, he had armor, a javelin, and a spear, the head of which weighed some fifteen pounds.

Goliath issued a bold challenge to Saul and his army, saying he would fight anyone who would come meet him in battle, and if he lost, the Philistines would become their servants. But if Goliath prevailed, Saul and his men would lay down their arms and become servants to the Philistines.

Goliath was defying the ranks of Israel with his nasty, intimidating bark. But then a young boy comes by, a shepherd named David on a mission from his father. David was a part-time armor-bearer for Saul, so he was used to coming on and off the battlefield and returning home regularly to care for his father’s sheep.

But on this latest trip to the battlefield, David was given an assignment by his father to carry some grain and bread to three of his older brothers who were enlisted full-time in Saul’s army. In addition, David was to take ten cheeses to their commander (incidentally, one of only a few times cheese is mentioned in the Bible).

Now as David approached the armies of Israel and greeted his brothers, who had once again aligned against the Philistines, he heard the familiar voice and taunt of the monster-warrior Goliath repeating the same challenge he had been giving for forty days and forty nights.

David watched as the men of Israel fled in fear, even though King Saul had apparently offered a reward—great riches and his daughter in marriage—to any man who would stand up to the giant and bring him down. David was grieved when he saw this, and poignantly asked, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17:26 ESV).

David did not seem to register any fear, and his bold words eventually reached the attention of King Saul, who called for him to come and report to him. Then David said to the king, “Don’t let anyone be discouraged by him; your servant will go and fight this Philistine!” (17:32).

Saul doubted David’s capabilities, but David convinced him he was able due to his past victories in striking down lions and bears in defense of his father’s sheep. Now David was asserting himself once again to defend another group of scared sheep, the armies of Israel. To David, Goliath was just another lion or bear to be conquered, and he was confident God would deliver him from the hand of this Philistine brute as well.

The king gave his consent, and then tried to give David his armor for further protection. But David was not about to wear it. He was to find victory in being himself and trusting in the God he knew was sovereign over man and all living things. So with staff and stones and sling in hand, he made his way out to the Philistine to make it clear whose God was in charge.

The mockery came quickly, with Goliath taunting David, “Am I a dog that you come against me with sticks?” (17:43). He then cursed David, no doubt hoping he would shrink back in fear. But once again, David showed no fear:

“You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord’s and He will give you into our hands.”

17:45–47 NASB

These are hardly the words of a boy who is afraid of a big dog.

And most of us know the rest of the story. David quickly approached Goliath (again, with no fear), pulled a stone from his bag, and slung it with such precision that it struck the middle of Goliath’s forehead, sending him to the ground. With that, David retrieved the giant’s sword and finished him off.

You see, David had a history with God. And because David knew the character and power of his God, he had no fear. To be fair, fear *is* a part of this story. The irony is that the ones who truly were afraid (Saul and his army) chose not to battle the giant. They certainly did not overcome fear with faith.

But David, the one without fear, overcame the giant not because he wanted to conquer his fear, but because he was zealous to defend the character and glory of God. So the main point of the story is not about overcoming fear and facing your giants as much as it is about trusting in the power and character of God to deliver.

When God's reputation is on the line, and a man or woman of faith seeks to defend his honor, you can rest assured that God will be there. God will be glorified in the life of one who trusts in him. He will deliver his people and ultimately triumph, for he gives us the victory, either in this life or in the life to come.