

David and Goliath

A few years ago I had my last boxing match. I had been drafted in at short notice to fight two weight divisions above my usual fighting weight. It didn't seem like much so I climbed into the ring at RAF St Athan, near Cardiff. My opponent climbed into the ring, removed his robe and revealed that I was in the ring with Charles Atlas. It was quite a scary moment. I looked down towards my coach, whose head was sunk into his hands as it shook. So when the bell sounded, I sprinted to the corner where Charles Atlas was beginning to emerge. – Well, to cut a long story short, it became clear that my usual approach was not going to work with someone this big. So, I departed from the Marquis of Queensbury rules. I positioned the referee on my left, and used my right elbow to full effect, drawing the fight to a swift conclusion. It was not the conclusion I had aimed for. I had forgotten that on my right, three judges were sat watching very closely. I was disqualified in shame. So ended my boxing career.

David and Goliath is a pagan myth that has nothing to do with bible. At least, for most people. In the village where I used to live, local home owners clubbed together to oppose a building development. The developers plans were turned down, the local paper described it as a David and Goliath victory. It has become a metaphor for the underdog becoming champion, for the little guy overcoming the giant. It is the kind of story has always emerged in different cultures in different ages. Success when it seemed impossible. The boy overcomes the evil enemy. Is that it? Is there nothing more to this story?

Terrorism is not an easy word to define. Since the invention of this bizarre phrase, 'war on terror', powerful nations justify their cruelty by claiming that their enemies are terrorists. And because terrorism is a slippery word, it is a justification that seems to convince many people. The more hastily that enemies are branded as terrorists, the closer we come to a definition that works something like this. Terrorists are those who inflict terror and death upon others, without adhering to the rules of war.

On this basis, David is a terrorist. He is not playing by the rules. What would have happened had David gone in front of Goliath armed with a sword, and taken him hand to hand? There would be no legend, no kingdom, probably no Israel. Israel is a nation whose first great King began his military career with a terrorist act. It was such a simple thing to do when you think about it though! This was something any shepherd boy could have done.

The scene is not so much an incredible victory against the odds. The scene is one of comedy. It is like the scene from Indiana Jones, when a swordsman wields his scimitar all around in a superb display of skill before moving in to attack the adventurer. And Indiana Jones just tuts to himself, pulls out his pistol and shoots him. That is precisely the kind of scene we are witnessing here.

The text makes it clear enough. David was well accustomed to using his slingshot to great effect. This is some young boy, out in the fields all day every day, practising with this slingshot while he watches the sheep. Can you imagine how good you would be with that thing if you were practising for a few hours each day. And can you picture how powerful a weapon this is? A decent sized stone in the hands of anyone accomplished with a slingshot, at a close enough range you are going to be deadly.

A friend of mine in the army, was a good few inches taller and a good couple of stone heavier than me. And on leave in Brazil one day, a young boy walked upon to him and demanded his wallet. My friend just laughed at this child, and spent the next six months in hospital recovering from a stab wound.

David was cheating. He was not playing by the rules.

So why is it, that nobody seems to complain about David? The *pagan myth* of David and Goliath is about overcoming impossible odds. The *biblical story* of David and Goliath is about somebody defying the rules of war. This is not some virtuous model of good soldiering. It is a story of desperation, about the heroism of someone who wins the battle without following the rules of war.

‘Use of white phosphorous on civilian targets?’

land mines are not illegal.

Use of white phosphorous is not illegal.