

2 SAMUEL 23:20-23

HOW TO BE A MIGHTY MAN

“Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was a valiant man of Kabzeel, a doer of great deeds. He struck down two ariels of Moab. He also went down and struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. And he struck down an Egyptian, a handsome man. The Egyptian had a spear in his hand, but Benaiah went down to him with a staff and snatched the spear out of the Egyptian’s hand and killed him with his own spear. These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and won a name beside the three mighty men. He was renowned among the thirty, but he did not attain to the three. And David set him over his bodyguard.”¹

“**T**he mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”² This was the assessment provided by Henry David Thoreau while in residence at Walden Pond. Thoreau was correct! Who among us hasn’t dreamed of accomplishing some outstanding deed? And, yet, few souls among us achieve even a modicum of the glory of which we dream. For most of us, unfulfilled dreams are left behind as we stumble into the moment. Consumed with our own pursuits, we seldom know of the brutal battles others have fought or the brilliant victories they have earned. Looking back, we may see a trace of glory from the days of our lives; but for most of us, the victories we have won are destined to remain ours alone and never to be shared.

The names of those identified as mighty among the warriors of David are men who would be recognised as mighty in any era and under any circumstance. Josheb-basshebeth, a warrior armed only with a spear, stood against eight hundred men! Eight hundred men! It is grave understatement to describe such an exploit as “mighty!” Eleazar the son of Dodo, son of Ahohi, was another of David’s mighty men. This was a man who stood with David, striking down Philistines until his hand was welded to his sword. That is a mighty deed performed by a mighty man! Shammah, the son of Agee the Hararite defended *a field of beans* against the Philistines, striking them down until an entire army turned and fled. These were mighty men.

We haven’t time to list each of the men named in this extraordinary chapter, though each surely is worthy of respect and honour, even in this day far removed from the days in which they served David the King. However, one man will receive our focus today; listed among David’s mighty men is a priest who became a warrior. This man, Benaiah, will be the focus of our study today. Benaiah is identified as “a doer of great deeds.” I believe any one of us would appreciate being identified as “a doer of great deeds.” Reviewing the deeds of Benaiah will prove instructive and encouraging to each believer. Join me in review of this extraordinary man. Through our study, it may be that God will teach us what is required to become a mighty man.

BENAIAH THE SON OF JEHOIADA — “Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was a valiant man of Kabzeel, a doer of great deeds” [2 SAMUEL 23:20a]. Benaiah was born into the priestly Aaronic lineage. This becomes evident when we read an account concerning him that is provided in the Chronicles. “The third commander, for the third month, was Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada the chief priest; in his division were 24,000. This is the Benaiah who was a mighty man of the thirty and in command of the thirty” [1 CHRONICLES 27:5, 6].

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Henry David Thoreau, **Walden**

Surprisingly, Benaiah is mentioned quite often in the Historical Books of the Old Testament. Benaiah was recognised not only for his prowess, but also for his intelligence and his abilities as a leader—he would be required to adapt and overcome in the heat of battle. Benaiah was put in charge of the Cherethites and the Pelethites [see 2 SAMUEL 8:18; 1 CHRONICLES 18:17]. The Cherethites and the Pelethites were foreign mercenaries hired by David; they functioned as special forces for the army. These warriors appear to have been distantly related to the Philistines, though they were not themselves immediately allied with Philistines. They were sea people, perhaps originally from Crete. They likely allied themselves with David during his time among the Philistines during the time he was forced to flee from Saul.³

In addition to their function as special forces, these fierce warriors were appointed to serve as the personal bodyguard for the King. The Cherethites and the Pelethites were, if you will, the palace guard—fiercely loyal to David. It was only reasonable that a trusted lieutenant would be charged with their oversight; and Benaiah was the man chosen by the King to lead these mercenaries who figure prominently in the various conflicts David fought. The fact that Benaiah was in charge of these fierce warriors speaks highly of his own abilities as a warrior and the respect both of those whom he was appointed to lead and the respect of David himself.

Before Solomon had ascended to the throne, Adonijah attempted to usurp the kingdom. The account of that attempted usurpation informs us, “Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, ‘I will be king.’ And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, ‘Why have you done thus and so?’ He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom. He conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest. And they followed Adonijah and helped him. But Zadok the priest and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and Nathan the prophet and Shimei and Rei and David’s mighty men were not with Adonijah.

“Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fattened cattle by the Serpent’s Stone, which is beside En-rogel, and he invited all his brothers, the king’s sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, but he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the mighty men or Solomon his brother” [1 KINGS 1:5-10].

Adonijah consulted with Joab, the long-time field marshal of the armies of Israel throughout David’s reign and with Abiathar, the priest, but he pointedly excluded consulting with those he knew to be loyal to his father. Among those whom Adonijah recognised as loyal to the King was Benaiah—the same Benaiah of whom we are now learning.

When David was informed by Nathan of what was taking place, the King called for Benaiah as one of his most trusted servants. Benaiah, in charge of the Cherethites and the Pelethites, would accompany Solomon as he was crowned King in David’s place. As these warriors had served to guard David during his reign, so they would serve Solomon.

Though thwarted in his efforts to become king, Adonijah did not give up his desires. He attempted to secure a place in the hearts of the people through deceiving Solomon’s mother in a plot that would make him a *de facto* ruler. Because of his continued efforts to promote himself as heir to the throne, Solomon was compelled to have Adonijah killed; it was Benaiah who was sent to fulfil the King’s command [see 1 KINGS 2:19-25]. Likewise, when Joab was at last held to account for his bloody exploits against innocent men, it was Benaiah who was again dispatched [see 1 KINGS 2:28-34]. He played a similar role in the execution of Shimei [see 1 KINGS 2:39-46].

³ “Cherethites,” “Pelethites,” articles in Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, Steve Bond, E. Ray Clendenen, Trent C. Butler and Bill Latta, Eds., **Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2003) 281, 1264

Solomon placed Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, to serve as commander over the army. “King Solomon was king over all Israel, and these were his high officials: Azariah the son of Zadok was the priest; Elihoreph and Ahijah the sons of Shisha were secretaries; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder; Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was in command of the army; Zadok and Abiathar were priests; Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers; Zabud the son of Nathan was priest and king’s friend; Ahishar was in charge of the palace; and Adoniram the son of Abda was in charge of the forced labor” [1 KINGS 4:1-6]. He had been in charge of the Israelite Special Forces, who were also charged with security for the King; now, he was in charge of all the army. He was noted both as a warrior and as a man able to think and to plan in times of war.

Benaiah managed his own household well, as his children give evidence. In the Chronicles, we read of those individuals who were appointed to serve David the King. Among those named are these, “Jonathan, David’s uncle, was a counselor, being a man of understanding and a scribe. He and Jehiel the son of Hachmoni attended the king’s sons. Ahithophel was the king’s counselor, and Hushai the Archite was the king’s friend. Ahithophel was succeeded by Jehoiada the son of Benaiah, and Abiathar” [1 CHRONICLES 27:32-34].

In broad strokes, this is the life of Benaiah, son of Jehoiada. However, the brief synopsis does not tell us what specific actions brought Benaiah to the attention of the king. The text before us this day tells us something of Benaiah’s bravery, his skill as a warrior in the crucible of combat. Make no mistake, there is an art to warfare. One does not simply go to battle and begin to kill the enemy; one must never forget that the enemy is trying to kill you! A battle is actually composed of multiple little battles, each of which consumes the combatants. Knowing when to fight and where to fight are part of the art of war. Knowing how to preserve your life and the life of your comrades speaks of the skill necessary for success in combat.

In a day now distant, I was training for war. My drill instructors, combat veterans, stressed that we were to make our enemies heroes of the order of Lenin ... posthumously! Our role was not to get ourselves killed or to get the men under our command killed, our role was to win battles. Combat is inherently dangerous. Anyone put into such a situation must know that there will be injuries and death as result of the battle. A successful warrior will endeavour to ensure that it is the enemy who is injured and/or killed. That was Benaiah!

Here is a fact that I passed by rather quickly a short while ago—Benaiah was a priest. Go again to 1 CHRONICLES 27:5: “The third commander, for the third month, was Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada the chief priest; in his division were 24,000.” Scope in on the fact that Jehoiada, the father of Benaiah, was the chief priest. Benaiah was born in the lineage of Israel’s priests.

HIS EXPLOITS — “Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was a valiant man of Kabzeel, a doer of great deeds. He struck down two ariels of Moab. He also went down and struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. And he struck down an Egyptian, a handsome man. The Egyptian had a spear in his hand, but Benaiah went down to him with a staff and snatched the spear out of the Egyptian’s hand and killed him with his own spear” [2 SAMUEL 23:20, 21].

The Chronicler provides additional help for us to understand the exploits of this mighty warrior when he writes, “Benaiah ... struck down two heroes of Moab. He also went down and struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. And he struck down an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits tall. The Egyptian had in his hand a spear like a weaver’s beam, but Benaiah went down to him with a staff and snatched the spear out of the Egyptian’s hand and killed him with his own spear. These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and won a name beside the three mighty men” [1 CHRONICLES 11:22-24].

The Word of God presents three valiant acts for which Benaiah is noted. Any one of these deeds would be significant, but this man appears to have been noted for multiple heroic actions. The movie “Hacksaw Ridge” describes the heroics of Desmond Doss, a conscientious objector who served as a combat medic in the United States Army. His refusal to fight was based on his religious belief that it was wrong to take life. However, he wanted to serve his nation in time of war, and so he volunteered for the armed forces with the understanding that he could serve as a medic. Desmond Doss was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor by the United States for his heroic actions saving both comrades and enemy soldiers during combat. The account of his courage got me to wondering about others who received this high honour from their nation for courage under fire. My research led me to a series of interviews and oral histories of the accounts of almost one hundred men who were awarded this highest honour for service during the Viet Nam War.

As I listened to the oral accounts of each of these men, one theme was repeated by each man. Each of these men recognised that they were awarded the medal because their deeds were documented. Each of them admitted that others were equally brave, equally valiant, except their deeds were not observed or documented. The other common confession of each of these men was that they didn’t consider themselves particularly deserving of the award, but they accepted the honour on behalf of the men with whom they had served. Each man, without exception, considered himself a representative of others. These men were genuinely humble when speaking of their own exploits, genuinely gracious toward their fellow warriors.

Think with me of the courage displayed by this gutsy man, Benaiah. We are provided with three specific incidents that undoubtedly qualify as valorous. Think of these conflicts in their turn. Benaiah is a doer of great deeds, and the first deed for which he is noted is that “He struck down two ariels of Moab” [2 SAMUEL 23:20]. Perhaps you are not familiar with the term “ariel.” The meaning of this word appears to refer to a “lion-like person,” a “brave, formidable soldier.”⁴ Thus, the meaning conveyed by this verse might read, “Benaiah son of Jehoiada, from Kabzeel, was a hero of many exploits. It was he who smote the two champions of Moab.”⁵ A more recent, contemporary version renders the verse as, “Benaiah son of Jehoiada was a brave fighter from Kabzeel who did mighty things. He killed two of the best warriors from Moab.”⁶

The people of Moab were a constant enemy for Israel even before they entered the land [see NUMBERS 22:1-23:9]. However, David had appealed to the King of Moab to provide sanctuary for his father and mother when David fled from Saul [see 1 SAMUEL 22:3-5]. It was perfectly natural that David should appeal to the King of Moab for sanctuary; remember, David’s great grandmother, Ruth, was a Moabitess [see RUTH 4:13-21].

However, after assuming the kingship over Israel, David fought the Moabites; his devotion to the Word of God [cf. NUMBERS 24:17] was greater than family ties. We read that “[David] defeated Moab and he measured them with a line, making them lie down on the ground. Two lines he measured to be put to death, and one full line to be spared. And the Moabites became servants to David and brought tribute” [2 SAMUEL 8:2]. David’s actions may appear harsh to us; however, in light of contemporary practise, it would have been considered compassionate. Prisoners of war would have been either killed or sold into slavery. By taking the action he did, he spared Israel facing another enemy immediately.

⁴ James Swanson, **Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)**, (Logos Research Systems, Inc., Oak Harbor 1997)

⁵ **The New English Bible** (Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, New York 1970)

⁶ **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2005)

In light of the message this day, what I would have you see is that Benaiah distinguished himself in battle by facing and besting two Moabite warriors recognised for their prowess. Combat in this day is not as it was in an earlier era. Today, firearms permit engaging a warrior from a distance; snipers conduct their war from distances up to two kilometers from the enemy. The combat in which Benaiah was engaged would have been close-in, it was conducted at arm's length. Benaiah would have been armed with a sword or perhaps with a spear. He may or may not have had a shield with which to protect his body. The combat would have required him to close ranks with these warriors. Unlike the movies, combat is exhausting. Swinging a sword, dodging blows aimed at the warrior and doing so while clad in armour is exhausting. To meet and beat two warriors recognised as among the best the enemy fielded speaks of might and skill.

Let's break this down and make any lesson accessible to each person listening. In your life, you will face some fierce warriors. Perhaps it is someone intent on doing you evil. Perhaps it is someone who is determined to destroy you through telling lies about you. Gossip is one of the most lethal weapons evil people employ to injure and destroy others. Slander is the companion of gossip. When the Apostle wants to display the utter degradation of society that has turned its back on the Son of God, note that gossip figures prominently in the characteristics of that culture. "They are filled with every kind of sin, evil, selfishness, and hatred. They are full of jealousy, murder, fighting, lying, and thinking the worst about each other. They gossip and say evil things about each other. They hate God. They are rude and conceited and brag about themselves. They invent ways of doing evil. They do not obey their parents. They are foolish, they do not keep their promises, and they show no kindness or mercy to others. They know God's law says that those who live like this should die. But they themselves not only continue to do these evil things, they applaud others who do them" [ROMANS 1:29-32, NCV].

In his Second Letter to the Church of God in Corinth, the Apostle wrote of his fear of what he might find when he came to Corinth. "I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit and disorder" [2 CORINTHIANS 12:20]. Tragically, it does not require a great deal of imagination to think of a modern assembly marked by such evil and wickedness. Too many churches are characterised by "quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit and disorder."

"Idle hands are the devil's workshop," says an old adage. The Apostle knew that this could become a problem among the faithful and warned of those who learned "to be idlers, going about from house-to-house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not" [1 TIMOTHY 5:13].

As gossip is a destroyer, so slander is just as destructive. Slander attacks the character of an individual; it arises from a wicked heart. Jesus warned, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" [MARK 7:20-23].

Perhaps it is to be expected that people today will be slanderous. We are warned, "that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power" [2 TIMOTHY 3:1-5]. The Apostle concludes by instructing saints, "Avoid such people."

Many of God's people have faced, or even now are facing fierce warriors. These vicious warriors and their implements of war are able to destroy a person without drawing blood. However, we must never shrink from the truth. We must stand firm in the truth, refusing to surrender to the temptation to become evil, striking back. We are taught, and we must practise, "Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" [2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5].

Just as Benaiah overcame two mighty warriors, perhaps defeating them in the same day, so the child of God can defeat the mighty warriors she faces, doing so in the strength of the Lord. When John wrote of the coming of our Master, he wrote, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" [JOHN 1:5]. That light which has never been overcome is the light which now shines in the heart of each child of God. This is the reason we are commanded, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good" [ROMANS 12:21].

I am always encouraged when I read that First Letter of John. You may recall these words, "Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" [1 JOHN 5:4, 5]?

Let me look forward to a day that is yet future. It may be closer than any of us can imagine, but it lies within God's timing. "Then war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But the dragon was not strong enough to prevail, so there was no longer any place left in heaven for him and his angels. So that huge dragon—the ancient serpent, the one called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world—was thrown down to the earth, and his angels along with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying,

"The salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God,
and the ruling authority of his Christ, have now come,
because the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
the one who accuses them day and night before our God,
has been thrown down.
But they overcame him
by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony,
and they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die."

[REVELATION 12:7-11, NET BIBLE]

"[Benaiah] also went down and struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen" [2 SAMUEL 23:20b]. We see that Benaiah met *the worst possible enemy*—he met a lion! He met that enemy in *the worst possible location*—he went down into a pit! He met that enemy under *the worst possible conditions*—he fought on a day when snow had fallen! Everything was against Benaiah! Yet, he won! Lions didn't stalk Benaiah; Benaiah stalked lions! Intimidation was not in Benaiah's dictionary, unless it was something that he did. Chuck Norris would have slunk away at the mention of Benaiah's name. If there had been movies in that ancient day, there would never have been a "Rambo," the movie would be named "Benaiah."

This lion had been perhaps driven from the normal haunts in the thickets of the Jordan by the winter weather to seek food and had drawn near to one of the communities. The Hebrew is not clear as to whether the lion fell into a pit or had entered into a cave, as the word can refer to either a pit or a cave. It is of scant moment whether the lion was in a cave or in a pit, what is important is that the animal was a danger to humans. Benaiah accepted the challenge of delivering the people from the danger of the beast. That the battle was during a period with snow on the ground would make the conflict more dangerous since it would be treacherous to gain secure footing. A slip while confronting the lion would be fatal. This encounter would require courage and skill, qualities Benaiah appears to have had in abundance.

I understand that modern society is enamoured of lions, thinking of them as sort of cuddly beasts. People that live with lions are glad to see them removed since they are dangerous and they do kill people. Cecil the lion and his brother were not mourned by people living with them. The people living nearby celebrated when he was killed.

It is quite the dramatic picture that is before us: Benaiah walks through the snow, jumps down into the pit and kills the lion. David could appreciate that. Speaking of himself when he was first introduced to Saul, David recalled without a hint of self-consciousness, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears” [1 SAMUEL 17:34-36]. David knew that it was the LORD who had delivered him from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear. He was assured that the LORD would also deliver him from Goliath [see 1 SAMUEL 17:37].

Here is a truth any child of God can get behind. ***So long as we are fighting the Lord's battle, He will deliver us.*** The problem for far too many of us is that we are fighting our own battle, and the outcome of the battle rests fully on us. If I am contending for the truth, battling for the souls of men, God will give me strength and I shall prevail. Say it with me—***I shall prevail.*** Say it with conviction—***I shall prevail.*** You make certain you are fighting the Lord's battle and ensure that you are doing so in the Lord's strength, and you shall never fail.

When I ministered among the black churches in the South Oak Cliff section of Dallas, I would hear the people singing a song that has often stuck with me in the years since.

God can do anything, anything, anything;
God can do anything but fail.
He can save, He can keep, He can cleanse and He will,
God can do anything but fail.⁷

Whom God calls, God equips; where God sends, God supplies. I would that God's people learned this critical lesson. The Psalmist has said, and we can say it, as well,

“I trust in you, O LORD;
I say, ‘You are my God.’
My times are in Your hand;
rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!”

[PSALM 31:14, 15]

That is a powerful, comforting truth for each child of God.

⁷ Ira Stanphill, “God Can Do Anything but Fail,” © 1946, renewal 1974; assigned to Singspiration/ASCAP

A moment ago, I spoke of some among the faithful who have faced great contests in the struggle for truth. The people of God are to be encouraged to overcome adversity, to succeed in standing for the truth. Now, I am addressing some who have faced, or perhaps who even now are facing an impossible foe; what is worse, you are compelled to face this foe of the Faith under impossible circumstances and in an impossible location. You don't always get the opportunity of choosing your fight or even where that battle will be fought. Often, the people of God are ambushed. At such times, the best advice you can receive is to advance into the fire. Never turn your back on the enemy. Satan never fights fair! Those who attack the saints of God are often directed in their attacks by the enemy of the soul. He knows our weakest point, and he will direct the assault at that point where we are most likely to succumb.

The tracks left by the evil one reveal that he is prowling about, and though we would prefer to be left in peace, we are forced into the fight. Perhaps we must confront the evil because it threatens our loved ones, or perhaps the presence of the evil threatens the progress of the Faith. Whatever the reason, we are forced into the fight, and it is seldom a time of our choosing.

I know I speak to some who believe their present battle is impossible. Listen carefully: *our Lord specialises in resolving the impossible*. If He can deliver six million slaves out of the hand of the most powerful nation in the earth, making those slaves into a nation, if He can deliver a giant into the hand of a shepherd boy, if He can send fire down from heaven to devour a sacrifice and the altar on which it is arranged, if He can deliver three Hebrew men from a fiery furnace, if He can shut the mouths of lions so that His servant is unharmed when he is in the den with the beasts, you may be assured that He can deliver you. The United States Naval Seabees have a motto: "We do the difficult immediately; the impossible takes a little longer." I'm telling you that we serve a God who *specialises* in the impossible. To the one who is facing an impossible battle, turn to God who will transform what looks like certain defeat into victory. That is what our God does and in power.

If Benaiah had earned a hero's commendation in two instances, how stunning when he had yet a third encounter that marked him as a valiant man. The text asserts, "He struck down an Egyptian, a handsome man. The Egyptian had a spear in his hand, but Benaiah went down to him with a staff and snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear [2 SAMUEL 23:21].

I'm intrigued by the notation that the Egyptian was "a handsome man." I wondered why the writer would include such a mundane fact in the record. The Hebrew reads somewhat literally, "he was a sight." I take it to mean that his height made him noticeable. I derive this from the parallel passage in the Chronicles: "He struck down an Egyptian, a man of great stature, five cubits tall. The Egyptian had in his hand a spear like a weaver's beam, but Benaiah went down to him with a staff and snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear" [1 CHRONICLES 11:23]. This means that the man was over seven and one-half feet tall. It leads me to postulate he was a mercenary hired to fight for the Philistines. Perhaps, as they had done with Goliath, they sent forth this man as their champion, challenging Israel to send a champion to engage in combat.

What is important is that not only did Benaiah engage this man in individual combat, but he approached him armed only with a staff while the Egyptian was armed with a spear. The spear was for thrusting, not for throwing. Still, the pointed tip of the spear was intended to kill, whereas the staff could hurt, perhaps even disable, but it would not necessarily kill. Benaiah not only went against this well-armed Egyptian, but he snatched his spear from his hand and then killed the man with his own spear.

Whether Benaiah was deliberate in disarming himself or whether it was happenstance that he did not have an edged weapon or a thrusting weapon, we are not told. What we are told is that he faced another serious conflict with inadequate equipment. There are some among the saints, individuals called to perform some major tasks without the equipment required to perform the assigned deeds. Perhaps a believer is called to teach a Bible study, but he demurs because he has not been to Bible college or to seminary. The first Sunday School class I was asked to teach was nine-year-old boys. I had never taught in my life. I studied hard, reading the Bible and preparing my lesson each week. Imagine my joy when I met a young man who is pastoring down in Washington. He introduced himself, saying, “You don’t remember me, do you?” He was correct in that assessment. Then, he told me, “You taught me when I was a nine-year-old boy back in Trinity Temple Baptist Church. Now, I pastor a church here in Washington. You’re the one who led me to the Lord.” What a joy for me to see what God had accomplished through my obedience. God took over the impossible task and gave me victory in that young man’s life.

I recall the first Bible study I was asked to teach. One of the elders at the Faith Bible Church in Dallas asked me to lead a home Bible study. I demurred, stating that I was untrained and a relatively young believer myself. He insisted, however, saying he saw something that was not at all evident to me. The study was hosted in the home of one of the elders of the congregation. My class consisted of about twelve men and women training for the mission field. Most of them were students in the Summer Institute of Linguistics; they would go into the mission fields under the auspices of Wycliffe Bible Translators to various unevangelised areas upon completion of their studies. I proposed to teach the Book of James; having never taught a Bible study, James was as good a book as any. Talk about feeling inferior and inadequate! Almost all of them showed up with Greek testaments on that first night. I did the best I could, confessing repeatedly to the Master my inadequacy.

My lack of knowledge was an obvious disappointment to those men and women. They left after the first night, openly disappointed in the teacher they had received. I can never forget the third evening, however. God came around. I had asked the students to read the Book of James at least once each day during their devotional time as we prepared for the study. Before that third class began, one of the men asked if he might speak before I began. I was convinced that I was going to hear what a miserable teacher I was and how they really wanted someone who could give them some meat. Imagine my surprise when he began by saying, “I’ve lived a lie. I thought I was a Christian, but as I read James this week, I realised that I was lost. I asked Christ to save me as I read this book, and I’ve become a believer.”

At that, a young woman said she had something to say. “Okay,” I thought, “now I will get it.” However, she said she had come to realise that she was playing church and wanted everyone to pray for her because she was tired of being a hypocrite. That evening, six or seven of the students confessed their sinful nature, requesting prayer of the others, or they acknowledged that they had become believers in the Risen Son of God. Revival broke out. The Master came around and honoured His servant.

What I’m saying is that each of you who are willing to be used by God can be used if you commit yourself to Him. Take on the daunting challenge that He assigns and know that He will equip you for the task. We live in a day when professing Christians want someone to do their thinking for them, want someone to feed them, want someone to care for them. God is not looking for more infants among the faithful—God is looking for valiant warriors who will trust Him to accomplish the impossible through them. I’m speaking to people who are capable of doing the impossible as God works through them.

“[Benaiah] won a name beside the three mighty men” [2 SAMUEL 23:22b]. We read further that “He was renowned among the thirty” [2 SAMUEL 23:23a]. He had a high rank, but not the highest. Think of that! You almost want to say, “If he wasn’t the highest rank, what would qualify for the highest rank?” I thought about that, remember the words of the Master when people were asking Him about John the Baptist. Of John, Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” [MATTHEW 11:11].

Now, John the Baptist was a great man! He was the forerunner! He was the one who baptised the Lord Jesus. This was a great man. Yet, Jesus said, “The one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” It’s hard to get my head around Jesus’ words. Any of you who are born into the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John the Baptist.

Benaiah performed some great deeds; but the deeds you can perform in the service of the King qualify you to be greater than Benaiah could ever be. We do not fight armed with physical weapons—we are engaged in spiritual warfare. I quoted the passage earlier, but listen to it again. “Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” [2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5]. *We advance the Kingdom of God through prayer and praise, through witness and worship, through reason and relationships.*

I’m speaking to Christians, saying that you may never make the top three, but you can be among the thirty. I’ve never seen an apple tree jealous of an orange tree. I’ve never seen a lemon tree jealous of a pear tree. Each just blooms where it is planted. Thus it is with you—be who you are, fulfilling the work that God has assigned. This will be to His glory.

Do I speak to one outside this holy Faith? Perhaps you have imagined you are a warrior in the cause of Christ, but you have never enlisted in His cause. Only one who is twice-born may be counted among the redeemed. It is necessary for you to be saved if you will serve. Christ Jesus died because of your sin. He was buried and then raised from the dead on the third day. He walked among those who knew Him before ascending into the glory. Now, He is seated at the right hand of the Father; and from there, He is coming again to take to Himself those whom He has redeemed through faith in Him.

This is the Word of God, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10]. You know quite well that this particular portion of the Word concludes with a plea to believe. “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [ROMANS 10:13]. Our sincere prayer is that you will receive this gift of life that is promised in Christ the Lord. Amen.