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Facing Our Giants?
Getting the Moral Sense Right in 1 Samuel 17

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Abstract: The recent history of interpretation for 1 Samuel 17 includes both scholarly and lay interpreters advocating for readers to "face their giants." This reading sees David as the moral exemplar, who trusts in God no matter the obstacle. While this reading is certainly inspiring, this article argues, through use of a modified version of the fourfold sense, that a Christological interpretation of the passage's spiritual sense leads to a more robust understanding of the tropological sense.

Introduction

The story of David's confrontation with Goliath in 1 Sam 17 has been interpreted by many, from lay people to biblical commentators, as an invitation for readers to "face the giants in their life." For these readers, this text apparently gives impetus, motivation, and ability for Christians to face their problems in everyday life with confidence and in the expectation that God will give them victory.

This essay will explore 1 Sam 17 using a modified version of the fourfold method of interpretation and ask whether or not the above

tropological[1] interpretation is reflected in and warranted by the text. Drawing on de Lubac's work on the interrelation of the senses, the essay seeks to demonstrate that a close reflection on the literal, spiritual, and anagogical senses of this passage does not warrant the application given above.

Not only does the above interpretation take 1 Sam 17 out of its literary and historical context in the history of Israel, but it also pays little to no attention to the literal, allegorical, or anagogical senses of the passage. I will argue here that a more appropriate theological interpretation, and specifically a better tropological reading, is derived through close attention to the first three senses.[2] In the first part of the essay, I demonstrate the differences in pre-modern and modern interpretive conclusions, while in the second part I give a brief explanation of the fourfold sense. The third part of the essay attempts to apply the *quadriga*[3] to the interpretation of 1 Sam 17.

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[1]The term tropological refers to the ethical or moral sense of the text. See Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of* Scripture, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 127–78.

[2]This article finds much conceptual and some structural affinity with Peter Leithart's essay, "The Quadriga or Something Like It: A Biblical and Pastoral Defense," in *Ancient Faith for the Church's Future,* eds., Mark Husbands and Jeffrey P. Greenman (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 110–25. Two important differences will become apparent, though. The first is that this essay intends to root the relationship between the literal and allegorical senses in an intertextual and canonical methodology that pays close attention to textual quotations, inner biblical allusions, and narrative recapitulation. The second is that while Leithart and I both intend to defend the fourfold method and use 1 Sam 17 as a test case, his articulation of the interpretation of 1 Sam 17 is different from mine in a number of places, especially in the literary and historical details emphasized. This is not to say that I disagree with Leithart's interpretation, only that mine is complimentary, not identical.

[3]I am using "*quadriga*" synonymously with "fourfold sense." See Leithart, "The Quadriga or Something Like It," 112.

1 Samuel 17 in Early Christian Interpretation. The early Christian interpreters exhibit a consistent Christological interpretation of 1 Samuel 17, seeing Christ and Satan prefigured in the persons of David and Goliath. Particular details of the story are seen as types of details of Christ's life and work, particularly his death. The most important parallel is between David's defeat of Goliath and Christ's victory over Satan, which has implications not only for the cosmic battle waged between God and his enemy but also for the redeemed and their sanctification. While there are not many examples of an interpreter working through the text in a way that separates the four senses, the underlying methodological and theoretical principles of the fourfold sense are easily discerned in their interpretive conclusions.

Particularly important in this regard is the consistent Christological *telos* of their various readings; their articulation of the spiritual sense is regularly centered on Jesus. While a few interpreters do have a more moralistic reading in their articulation of the tropological sense,[4] especially in their comparison of David's battle against Goliath to their own battles against various heretical

[4]e.g. Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy* 1.35.177 (*NPNF*^{2} 10:30); Aphrahat, *Demonstration V: Of Wars* 1.3 (*NPNF*^{2} 13:353); Basil, *Homily 20* (*NPNF*^{2} 8:lxv); Chrystostom, *Against the Anomoeans* 11.4–5, cited in John R. Franke, ed., *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1–2 Samuel* (ACCS 4; gen. ed., Thomas C. Oden; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 267; idem, *Homilies on Genesis* 46.9–10, cited in ACCS 4, 270; John Cassian, *Conferences* 24.8.1–2, cited in ACCS 4, 272. Note, though, that for Ambrose and Chrysostom, they also read the passage as ultimately speaking of Christ and his victory over Satan. Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy* 2.7.32 (*NPNF*^{2} 10:49); idem, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 3.15.125 (*NPNF*^{2} 10:260); Chrystostom, *Against the Anomeoeans* 11.6, cited in ACCS 4, 274. See n. 4 for more Christological interpretations.

theological positions,[5] even a more moralistic interpreter like Chrysostom ultimately sees the passage as a figuration of Christ and his victory over Satan.[6]

Further, many of these Christocentric articulations of the spiritual sense are followed by tropological interpretations directly dependent on those previous Christ-centered spiritual readings. Caesarius of Arles, after commenting on Christ as the true David and his defeat of Satan, only then goes on to discuss how Christians, through the Christ-given Spirit's power, are able to enter into spiritual battle. In his words, ". . . it would be impossible to conquer, if Christ the true David had not come down with his staff which is the mystery of the cross."[7] Likewise, Augustine says, "But our armor is Christ; it is that which the apostle Paul prescribes when, writing to the Ephesians, he says, 'Take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may be able

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[5]e.g. Gregory of Nyssa, *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book* 1 (*NPNF*^{2} 5:250); Jerome, *Letter LXX. To Magnus an Orator of Rome* 1.2 (*NPNF*^{2} 6:149); Paulus Orosius, *Defense Against the Pelagians* 2, cited in ACCS 4, 267–68; and Theodoret, *Letter XVI. To Bishop Irenaeus* (*NPNF*^{2} 3:255–56). Note that Jerome makes an explicit typological parallel between David and Jesus in his exhortation to defeat heretics. In other words, his tropological point is bolstered by the spiritual and anagogical senses of the passage.

[6]Chrysostom, *Against the Anomeoeans* 11.6, cited in ACCS 4, 274. In addition to the other Christologically typological interpretations noted in footnotes 2, 4, and 5, see also Jerome, *Letter XLVI. Paula and Eustochium to Marcella* 1.2 (*NPNF*^{2} 6:61); Theodoret, *Letter CLXXX: Letter of Theodoretus, As Some Suppose, to Domnus, Bishop of Antioch, Written on the Death of Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria* (*NPNF*^{2} 3:346–47); Ephraim the Syrian, *The Nisibene Hymns* 18.6, 36.3, 53.15 (*NPNF*^{2} 13:188, 197, 208); Bede, *Four Books on 1 Samuel 3.17*, cited in ACCS 4, 268; Ceasearius of Arles, *Sermons* 121.3, cited in ACCS 4, 270; idem, *Sermons* 121.4, cited in ACCS 4, 271–72; and Origen, *Fragments on Jeremiah* 28.1, cited in ACCS 4, 271.

[7]Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons* 121.5, cited in ACCS 4, 268–69. See also Maximus of Turin, *Sermons* 85.3, cited in ACCS 4, 274; Bede, *Four books on 1 Samuel 3.17*, cited in ACCS 4, 275; and Paulinus of Nola, *Poems* 26.150, cited in ACCS 4, 273.

to withstand in the evil day . . . ." He goes on to compare this aforementioned armor with David's armor when facing Goliath, drawing a parallel between David's victory and Christ's, and thus between Christians' spiritual battles and the battles of both David and, more importantly, Jesus.[8]

For the early Christian interpreters, then, while there are some instances of a more moralistic approach, the dominant interpretive strategy is to see the David and Goliath story as having its figural fulfillment in Christ. The pre-modern interpretation of this passage is consistently one which sees the spiritual and anagogical senses as thoroughly Christological, and, furthermore, which thus sees the tropological sense as dependent on Christ's fulfillment of the typological thrust of the passage in his death and resurrection. Christ, the greater David, secures victory over Satan, prefigured in Goliath, through his death and resurrection, which then gives Christians the ability through their reliance on the Christ-given Spirit to fight their own spiritual battles against temptation, sin, principalities, and powers.

1 Samuel 17 in Popular Commentary. This Christocentric reading of the spiritual, anagogical, and tropological senses is almost non-existent in modern commentary and scholarship. Instead, two approaches dominate the discussion. On the one hand, biblical scholars seek to pay close attention to the details of the text but do not read the passage as spiritually or allegorically referring to Christ. On the other hand, modern popular commentary seems to skip both the literal sense and the Christological spiritual sense and move directly into a moralistic

[8]Augustine, *Letters* 75.2, cited in ACCS 4, 275–76.

reading of the tropological sense. An example of much of modern American culture's take on the story comes from popular author Max Lucado:

> What odds do you give David against his giant?
>
> Better odds, perhaps, than you give yourself against yours.
>
> Your Goliath doesn't carry sword or shield; he brandishes blades of unemployment, abandonment, sexual abuse, or depression. Your giant doesn't parade up and down the hills of Elah; he prances through your office, your bedroom, your classroom. He brings bills you can't pay, grades you can't make, people you can't please, whiskey you can't resist, pornography you can't refuse, a career you can't escape, a past you can't shake, and a future you can't face.[9]

In recommending to his readers how to face these giants, Lucado suggests, "Rush your giant with a God-saturated soul. *Giants of divorce, you aren't entering my home! . . .* How long since you loaded your sling and took a swing at your giant? Too long, you say? Then David is your model."[10]

Although biblical scholars may be quick to dismiss this as anachronistic allegory, this type of interpretation, where the exemplary David gives believers confidence to face obstacles in light of God's supreme power, is not relegated to populist speakers. Stephen

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[9]Max Lucado, *Facing Your Giants: God Still Does the Impossible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 2–3.

[10]Lucado, *Facing Your Giants*, 6.

Andrews and Robert Bergen, for example, offer this type of application numerous times in their commentary. One such instance occurs in their discussion of David's supposedly inferior weaponry when they state, "Christian leaders need to learn to trust God when facing difficult enemies. This means trusting God's strategy as well as trusting that God will give us the weapons we need to win."[11] Jessica Fitting explains that the proliferation of this interpretation is partially due to the popularity of the David and Goliath story in children's literature and its similarities to "young boys' tales." This relationship between 1 Sam 17 and children's literature has resulted in a tendency to focus on the "underdog" aspect of the story, and has influenced the interpretive conclusions of biblical commentators, secular academics, and popular speakers alike.[12] Even Esther Menn, while not appropriating the prevalent interpretation above, comments that, "No doubt much of the popularity of this narrative stems from David's exemplification of Israel's identity as a small nation surviving under seemingly impossible odds."[13]

1 Samuel 17 in Modern Biblical Scholarship. Nevertheless, even with the predominance of the "underdog" interpretation in popular (and

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[11]Stephen J. Andrews and Robert D. Bergen, *I & II Samuel,* Holman OT Commentary 6, ed., Max Anders (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 122. For similar statements, see ibid., 118–19, 121. See also Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, New American Commentary 7, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 186–87.

[12]Jessica Fitting, "Children's Literature and the 'David and Goliath' Story," *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* 34, no. 2 (2010): 38–53.

[13]Esther M. Menn, "Child Characters in Biblical Narratives: The Young David (1 Samuel 16–17) and the Little Israelite Servant Girl (2 Kings 5:1–19)," in *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 331.

especially American) culture, many biblical interpreters opt for interpretive conclusions that are more grounded in the text of 1 Sam 17 and its historical and covenantal context. For instance, Mark George argues that, "As a result of the coming battle, a theological statement will be made that all the earth will recognize: YHWH and Israel's new national identity [as embodied in David] have triumphed."[14] Similarly, Robert Couffingal, in comparing 1 Sam 17 to folktales, argues that the story is intended to highlight David as YHWH's warrior and in doing so, demonstrate the power and preeminence of Israel's God.[15]

Numerous other scholars focus on Israel's declaration of YHWH's supremacy as part of its missional identity and in the face of Philistine reliance on arms.[16] Some focus on the pericope's description of

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[14]Mark K. George, "Constructing Identity in 1 Samuel 17," *Biblical Interpretation* 7, no. 4 (1999): 410.

[15]"Leur but était double: exalter celui qui fut le sauveur de son peuple et le roi le plus glorieux d'Israël, en qui se retrouve la nation tout entiere; démontrer ensuite qu'a travers l'homme agit le bras du dieu national: l'acteur principal du récit n'est ni David, ni Goliath, mais YHWH." Robert Couffignal, "David et Goliath: Un Conte Merveilleux, Étude Littéraire de *1 Samuel* 17 et 18, 1–30," *BLE IC* (1998): 440.

[16]In addition to Mark George, "Constructing Identity in 1 Samuel 17," see also, for instance, Walter Bruegemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation, ed., James Luther Mays (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 132; Mary J. Evans, *The Message of Samuel: Personalities, Potential, Politics, and Power*, The Bible Speaks Today, ed., J. A. Motyer (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 111; David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary 8, eds., David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 193–94, 203; Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary,* Old Testament Library, eds., Peter Ackroyd (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1964), 146–55; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel*, trans., James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 repr.), 183; Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, eds., David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 180, 182–83; Kyle P. McCarter, *I Samuel*, Anchor Bible 8 (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 297; Ben F. Philbeck, Jr., "1–2 Samuel," in *1 Samuel-Nehemiah*, The Broadman Bible Commentary 3, ed., Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 56; and David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, New International

weaponry and armor,[17] while others look to rhetorical analysis,[18] narrative criticism,[19] and literary structure.[20] But while this focus on YHWH's sovereignty over military victory is certainly closer to the theological message of the text than "God will defeat the giants in your life," what is still decisively lacking here is any sense of how the passage can be read Christologically.[21] While a Christological reading may be foreign to some modern interpreters, as will be shown below,

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Commentary of the Old Testament, ed., Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 463.

[17]See, for instance, David Bernat, "Biblical *Wasfs* Beyond Song of Songs," *JSOT* 28, no. 3 (2004): 327–49; and Gregory T. K. Wong, "A Farewell to Arms: Goliath's Death as Rhetoric Against Faith in Arms," *BBR* 23, no. 1 (2013): 43–55.

[18]Anthony R. Ceresko, "A Rhetorical Analysis of David's 'Boast' (1 Samuel 17:34–37): Some Reflections on Method," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 58–74.

[19]Moshe Garsiel, "The Valley of Elah Battle and the Duel of David with Goliath: Between History and Artistic Theological Historiography," in *Homeland and Exile: Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Bustenay Oded* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 419–20. Garsiel actually calls out the underdog interpretation, saying, "It would be a mistake to conclude that this is a story of a courageous young shepherd who defeated a giant well equipped professional warrior with his shepherd's sling. This is not a story of a contest between warriors in which the weak, the underdog, defeats the stronger. This is a story that delivers a theological message that the outcome of the war is in the hands of God, no matter what weapons are used by the warring parties." Garsiel, "Valley of Elah Battle," 420.

[20]Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 193–94.

[21]Three notable exceptions in contemporary interpretation are Francesca Aran Murphy, Bill Arnold, and Peter Leithart. Francesca Aran Murphy, *1 Samuel*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible, ed., R. R. Reno (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 185; Bill T. Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel*, The NIV Application Commentary, ed., Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 266–67; and Peter Leithart, "The Quadriga or Something Like It." My essay differs Murphy's and Arnold's in considerable ways, most notably in the attempt to provide textual grounding for the move from the literal to the spiritual sense and to read this passage in an explicitly Christological manner. I have already noted the differences with Leithart's essay in n. 1 above.

the fourfold sense and the rule of faith both promote this *telos* of interpretation. Seeking to address both the application related error and Christological deficiency of modern day interpretation, we now turn our discussion back to the fourfold method, as it moves from the literal sense through the Christotelic spiritual sense to the moral sense.[22] The argument here is that using the fourfold sense's structure will guide the reader to a better theological reading of 1 Sam 17, and especially, a better reading of the tropological sense.

The Fourfold Sense of Scripture

The Christological Unity of the Senses

Pre-modern interpreters[23] use the four senses of Scripture to capture the multiplicity of meanings.[24] While the literal sense—the details of

[22]As with all interpretative methods, one can abuse the fourfold method by using it either as a free ranging speculative exercise or as a machine through which to crank the text to obtain "objective" results. I hope to do neither here, although I may not be successful in avoiding that Scylla and Charybdis.

[23]There was of course a historical development of the method discussed here as well as variety in how it was employed. The following is not intended to suggest that there was uniformity among interpreters for the first fifteen centuries of church history but that, for many, at a foundational theoretical level, this is how the *quadriga* conceptually works. For the history of the fourfold sense, see Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 3 vols.

[24]Multiplicity does not mean relativism. Rather, it recognizes that there are multiple purposes in any given text. See, for instance, Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 272–76; and idem, *Is There a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 414–21.

the text—is the starting point for exegesis,[25] the spiritual sense is intimately connected to the literal and recognizes the details of the literal sense are not the point in and of themselves. Instead, the fathers saw that the details of the text point to a greater meaning.[26] The plot of the story, along with the details in it, has a greater point, or *skopos*, and namely a Christological one.

Additionally, the *regula fidei* and an understanding of the unity of the four senses were vital for pre-modern interpreters. Early and medieval Christian exegetes assumed the scriptures to be unified in their narrative, purpose, and content, all of which are Christological,[27] and that the fourfold sense captured this Christological unity. More recently, Kevin Vanhoozer has argued for this Christological hypothesis of Scripture based on its pneumatological purpose—to testify to the Son—and its Christological origin—Christ the Word speaking to his people through Scripture.[28] This conviction of a biblical narrative, purpose, origin, and theme unified around the person and work of Jesus is mirrored in the pre-modern interpreters'

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[25]For the fathers and medieval theologians, understanding the literal sense was not so much understanding historical background as it was grasping the literary details, whether narrative, poetic, legal or otherwise, of the text. Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 166–69.

[26]See, for example, de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:197–207.

[27]John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*, Formation of Christian Theology 1 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 17–43; Christopher Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 192–95; Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis,* 1:234–47; and John O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore, MA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 22, 25–26, 28.

[28]Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 219–31.

understanding of the four senses as a unity. They recognized that the Bible reveals God in Christ and transforms his people,[29] and this acknowledgment that Scripture is both revealing and transformative was coupled by seeing the latter three senses—allegorical, anagogical, and tropological—as part of the one spiritual sense, or purpose, of each passage.[30]

Note that I am not blindly appropriating the Fathers' and Medieval interpreters' method, nor am I ignoring the egregious abuses of it. These abuses are not necessitated by the method, however, nor do all articulations of it rely heavily on Platonic dualism or metaphysical speculation, as is often posited. For instance, Frances Young helpfully distinguishes between ikonic and symbolic exegesis, and between figural and symbolic allegory, a distinction that assists in appropriating the fourfold method in a textually careful manner.[31] The latter "symbolic" categories, according to Young, characterize pre-modern interpreters who wanted to make the details of the text correspond to metaphysics or extra-biblical history without textual warrant. Ikonic exegesis and figural allegory, on the other hand, approached allegory as rooted in textual and narrative markers—rooted in the details of the text, and consistent with the main point of the Bible.[32]

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[29]See e.g. de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:226.

[30]de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:225–68; Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture,* 175.

[31]See the helpful distinction between ikonic and symbolic exegesis, and figural and symbolic allegory in Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, 161–213.

[32]While I appreciate Young's categories for their heuristic value, I depart from her conclusion that they are merely descriptions of the "activities of the exegete."

Christological Figuration. While this account of premodern interpretation is fairly standard, the assertion that there is a Christocentric spiritual sense to the entire Bible, and especially the entire OT, needs more explanation. Many modern readers shy away from reading the Bible Christocentrically, and, further, some might quibble with the assertion that pre-modern readers saw the spiritual sense as preeminently Christological. Part of the problem here is that, in the history of interpretation beginning with Origen and paralleled in Jewish interpretation in Philo, "allegory" has come to mean forcing the details of the text to refer to some extratextual and usually metaphysical reality disjointed from the author's intention and the narrative structure of the text. What the Antiochene school reacted against was not seeing that the text has an allegorical sense but "improper" allegory,[33] allegory that pointed beyond the text to metaphysics. Instead, they understood the text's *theoria* as an intertextual and Christologically focused allegory that tied biblical characters and events together through quotation, allusion, and narrative recapitulation. Contemporary interpreters most often refer to this as figural or typological interpretation.[34]

Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, 175. Instead, it seems to me that ikonic exegesis and figural allegory are activities of the exegete precisely because they are recognizing textual features, namely intertextuality and narrative recapitulation. See the discussion of both of these textual features, and the example of Scott Hahn, below.

[33]See Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture,* 161–85.

[34]But by typological interpretation I do not mean only "coincidental" historical correspondence rooted in divine providence noted by a later author, but a textually connected and prophetically intended literary correspondence between two scriptural persons or events. The latter is still rooted in divine providence, but it is also authorially intended. Here I differ from Vanhoozer, who seems to root typology

Figuration and typologically intensifying inner biblical allusions were key parts of the premodern readers' search for the Christ-centered allegorical sense, and it is for this reason that it was so tied to the anagogical, or eschatological, sense. Beginning with Moses and the Pentateuch, the OT builds an intertextual web of related characters and events. This is the pattern of biblical revelation – later events are interpreted in light of previous Scripture. The entire Old Testament textually and typologically builds on itself to present a unified but diverse narrative, prophetic, and poetic hope, a hope that is summarized as eschatologically Messianic.

Scott Hahn, speaking of the typological character of Chronicles, says,

> The Chronicler's history represents a deep reading of the canon of Israel's scripture. Beginning in the Torah and continuing through the historical and prophetic books of the Nevi'im, as well as the liturgical and Wisdom literature of the Ketuvim, the Hebrew canon is filled with examples of inner-biblical exegesis. Later texts rewrite, comment upon, or reinterpret earlier ones; new situations and people are understood and characterized by analogy to earlier texts.
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> . . . Like any good historian, the Chronicler provides a record of past figures, places, and events; but his accounting is written in such a way that these figures, places, and events often appear as types – signs, patterns, and precursors – intended to show his

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and figures only in an a posteriori recognition of providential correspondence rather than in a authorially intended, prophetically colored textual association between two or more events or characters. See Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 222–23, 231.

> readers not only the past but also their present reality from God's perspective.[35]

This is true not only of Chronicles but of OT narratives in general. This repetition of inner biblical allusions,[36] centered primarily around Adam, Joseph, Moses, David, the exodus, and the exile, gives the entire OT narrative an eschatological thrust, one which expects the Messianic Davidic king to bring Israel out of exile through a new exodus.

Hahn's contemporary understanding of typology fits with the Fathers' understanding of the economy of Scripture; Irenaeus argued that the biblical stories are organized into one overarching story,[37] and Athanasius relied on the economy of Scripture in his refutation of Arius.[38] When the Fathers and medieval theologians spoke of the economy of Scripture, they did not just mean that there was a unified story, but that this story has a climax, which is Christ. In other words, the story is always moving forward anagogically towards Christ's first and second advent. Thus the Christocentric spiritual sense of Scripture is bound up intimately with the anagogical sense.

As Henri de Lubac has argued in his monumental study of medieval exegesis, the four senses are thus a unified whole that seek to articulate the polyvalent but authorially controlled meaning of the

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[35]Hahn, *The Kingdom of God as Liturgical Empire*, 6.

[36]Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture,* 133, 148–54.

[37]O'Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 36–39.

[38]O'Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 58; see also Peter Leithart, *Athanasius*, Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 40; Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, 21.

text.[39] Moving from literary detail, the interpreter recognizes a typologically or figurally connected, narratively unified, and progressively eschatological spiritual meaning. Note that the allegorical and anagogical are tied closely together here, as it is usually through intertextual typology—the anagogical sense—that the spiritual, Christological meaning is derived.[40] After understanding the allegorical sense, the reader is free to understand the tropological sense, or what we might call application. Further, it is vital for the interpreter to proceed in this order, as placing the tropological sense prior to the allegorical produces an a-Christian moralism divorced from gospel-empowered ability to obey.[41] With this framework in mind, in the remaining section of this essay I want to apply this method to a specific text, 1 Sam 17, as a test case and also as a means of arriving at a proper moral application.

Facing Our Giants? The Four Senses of 1 Samuel 17

The Literal Sense

[39]de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*. He makes the arguments for unity primarily in volumes one and two, although his interpretive history and examples in volume three are intended to bolster that sense of unity given in the first two volumes.

[40]Other closely related, indeed overlapping, ways that the authorially intentional text communicates an anagogical message include narrative recapitulation and direct prophecy. By narrative recapitulation I mean the use of previous scriptural narratives to interpret contemporary events, such as Luke's interpretation of Jesus as the new Elijah/Elisha. See, for instance, Anthony Le Donne, *Historical Jesus: What Can We Know and How Can We Know It?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 38–40; Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture,* 154, 195–202.

[41]de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:132, 135; and Leithart, "The Quadriga or Something Like It," 117.

The details of 1 Sam 17 (or more accurately 1 Sam 17:1—18:5) are fairly straightforward.[42] The immediate context of the passage includes Israel's continued lack of victory in the Promised Land (1 Sam 12),[43] Saul's failure as Israel's first king (1 Sam 15), and YHWH's choice of David (1 Sam 16). Discussion of Israel's king widens the reader's vision to the preceding book of Judges in the Hebrew Bible, in which Israel fails to conquer Canaan, repeatedly worships idols, and is portrayed repetitively as lacking any ability to obey YHWH. The solution is for

[42]Historical background and textual criticism have a role in understanding this passage, but in this essay the focus will be on literary details. For opposing viewpoints and conversation on many of the relevant issues, see McCarter, *I Samuel*, and Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*. For the text critical issues and decisions between the MT and LXX, there is a plethora of articles and monographs. See, for instance and in addition to the technical commentaries, A. Graeme Auld and Craig Y. S. Ho, "The Making of David and Goliath," *JSOT* 56 (1992): 19–39; Dominique Barthélémy, David W. Gooding, Johan Lust, and Emanuel Tov, *The Story of David and Goliath: Textual and Literary Criticism, Papers of a Joint Research Venture*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 73 (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986); Simon J. De Vries, "David's Victory Over the Philistines As Saga and As Legend," *JBL* 92, no. 1 (1973): 23–36; Charles David Isbell, "A Biblical Midrash on David and Goliath," *SJOT* 20, no. 2 (2006): 259–63; Frank Polak, "Literary Study and 'Higher Criticism' According to the Tale of David's Beginning," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, August 1985* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 27–32; Hans J. Stoebe, "Die Goliathperikope 1 Sam. XVII 1–XVIII 5 Und Die Textform Der Septuaginta," *VT* 6, no. 4 (1956): 397–413; Emanuel Tov, "The Composition of 1 Samuel 16 – 18 in the Light of the Septuagintal Version," in *Empirical Modes for Biblical Criticism* (ed., Jeffrey H. Tigay; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 97–130; Arie Van Der Kooij, "The Story of David and Goliath: The Early History of Its Text," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 68 (1992): 118–31; and Jan-Wim Wesselius, "A New View on the Relation Between Septuagint and Masoretic Text in the Story of David and Goliath," in *Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality: Exegetical Studies*, vol. 2, eds., Craig A. Evans and Daniel H. Zacharias (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 5–27. While Tov's position of LXX chronological priority has been highly influential, I concur with Van Der Kooij, David Firth, and others who adopt an MT priority. Space does not permit any engagement with the issue here beyond citing sources.

[43]See Paul R. House, "Examining the Narratives of Old Testament Narrative: An Exploration in Biblical Theology," *WTJ* 67 (2005): 237.

YHWH to rise up a king for Israel, as hinted at in Judges' refrain of "and there was no king in Israel" and portrayed in Samuel. Reference to Judges further reminds the reader of God's covenant with Abraham and Israel, his solution to Adam's sin in the Garden. God's promises to Abraham to bless others through him, to make his name great, to give him a land, to bring kings through his line, and to give him descendants that will form a great nation reverse the curse brought by Adam's sin. Adam was to be God's vice-regent, ruling over his good land, worshiping and obeying him, being fruitful and multiplying, and being a blessing. He lost the ability to complete these tasks in the fall, and God's covenant with Abraham—and thus with Israel—is intended to restore what was lost in Gen 3.[44]

Preliminarily, what the reader should note from a survey of both the immediate and canonical contexts is that 1 Sam 17 occurs within a narrative of covenant promise on YHWH's part and covenant failure on the part of Israel. Further, this covenant is cosmic in its scope, as the Abrahamic covenant is intended to reverse Adam's fall. The battle that ensues is for the as yet conquered land, a part of this covenant promise.

Textual connections to other significant battles in Israel's history demonstrate this covenantal importance. Phrases used in 1 Sam 17 that are found in other significant OT military contexts include "given into your hand" (1 Sam 17:31, 46; Num 21:34; Deut 3:2), "he fell on his face

[44]James M. Hamilton, "The Seed of Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," *TynBul* 58 (2007): 253–73; idem, "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *SBJT* 10, no. 2 (2006): 30–54; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, Word Biblical Commentary 2, eds., David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1994), 7; N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 23.

to the ground" (Josh 7:6; Judg 13:20; 1 Sam 17:49), "went out to meet Israel" (Gen 46:29; Num 21:23; Josh 8:14; 1 Sam 4:2; 2 Sam 18:6), and "your father and his house" (Gen 45:14; Josh 6:25; Judg 14:15; 1 Sam 2:28; Jer 37:15).

A few observations can be made from this list. First, these phrases are clustered around a small number of OT battles: the battles with Sihon and Og in Num 21 (and its parallel in Deut 3), the succession of battles in Josh 6–8, the battles with the Philistines in Judg 13 and 14, and the earlier battles with the Philistines in 1 Sam 2 and 4. Notice that these battles have implications for entering the land (Numbers, Joshua) and feature the Philistines (Judges, 1 Samuel). Second, the phrase "your father and his house" appears fairly generic and perhaps idiomatic. Note, though, that this phrase is clustered in the coherent narrative unit of Joshua–Kings, as are the other phrases. The only exceptions to that clustering pattern are the two parallels in Gen 45 and 46, the references to Og and Sihon in Num 21 and Deut 3, and Jer 37:15. One should further note here that the Og and Sihon references are significant land narratives within the Pentateuch. This means that, in terms of significant military battles within Israel's history, only Genesis 45 and 46, and Jeremiah 37 do not fit the pattern. In other words, the vast majority of these textual connections occur within the narrative of Joshua–Kings and/or the land narrative of Israel.

Additionally, the references within Joshua–Kings occur in very specific places. In Joshua, the references are all in the stories of Jericho and Ai (Josh 6:25; 7:6; 8:14); in Judges, the references are both in the story of Samson (Judg 13:20; 14:15); and in Samuel, the references are to Eli (1 Sam 2:28; 4:2) and David (1 Sam 17:31, 46; 2 Sam 18:6). Notice also that in each of these narratives, and in each of the textual connections between them, there is a pattern of victory followed by

defeat. Further, in at least the cases of the battles with Og and Sihon, Jericho and Ai, and the Philistines under Samson, we are dealing with covenantally significant battles that involve Israel's ability or inability to carry out God's command to inhabit the land. These textual and narrative connections, as well as the overtly Davidic hope of the rest of the Old Testament, bolster the conclusion above that the battle in 1 Sam 17 has obvious covenantal—and therefore cosmic—implications.

Looking at the actual battle itself, a number of details stand out. First, again, this battle is a covenant battle. It is not just any battle, but a geographically and strategically decisive battle[45] that is covenantally significant. Second, two representatives fight this battle, one for God's enemies and one for God's people.[46] The representative for God's people, David, has been chosen as king, and, looking at not only the previous canonical context but also the future context within Samuel, is the recipient of the Davidic covenant. While Goliath, representing God's enemies,[47] is arrayed with the traditional weapons of warfare and

[45]See, for instance, John A. Beck, "David and Goliath, A Story of Place: The Narrative-Geographical Shaping of 1 Samuel 17," *WTJ* 68 (2006): 321–30; Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 195; Garsiel, "The Valley of Elah Battle and the Duel of David with Goliath," 395; and Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 437.

[46]Some scholars, such as Israel Finkelstein and Azzan Yadin, suggest that the battle is reminiscent, and perhaps intertextually echoing, Homeric single combat. See Israel Finkelstein, "The Philistines in the Bible: A Late-Monarchic Perspective," *JSOT* 27, no. 2 (2002): 131–67; and Azzan Yadin, "Goliath's Armor and Israelite Collective Memory," *VT* 54, no. 3 (2004): 373–95. For a counter argument, see Serge Frolov and Allen Wright, "Homeric and Ancient Near Eastern Intertextuality in 1 Samuel 17," *JBL* 130, no. 3 (2011): 451–71. The important point is that these two men represent the hope of their respective nations. It is thus a covenantally, geo-politically, spiritually, and theologically important battle. See George, "Constructing Identity in 1 Samuel 17," 390, 397.

[47]Note Goliath's defiance (*hrp*) and cursing (*qll*) of Israel (cf. Gen 12:3; Lev 24:16). The fate of Goliath is sealed even before David walks onto the field because of his blasphemy. See Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 198–99; and Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel,* 195.

is, due to his size and experience, seemingly insurmountable, David looks unequipped. He refuses armor, does not fight with traditional weapons, and is diminutive in stature compared to Goliath. Israel, including King Saul,[48] flees—or at least cowers—in the face of the giant; David, on the other hand, goes to war with a sling and five stones. Further, with these stones David hits Goliath's head, knocks him down, and then cuts his head off. In other words, we have here a covenantally significant battle fought on the one side by a seemingly insurmountable representative of the enemies of YHWH and on the other side by an anointed but seemingly outmatched representative—and future king—of Israel, who wins by striking and cutting off the enemy's head.[49]

The Spiritual Sense.

This attention to detail allows the reader to see with more clarity the spiritual sense intended by the author of Samuel. Much importance has been ascribed to 1 Sam 17:45–47, where David contrasts his reliance on God with Goliath's reliance on his own strength, and rightly so. This is one of the main points of the passage. But in many cases this detail,

[48]One particularly interesting comparison in this passage is between Saul and Goliath. See, for instance, Auld and Ho, "The Making of David and Goliath"; Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 196; and George, "Constructing Identity in 1 Samuel 17," 401–2. As Firth notes, Saul's attempt to place his armor on David may indicate an attempt by Saul to force David to rely on what he will not, namely physical protection and weaponry. David, in contrast to both Saul and Goliath, relies not on traditional weaponry but on YHWH. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 199; see also Wong, "A Farewell to Arms."

[49]The careful reader of 1 Sam will notice that Goliath's death is portrayed in similar fashion to Dagon, the Philistine god in 1 Sam 5:3–4. Specifically, both Goliath and Dagon are ". . . reported to have fallen on his face to the ground . . . ." Both characters also have their heads cut off (*crt*). See George, "Constructing Identity in 1 Samuel 17," 406–407.

which teaches the reader to rely on God and not on their own strength, is improperly allegorized to say that, in *any* "battle" in a believer's life, he or she must rely on God. But this statement of David's reliance on God is not made in any generic sense or even in generic warfare language; it is made in the context of a battle with covenantal implications. In other words, this text does not warrant a reading that applies to every "battle" in a believer's life; rather, it is speaking specifically of a covenant-fulfilling battle. Although this point will be stressed in our discussion of the moral sense, it is important to note it here, both for its negative implications for the tropological sense and its positive implications for the spiritual sense. In regard to the latter, the reader ought to be drawn to think of covenantally significant battles in the rest of the Bible, and especially in the culmination of redemptive history in Christ. The battle that immediately comes to mind is, of course, Christ's work of atonement in his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost. Colossians 2:15, for example, presents the work of Christ, and especially the cross, as a victorious battle with God's enemies; likewise, Eph 1:20–21 teaches that Christ's resurrection defeats those who are opposed to YHWH.

The connection to Christ, and especially to the cross and empty tomb, is made clearer when we remember the other details of the passage. While David is certainly not Jesus, there are ways in which he typifies Christ. Like David, Jesus faces a towering enemy. The Roman Empire and Jewish leadership are in the foreground in the Gospels, but the Accuser, Satan, the Great Dragon, is presented as behind these machinations, both in the Gospels and in Revelation.[50] He is the

[50]E.g. the temptation narrative in the Gospels (Matt 4:1–11 and parallels); Satan entering Judas (Matt 26:14–16 and parallels); and Rev 12:5.

representative of all the enemies of God, indeed their leader, and is arrayed with powerful weapons – namely the tortuous execution by crucifixion. Jesus, on the other hand, refuses armor, namely Peter's sword and the heavenly host, and instead goes into battle naked and unarmed. Jesus, like David, defeats his enemy through foolish means, and through wounding his head. And finally, like David, Jesus fights the covenant battle on behalf of God's people. Like David, Jesus now leads God's people from the Davidic throne and rules over the kingdom of God – not, this time, a strip of land on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, but the entire cosmos. And like David, Jesus's covenantal battle is rooted in the canonical context of the Abrahamic covenant and reversing Adam's curse. Indeed, Jesus does exactly that. He is not only a better David, but the seed of Abraham, the new Israel, and the new Adam.

Notice that every detail of the story is not pressed into the service of allegory, keeping the text in bondage. For instance, I have not attempted to divvy up the OT or the entire Bible into five parts to correspond to the five smooth stones. Rather, the major literary and narrative details (plot, characters, context, climax) have been related to the canonical context and ultimately to the climax of the scriptural story, Christ.

Anagogical Sense

This brings the reader to the anagogical, or eschatological sense. While the preceding may seem overly theological or devotional, remember that these are distinct details parallel in both accounts. For 1 Sam 17, given the previous articulation of the literal and spiritual senses, the passage looks forward to the fulfillment of the covenant promises

through the Davidic king who defeats Israel's enemies. Further, 1 Samuel and the David narrative in particular are eschatologically charged both by its preceding narrative context[51] and the subsequent prophetic hope for a Davidic king. Each passage in the OT fits into the larger framework of the first testament, as it narratively builds towards YHWH's salvation of Israel and the nations through his Davidic Messiah. Because of the significance of this battle, both in its literary placement and its importance in the life of David, 1 Sam 17 contains this eschatological flavor and contributes heavily to it.

In one sense, then, this eschatological aspect of the meaning of 1 Sam 17 has been fulfilled in Jesus's first coming. But in another, New Testament believers are still waiting for Christ to return and finally and completely destroy Satan and all his followers. The Great Dragon has been cast down to earth and sea (Rev 12), but he has not yet been thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:7–15). The already/not yet tension that pervades the NT here allows the reader to see the anagogical sense as not only pointing to Christ's first coming but also to his second.

The Tropological Sense

And finally we arrive at the tropological sense. What is the correct application of this text? The author is attempting to produce some effect in the reader, but what is it? The tropological sense is dangerous ground in the history of the fourfold method. It is here that many

[51]Ruth, for example, ends with the hope of the birth of David, and the mention of Ephrath in 1 Sam 17:12–15 recalls both Ruth 1:2 and Mic 5:1. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 150. Tsumura and McCarter also note the eschatological thread that is picked up by Ezekiel, waiting for YHWH to do once again what he does in 1 Samuel 17 – defeat his enemies through his Davidic representative (cf. Ezek 39:23). Tsumura even explicitly, if briefly, notes that this eschatological hope finds its completion in Jesus Christ. See Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 463; and McCarter, *I Samuel* 297.

stumble, most often because they jump straight to it instead of passing properly through the literal, anagogical, and spiritual senses. Peter Leithart argues that the arrangement where moral applications are drawn directly from the literal sense, skipping over the allegorical, ". . . implies that virtue and ethics are prior to faith and thus represents a hermeneutical moralism."[52] Here I would add further that not only is it important to pass through the literal, spiritual, and anagogical senses properly, but it is vital to understand just what these senses are about. This is what the Fathers and medieval exegetes used the *regula fidei* for, as well as the economy. They argued that the structure and content of Scripture was inherently Christological. This is how the NT authors read the OT as well, and how Jesus understood the Scriptures' message.[53] The tropological sense must be grounded in this Christological framework in order to understand it properly. Even when the NT authors explicitly derive moral instruction from the OT narratives (1 Cor 10; Rom 15), it is in the midst of a Christologically framed argument. All this is to say that the tropological sense of 1 Sam 17 ought to be grounded in the Christ centered spiritual and anagogical senses, as well as the Christological *skopos* and economy of the Bible.

For this reason it is hard to see how "Face Your Giants" or any such variant is an appropriate moral application of this passage. We are decidedly not fighting a significant covenantal battle as the Davidic king and Adamic seed against the representative enemy of God. All of

[52]Leithart, "The Quadriga or Something Like It," 117.

[53]The point of Richard Hays that the NT authors also read the OT with an ecclesiological focus is well taken, although I am in agreement with Matthew Bates that the Christological and ecclesiological foci should not be too easily separated. See Matthew Bates, *The Hermeneutics of Apostolic Proclamation: The Center of Paul's Method of Scriptural Interpretation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 344–45.

this is accomplished in Christ Jesus. In fact, the one element of the text that can be figurally comparable to the church is not the one person David but instead Israel's military. And the comparison is not one of imitation but of contrast; unlike the armies of Israel, the church ought to put their confidence (faith) in their covenantal representative to win the battle for them.

This of course does not mean that believers are not engaged in spiritual warfare; far from it. Rather, as the allusions to Isa 59:15ff. in Eph 6:10–20[54] makes clear, Christians are called to fight spiritual battles in Christ through the power of the Christ-given Spirit. But the battle has been mysteriously transformed, and even turned on its head. Jesus has won through what Paul calls in 1 Cor 1 "foolishness," and instead of defeating a temporal geo-political enemy he has defeated the ultimate and last enemy, Satan. This in turn impacts the battle that believers face: they too do not battle against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of this world (Eph 6:12). To be clear: this means that "facing our giants" does not apply to any trial or uncomfortable circumstance that believers face. Divorce, trials in parenting, loss of employment, and other such examples do not constitute spiritual giants in believers' lives. Similarly, believers do not fight with the weaponry of the world but through putting on the armor of God, which, as the allusions to Is 59 in Eph 6:10–20 make clear, is simply putting on Christ. Spiritual warfare for the Christian is, according to Paul, putting on the victorious reigning Davidic king, who has already won the battle for us.

[54]Brueggemann makes an allusion to this passage in his commentary. See Bruegemann, *First and Second Samuel,* 127.

Conclusion

A careful application of the *quadriga* to 1 Sam 17, then, on the one hand, assists readers in avoiding a timeless and gospel-less moralism. On the other hand, the fourfold method provides space and impetus for a close, textual, contextually sensitive reading of the passage. In other words, the fourfold sense allows modern readers to use contemporary interpretive tools while at the same time giving proper attention to the Christological focus of Scripture. Instead of applying 1 Samuel 17, then, as an energetic call to face spiritual battles with confidence because God will give victory to believers as they face their own giants, Christian interpreters ought to instead urge one another to, through the Christ-given Spirit, put their confidence in Jesus the covenantal king who has already defeated the representative enemy of God in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension and will completely destroy him at his return. As they face the real enemy as God's ambassadors and for the spread of the gospel, they can place their faith in the Crucified and Risen One who has already won victory over the Enemy and will completely vanquish him at the final judgment.