

# A modern David and Goliath story

The David and Goliath tale is the most famous story about an underdog prevailing against a seemingly invincible foe. While we all have a narrative of this story in our heads, Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *David and Goliath*, claims our narrative is inaccurate. In Gladwell's telling, the first part of the story matches the story most of us have heard. The Israelite and Philistine armies met on a battlefield. Rather than suffering the many deaths that would come with a battle between the armies, the Philistines challenged the Israelites to a different kind of fight: their champion versus the Israelite champion. And their champion was imposing – tall, muscular, and seemingly impossible to beat in hand-to-hand combat.

At this point, Gladwell's story starts to take a different path from the one most of us know. I had heard that David challenged Goliath using just a sling, which I was told was a weapon only used by shepherds to keep wolves and other predators from killing their sheep. Gladwell corrected my false notion. He explained that slings were commonly used by militaries 3,000 years ago. They were an integral component of an army. These armies were made up of infantry, cavalry, and

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soldiers that could deliver blows from a distance. 3,000 years ago, armies used slings to hit their enemies at long range. Today, we do not think of slings as a common weapon of war because they were replaced by bows, which in turn were replaced by guns. We have all seen movies that have armies employing bows or guns, but almost none of us have seen movies depicting armies using slings.

For Gladwell, the interesting part of the story wasn't that David was a shepherd boy who was overmatched. Instead, the interesting part of the story was that the Israelites did something unexpected. The Philistines expected that Goliath would fight another infantry man. As they pictured the upcoming fight, two champions would use shields and swords and fight in close combat. By picking David as their champion, the Israelites allowed the one-on-one battle to unfold in a way the Philistines never imagined. As it turned out, Goliath was defenseless against an opponent who could hurl rocks from a distance. Goliath was dead before he got close enough to use his sword

against David.

In Gladwell's book, he emphasizes that an underdog can win by doing something unexpected. This is a general lesson that can still be applied 3,000 years after the rock felled Goliath. Most notably, the lesson gives hope to the Ukrainians as they fight the Russians. In this analogy, the Russians are like Goliath. They have more soldiers and more weapons. If the Ukrainians fight the war the way the Russians expect them to, the Ukrainians are doomed. That is, if the Ukrainians fight the Russians on Ukrainian land and only attack well-fortified Russian defensive positions, the Ukrainians will be beaten into submission.

The Ukrainians have only one path to victory – do something unexpected. Or more precisely, do several things that are unexpected. The Ukrainians recently made one of these unexpected moves. They attacked Russia. By doing so, they were able to face little resistance and achieve some success. If the Ukrainians can continue to find unexpected ways to fight against the Russians, they might be able to achieve success against a heavily favored opponent – just like David did.

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