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Q&A#117 Why Did David Take Five Smooth Stones?

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Today's question: "In your video on numerology, you said that we should pay attention to the presence of very specific numbers in surprising places. One possible example I'd like for you to discuss is the five smooth stones of 1 Samuel 17:40. Why be so specific about FIVE stones, when he only ended up using one? And is there any point to the other peculiarly specific details here?"

You can see the numerology video I mention here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zi5XB-qQ448>.

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Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, in your video on numerology, you said that we should pay attention to the presence of very specific numbers in surprising places. One possible example I'd like for you to discuss is the five smooth stones of 1 Samuel 17, 40.

Why be so specific about five stones when he only ended up using one? And is there any point to the other peculiarly specific details here? Interesting question and I've seen the example of five smooth stones being brought up as a sort of defeater for these sorts of

arguments about numerology. If you can give a meaning to the five smooth stones, then it seems that you can give a meaning to anything. And there are all sorts of allegorical meanings that have been given to these five smooth stones on occasions and in various sermons, things like that.

I think there might just be a meaning to these and I'm going to put forward one theory. But first I'll read the verse in question. Then he took his staff in his hand and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook and put them in a shepherd's bag in a pouch which he had and his sling was in his hand and he drew near to the Philistine.

So the Philistine came and began drawing near to David and the man who bore the shield went before him. And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him for he was but a youth, ruddy and good looking. Now there is an interesting collection of details there.

We have things like why smooth stones? Why from the brook? Why mention that? Why mention that he put them in the shepherd's bag and pouch? And why mention these other sorts of details within that context? The drawing near and all these sorts of things playing out. It seems to me that this will not make sense by itself. And if you are just relying upon these verses, it would be a difficult theory to put forward.

But I think that there is a connection here. And the connection that illumines this is the broader way in which the whole of the book of Samuel, the books of Samuel are playing out the story of Jacob. And if you look through the story of Jacob, you'll see a number of key characters that are juxtaposed with Jacob.

Jacob and Isaac. Jacob and Esau. Jacob and Laban.

Jacob and Rachel. And all these characters are part of a broader narrative. And in the story of David, we have these things being played out.

One of the reasons I wanted to answer this question is because I've just done an article exploring some of these themes as they appear late on in the life of David after his sin with Bathsheba. And how the story of Jacob plays out in all its most tragic elements. I'll leave that for another day.

You can read the article when it comes out. But here I want to focus upon some different themes and connections. Within the story of Saul, we have Saul juxtaposed with David in a number of key ways.

So Saul is in some senses like Isaac. Like Isaac, he's the one who fails, doesn't want to give the inheritance to the right son. He wants to give it to Jonathan instead of David.

And that sets Jonathan and David up in a sort of Esau-Jacob type rivalry. In a similar way to Isaac, he's someone who's deceived by a woman of his house using goatskin

concerning his son. And that is something that happens in the story of Michael.

And as David escapes, we see that being played out. What other connections can we see with Isaac? Well, there are two encounters. There are two encounters where in chapter 24 and 26, there is the theme of blessing at the end.

And David comes to Saul in both cases. And Saul is in both cases in a position of blindness. First, in the blindness of the darkness of the cave.

And second, in the blindness of sleep. And in both cases, he takes something. And it's some sign of status, some sign of inheritance.

In the first case, he takes the corner of his robe, which is associated with his rule, his kingdom. In the second case, he takes his spear and the jug of water next to his head. Again, signs of blessing and authority.

And it's associated with David's juxtaposition with Abner, who's Saul's right-hand man. And these two people are competing, as it were, for the top status next to Saul within the kingdom. And David puts himself, particularly in chapter 26, as the alternative to Abner.

Look, Abner's failed you. He's done really badly in this case. And shouldn't I be implicitly the right-hand man? And that both cases, we see Saul saying, is this your voice, David, my son? Now, that reminds us of nothing so much as the story of Esau and Jacob and Isaac's blessing of Jacob.

The voice sounds like Isaac. Well, it sounds like Jacob, but everything else seems like Esau. So there's this question of the voice of the son.

And that question rings out in a very powerful way within that context. So we see there that there is this connection between Isaac and Saul. Saul fails to bless the right son.

What else is there? What else could we see as a sort of connection? He's also the character who's like Laban. Laban is one who switches his two daughters. When he's promised one of them to Jacob as a wife, he switches them around and gives Jacob the wrong one.

Saul does exactly that to David. He switches around Merab and Michael. And so David marries Michael instead of Merab.

And so he's cheated. And he's a father-in-law who's a wicked father-in-law who's conspiring against his son-in-law. In other cases, we see that he pursues David away from his house.

We see that there's another situation where he's like Laban. He's like Laban in his attitude towards David and being drawn back from the final act of vengeance. That God

intervenes, as it were, and peace is made between the two of them.

And they go their separate ways. There are connections with Laban in the deception of Michael again. In both cases of Rachel deceiving her father Laban and Michael deceiving Saul, there is the rescue of the son-in-law or the escape of the son-in-law and a case of deception involving Terafim, household guards.

And we see that in both of those stories. So there are connections there with Laban. We also see connections with Laban and Nabal.

Nabal is in Hebrew, as in English, Laban backwards. He's a fool. He's someone who's ungrateful, who doesn't reward David or Jacob for the work that he has done.

And in that story, we see an interesting twist, which I might get to at some point later on in this discussion. What other connection is there? He is like Esau. He's the one who's rejected from the inheritance.

He's the one who despises the birthright. And we see these two characters of Esau and Jacob, and then David and Saul played off against each other throughout the narrative in very subtle ways. But if we're not paying attention to it, we're missing a lot.

We need to hear these things. If we're careful readers of scriptures, we will notice these things. And the way they're played off against each other is through various subtle signs.

So, for instance, the signs of the kingdom that are given to Saul involve the messengers saying that his donkeys have been found. Then some people with goats, with wine, with bread, and carrying those items that encounter him on the way. And then there are people playing musical instruments with the spirit of God coming upon him.

What happens when David is sent to Saul? He is sent with a donkey, bearing a goat, bread, wine, and bearing a harp to play music to remove the evil spirit and to bring rest to Saul. And David, of course, has the spirit of God with him. So all the signs that are associated with Saul's kingdom are born by David.

David is a kind of Saul-like character. He's a new Saul in a number of respects. We also see the Saul connection with the violence and the vengeance that's associated with Saul.

He's an Esau character who wants to avenge himself upon his adversary. And he sees that David's name is being lifted up. David has, Saul has killed his thousands, slain his thousands, David his tens of thousands.

There's this rivalry between them. It's not just between Jonathan and David, a sort of Esau-Jacob conflict, and Saul as Isaac. No, Saul is Esau, or Esau, we could call him.

And as Esau, he's someone who is in direct conflict. And we see him switching between these roles as Isaac and Esau, as it were, on various occasions. So, for instance, he says

in chapter 24, Is this your voice, David, my son? And then his immediate response after that is Saul lifted up his voice and wept.

Where have we heard that before? It's exactly what Esau does when he hears that he does not receive the blessing. There's a switch. And they have the Isaac character, you have the Isaac character who gives the blessing, and then the Esau character who weeps when he sees that he does not get it.

And Saul switches between those two. So immediately after he says, Is this your voice, David, my son? He then lifts up his voice and weeps. And then he declares the blessing.

He declares that David is the one that will receive all these things. And that happens at the end of chapter 24, and then the end of chapter 26. There are two encounters there.

And between those two is this time engaging with Nabal. And I think that's correct as building out this thesis a bit more. There's the first encounter with Isaac and the blessing that's involved there.

And then the next encounter that occurs with Esau after he returns from the time with Laban. And these two themes are associated. Now, what else is going on? Within this story, we see Esau and Saul as two characters bound together.

And then Isaac and Saul. And that sets up Jonathan and David as two characters that are like Esau and Jacob as well. They have an encounter within chapter 20 that is very reminiscent of the encounter between Esau and Jacob after their rivalry has gone.

So we see, Now, as soon as the lad had gone, David arose from a place toward the south, fell on his face to the ground and bowed down three times. And they kissed one another and they wept together, but David more so. That's exactly pretty much what we hear when Esau and Jacob meet after the crossing of the Jabbok.

So there's a significant reconciliation. These two are not rivals. So Esau and Jacob, in the case of David and Jonathan, is not a rivalry, but it's a friendship.

It's the relationship that exists between Esau and Jacob after they have reconciled. But then we also see Saul is Esau. He's Esau type character.

And there's a similar sort of event when, after he meets with David in chapter 26, he invites David to come back with him. And then David just goes his separate way. There's a difference.

There's a separation between them at that point, much as there is after Jacob encounters Esau after returning from the house of Laban. And Saul says to David at the very end, May you be blessed, my son David, you shall both do great things and also shall prevail. So David went on his way and Saul returned to his place, similar to what we

see in the case of Esau and Saul.

Esau and Jacob at the end of that encounter. And there are a number of similar themes here. So Saul is like Esau who despises his birthright.

He's removed from the kingdom. The blessing goes to David instead. And David is that younger son.

He's the youngest son of his house. He's the one who's raised up over his brothers. And he's one who is in many ways a supplanter.

He's someone who uses tricks in the house of Abimelech and in other places like that. He's someone who uses tricks to get his way. He's very similar to Jacob in that respect.

A lot of cunning and ploys to get his way. What else can we see? In the story of David, there are very peculiar details that associate him, not just with Jacob, but with Esau. And this is surprising to us.

Who are the two characters in scripture that are described as ruddy? There are only two of them. One is Esau and one is David. And so David is immediately introduced to us as ruddy and fair.

He's someone who's very attractive and he's ruddy. And these features are similar to features of Rachel and associated with Jacob and the features of Esau. Later on, we see him connected with Esau in a more negative way when he goes out with 400 men to attack in the story of Nabal.

And then Abigail brings him back to his Jacobness by sending over gifts, waves of gifts ahead of her. And that's exactly what Jacob does in his encounter with Esau when Esau comes to attack him with 400 men. These details are not accidental.

When we see these specific numbers, we should be alert. We should be paying attention. There's not always a meaning to them.

But often when we see those sorts of details, there is very much a meaning to them. There's a meaning to the places that things happen. There's a meaning to other details like that.

Now, we'll be getting to the story of the encounter with Goliath soon. But just think about these details a bit more. We're playing out the story of Jacob and Esau and we're playing it out in a different way now.

What we see is that the Jacob character, the character who's predominantly Jacob, is also a character that has Esau-like characteristics. Unlike the earlier Jacob, who is a man of tents. He's a shepherd, perhaps.

Whereas Esau is a man of the field. And we have interesting encounters that play on those themes. So the encounter between Esau and Jacob as David and Jonathan is within the field.

It's in the context of hunting. The arrows and this action using weapons. This is something that's associated with Esau.

Esau is a hunter, a man of the field, a man who gets game. Now, Jacob is a man who dwells in tents. He's a mild man.

He's a soft, smooth-skinned man. Whereas Esau is hairy and ruddy and tough and all these sorts of things. Esau is associated with wild goats.

And sure enough, we see David associated with the place of wild goats in, I think, it's chapter 24, verse 2. David is associated with the wild goats, just as Esau is. And we see within the story of Esau, there's a play upon words. Seir, the place where he lives.

Goats and hairy. All these things are related in the terminology in the Hebrew. They're playing upon the terms.

So you're supposed to hear the puns. And we see the same thing used in the story of the deception of Laban. Laban is deceived using the poplar strips from the poplar tree, which is associated with Laban's name.

With laz, a tree associated with laz and then also with cunning. And in each of these cases, it's playing upon key terms within the narrative, key terms associated with Jacob. And earlier on, we see that Esau is deceived using the red stuff.

And then immediately after that, called Edom. These names are significant. They're not accidental that they are given to us.

Now, getting back to the story of David and Saul. How might that help us to understand what is taking place in chapter 17? Well, I think it helps us to understand because we're having Esau and Jacob themes playing out. Here we have the faithful Jacob like character and the Esau character.

Who is the giant of Israel? Who is the giant that should be overtaking, defeating the giant of the Philistines? Well, who's head and shoulders above every other person in Israel? Saul. He's this good looking king whose head and shoulders over everyone else. He's the one with this great massive armor and he's not doing his part.

He's not fighting the battle. He's the one who should be the one inheriting. He's the one who's despising his birthright.

He's the one who's lost his right. He's the one who is futilely trying to repent. But he's a man associated with futile tears.

A man who loses his chance, who throws away what is given to him. And here in this story, we see that he's supposed to be the one going out to face the giant and he's not. Then David comes along the scene and David's actions are the actions that it's interesting.

He's associated with Joseph in some senses. He's sent out by his father to bring back messages from his brothers. His brothers resent him because he has ideas above his station.

All these sorts of things. And we see the Joseph story playing out in a great many ways in the story of David. But there is also the Jacob story.

And what I think we see within the story of Jacob is when Jacob starts out, he's not fit for authority. He's not fit for rule. He's someone who has to be dressed up in the clothes of another.

He's not really the person who has these qualities. His dad likes the hunter who goes out, the man of the field, the man who can go out and hunt game. Whereas Jacob's this mild mannered, smooth man who dwells in tents.

And he's not really got much strength or manliness to him. He's not much of a guy at all. And so he's dressed up and disguised and blessed in a disguise as he looks like Esau and smells like Esau.

But he isn't really Esau. There's something lacking there. He's dressing up in clothes that don't fit.

And what I think we see within the story of David is a play upon the themes that are associated with Esau and the themes that are associated with Jacob. So he's a hybrid, someone who brings together traits of Jacob and traits of Esau. He's someone who's like Jacob throughout the story, but he's ruddy.

The only other character who's ruddy like that is, sure enough, Esau. Now, let's get to this passage with the encounter with Goliath. Here he encounters this giant, this conflict, mano a mano conflict that has to occur.

What's he going to do? Is he going to be able to stand up? Now we see in the case of Jacob, Jacob was a fairly weak, mild mannered man. He was smooth. He wasn't really able to do these things.

And he failed in a great many ways in his deception. He didn't live up to it. Whereas in the case of David, we see that David doesn't deceive in the same way.

David is able to use cunning, but he doesn't deceive to get the inheritance. Rather, he can get it more directly. He shows his capacity to win it through cunning by taking the

corner of the robe and by taking the spear, which is associated with Saul throughout.

Notice that this spear that is associated with Saul, the spear that he tries to throw at both David and Jonathan, and the spear that is also resting above his head, it's associated with him. It's the symbol of him, but also associates him with Goliath. Goliath, the giant of the Philistines, Saul, the giant or the Goliath of Israel, this great monster that's trying to take David over.

And here we see very similar ways in which David and Saul are related. And Saul and Goliath are related. So Goliath, as it were, Goliath's mantle falls on the shoulders of Saul.

What happens when David is challenged? He's a smooth man. He seems to be a smooth man. He seems to be a man that's mild-mannered, just dealing with the animals in the flock, keeping his father's flock, and there's nothing more to him.

How does he respond when asked about whether he's just a callow youth who's able to stand up or not? And Saul said to David, you are not able to go out against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth and he a man of war from his youth. So we have a similar distinction here between this great hunter, Esau type character, who is like Saul, who's also like Goliath, and this smooth man who's not really up to much. He's not really manly in the same way.

He's not a man of war. But David said to Saul, your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it and delivered the lamb from its mouth. And when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard and struck and killed it.

Your servant has killed both lion and bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God. Now here we see something interesting. David is like Jacob, but he's also like Esau.

He's someone who has this. He's someone who's able to be mild like Jacob. He's someone who's very much a musician, a man who deals with, who can be with the flocks, a man who can be a lot milder.

He can be very much a man of emotion and someone who's attached to all these things that we might think of as less manly. But yet he's also a beloved person, someone who everyone falls in love with. He's a charming man.

He's a man who is associated with love and women. He's a man who is also associated with looking very attractive. And he doesn't seem the most, he's not a man of war.

That's not the first thing that will come to mind. But yet there's more to him that meets the eye. And here we see that he has the characteristics of Jacob in many respects, but also the characteristics of Esau.

He can go out in the field and he can hunt. He can kill the lion and the bear, but he does it in protection of the flock. Later on, what happens immediately after this is that Saul offers his armour to David to wear.

So here we see the Esau type character giving his robes so that David can dress up, so that David can play dress up and then go out to face this opponent. But David tries them on and takes them off. They're not for him.

And at this point, what he does is he takes his staff in his hand. He chooses for himself five smooth stones from the brook and puts them in a shepherd's bag in a pouch, which he had. And his sling was in his hand and he drew near to the Philistine.

And the Philistine came and began drawing near to David. And the man who bore the shield went out before him. And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him.

For he was but a youth, ruddy and good looking. Okay. Think about the details of this story.

What does it remind you of? Taking his staff in hand, going to the brook, taking stones and then drawing near to this opponent for combat. It's the story of Jacob in chapter 32 of Genesis. It's when he's drawing near to the brook, Jabok.

It's where he takes his staff in his hand and he's preparing to meet Esau, his brother. And they're drawing near to each other. They're approaching each other.

And the tension is ramping up. And it's also the conflict, that great conflict with the angel at the foot of the Jabok. What we're seeing here is Jacob proving himself to be a man who's able to be a man.

Not just someone who's a soft-skinned man who dwells in tents and really can't stand up for himself. Who has to be assisted by his mother and everything to actually go before his father. Because he can't go before his father in his own self.

He has to be dressed up like his brother and pretend to be his brother in order to be accepted by his father. No, this is a man who's strong enough to wrestle with the angel. This is a man who can meet his brother face to face.

And here we see that David is drawing upon all those themes. And these words, many of the words used in this verse are very, are not common. But they're associated with particular events in scripture.

So if you read chapter 32 of Genesis, you'll see a few familiar details. So for instance, I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which you have shown your servant. For I crossed over this Jordan with my staff.

The reference to the staff. And now I have become two companies. And later on, he sends them over the brook, the brook, Jabok.

And so what does David do? David goes to the brook. And he takes five smooth stones. And he puts them in his, he takes his staff, goes to the brook, takes five smooth stones and puts them in his shepherd's bag and then takes his sling, etc.

These details then. How can all of this network of connections help us to understand the details? Well, what I think we're seeing here is a hybrid of Esau and Jacob. Of a Jacob that has come of age, that has raised, a Jacob raised to his full stature.

A Jacob who is no longer dressing up in borrowed clothes. Like David would have been if he'd worn the armor of Saul, the Esau character. He isn't dressing up in the clothes of his brother Esau.

Rather, he's coming with his own clothes where he has come of age. He's a warrior shepherd. Now Jacob is a shepherd in the house of Laban.

He's someone who's associated with his mother even there. He's really associated with his mother through all this story. He's associated first of all, with his mother who dresses him up, who prepares the meal for him, does just about everything for him.

And he's got no initiative of himself really. And then he goes to his mother's family, his mother's brother, his uncle, and then is, marries the two nieces, his two cousins, Rachel and Leah. And this is again, an association with his mother.

He's not really leaving his mother's house and coming into his own as a man. But yet that's what happens when he crosses over the brook and when he meets the angel of the Lord and wrestles with the angel and then meets Esau, his brother, face to face. That is Jacob come of age.

There's Jacob when he's truly arrived. And this I think is what we see within the story of David, that David has the character of Esau and Jacob, which is why incidentally, we see the second reference to David being ruddy at this point. Just as he was referred to as ruddy the first time he's introduced to us, as he approaches, he's described as ruddy by Goliath.

Because Goliath sees this character who has characteristics of both Esau and Jacob. Now, the details, five smooth stones. Why smooth stones? Because the word smooth, when it's used in scripture, is very associated.

It's used as a word that is strongly associated with Jacob. If you read in Genesis, that is the word that is associated with Jacob. He's smooth.

And so that smoothness needs to be covered up in these ill-fitting clothes to make him

appear like Esau. But here we have someone who takes the staff, the sign of Jacob, takes smooth stones, again a sign of Jacob, and he puts them in a shepherd's bag. Now, the bag is also associated with some of the things that Esau takes out to hunt in the field.

Now, this is again a conflict that occurs within the field. There's this whole concept of the field is very much associated with characters like Cain, Nimrod, with characters like Esau, these hunter-type figures, and these characters like Saul and Goliath. These are men of the field, men of war.

And here we have a conflict or a juxtaposition between the men of the field and the men of tents, the men of sheep, the men who keep their father's sheep. We also have encounters with the field between Joseph and his brothers. Again, someone who is associated very much with his mother, with a sort of doting father.

He's not really come of age. He's not really come into his own. Later on, we'll see that he does.

But this picking up of the stones, this going to the brook, the brook associated with Jacob, the staff associated with Jacob, the bag more associated with Esau. And the sling, it's a weapon. It's a weapon that could be associated with hunting, but it is a shepherd's weapon.

And so what we're seeing here is a fusion of the characters of Esau and Jacob in the character of David. Why five stones? Five stones, I would suggest, because of all the characters in the Bible, Jacob is associated with establishing stones, memorial stones. And as I, by my numbering, I think he sets up five.

So he sets up the stone of Bethel, the stone that he uses as his pillow, and then sets up as a pillar of remembrance as the house of God. He removes a stone over the well in chapter 29, another very key event. He establishes a stone as a pillar, as a witness of the covenant with Laban in chapter 31.

In chapter 35, he establishes another stone at the site of God's appearance. And then finally, he establishes a pillar over Rachel's grave. Jacob is the man of five stones.

And so David picks up five stones as he's carrying these tokens of Jacob's identity in this conflict with this champion. This champion that he meets like the angel wrestling with Jacob, where Jacob came of age. Now he's coming of age.

He's the one that's set apart as the one who will inherit the kingdom, the one who's finally entering back into the land, the one who's come of age. And so what we have after this story is he does not take on the clothes of this Esau character. Rather, he takes the clothes that are given to him immediately afterwards by Jonathan.

And what we see in that relationship is that Jonathan hands over all the tokens of his

status. So at the very beginning of chapter 18, Jonathan and David made a covenant because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David with his armor, even his sword and his bow and his belt.

What we're seeing here then, I think, is a connection between all this nexus of characters and the story of Jacob and Esau and Isaac and Laban. And within this story, this encounter with Goliath is a key pivotal event. It's David facing that champion just as Jacob fought with the angel at the fort of the Jabbok.

And he takes these signs of Jacob and he brings them around with characteristics of Esau. This is a man who has come of age. This is the true king.

This is a man who has these characteristics that can bring together the riven family of Isaac and of Abraham. But he is also a character who can look after the sheep, guard the flock. He's someone who is not just a soft, mild-mannered, smooth man.

He's also a man who can be a warrior, a man of the field, a man who can be like a great hunter like Esau. But without leaving the flock, without being a wild man. This is a man who is a man who can dwell within the house, but also a man that can fight within the field.

He's someone who has come of age. And this, I think, helps us to understand why David picked up five smooth stones. It might be a surprising answer, but I think it has a bit of merit to it.

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