

## **Gideon: Coward turned Spirit-Driven Deliverer**

### **Judges 6-7**

*“And the LORD turned to him and said, ‘Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?’”* (Judges 6:14)

After Moses’ death Joshua brought Israel up into the Promised Land. But after Joshua’s death the Israelites turned away from God and started worshiping the false gods of the surrounding nations. Each time God brought in a neighboring country to oppress them, Israel cried out to the Lord for rescue and He raised up a judge to deliver them. After the judge died, the Israelites turned away again. This time God brought in the Midianites to turn Israel back to Him.

#### **Read Judges 6:1-10**

After Abraham’s wife Sarah died, he married a woman named Keturah. Their descendants were the Midianites. They lived in the desert region southeast of the Dead Sea near Moab and made their living through trade. (We see them in Genesis 37:28 where Joseph’s brothers sell him to them as a slave. They then took him down to Egypt.)

In Judges 6, the Midianites overpowered the Israelites and forced them to live in mountains, caves and strongholds. They kept Israel weak by devastating their agriculture.

- Describe a situation where you have been trapped by circumstances into an inescapable pit.
- What kind of deliverer or deliverance were you expecting or hoping from God?

In their intense suffering, the Israelites remembered the Lord and called out for His deliverance. But first the Lord sent a prophet to make it clear to them why they were suffering under the Midianites. Not because God had abandoned them, but because they had abandoned Him.

#### **Read Judges 6:11-24 - - God Selects His Judge**

To deliver powerless Israel from the oppressive Midianites, you might expect God to select a man of unusual courage and strength. Who would imagine He would select a coward who hid in a winepress to thresh his wheat rather than doing it in the open where he could be detected by the Midianites? But God chose Gideon.

To reassure Gideon that God would be with him God worked a mighty sign. When Gideon requested the Lord to accept some food from his hand, the Lord told him to make it an offering instead. Then the Lord made fire come out of the rock to consume the offering.

- Describe how you have found reassurance that God was with you when you went through difficult times.

#### **Read Judges 6:25-32**

Now Gideon begins to deliver Israel. But before they can be set free from their captivity to the Midianites, they need to be set free from their captivity to their idols. So God gives Gideon his first task- break down the Baal that his own father erected in town.

- How did his father's idol worship make Gideon's job harder?
- What does it show about Gideon's level of courage that he would only tear down the altar of Baal in the darkness of night?
- What obstacles do you struggle to overcome to fulfill your work in God's kingdom?

Despite the terrible life they lived under the Midianites, Gideon's neighbors were devoted to their false gods- they demanded that he be killed for tearing down the altar of Baal. Gideon's father had to step forward and defend him.

A similar thing happened when Jesus exposed the unbelief of His neighbors among whom He grew up in a Nazareth- they rose up to kill Him too (Luke 4:28-30).

### **Read Judges 6:33-40 (Gideon shows both courage and fear)**

Now the moment has come for God's deliverance. The Midianites gather with their allies in the Valley of Jezreel, a vast, powerful army of 135,000. When Gideon musters the Israelites to go to war he can only raise 32,000 Israelites. His army is outnumbered by more than 4 to 1. Gideon needs reassurance, so he requests a sign from God. God graciously works two miracles with the fleece and the morning dew to reassure Gideon of His presence and help.

- What special reassurance did God the Father give Jesus as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He died for us (Luke 22:39-46)?
- What personal signs has God provided to you to build up your faith and confidence?
- What confidence can we take from the fact that God is willing to give signs to people who need extra reassurance (Acts 7:55-56; Acts 10:44-47; 18:9-11).

### **Read Judges 7:1-15**

God reassured Gideon with the fleece and the dew, then immediately challenged his faith and confidence. As if being outnumbered 4 to 1 wasn't enough, God told Gideon to thin down the Israelite army. When the fearful men left the ratio of Midianites to Israelites jumped from 4 to 1 to more than 13 to 1. When all but 300 were sent home, the ratio leaped to a fearful 450 to 1. In the face of these horrific odds God graciously offers a third sign to Gideon. Hearing a member of the Midianite camp recount a dream God had given, the Holy Spirit filled Gideon with a fiery courage to go to battle against impossible odds- and with a suicidal battle plan. He led his tiny army to surround the Midianite camp. In their hands they held no weapons- only torches and jars in one hand and ram's horn trumpets in the other.

- Describe a time you were “unarmed” against a huge problem in your life.
- How did God deliver you?

**Read Judges 7:16-25**

God gave a tremendous victory to Gideon and the Israelites. The Midianites were vanquished and driven completely from the land of Israel. Though in his own strength Gideon was a coward, the Spirit of the Lord transformed him into a courageous judge and leader of His people.

We are often as fearful and insecure as Gideon. When we go through difficult times in our lives we often find it hard to be assured God cares. But the Holy Spirit works through the Scriptures and Sacraments to make us as strong as Gideon.

## King Saul: Spirit-Driven Warrior

### 1 Samuel 10:17-11:15

*“And the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled.” (1 Samuel 11:6)*

When Gideon delivered Israel from the Midianites, the Israelites wanted to make him their king. Gideon answered, “I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you.” (Judges 8:23) As future judges came and went Israel kept demanding a king to rule over them. Finally God told Samuel the prophet and last judge of Israel to give them what they wanted. He commanded Samuel to anoint Saul as the first king of Israel.

Most of us are familiar with King Saul in the final years of his reign when he was haunted by an evil spirit from the Lord and pursued David with the army of Israel because he feared David’s popularity and power. But in the early days of his reign Saul was a very different sort of king.

#### Read 1 Samuel 10:17-27

When Israel stubbornly demanded a king, God provided a young man who had all the makings of a great king. Saul was meek and humble, much as Jesus would be during His earthly ministry as the King of the Jews.

- What does it show about Saul’s character that he hid himself among the baggage, even though Samuel had already anointed him as the king of Israel in 1 Samuel 10:1?

At his anointing Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit. As he left the Israelite assembly and returned home God touched the hearts of some men of valor who began to follow him.

- What encouragement would these men bring to a young ruler like Saul?
- What people bring you encouragement in the Lord?
- What wisdom did Saul show by choosing not to react to the worthless men who despised him and challenged his rule over them?

#### Read 1 Samuel 11:1-4

The Ammonites were descendants of Abraham’s nephew Lot. Obviously Nahash their leader felt the land of Jabesh-gilead on the east side of the Jordan River belonged to him. When he surrounded the city to starve it out, the Israelites ask terms of peace.

- What military reason would Nahash have for gouging out one eye of each of the men of Jabesh-gilead?

- What did it show about his feelings for his distant relatives the Israelites?
- What did it show about his thoughts toward God?

The people of Jabesh-gilead request safe passage for messengers to seek help from the Israelites, promising if no help arrives within a week they will surrender themselves.

- How does the reaction of the people in Gibeah of Saul show their feeling of total helplessness to deliver their fellow Israelites in Jabesh-gilead?

### **Read 1 Samuel 11:5-9**

Saul was at work in his father's field when the messengers arrived from Jabesh-gilead. Returning home he saw the townspeople weeping. Look carefully at his reaction- first he was filled with the Holy Spirit who then kindled a holy anger within him.

- Why would the Holy Spirit choose anger as the appropriate emotional response for His servant Saul?
- What happened when a similar anger filled Jesus looking upon the moneychangers and animals in the temple courts?
- How did the Lord unite the people when they heard Saul's message in verse 7?

When you look at Satan laying siege to our culture and to countless people around the world you may find yourself moved to tears of resignation and wonder what you can possibly do to make a difference. God the Father saw Satan holding all humanity captive, and was moved with love to send His Son to deliver us.

When the messengers returned to Jabesh-gilead and let them know of Saul's reaction and the gathering of the army, they were glad, even though they hadn't been delivered quite yet.

- How can Jesus' victory won on the cross and demonstrated by the empty tomb fill us with gladness even while we are still being oppressed and threatened by our enemies and by this life's problems?

### **Read 1 Samuel 11:10-11**

The men of Jabesh tell their oppressors that the next day they will give themselves up. The Ammonites are lulled into complacency thinking they have already won the battle without ever having to fight. Saul arrives in the night, divides his army into three units to surround the Ammonites, and launches a surprise attack between 3:00 and 6:00 A.M. The battle is so successful that the Ammonite army was destroyed and scattered.

On Good Friday when Jesus died and His body was laid in the tomb it looked to all the world like Satan and his forces had won the battle. But in the early hours before sunrise on Sunday morning

when Jesus rose again He made it clear to His enemies that they had been defeated and their power shattered.

- Describe a time when it looked like you were defeated by enemies or a problem you were suffering through.
- How did God give you victory?

**Read 1 Samuel 11:12-15**

Though many of the Israelites asked Samuel to kill the worthless men who had opposed their new king, Saul once again showed great wisdom and restraint by sparing their lives. Instead, Samuel gathered the people in Gilgal to renew the kingdom. There Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

Because of Jesus' death and resurrection we can rejoice greatly no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in.

## David: Spirit-Driven Giant Slayer

### 1 Samuel 17

“... Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17:26b).

King Saul started off great, but he quickly became proud. He built monuments to himself and began playing loose with God’s clear and precise directions. In the end God rejected him as king and took the Holy Spirit from him. The Lord sent Samuel to anoint David as Saul’s replacement and filled him with the Holy Spirit. Today we look at David’s most famous exploit—his do-or-die battle against the mighty giant Goliath.

#### **Read 1 Samuel 17:1-11.**

The Philistines had been a thorn in Israel’s side from the time Samuel was a boy. When their army arranged itself on a hill, Israel’s army lined up on the opposite hill, ready to do battle in the valley that lay between. And it is here that Goliath took the giant steps forward to challenge the Israelites to a representative duel. For two great leaders to duel it out to determine the outcome of the battle was not an unusual practice. It was a way to save much bloodshed.

As Israel’s king, Saul should have been the Israelite stepping forward to battle Goliath. And in the first days of his reign he might have done so, especially when you think of his angry response to the messengers from Jabesh-Gilead in the last lesson. But like Samson without his hair, Saul without the Holy Spirit had not the faith, courage or strength to proceed. Instead, he stepped back and looked for someone else brave enough to go. Forty days went by and no Israelite was brave enough.

- What effect did Saul’s lack of faith and lack of leadership have on the rest of the men in his army?
- Describe a time you have seen a group of men unable to move forward because their leader didn’t have the courage to step up and lead them.

#### **Read 1 Samuel 17:12-27.**

David was too young to be in the military at this time, but his three oldest brothers were warriors. So David’s father sent him to bring supplies for them. While he was there, David saw Goliath step forward and taunt the army of God.

- What is the difference between the way Saul and his soldiers reacted to Goliath’s taunt and the way David responds?
- Why is David so confident Goliath can be beaten?
- How do David’s words show that he sees the situation through God’s eyes, whereas Saul and his men only see it through their own eyes?

- What happens to our overwhelming problems when we look at them through God's eyes?

### **Read 1 Samuel 17:28-30.**

When David's oldest brother Eliab heard David's questions, he was angry and lashed out at his baby brother.

- As an Israelite warrior, where should Eliab's anger have been directed instead?
- Why did David keep speaking to different groups of Israelite soldiers instead of going directly to King Saul to offer his services?
- Describe a time you offered a solution to a problem only to be put down by someone else, who didn't share your vision.

### **Read 1 Samuel 17:31-40.**

When word reached Saul that David was asking these questions, Saul summoned him.

- Why did Saul think David was unfit to fight the giant?

David had been in seemingly hopeless situations before.

- How did David's words concerning the lions and bears he had fought as a shepherd convince Saul to send him against Goliath as Israel's representative in battle?
- Describe God's deliverance from hopeless situations in your past that give you courage in the future.

Saul wanted David to wear his armor into battle.

- What are some different motives Saul might have had for wanting this?
- How confident do you think Saul was when he sent David to fight Goliath?
- How is the picture of a young, seemingly helpless David, striding off to fight the veteran Philistine warrior-giant similar to a bloody, beaten Jesus, carrying His cross to fight Satan, sin, death and hell at Mt. Calvary?

### **Read 1 Samuel 17:41-47.**

David steps in front of the Israelite army to fight Goliath by himself. Seeing this teenager coming out against him, the giant tries to terrify him with his words. David taunts him back with confident, prophetic words that point to what God will do—not what David will do.

- What does Goliath teach us about relying on our own skill or in the power of other men?

- How can we have David's assurance and confidence when we face overwhelming situations in our life?

**Read 1 Samuel 17:48-54.**

David's stone hits Goliath's forehead in the place where his helmet should have been. Either the giant wasn't wearing it correctly or he left it off—overly self-confident and thus unable to see the young shepherd boy as a viable threat.

- How is David's hurled stone sinking into the giant's skull similar to the Genesis 3 prophecy that the serpent would bruise Christ's heel, but He would crush Satan's head?
- How do you think the Israelite soldiers responded when they saw Goliath crumble at David's feet?
- What courage does the Spirit give us when we see Satan, death and hell lying crushed at Jesus' feet?

**Closing Prayer:** Heavenly Father, there is no shortage of giants Your people must face in this world. In all things through Your Son we are victorious. Encourage us in this transforming truth that we may slay the enemies that would snuff out our joy and the confidence we have in You. In the Name of Jesus we pray. Amen.