

# Doomed To Success

by Ron R. Ritchie

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Last week we began our study on Gideon in the Book of Judges, chapter 6. We found that the Israelites were not living life as God intended it to be lived. God wanted them to live a life that would so reflect his glory that all the nations would ask, "What is it about the Israelites? God seems to bless everything they do."

Unfortunately, because of sin, Israel ended up in captivity over and over again. In the Book of Judges we learn that they went after other gods, they forsook the Lord, and they intermarried with the Canaanite women.

We learned that we are meant to be servants of the living God, willingly yielding to him so that we might obediently serve him by faith. Our life in Christ should be filled with richness, and free from sin, because God, through Christ, has given us the power to avoid sin. The thing I dislike most about my life is that when I sin the Spirit of God is constantly whispering in my ear, "Do you know you don't have to sin any more? I have given you the power to stop this." When I sin now it is not because I cannot help myself; it is because I want to. And that is so discouraging; it takes all the fun out of sin.

How can we win all these battles against sin? There is a principle in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 that I find helpful:

**For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.**

That is the theme I want to develop this morning through the life of Gideon. It is a theme in which we will see that, as we walk in the power of the living God, as we allow him to express himself through us, regardless of the circumstances, regardless of the enemies, spiritual and physical, in our life, when Jesus Christ is allowed to be Lord in our life we are doomed to success. We cannot fail. God will use our lives richly; everything we touch will succeed according to his purpose, although at times we cannot see this, because we will be trusting him by faith to express his life through us.

Gideon was chosen by God, who called him a "valiant warrior." Now Gideon knew he was no such thing, but God saw in him a willingness to trust him. God told him that he and Gideon, as one man, would defeat the Midianite army of 135,000 men and set the land free for the first time in seven years. The Spirit comes upon Gideon, and, after some testing and some encouragement through signs, Gideon raises an army of 32,000 men from the tribes of Naphtali, Asher, and Zebulun. Gideon then asked God for two more signs just to be quite sure in his own mind that God would indeed deliver Israel through him. God graciously does what Gideon asked.

The Lord Builds His Army By Subtraction (Judges 7:1-8)

**Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. And the Lord said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, lest Israel become boastful saying, 'My own power has delivered me! Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.' " So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained. Then the Lord said to Gideon, "The people are still too many; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. Therefore it shall be that he of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, "You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink." Now the number of**

**those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was 300 men; but all the rest of the people kneeled to drink water. And the Lord said to Gideon, "I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into you hands; so let all the other people go, each man to his home." So the 300 men took the people's provisions and their trumpets into their hands. And Gideon sent all the other men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained the 300 men; and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.**

In Judges 3 God said that he allowed five nations to remain in the land to teach each generation war, to test the Israelites to see if they loved the Lord God with their whole heart, their soul, their mind and their strength. What did God mean by "teach each generation war? Well, the God of the Universe does not do things our way, so each generation had to learn how to "war ' God s way.

Moses, for example, came out of Egypt without any equipment but with 600,000 people. They had been slaves for 430 years and they had no weapons. But God destroyed the pursuing chariots of Egypt as they crossed the Red Sea. How? With a flood. That's not the way we would fight a war, is it? God conveniently opens and closes seas. Forty years later Joshua came to the Jordan river which opened up, and all two million people got through on dry land. On the other side they saw a fortified city which they had to conquer before they got to the Promised Land. They asked How are we going to do that? We don't have any weapons." Joshua says, "Well, I don't know. I m going to check in with God.

He comes back and says, "Listen, guys, here's what I want. I want a bunch of trumpeters up here. Let 's get the choir in the back. Now all the kids and everybody that is left over go around the city six times, once a day, and on the seventh day we are going to blow the trumpets and shout." "What's going to happen?" they ask. Joshua says, "I don't know. Let's walk by faith." Think of yourself in that group: "Hey, what are you doing Ralph?" "I don't know man." "How many days do we have to do this? " "Three more days and then we've got to shout on the seventh." They got to the seventh day and they do exactly what God says. It's really a ridiculous thing from a human point of view. They go around once. They blow the trumpets, they all shout, and the walls come tumbling down. They go in and destroy everybody except Rahab and her family. You have to be taught war the way God fights it.

Later, when Joshua is fighting the Amorites, they say, "If we can just hang on until dark we've got it. I think we can defeat Joshua." So they are hanging on, fighting for their lives. They keep looking up but the sun won't go down, so they keep fighting just slugging it out. The armies are rushing back and forth and the Amorites are asking, "Hey, what time do you have? Somebody has daylight saving time and we don't know about it? What's going on here, The sun stays up and the, Amorites are defeated because they learned war the way God fights it. Then in the Book of Judges we have a whole series of new wars. The Spirit of God comes on Othniel, who defeats the man of double wickedness, Cushan--rishathaim. Then Shamgar picks up a cattle prod and defeats 600 fully armed Philistines. Deborah tells Barak they are going to defeat Sisera and his 900 iron chariots. Barak says, "What? How do you do that?" "I don't know. God told me we are supposed to go up to Mount Tabor and wait there." Sisera decides the best way to cut the Israelites off is to go up the dry river bed. But a flood comes down and wipes them out. They have to learn war the way God fights war.

What are the pressures in our lives? What are the things that are really getting to us? What are the impossible situations you face right now? What do you do about them? Well, don't try to figure them out. Go to God and say, "Lord, this is what I need. I haven't a clue how you can solve this problem, but I am going to trust you. I'll walk by faith, trusting that you know who I am, that you love me. I'm not going to fight the way the world fights. I'm going to trust you." He will solve that problem by powers that are able to tear down strongholds we don't even understand. Hearts will change, attitudes will change, people will change. We'll get hurt at times too, but at least we'll be free from the world system. We need to be taught war like the Israelites were taught war. They were given battle plans that men would never design, and they were given victories that men could never expect.

We have this problem today with the arms race. We see all these graphs of battleships, missiles, submarines, United States versus Russia, etc. I don't think we are No. 1 anymore. Who are we kidding? I keep looking at these charts. thinking, "HMMMMM, Lord, you don't line up armies like that. Ten submarines. All right we'll get eleven. Twenty ballistic missiles. Let's get twenty-one. We need to stay first." We are always trying to

hold each other off. But God never does that. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord . . ."

Now we see in verse 2 that God says to Gideon, "You've got 32,000 men. That's too many." Is that the way to fight a war? Gideon says, "Are you serious?" God says, "Yes, because if you win this battle with 32,000 men against 135,000 Midianites you will take all the credit and I'm not sharing that with anybody. You Israelites are filled with pride. I want you to understand that that is too many men. When this battle is over you are going to stand there with your mouths open. You are going to praise God and say, 'What happened? We won. How did we do it?' But they won't know how. They will just enjoy the victory. They won't understand all the circumstances, but they will want credit. "

We all want credit, don't we. I did a stained glass window in my home, and when people come there I make sure they sit where they can look up and say, "Oh, what a neat stained glass window. Did you make it?" "Yeah. It was nothing. Can I show you the lamps I made?" We love to take the credit when we shouldn't. So one day my mentor, Bill Rose, who taught me everything I know about stained glass, was in my house with some other people. They sat down and I thought, "Oh, no! I hope they don't ask about this." They did. "Hey, what a neat stained glass window. Did you make it?" "Aww, well, no, not really. Bill Rose right here, in fact, taught me how to cut it, then he taught me how to put all the lead together. And of course, it's his design, and he actually put it in." What is it about me that always wants the credit? I struggle so much with this.

Well, that was the Israelites' problem. So the Lord said, "I will never leave you in a position where you can brag. I'll keep you humble, I'll keep you in this position to test you and to teach you the principle that man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord." (Deut 8:3) He tells Gideon, "There are too many men. Tell your chief of staff to say that every man who is trembling or afraid to go into this battle can go home." So Gideon says to his chief of staff. "Go down and get the guys together and tell them, 'Anybody who is afraid and trembling can go home. It's no big deal; we won't feel bad about it; we understand. After all, we're going to fight a battle with 135,000 Midianites. We've no weapons, all we've got is God, so there must be one or two guys a little afraid. "

So his chief looks down the row of 32,000 men and says, "All right, here's the word. Every guy who is a little fearful and trembling can go home." He couldn't see them for the dust! There are 10,000 left. He goes back to Gideon and says, "Well, we're in real trouble." "What do you mean?" "We've got 135,000 Midianites, right? Now God just took 22,000 men home and we're stuck with 10,000. We're 125,000 men short. What's going on, Gideon?" Gideon says, "I don't know. I'm going to check with God. I'll be right back." He says, "God, I think we're in trouble, you and me. Didn't you say they could stay, or what? So many guys went home I'm confused. What happened." God says, "You have 10,000 left? That's too many. Trust me. Don't worry; I'm in charge."

"What do you want me to do, Lord?" asks Gideon. "I want you to take the 10,000 men down to the spring of Harod and I will test them for you there. You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink." Gideon lines his men up at the stream and God says, "I want that one, that one, that one." 9,700 men go home; he is now stuck with 300, and they were 300 cowards, I think. They were trying to get out of this whole deal. If you lap like a dog it means you are not looking around so you are not really thinking about the enemy. The ones who knelt at least could look around. No, I don't think the 300 were the strong men, because God doesn't need strong men. He needs available men, empty vessels. And now he has 300.

Now the Lord says, "It's time to issue weapons." Gideon says, "Yes, sir, it's about time." God says, "All right. Remember all the guys you sent home? Take their provisions and their trumpets, a pot, and a candle apiece. Put a candle inside the pot, and when I tell you to do something get ready to do it." Gideon is really frightened. Wouldn't you be?

But there is a principle here. Gideon is overlooking the valley of Jezreel. where the battle of Armageddon will be fought. He looks at his 300 men, and then at the hated enemy. He feels this terrible sense of inadequacy. And that is the principle. That is what God wants. He wants us to come to the place where we are bankrupt within ourselves. He wants us to come to the place where we say with Paul, "Not that we are adequate in

ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God." That is where we end up. That is where victories are won. It is when you come to a place where you don't think you have it together in a situation that God can work. Then, when all is said and done, God, not man, gets the praise.

One of the hardest lessons I have been learning is that whoever exalts himself God will humble, but whoever humbles himself God will exalt. I got the greatest revelation one day driving home. I thought, "That's it. I don't have to worry about it. I'll just keep exalting myself and God will just keep bringing me down. I'm going to win. God is in charge of my life. He is going to bring me to a place where I will thoroughly trust him. I may be kicking and screaming, but I'll be there because he loves me." And God wants us all to come to that point.

The Lord Provides A Dream For Gideon's Enemies (Judges 7:9-14)

**Now the same night it came about that the Lord said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands. But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp, and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp." So he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts of the army that was in the camp. Now the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the sons of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, "Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat." And his friend answered and said, "This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand."**

God so loves Gideon and the Israelites that he makes a man dream that a barley loaf will come rolling down into the Midianite camp and destroy it. Now barley was the cheapest substance for bread making. The Israelites and other poor people would feed it to their cattle or eat it themselves. (The Arabs today still call the Israelites "cakes of barley" and themselves the wheat.") Gideon walks right into the only guy in camp who had that dream. Isn't that just like the wonderful God we have? His heart needs to be encouraged, so not only does he learn of the dream, he hears the interpretation of it. The pagan Midianite says that God is going to deliver all of them into Israel's hand. That dream circulated through that camp; God was already preparing the hearts of the enemy to tremble.

Have you ever had a friend whom you really wanted to talk to about something that was wrong, something you were really burdened about, and finally you decided to go and see him? When you told him that you waited a long time to share that with him, he says, "You know, that's strange. I've been thinking about that for four days." You always feel like you are the second or third witness. I have never felt that I was there first. I always think "Why am I involved in this thing if God is so far ahead of me? But God wants second and third witnesses. You can't take any credit when you are the second or third witness therefore your friend gives God the credit.

So Gideon's heart was encouraged by learning of this dream that God had arranged. There is a beautiful passage in Isaiah 40 that says:

**He gives strength to the weary,  
And to him who lacks might He increases power.  
Though youths grow weary and tired  
And vigorous young men stumble badly  
Yet those who wait for the Lord  
Will gain new strength;**

And Gideon gained new strength. All through this story he constantly waited on the Lord. He was in no hurry to go to this battle. He was always saying, "Well, let's see now what can we do to get out of this battle?" But God kept prodding him along one day at a time right up to the dream.

## The Lord Provides The Victory For Gideon (Judges 7:15-25)

And It came about when Gideon heard the account of the dream and Its interpretation, that he bowed in worship. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the Lord has given the camp of Midian into your hands." And he divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers. And he said to them, "Look at me, and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp, and say, 'For the Lord and for Gideon.' " So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands. When the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and cried, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" And each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled. And when they blew 300 trumpets, the Lord set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. And the men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali and Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian. And Gideon sent messengers throughout all the hill country of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against Midian and take the waters before them, as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan." So all the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they took the waters as far as Beth-barah and the Jordan. And they captured the two leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb, and they killed Zeeb at the wine press of Zeeb, while they pursued Midian; and they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon from across the Jordan.

Once Gideon was encouraged by the Lord he gathered his men and he said, Now you've all got trumpets, pots and candles. Put the candles inside the pots take the pot in your left hand and the trumpet in your right hand and divide into three companies. When I give the signal I want you to break the pot, blow the trumpet, and cry out. 'For the Lord and for Gideon!' "But then what Gideon? they asked. I don't know, guys. That's all I got. The Lord said he would deliver, but he doesn't give him the whole picture. That's called "faith," isn't it? He just gives you enough to keep going. You don't need faith if he gives you the whole thing.

Now when the 10 o'clock watch changes all the hills light up trumpets start blowing and voices cry out, "For the Lord and for Gideon! The terrorized Midianites begin killing each other. It had to be that way. We are told that 120,000 Midianites killed each other. The Israelites never moved; they stood their ground. Later they chased the remaining 15,000 Midianites and killed them.

There is an interesting end to the story of one of the Midianite leaders Zeeb who is killed at his own wine press. Now this story began at a wine press. A weak man, of a nation held captive for seven years is beating out wheat in a wine press. He is called out by God filled with his Spirit, given courage, and he achieves victory at another wine press. But look at what he had to go through to taste the victory. Many of us quit too soon. We quit at the dream we quit at the fleece, or we quit when God asks us to cut down the idols. We quit too soon and we don't get to all the joy God has for us.

The principle here is so beautiful: 'Thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ . . . we have this treasure [Christ] in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves.' We have this treasure Jesus Christ who is always leading us in triumph. He only asks one thing: show up for the battle.

We are unique people. When Christ is in charge we are doomed to success. Whatever God wants to do through us will be accomplished through us if we walk in obedience to him.

Judges 7:1-25  
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