**FIGHTING SATAN AT THE HOT GATES**

Thermopylae is the site of one of histories most crucial battles. Sit back and let me tell you this fascinating story of the legendary Spartan 300 who stood off a massive Persian army that outnumbered them perhaps 100 to 1. Believe it or not, even though this event in history dates back 2,500 years to 480 B.C., it has a powerful application to your battle with Satan. What’s the old saying? “He who does not learn from history is apt to repeat it.” Learn this battle plan from history so you can “*resist the devil*” (James 4:8).

In 490 B.C. the Persians, under king Darius, had sought to expand their empire all the way to Greece. But at the famous Battle of Marathon (from which we get our name for the 26 mile race) the Greeks defeated the Persians and sent them packing. Xerxes, son of Darius, succeeded his father and sought to fulfill his dream of world conquest. He spent the next 10 years rebuilding the army and navy to attack again. By 480 B.C. he had trained a massive army to secure his plan of ruling the world all the way to Greece. The historian Herodotus, who lived in this era, claimed the combined Persian forces numbered over 2,600,000, which included 1,700,000 infantry. If you add the support staff (non-military) Herodotus claims it totaled 5,283,220. Modern historians doubt this staggering number, adjusting it to between 200,000 to 700,000 soldiers and sailors. Whatever the true number it was far more than the 7,000 total allied ground forces of the Grecian city-states (Spartans, Corinthians, Thebians, Thespians, etc). This was to be another David vs. Goliath. Or, more accurately, another Gideon vs. Midian.

Themistocles was both a politician and military leader in Athens. He set out a battle plan to stop this seemingly irresistible force by confronting it with an immovable object. But since he was grossly outnumbered he had to use geography and tactics to his advantage. He took his powerful navy to the narrow straits of Artemisium. He sent king Leonidas of Sparta to Thermopylae.

Thermopylae (Grk. Thermo = “hot” + Pylae = “gates”) was a perfect place for a small army to defend against a large one. With mountains on one side, and water on the other, the pass was only 14 meters wide. Thus, the famed Phalanx formation of the trained Spartan army could hold off the onslaught of Xerxes infantry. It was the immovable object stopping the irresistible force.

When Xerxes offered King Leonidas of Sparta a chance to surrender his weapons and thus live, he famously replied, “Come and get them!” The order was given to attack. It turned into a blood-bath … for Persia! The narrow passage allowed for the highly trained Spartans to easily defend themselves. It was like sand going through the funnel of an hour-glass. Attack after attack left thousands upon thousands of dead Persians, with very few casualties for the Athenian army. This went on for two solid days.

But then a traitor by the name of Ephialtes (his name now lives in infamy with Benedict Arnold and Judas Iscariot), seeking favor from Xerxes, betrayed his fellowmen by revealing a mountain pass that would allow the Persians to trap Leonidas’ in front and rear. The rest of the Greek army retreated in order to fight another day, leaving the 300 soldiers of Sparta to defend this position to the last man. The 300 Spartans perished, but held them off long enough to save the rest of the army from being destroyed by the huge cavalry of Persia.

But the strategy of Thermopylae should not be lost on Christians as we seek to defeat the seemingly irresistible force of Satan. Like Xerxes, he has called us to meekly lay down our arms and surrender, promising to reward us with “life.” Sadly, the vast majority have believed this “*father of lies*” (John 8:44), selling their soul to the devil (Matt. 16:26) in exchange for “*the passing pleasures of sin*” (Heb. 11:25). Don’t fall for it!

Look again at the strategy of the Spartans. They fought where they had the advantage. Satan wants us to come out in the open and fight him where he can overwhelm us with superior numbers and weapons. He wants to throw every weapon at us all at once. John describes those weapons as “*all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life*” (I John 2:15).

But Jesus has exposed Satan’s scheme. “*We are not ignorant of his devices*” (2 Cor. 2:11). We know his battle plan. And we have on our side the “*Captain of our salvation*” who knows how to defeat him (Heb. 2:10). Jesus faced Satan in the wilderness, fighting off one temptation at a time (Matt. 4:1-11). First, the lust of the flesh (stones to bread). Second, the lust of the eyes (kingdoms of the world). Third, the pride of life (God’s rescue from the temple jump). See, our Captain knows the devil’s strategy. He’s already fought and defeated him.

Christ’s key: Make Satan fight where you have the advantage! Like the Hot Gates of Thermopylae, make Satan attack you one temptation at a time. Due to the narrow passage Xerxes could not take full advantage of his cavalry, infantry, and artillery to crush the Spartans. This limited his ability. We must do the same. Make Satan attack us one temptation at a time. Read Christ’s defense strategy:

*“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”*

Did you notice the two words: “*the temptation*?” Just as we live one-day-at-a-time, so we only face one-temptation-at-a-time. God will not allow us to be overwhelmed with more than we can handle. He will always “*make the way of escape*.” No matter what temptation Satan attacks me with I know I will “*be able to bear it*.”

Epilogue:  
King Leonidas’ and his courageous 300 Spartans could have held off the million-man army of Xerxes for weeks by simply defending those few yards of ground between the mountain and the sea. Even though they eventually lost due to betrayal, the Greeks eventually defeated the Persians in a great naval battle at Salamis, then a land battle at Plataea. The Persians never again invaded Greece. In fact, 150 years later Alexander the Great attacked Persia, defeating them and founding the Greek Empire.

Even though we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, losing occasional skirmishes against Satan’s attacks (Rom. 3:23), we must look at the big picture. We might have lost some battles, but we can, and must, win the war! Face Satan down by:  
  
1) Putting on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18).  
2) Fighting together with your fellow Band of Brothers (Heb. 10:22-25).  
3) Confessing your weaknesses and sins to a forgiving God (I John 1:5-10).  
4) Confident that when the smoke of battle is clear, faith wins the victory (I Pet. 1:4-11).

That’s our Battle of Thermopylae. While we can’t join Gideon’s 300 (Judg. 6-8), we can join Christ’s 144,000 and one day sing their victory song (Rev. 14:1-5).

Until tomorrow, let us stand together as we sing:  
 On every hand the foe we find drawn up in dread array;  
 Let tents of ease be left behind, and onward to the fray.  
 Salvation’s helmet on each head, with truth all girt about,  
 The earth shall tremble ‘neath our tread, and echo with our shout!  
 Faith is the victory, faith is the victory, O glorious victory that overcomes the world!”

I love you.

Rick