

Focus on Prophecy GUIDE 14



Conspiracy to Murder

- **In photographs that remain of them from the little town of Tobolsk back in 1918, they could be mistaken for any close-knit family on vacation: two affectionate parents, an energetic young son, and four lovely daughters.**
- **Nicholas and Alexandra had always surrounded their children with love. But now they were surrounded by Bolshevik guards in remotest Siberia.**
- **This devoted father happened to be Nicholas Romanov, “Czar of all the Russias” who’d just been forced to abdicate by communist revolutionaries.**
- **The long line of monarchs ruling over that vast land had come to an end.**

Conspiracy to Murder

- **But abdication wasn't enough for communist officials. They were intent on consolidating their power.**
- **They wanted no possible rival who could challenge their absolute control over Russia's millions.**
- **And so one night in July the guards roused this family from their beds and marched them down to a cellar by torchlight.**
- **Parents and children were seated in a row of chairs against a wall.**
- **The guards pointed revolvers. The father stepped forward to speak. He was shot through the head. A volley of gunfire followed.**
- **Soon the blood of Nicholas, Alexandra, Alexei, Olga, Maria, Tatiana, and Anastasia mingled on the cold floor.**

Conspiracy to Murder

- **The assassination of the Romanovs was one of the more shocking crimes of the twentieth century.**
- **Revelation 12 shows us who really lies behind all the crime and cruelty in our world. And it does so by exposing an assassination attempt—directed at a heavenly family.**
- **The would-be assassin is Satan, a rebel who was once cast out of heaven and is now seeking hellish vengeance.**
- **He knows that his only chance to consolidate his power in this world is to destroy Jesus, the Messiah, the only One who can save mankind. Revelation 12 lays out his plot in symbolic language.**

Conspiracy to Murder

- **First we see a mother projected up into the sky as on a giant movie screen. The sun, moon, and stars surround her, reflecting the light of her beauty. She is crying out in labor, about to give birth. Satan appears, disguised as a seven-headed dragon. He hopes to play midwife at this all-important birth so he can snuff out the life of the child.**
- **The baby is born. Miraculously, the child is snatched from the clutches of the dragon and carried to God's throne and His protection. Satan is furious and attacks the mother. She finds a place of safety prepared for her by God.**
- **But then Satan goes after her remaining children. Some survive his attacks; others are wounded or killed. In the end, however, the mother and her surviving children spend eternity with Jesus.**

Conspiracy to Murder

- **Let's look at the main players in the scenario:**
- **The woman (mother) represents the pure church of God (2 Corinthians 11:2).**
- **The baby represents Jesus (Matthew 1, 2).**
- **The dragon represents Satan (Revelation 12:9).**
- **The children who are left represent the followers of Jesus (Revelation 12:17).**
- **Throughout the centuries, Satan has harassed and persecuted God's people. His attacks are really part of a cosmic conflict, a great controversy, between Jesus and Satan. Revelation 12 brings this conflict out on center stage. It spotlights four dramatic encounters in the history of the great controversy. Let's study them.**
- **THOUGHT QUESTION: In Revelation 12, the great red dragon represents God's faithful people. (False OR True)**

Battle Number 1: Introduction to Satan's Murderous Tactics—Jesus attacked!

- READ REVELATION 12:1-6.**
- Have you ever wondered how sin entered this world of ours? These verses tell you. They summarize the cosmic battle with sin. Let's look at the details.**
- “Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.**
- Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth” (Revelation 12:1, 2).**
- In this vision John sees a pregnant woman, but he must have noticed something else about her. She is surrounded by the light of the sun, moon, and stars.**

Battle Number 1: Introduction to Satan's Murderous Tactics—Jesus attacked!

- ***What do you think the light represents?***
- **Light is the clothing that God wears (Psalm 104:2). Jesus is called the “light of the world” and the “sun of righteousness” (John 8:12, Malachi 4:2). Christians are called “sons of light” (Luke 16:8).**
- **This woman, clothed with light, represents God's church at its very best, filled with God's power.**
- **Then another figure enters the vision. John writes, “Another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.**
- **His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them down to the earth” (vss. 3, 4).**

Battle Number 1: Introduction to Satan's Murderous Tactics—Jesus attacked!

- In this verse the angels in heaven are referred to as stars.**
- Verse 9 tells us that when Satan was cast out of heaven, the angels who joined him in the rebellion were cast out too.**
- Events surrounding the actual birth of Jesus fit the symbols in Revelation 12. Verses 4 and 5 state that the dragon was waiting for the woman to give birth so that he could “devour her Child as soon as it was born” but instead “her son was caught up to the throne of God.”**
- The only child born into this world and taken up to God's throne is the Man, Christ Jesus.**

Battle Number 1: Introduction to Satan's Murderous Tactics—Jesus attacked!

- When the virgin Mary was about to be delivered of the Christ child, the Roman king Herod plotted to have this rival to his throne killed quietly. But God foiled his plan.**
- Through a dream He warned the wise men, who'd just paid homage to Jesus in Bethlehem, to tell Herod nothing about the location of the baby.**
- Herod panicked and ordered every baby boy under two years of age in Bethlehem to be murdered. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus escaped into Egypt (Matthew 2:1-15). Behind this terrible atrocity we can see Satan's fury against his rival, Christ.**
- Thirty-three years later Satan was still at it. Another Roman ruler, Pontius Pilate, ordered Jesus nailed to the cross on the hill Calvary.**
- Centuries later, the official church itself, which had become powerful in Rome, acted on behalf of the great red dragon mercilessly persecuting some of Christ's most devoted followers.**

Battle Number 1: Introduction to Satan's Murderous Tactics—Jesus attacked!

- In spite of the dragon's efforts to destroy Jesus and His followers, the prophecy says that the woman's Child "was to rule all nations with a rod of iron" (vs. 5).**
- God is in control; Jesus rules in human affairs.**
- And He will rule in your life as well if you will allow Him to.**
- What does the woman—God's true church—do when she is persecuted by the dragon?**
- "Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (vs. 6).**

Battle Number 1: Introduction to Satan's Murderous Tactics—Jesus attacked!

- The church entered a 1,260-day wilderness period which we learned is 1,260 years in prophetic time (see Daniel 7:25, Revelation 11:2, 3).**
- As we've seen, this period falls between A.D. 538 and 1798. During this time, the Roman church persecuted those believers who did not accept her authority and doctrines.**
- It was a great time of trial.**
- But many testimonies from those years show us that God had His arms of love around His faithful followers during their wilderness experience.**
- God still cared.**

Battle Number 1: Introduction to Satan's Murderous Tactics—Jesus attacked!

- ***Have you ever had what you would call a wilderness experience, a time when it seemed the ruthless red dragon, Satan, was trying to destroy you or mess up your life? If so, how did you react?***
- **The bottom line of this dramatic story is that Jesus won the battle with Satan! Jesus died on the cross, but then He rose from the grave and ascended to heaven.**
- **He is ministering on behalf of each one of us in those heavenly courts to this very day.**
- **He ends up ruling the nations.**
- **That means there is victory for you and me!**

Battle Number 2: War in Heaven

- **READ REVELATION 12:7-12.: The conflict we just read about in verses 1–6 actually stretches back further in time than the birth of Jesus.**
- **The reason there is war on Earth is because there was first war in heaven. Long ago, a glorious angel named Lucifer openly rebelled against God.**
- **He'd been given the power of choice just like all of God's perfectly created beings. The power of choice includes the power to make bad choices.**
- **Lucifer's tragic choice was the seed that grew into all the cruelty and suffering that surround us.**
- **God would not force Lucifer to obey Him because love just can't be forced. It has to be offered freely.**

Battle Number 2: War in Heaven

- **Here is what the Bible says about the war that took place in heaven when Lucifer rebelled:**
- **“War broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.**
- **So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (vss. 7-9).**

Battle Number 2: War in Heaven

- **Deception! That's it in a nutshell. That's why everyone in the world struggles with temptation.**
- **It may be the urge to lie, steal, seek revenge, cheat on a spouse, etc.**
- **Many times pastors hear confessions from individuals: "I don't know why I did it. I knew I shouldn't, but the urge was so overpowering."**
- **Maybe you wonder why your children behave the way they do after you've spent years doing your best in raising them. Verse 9 reveals the basic reason—deception by Satan.**
- **He is trying desperately to pull the wool over everyone's eyes. He doesn't want them to see how wonderful God's way is.**
- **He doesn't want them to see how self-destructive his way is.**

Battle Number 2: War in Heaven

- **So please don't blame God for moral failures. He did not create planet Earth as the dumping ground of the universe.**
- **He made it as a perfect world. But, as Genesis 1–3 shows us, God gave Adam and Eve the same choices He gave Satan and the angels.**
- **They could freely love and obey Him and receive eternal life, or they could turn away from Him, slide down Satan's path, and receive eternal death.**
- **Satan may be very active in our world, but God is active as well. Everyone has the same choice to make—to follow God or to follow Satan.**

Battle Number 2: War in Heaven

- **Remember, don't get bogged down in the details of the cosmic conflict between good and evil.**
- **Especially don't focus on all the terrible things Satan is doing or might be doing.**
- **Most of the phrases in this section describe Christ's victory over Satan and his angels.**
- **We read words such as "salvation," "strength," "power," "overcame," and "rejoice." These are key concepts for those of us who follow Jesus. Satan, "the accuser," may harass us, but Someone else has the last word.**

Battle Number 2: War in Heaven

- **“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.**
- **And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death’ ” (vss. 10, 11).**
- ***What does the phrase “they did not love their lives to the death” mean to you?***
- **“Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea!**
- **For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (vs. 12).**

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Battle Number 2: War in Heaven

- **According to verses 11 and 12, since Christ defeated Satan at the cross, the Devil has a short time left to work havoc in the world. Aren't you glad about that? However, the Devil has been tormenting men and women for thousands of years. That doesn't sound like a small span of time does it? "Short" is a relative term. When you compare a few thousand years to eternity, it is a short time. And that's the point.**
- **Satan's time to tempt will not go on forever. It will end. This is something to keep in mind when your problems and trials seem endless. In Christ, you are offered a truly endless life of joy, peace, and love. So please remember, your worst trial is very short when compared to an eternity with God.**
- **And you can be an overcomer by the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony. You will always overcome when you place your faith in the victory and power of Jesus Christ!**

Battle Number 2: War in Heaven

- **THOUGHT QUESTION: God's people overcome Satan and his temptations by the blood of the Lamb. (False or True)**
- **The war between good and evil on earth has its beginning in a war between good and evil in heaven.**

Battle Number 3: Satan Attacks God's People

• READ VERSES 13-16.

- **After the death of Jesus, Satan attempted to destroy God's church through pagan Roman emperors and their fierce persecution. Christians were burned at the stake.**
- **They were thrown to the lions.**
- **They were beaten, imprisoned, and tortured.**
- **Historians estimate that millions of Christians were martyred during this time.**
- **But in spite of this cruel oppression, the Christian church grew and flourished.**

Battle Number 3: Satan Attacks God's People

- **So Satan changed his tactics. He decided to infiltrate the church itself. He introduced doctrinal heresies and a spirit of intolerance.**
- **He worked behind the scenes to unite religious authority with civil power in the Roman Empire.**
- **Power corrupted the church. This union of church and state caused such a nightmare that the period is known as the Dark Ages.**
- **Simple believers, who wanted nothing more than to live their lives according to the teachings of Jesus, had to flee for their lives.**
- **Some in England decided to make a completely new start on a new continent.**
- **The Pilgrims who came to America founded a country that guaranteed religious freedom, and their descendants wrote a constitution that decrees a separation of church and state.**

Battle Number 3: Satan Attacks God's People

- **In summary, these verses describe events that took place during the 1,260-year period mentioned in verses 6 and 14, when the Christian church of the Roman Empire persecuted believers who refused to follow the teachings of the church.**
- **The 1,260 years (A.D. 538-1798) are called “a time, times, and half a time” in verse 14.**
- **The date A.D. 538 is significant because that’s when the Roman Church leaders received civil as well as religious authority from the Roman emperor.**
- **The pope was a major force in Europe for 1,260 years until the overthrow of the papal dominion by Napoleon’s general, Berthier, in 1798.**

Battle Number 3: Satan Attacks God's People

- **How did God rescue the woman (His church) from the attacks of the dragon?**
- **“The woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time, times, and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.**
- **So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.**
- **But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth” (vss. 13-16).**

Battle Number 3: Satan Attacks God's People

- In referring to Israel's escape from slavery in Egypt, Moses said God had carried them on "eagles' wings" (Exodus 19:4).
- Noah's family was protected from the waters of the Flood in the ark.
- In these verses God causes the earth itself to swallow up the flood that threatens His people.
- The waters may rise, the flood may seem wide, but always remember that God's arms of love and caring are wider still.
- **THOUGHT QUESTION:** Revelation 12 pictures a period of 1,260 years—from A.D. 538-1798—when Satan and his followers would persecute God's true church. (False or True)

Battle Number 4: God's Last-Day People—His Remnant

- READ REVELATION 12:17.**
- Following the Dark Ages, Satan still couldn't win the war against God's people. He couldn't wipe out faith in Jesus. In his anger and frustration at not being able to destroy the woman, Satan turned his attack against the rest of her offspring.**
- "The dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (vs. 17).**

Battle Number 4: God's Last-Day People—His Remnant

- ***What are the “commandments of God?”***
- **God gave His commandments to His people on tablets of stone when He led them out of Egypt (Exodus 20:1-17).**
- **These ten clear, brief rules summarize how we are to live as we worship God and interact with one another.**
- ***What is the “testimony of Jesus”?***
- **The Bible says, “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).**
- **Frantic with frustration for failing to destroy the church during the 1,260 years of the Dark Ages, Satan now attacks “the rest of the offspring” of the church.**
- **This refers to Christians living in the last days of Earth’s history. Another accurate translation of the words for “rest of the offspring” is “remnant.”**

Battle Number 4: God's Last-Day People—His Remnant

- In biblical times, tribes and nations frequently faced the threat of extinction from an invading army or a famine.**
- They found comfort in knowing that, if a remnant survived, that group might be able to restore their tribe or rebuild their national identity.**
- Noah and his family of seven, for example, survived the Flood and therefore prevented the entire human race from being obliterated.**
- The Jewish exiles who returned from captivity in Babylon were a remnant who restored the temple and reclaimed their Jewish heritage.**
- In the Bible, the remnant, those who are left, take on special significance.**

Battle Number 4: God's Last-Day People—His Remnant

- The remnant of Revelation 12 are believers who, in these last days of earth's history, remain faithful to their love relationship with Jesus Christ.**
- They obey His Ten Commandments; their lives testify that they belong to Jesus.**
- They are saved by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and they are guided by the Holy Spirit who reveals God's messages through His chosen prophets.**
- There is a remnant, above all, because God still cares.**

Battle Number 4: God's Last-Day People—His Remnant

- In summary, before the Dark Ages began there was one Christian church.**
- Because Rome was the ruling empire, the official church was the Roman Catholic Church.**
- From A.D. 538-1798 (the time of the 1,260-year prophecy), the church lost sight of many of the truths of Scripture.**
- Eventually, courageous Bible students and church leaders spoke out against the non-biblical positions being taught.**
- These individuals were called “protestors” or “protestants.” They were the catalysts for the Protestant Reformation.**

Battle Number 4: God's Last-Day People—His Remnant

- The 1,260-year period began with only one Christian church in existence—the Roman Catholic Church—but it ended with many different Christian denominations teaching different messages from the Bible.**
- God, however, has only one truth in Scripture. Before Jesus returns to Earth, a “remnant” will return to the pure truths of the Scriptures and preach a final message for those living upon the Earth.**
- THOUGHT QUESTION: God’s faithful, last-day people will be keeping His Ten Commandments because they love Him.
(False or True)**

Remnant: Recovering Something that was Lost

- **In the fourteenth century an Oxford scholar named John Wycliffe heard the call to be a part of God's remnant, to recover something that had been lost.**
- **The church of his day had grown powerful and overbearing. He began calling for reform, to follow the pattern of the church described in the New Testament.**
- **Wycliffe declared that tithes should be withheld from priests who neglected their duties. In this he was taking a stand against his own self-interest as a clergyman.**
- **But all around him friars were growing fat and monasteries wealthy in parishes where a whole family might have only a small wheat cake to feed all its members for a day.**
- **In one typical sermon Wycliffe declared, "A cup of cold water given with kindness and warm love is a greater gift than all the lands and kingdoms of the church."**

Remnant: Recovering Something that was Lost

- **Wycliffe dedicated his life to translating the Bible, then available only in Latin, into the language of the people.**
- **Though condemned as a heretic, he continued to champion the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ.**
- **Wycliffe's English Bible would help create a spiritual revolution in England as God's essential truths were rediscovered.**

Remnant: Recovering Something that was Lost

- **The courageous stand of that one man affected an entire nation. Each one of us is called to take a stand today. Each one of us can make an impact in our world for God.**
- **It's our privilege to be part of God's last-day remnant people. God is appealing to you right now. He wants you to be one who overcomes by the blood of the Lamb.**
- **He wants you to be part of His remnant church. When you respond and unite with God, the vast resources of heaven will back you up. You have access to the heart of heaven through prayer.**
- **You have access to the wisdom of God. You have access to His ministering angels. Best of all you have a place reserved at the foot of the cross.**
- **The blood of the Lamb is still powerful today against all strongholds. Satan still shrinks before "the word of their testimony" about Jesus.**

Remnant: Recovering Something that was Lost

- **If there's a step God wants you to make today, please don't put it off.**
- **Please accept the gracious invitation of the Lord who cares for you more deeply than you can understand.**