OUTNUMBERED

In *Outnumbered: Incredible Stories of History’s Most Surprising Battlefield Upsets*, Cormac O’Brien recounts the stories of armies that, though seriously outnumbered, still won. It tells of Hannibal’s army of 55,000 soldiers from Carthage defeating the “invincible” Roman army of 80,000 strong. It tells the amazing story of Alexander the Great’s Greek army defeating the empire of Persia.

We, too, are in a life-and-death battle with a wily foe. We are outnumbered, fighting against incredible odds. The forces of evil appear invincible. We seem to be facing certain loss and defeat appears inevitable. Victory seems out of sight. From a merely human perspective, it seems that Satan’s forces will overwhelm us.

But, thank God, though we are outnumbered, though the odds are (humanly speaking) stacked against us, though Satan’s attacks are vicious, through Jesus we will win at last. Summarized in a few words, the theme of the Bible’s last book, Revelation, is this: “Jesus Wins, Satan Loses.” The heart of this battle is outlined in Revelation 12, the focus of our study this week. This study will give a good preparation for understanding Revelation 14 and the three angels’ messages.
Write out Revelation 12 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Revelation 12:11 and 17. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.
THE BATTLE IN HEAVEN

Revelation 12 presents a stream of dramatic episodes—snapshots of the agelong conflict between good and evil that began in heaven but will end here on earth. These episodes take us down the stream of time from the opening scene of Satan's rebellion in heaven to his vicious attacks on God's people in the last days.

Revelation 12:7–9 describes this cosmic conflict between good and evil. The freedom to choose is a fundamental principle of God's government, both in heaven and on earth. God did not create robots, either in heaven or on earth. Created in the image of God, we as humans can make moral choices.

The power of choice is closely aligned with the ability to love. If you take away the power of choice, you destroy the ability to love, for love can never be forced or coerced. Love is an expression of free will. Every angel in heaven was faced with the choice either to respond to God's love or to turn away in selfishness, arrogance, and pride. Just as the heavenly angels were confronted with an eternal choice, Revelation presents each of us with eternal choices in earth's final conflict.

There has never been neutrality in the great controversy (see Luke 11:23), and there will be none in earth's final war. Just as every angel chose Jesus' side or Lucifer's side, all humanity will be led to their final, irreversible choice at the end of time. Who will have our allegiance, our worship, our obedience? This has always been the issue with humanity, and it will be so, however more dramatically, in the final crisis of earth's history.

But here is the incredibly good news: Revelation 12 describes Christ's triumph in the conflict, and all we have to do, using our free will, is choose to be on His side, the winning side. How wonderful to be able to choose a side in a battle that you know, beforehand, will be the winner!

From the start, Satan sought to destroy Christ (see Rev. 12:4, 5), yet failed in every attempt. At Christ's birth, for instance, an angel warned Joseph and Mary about Herod's vicious plans, and they fled to Egypt. Jesus faced Satan's most enticing temptations in the wilderness with an “It is written” and thus found protection in the Word of God. In His death on the cross, He revealed the magnitude of His love and delivered us from the penalty of sin's condemnation. In His resurrection, as our living high priest, He delivers us from the power of sin in our lives.

In the Bible a rod is a symbol of dominion or rulership. Specifically in Revelation 12:5, a rod of iron is a symbol of an unbreakable, all-powerful, invincible rulership. Jesus faced every single temptation that we will ever experience, but He came out a conqueror. The devil is a defeated foe. Christ has triumphed over him in His life, death, and resurrection. Because Jesus has already defeated the devil on Calvary's cross, we can be victorious, too. Christ's victory over Satan is complete, but the great controversy between Christ and Satan is not yet over.

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The 1,260 days in Revelation 12:6 are parallel to the time, times, and half a time in Revelation 12:14. This same time prophecy describing the same time period is found in Daniel 7:25, Revelation 11:2, 3, and Revelation 13:5. Because these are prophetic symbols (a literal woman with wings did not go into the wilderness), we apply prophetic time, the day-year principle (see, for instance, Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:4–6), to these prophecies. This means, simply, that one prophetic day equals one year. Commenting on this same prophetic period of time in Revelation 11:2, the Andrews Study Bible states, “Historicist interpreters, therefore, have generally understood the period of 1,260 prophetic days to mean 1,260 literal years running from A.D. 538 to 1798” (p. 1,673 comments on Revelation 11:2).

A corrupt church, together with a corrupt state, oppressed, persecuted, and at times slaughtered God’s faithful people. This fierce, satanic persecution of Bible-believing Christians was an extension of the great controversy between good and evil. Coming out of the darkness of the Middle Ages, at the time of the Reformation in 1517, men and women were faced with a choice. Would they be faithful to the Word of God, or would they accept the teachings of priests and prelates? Truth triumphed once again, and God had a people who were faithful to Him in the face of mighty opposition.

There are some fascinating and extremely encouraging expressions of God’s care in these verses. Revelation 12:6 uses the phrase, “a place prepared by God,” Revelation 12:14 says the woman was “nourished” in the wilderness, and Revelation 12:16 declares that “the earth helped the woman.” At times of severe persecution, God provided for His church. As He did then, so He will do for His end-time remnant.

The devil has been at war with Christ since his rebellion in heaven (Rev. 12:7). Satan’s purpose then and his purpose now is to seize control of the universe (see Isa. 14:12–14). The focus of his attention in the last days of earth’s history is upon God’s people. Revelation 12:17 emphatically declares that the dragon (Satan) was angry with the woman (the church) and went to make war with the rest of her offspring. This expression, “the rest of her offspring” is translated “the remnant” in the King James Version. God’s remnant remains loyal to Christ, obedient to His truth, and faithful to His mission.

In Revelation 12:17 Satan (the dragon) is angry with the woman, God’s church. The devil is furious with a people who keep the commandments of God, and he will do everything he can to destroy them. Eventually he instigates a decree so that they cannot buy or sell and will be imprisoned and face death (see Rev. 13:14–17). If Satan cannot destroy Christ, he will attempt to destroy the object of Christ’s deepest affection: His church. Earth’s last war is not centered on the various conflicts in any specific region of the world; it is fixed on the minds of God’s people scattered all around the globe. It is a battle between two opposing forces, Christ and Satan. Again, no one is neutral.

The central question in this final war is “Who has our loyalty? Where is our allegiance?” Heaven calls for believers who are so captivated by Christ’s love, redeemed by His grace, committed to His purposes, empowered by His Spirit, and (cont. on p. 13)
Nevertheless, when we accept by faith what Christ has done for us, our sin debt is canceled and our sins forgiven. We stand perfect before God, covered by Christ's righteousness. As Paul writes, we are “found in Him, not having [our] own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Phil. 3:9). If we are forgiven, there is nothing that we can be accused of. Jesus conquered and overcame forever the worst that sin and evil could do to Him. He made the full assault on evil and overcame it. When we accept Jesus by faith, His victory is ours.

Obedient to His commands that they are willing to face death itself for His cause.

Our world is headed for a major crisis, but in Jesus, by Jesus, through Jesus, and because of Jesus, our victory is assured as long as we stay connected to Him, which we do by faith—a faith that leads to obedience. It all comes down to our own choice.

The great conflict that Satan created in the heavenly courts is soon, very soon, to be forever decided. Soon all the inhabitants of the earth will have taken sides, either for or against the government of heaven. Now, as never before, Satan is exercising his deceiving power to mislead and to destroy every unguarded soul. We are called upon to arouse the people to prepare for the great issues before them. We must give warning to those who are standing on the very brink of ruin. God's people are to put forth every power in combating Satan's falsehoods and pulling down his strongholds. To every human being in the wide world who will give heed, we are to make plain the principles at stake in the great controversy—principles upon which hangs the eternal destiny of the soul. To the people far and near we are to bring home the question: “Are you following the great apostate in disobedience to God's law, or are you following the Son of God, who declared, 'I have kept my Father's commandments'?” (Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1902], vol. 7, 141.)
ACCEPTING JESUS’ VICTORY

As depicted in the Bible, Jesus has never lost a battle against Satan. He is the mighty conqueror, the victor over the powers of evil. However, it is one thing to believe that Jesus was victorious over the temptations of Satan, but it is quite another to believe that Christ’s victory is our victory as well.

Although the battle still rages on earth, Satan has lost. Period. This is true not only of Christ’s ultimate victory at the climax of human history but also in our battle over the principalities and powers of evil in our personal lives. Some Christians live in frustrated defeat. They hope for victory over some attitude or habit but never grasp the reality of Christ’s victory for them in their personal lives.

Seven times in Revelation’s messages to the seven churches we find the expression “he who overcomes.” In Revelation 12:11 we again find this concept of overcoming. The word “overcome” in the original language of the text is nikao. It can be translated as “to conquer, to prevail, to triumph, or to come through victoriously.” Revelation 12:11 affirms that it is possible for us to be overcomers “by the blood of the Lamb.”

In Revelation 5:6, in prophetic vision, John gazes into heaven and sees “a Lamb as though it had been slain.” Christ’s sacrifice is the focus of all of heaven’s attention. There is no better demonstration of the infinite, unfathomable love of God than the cross.

When we accept by faith what Christ has done for us, our debt is canceled and we stand perfect in the sight of God. Our sins are forgiven (Col. 1:14, Eph. 1:7, Col. 2:14), and the “accuser of our brethren” has been “cast down” (Rev. 12:10). We are redeemed, victorious, and saved, not because of our own merits, but because of Christ’s victories in our behalf.
**THE GREAT CONFLICT**

In the Revelation are portrayed the deep things of God. The very name given to its inspired pages, “the Revelation,” contradicts the statement that this is a sealed book. A revelation is something revealed. The Lord Himself revealed to His servant the mysteries contained in this book, and He designs that they shall be open to the study of all. Its truths are addressed to those living in the last days of this earth’s history, as well as to those living in the days of John. Some of the scenes depicted in this prophecy are in the past, some are now taking place; some bring to view the close of the great conflict between the powers of darkness and the Prince of heaven, and some reveal the triumphs and joys of the redeemed in the earth made new. (Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911], 584.)

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all intelligent beings depends upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.

So long as all created beings acknowledged the allegiance of love, there was perfect harmony throughout the universe of God. It was the joy of the heavenly host to fulfill the purpose of their Creator. They delighted in reflecting His glory and showing forth His praise. And while love to God was supreme, love for one another was confiding and unselfish. There was no note of discord to mar the celestial harmonies. (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1890, 1940], 34, 35.)

The Father decides the case of Satan, and declares that he must be turned out of heaven for his daring rebellion, and that all those who united with him in his rebellion should be turned out with him. Then there was war in heaven. Christ and His angels fought against Satan and his angels, for they were determined to remain in heaven with all their rebellion. But they prevailed not. Christ and loyal angels triumphed, and drove Satan and his rebel sympathizers from heaven. (Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* [Battle Creek, Mich.: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1864], vol. 3, 38.)

Christ on the cross not only draws men to repentance toward God for the transgression of His law—for whom God pardons He first makes penitent—but Christ has satisfied justice; He has proffered Himself as an atonement. His gushing blood, His broken body, satisfy the claims of the broken law, and thus He bridges the gulf which sin has made. He suffered in the flesh, that with His bruised and broken body He might cover the defenseless sinner. The victory gained at His death on Calvary broke forever the accusing power of Satan over the universe and silenced his charges that self-denial was impossible with God and therefore not essential in the human family. (Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958, 1980], vol. 1, 341.)

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Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Why is Revelation 12 a fitting introduction to the three angels’ messages, especially in view of the coming conflict at the time of the end?

How is Revelation 12 reassuring to you personally in the daily temptations and trials you face?

There are some who believe our actions are determined largely by our heredity and environment. Do you agree or disagree? What role does our choice have in determining our behavior?

Discuss the relationship between our choice and God’s power as He operates in our lives.

Think about how sacred free will and free choice must be to Jesus, who, though knowing it would lead Him to the cross (see 2 Tim. 1:9), gave us free will anyway. What should this tell us about how carefully we should use this sacred-but-costly gift?

How can what Paul wrote in Phil. 3:9 be our own experience?