



## got life?

### The Gospel of John A Bible Study with Stan Key

## COSMIC CHRISTMAS

*Revelation 12*

### I. Victors or victims?

- A. Chippie the Parakeet.<sup>1</sup>
- B. What's so merry about Christmas?

For millions of people, Christmas is a time of **depression** and **sadness**. Human pain is augmented during a season where it seems everyone else is happy. Loneliness, bills, broken relationships, an empty chair at the table—it just hurts worse at Christmas.

- C. Keep **Herod** in Christmas (Mt 2:16–18).

The Bible is clear that the first Christmas was not a happy occasion for everyone. Mothers in Bethlehem must have had a hard time singing, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come.” The words of Simeon to Jesus’ parents awaken us to the reality that the coming of Christ **confronts us** all with a radical choice.

*This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too. (Luke 2:34–35 NIV)*

- D. Overcomer? Or overcome?

Because Jesus is born, I must make a choice: will the trials of life overwhelm and defeat me, or will the babe of Bethlehem enable me to be an overcomer? Will I be **victim** or **victor**? Overcome or an overcomer? Will Chippie learn to sing again? The Greek verb *nikao* (to conquer, to overcome) and the noun *nike* (victory)<sup>2</sup> introduce us to God’s promise for all his children as they find their way through a world filled with suffering, loss, temptation, affliction and persecution.

1. Jesus is the ultimate conqueror. The **Lamb** has defeated the **Dragon** (see Jn 16:33; Rv 5:5–6; 17:14). No one took his life. He was no victim (see Jn 10:17–18).
2. Those who overcome the adversities of this life are given what are perhaps the most amazing set of **promises** in all of Scripture (see Rv 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7).
3. As followers of Jesus, we can share in his victory so that we too become overcomers (see 1 Jn 2:13–14; 4:4; Rv 12:11; 15:2). In fact, Paul tells us that we are “**more than** conquerors [*huper-nikao*] through him who loved us” (Rom 8:37).

*For everyone who has been born of God overcomes [nikao] the world. And this is the victory [nike] that has overcome [nikao] the world—our **faith**. Who is it that overcomes [nikao] the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4–5)*

<sup>1</sup> As told by Max Lucado in *The Eye of the Storm* (Word, 1991): 11.

<sup>2</sup> In Greek mythology, *Nike* was also the name of a goddess who assisted men and women in combat and struggle, enabling them to gain victory.

## II. Christmas from God's Perspective—Revelation 12.

### A. Christmas according to John.

John handles the story of Christmas very differently than Matthew and Luke. He makes no mention of the manger, the star, the shepherds or even Mary and Joseph. Rather than giving the historical facts, John presents us with the **theological meaning**. In his Gospel (Jn 1:1–18), John tells us: “In the beginning was the Word... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory...”

### B. In the book of Revelation (Rv 12).

Though at first this may not appear to be a Christmas story, look again. All the elements of Christmas are present, but they are not localized in a specific time and place. This is Christmas from **God's** point of view: cosmic Christmas.

1. *The place:* not Bethlehem but in **heaven** (Rv 12:1).
2. *The time:* not 2,000 years ago but in an **undefined** “moment.”
3. *The people involved:* Three main characters who seem strangely familiar to those of us who know the story as told by Matthew and Luke.
  - A **godly woman** giving birth in unusual circumstances.
  - A **baby boy** protected by God, destined to rule the nations.
  - A **wicked dragon** who is obsessed about killing the baby and/or his mother.

### C. Why would John want to tell the story of Christmas in this manner?

1. To help us understand that the story is **bigger** than we ever imagined.
2. To teach us about **spiritual warfare**: it is real, it is cosmic, it is here, it is now!
3. To help us understand what happened to **the woman** after she gave birth.
4. To underscore the fact that the dragon is a triple failure: a **Big Loser!**
  - He fails in his effort to kill the baby (Rv 12:1–6).
  - He fails to dethrone God in heaven and is cast out (Rv 12:7–12).
  - He fails to kill the woman (Rv 12:13–17).

## III. Three main characters.

### A. The Child.

1. It should not trouble us that so little is said about the child in this chapter because he is the main character everywhere else in the book of Revelation! However, this passage does underscore one important piece of information: he is destined to **rule the nations** with a rod of iron (Rv 12:5). This is obviously a reference to Jesus, the Messiah, the Lamb of God (see Isa 9:6–7; Ps 2:9; Rv 5:6, 12; 14:4).
2. When the dragon tries to kill the baby, he is “caught up to God and to his throne” (Rv 12:5). Nothing is said of Jesus' life, ministry, death, or resurrection; only his birth and **ascension** are mentioned here.
3. Though Jesus gets only brief mention in this chapter, don't worry: he'll **be back** (see Rv 1:7; 19:11–16).

B. The Dragon.

1. What is he like?

- He is **terrifying**. He is enormous and red; has 7 heads (hard to kill) with 7 crowns (political power). He has 10 horns (a horn is a symbol of strength) and a huge, destructive tail (Rv 12:3–4).
- He is **furious** because he failed to kill the baby or his mother, and he has been kicked out of heaven. He knows his time is **short** (Rv 12:12, 17).

2. What is his story?

In what is a sort of **prequel** (Rv 12:7–12), we learn of a “war in heaven.” This dragon once fought against God himself! But he lost and was **cast out** of heaven along with his demonic army (perhaps a third of the heavenly host, see Rv 12:4). See Isa 14:12–15; Ezek 28:12–17; Lk 10:18.

3. What are his names?

- The ancient **serpent** (Rv 12:9; see Gn 3:1).
- The **devil** (Rv 12:9). The word *diabolos* means to accuse, to slander.
- The **accuser** who accuses believers before God day and night (Rv 12:10).
- **Satan** (Rv 12:9). The word means adversary.
- He is the **deceiver** of the whole world (Rv 12:9).

4. Satan is *not* original or creative. He can only take what is God’s and twist it, pervert it. He’s a **copy-cat** and traffics in forgeries and cheap, imitation art. Thus, he presents himself as a perverse form of the **Trinity**:

- Dragon. **Satan** (Rv 12:12). The counterfeit “Father.”
- Beast from the sea. **Antichrist** (Rv 13:1–10, 12–14). The counterfeit “Son.” He performs signs and wonders and even orchestrates a pseudo-resurrection.
- Beast from the earth. **False prophet** (Rv 13:11–18). A counterfeit “Spirit” who is a sort of minister of propaganda exalting Antichrist and urging people to worship him.

5. What is his strategy?

Because he failed in his attempt to kill the baby, Satan now wages all out warfare on the woman and her offspring, the **church** (see Rv 2:17; 13:7). His intent is to destroy God’s people. But be of good cheer! We are not **ignorant** of his devices (2 Cor 2:11). To be forewarned is to be forearmed. This chapter reveals Satan’s demonic strategy:

- **Deception** (Rv 12:9). Ever since the serpent tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, Satan has used lies and half-truths to accomplish his purposes. He disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).
- **Condemnation** (Rv 12:10; see Job 1:6–11; Zech 3:1). Like a malicious prosecuting attorney, Satan gathers evidence to show God what miserable failures we are. Unless we can find a better attorney, we don’t stand a chance (see 1 Jn 2:1–2; Rom 8:33–35).
- **Intimidation** (Rv 12:12, 17). Satan is a bully. But his fierce exterior is only camouflage. He is bluffing. He’s a big loser and he knows it! The next time Satan reminds you of your past; remind him of his future!

C. The Woman.

1. The woman represents much more than Mary. She symbolizes the **people of God**, the new Israel, the church. Just as Jesus was born out of Israel, so this godly woman gives birth to other offspring.<sup>3</sup> Because the dragon fails to kill the woman, he **declares war** on the church (see Rv 12:17; 13:7).
2. This godly woman is a dramatic contrast to the **Great Prostitute** (see Rv 17:1 ff). This wicked woman (Babylon) will ultimately be cast into the lake of fire but the righteous woman (New Jerusalem) will become **the bride** of Christ (see Rv 19–22).

IV. What the story of Cosmic Christmas means for you and me.

A. The world is a **battleground**.

Many American believers, infected with prosperity theology, think of life in terms of an **amusement park** where the point is to be healthy, wealthy, and happy. Others think of salvation in terms of a **cloistered monastery**, far from conflict and strife. Cosmic Christmas reminds us that following Jesus is an invitation to war (Eph 6:10–20; 2 Tm 2:3–4; 4:7; etc.). This means the Christian life will be dangerous, costly, and **messy**.

B. Your life has **cosmic significance**.

Many today see only meaninglessness and absurdity in human existence.<sup>4</sup> As a follower of Christ, you are part of God's **Great Story**. God has written you into the script! Your life matters. The destiny of the world hangs in the balance (to some degree) on how you live your life.

C. Three essentials for becoming an overcomer.

*They triumphed over [conquered] him [the dragon] by **the blood of the Lamb** and by the word of **their testimony**; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from **death**. (Revelation 12:11 NIV)*

1. *The blood of the Lamb.* It is the victory of the Lamb over the dragon that makes our victory possible. **Faith** in the Lamb makes possible forgiveness, birth into God's family, and assurance of our standing before God. "Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 Jn 5:4–5). In Christ, we can withstand the attacks of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

A Christmas question: *Am I trusting in Christ as Savior and Lord?*

2. *The word of their testimony.* While the Roman Empire demanded that all citizens proclaim *Caesar is Lord*, the church refused because such a statement simply wasn't true. *Jesus is Lord!* To be secret and private about their faith was to deny their faith. Victory comes only when we **go public** with our witness and name the Name!

A Christmas question: *Does the watching world know that I am a follower of Jesus? Am I vocal about the Name in which I trust?*

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<sup>3</sup> The 12 stars in her crown (Rv 12:1) probably represent the 12 tribes of Israel or the 12 apostles—or both.

<sup>4</sup> Think of John Lennon: "He's a real nowhere man, sitting in his nowhere land, making all his nowhere plans for nobody..." Or think of Shakespeare's Macbeth: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It's a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

3. *They did not shrink from death.* To be a witness (Greek, *martus*) is to be a **martyr**. No one can be an overcomer until he/she recognizes that martyrdom is inherent to our calling. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his **cross** daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23). Few people said it better than Martin Luther:

*Let goods and kindred go,  
This mortal life also;  
The body they may kill;  
God's truth abideth still;  
His kingdom is forever.*

A Christmas question: *Is my all on the altar? Or is something held back?*

## Lo! He Comes, with Clouds Descending

By John Cennick (1752)

Republished and altered by Charles Wesley (1758)

*Lo, he comes, with clouds descending,  
Once for favored sinners slain;  
Thousand thousand saints attending  
Swell the triumph of his train:  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Christ the Lord returns to reign.*

*Now redemption, long expected,  
Comes in solemn splendor near;  
All the saints this world rejected  
Thrill the trumpet sound to hear:  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
See the day of God appear!*

*Every eye shall now behold him  
Robed in dreadful majesty;  
Those who set at naught and sold him,  
Pierced and nailed him to the tree,  
Deeply wailing, deeply wailing,  
Shall the true Messiah see.*

*Answer thine own bride and Spirit,  
Hasten, Lord, the general doom!  
The new heaven and earth t'inherit,  
Take thy pining exiles home:  
All creation, all creation,  
Travails! Groans! And bids thee come!*

*Those dear tokens of his passion  
Still his dazzling body bears,  
Cause of endless exultation  
To his ransomed worshipers:  
With what rapture! With what rapture!  
Gaze we on those glorious scars!*

*Yea, amen! Let all adore thee,  
High on thine eternal throne;  
Savior, take the power and glory,  
Claim the kingdom as thine own:  
O come quickly! O come quickly!  
Thou shalt reign, and thou alone.*