

The Divine Preservation of the Messianic Line: The True Meaning of the Holidays

The holiday season comes and goes very quickly. Sometimes the hectic nature of the Christmas season provides us little time to adequately reflect upon the true meaning of Christmas. What then is the true meaning of Christmas? The true meaning of the holiday is the celebration of the superintendence of a sovereign God that allowed His prophesied redeemer, God the Son, to be born into the world.

A seldom considered Christmas passage is Rev 12:4b, which says, "And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child." Here, the dragon or Satan (Rev 12:9) is pictured as standing before the woman or Israel (Rev 12:1; Gen 37:9-10) so that he might preempt the birth of Jesus Christ (Rev 12:5; Ps 2:9; Acts 1:9). This passage represents the angelic perspective on Herod's attempt to prevent the birth of the Messiah by murdering all of the male infants in Bethlehem (Matt 2:1-8, 16). Although Matt 2 depicts this event from the human perspective of Herod's insecurity over his own throne, Rev 12:4b describes the same event from the point of view of the fallen angelic realm. In actuality, it was Satan who used Herod's insecurity in an effort to prevent the birth of the Messiah.

Such a preemptive effort was not Satan's first attempt to prevent the birth of the Messiah. All the way back in Gen 3:15, we find the first biblical, messianic prophecy. It is often referred to as the *protoevangelium*. Here, Satan was put on notice of a coming redeemer. This critical verse says, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." Not only does this verse predict a coming one who would crush the serpent's (or Satan's) head, but it also predicts the serpent's bruising of the heel of this coming redeemer. Much of this bruising occurred through Satan's attempt to prevent the Messiah from being born. Thus, Rev 12:4b and Gen 3:15 when taken together furnish an angelic commentary or perspective on the repeated near extinction and jeopardy experienced by the messianic lineage as recorded throughout the pages of the Old Testament.

For example, because Abel's sacrifice was accepted, Satan figured that the messianic lineage would come through him. Thus, Satan prompted Cain to murder Abel (Gen 4; 1 John 3:12). Yet, God circumvented Satan's effort through the continuation of the messianic line through the birth of Seth (Gen 4:25-26; 5:1-32). Satan again sought to prevent the birth of the Messiah through the contamination of humanity's pre-flood gene pool (Gen 6:1-4) so that the human race could never give birth to a Messiah who must not only be fully God but also fully human.

God again got around this Satanic attempt through the preservation of Noah and his sons (Gen 6:9; 1 Pet 3:19-20). Through this line, the Messiah would ultimately come (Gen 9:26; 11:10-26).

In the days of Moses, Satan again tried to thwart the birth of the Messiah by enslaving the nation through which the anticipated redeemer would come from (Exod 1). Yet, God again circumvented Satan's effort through the Exodus event. The same pattern again repeated itself when the usurping queen Athaliah sought to exterminate all of the royal offspring of the house of Judah. Yet, God again thwarted this Satanic attack through the preservation of baby Joash, the sole surviving Davidic descendant, in the temple throughout the duration of Athaliah's rampage (2 Chron 22). This pattern again emerged when wicked Haman developed a plot to exterminate all the Jews. Yet, God again circumvented this Satanic effort to preempt the birth of Christ by sovereignly working through Mordecai and Esther in order to preserve the Jewish race from annihilation as recorded in the Book of Esther.

Thus, Herod's ambition to kill all of the male Bethlehem infants (Matt 2) is yet another chapter in the ongoing attempt by Satan to preempt the birth of the Messiah. Once again, God sovereignly intervened by causing the royal family to flee to Egypt until Herod's death. Despite these numerous attempts to thwart the Messiah's mission by preventing His birth, God sovereignly protected the messianic line thereby allowing the redeemer to be born and eventually fulfill His earthly mission of paying the world's sin debt. God's faithful protection of the messianic line leading to the birth of Christ is what we are to remember and celebrate at Christmas time. During this holiday season let us continually praise God for how He has worked faithfully and sovereignly in history so as to allow the redeemer to come into the world so that He could accomplish His great mission on humanity's behalf.