



The Spirit of Herod Is Alive and Well

By Alfred B. Davis
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King Herod and the people of Jerusalem were troubled. A large entourage from the east had arrived unexpectedly and camped outside of the city. According to Matthew 2:2, the Magi leading the entourage sent King Herod a disconcerting request, "Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

Herod and the people were concerned because the entourage from the east was considerably more than just a small caravan of three religious pilgrims and their attendants. It was most likely an official delegation from the Parthian Empire. Parthia was the chief rival power to Rome in the east at the time of the birth of Christ. The entourage would have been composed of several important members of the Parthian nobility, the Magi, along with their personal attendants and servants. Also accompanying them, due to the importance of the Magi and the treasure of gold, frankincense, and myrrh that they carried with them, would have been a very large contingent of armed Parthian cavalymen as escorts.

No doubt, Herod may have felt caught between a potential power play between Rome and Parthia, fearing that Parthia was about to make a move into the Roman occupied province of Judea. Consequently, in Matthew 2:4-6, we read that Herod contacted the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem in order to ascertain what the Parthians meant by "he that is born King of the Jews":

⁴And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. ⁵And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, ⁶And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

No doubt, King Herod was relieved after talking with the chief priests and scribes to find that the Parthians had not made something up to use as a pretext against him. Still, the threat of a potential Jewish king would have been another concern. After all, a potential alliance between a Jewish king and the Parthians would likely disrupt the balance of power between Rome and Parthia in the region and cost Herod both his throne and his life. Consequently, we read in Matthew 2:7-8:

⁷Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

However, as we read further down, in verses Matthew 2:13&16, Herod had no intention of worshipping the King of the Jews. Rather, he meant to destroy the rival king:

¹³And when they [the wise men] were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. ...¹⁶Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

Now, we could speculate endlessly as to Herod's motivations and the political situation of the day, but those speculations would fall short of the root cause, which is spiritual. It is spiritual because King Herod was influenced by Satan's hatred of the Jewish people.

Satan hates the Jewish people for several reasons. One is that God has a special love for the Jewish people. In Deuteronomy 32:9-10, God lovingly refers to Israel as the "apple of his eye":

⁹For the LORD'S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. ¹⁰He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.

Adam Clarke, in his Commentary on the Bible, says of this phrase:

He kept him as the apple of his eye - Nothing can exceed the force and delicacy of this expression. As deeply concerned and as carefully attentive as man can be for the safety of his eyesight, so was God for the protection and welfare of this people. How amazing this condescension!

We see God's love and care for Israel reflected through the use of this phrase again in Zechariah 2:8:

For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.

Of course, Satan hates and wants to destroy all of humanity, not just the Jews. However, because the Jews have a special place in God's heart and His prophetic plans, the devil goes after them with a particular venom and malice. Hence Herod's motivation to kill the Jewish children "that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof," as was Pharaoh's similar motivation to kill the male Jewish babies in Exodus 1:8-22 in an earlier era. Witness also the unbelievably demonic attacks on October 7, 2023, when Hamas terrorists burned, beheaded, and even baked alive in ovens Jewish babies in front of their parents.

Another reason Satan hates the Jewish people is the promise of a coming Saviour. The first reference to a coming Saviour is found in Genesis 3:14-15:

¹⁴And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: ¹⁵And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

This passage is called the "proto-gospel" because it contains the promise that the seed of the woman would one day inflict a fatal wound, bruising the head, of the serpent while the serpent would inflict a non-fatal wound, bruising the heel, of the seed of the woman. In many ways, this was fulfilled at the cross where the Devil, the serpent, wounded Jesus, the seed of the woman, at the cross whereas Jesus, through His death, burial, and resurrection, defeated Satan.

Satan attempted to thwart God's promise in Genesis 6, where we read in verse 4:

There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

Apparently, the Devil was attempting to adulterate the human gene pool, thus preventing the coming birth of “the seed of the woman.” However, not all of humanity was corrupted genetically. Noah, for instance, was said, in Genesis 6:9, to be “perfect in his generations.” So, although God destroyed the old world in the flood, He preserved Noah and his family in the Ark and the promise of the coming “seed of the woman” was preserved.

Soon after the flood, God made a promise to Abram (Abraham) in Genesis 12:1-3, indicating that the promised “seed of the woman” was to come through his line:

¹Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: ²And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: ³And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

This same promise was later confirmed with Abraham’s son, Isaac (Genesis 26:1-5), and his grandson, Jacob (Genesis 28:13-15). The promise continued from Jacob to his fourth son, Judah (Genesis 49:10), and then on to Judah’s descendent, Jesse (Isaiah 11:1,10), and then Jesse’s youngest son, David (2 Samuel 7:16).

Along the way, the Devil tried numerous times to destroy the line through which the Saviour was promised. His efforts increased substantially with the calling of Jacob and the establishment of the Jewish people. There was the threat of Esau to kill his brother Jacob (Genesis 27:14), the previously mentioned effort of Pharaoh to destroy the Jewish people by ordering all the male babies to be killed (Exodus 1:8-22), and the numerous attempts of other nations to destroy the Jews after they returned to Canaan and established themselves as a nation there. There were also attempts to destroy the Davidic line, such as when the usurper, Queen Athaliah, endeavored to kill all the surviving heirs to the throne of the royal house of Judah, only to be thwarted by the divine preservation of baby Joash, the sole surviving son of King Ahaziah (2 Chronicles 22).

These many attempts to prevent the birth of Christ are pictured in a colorful drama in Revelation 12:1-5, where the woman pictures the Jewish people, the child pictures Jesus Christ, and the dragon pictures Satan:

¹And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: ²And she being with child cried, travailling in birth, and pained to be delivered. ³And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. ⁴And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. ⁵And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

After the birth of Christ, however, the Devil began trying to prevent Jesus from fulfilling His divinely prophesied role as the Saviour. Certainly, the previously mentioned effort by King Herod to kill all the male babies in and around Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16) was one of those efforts. Other efforts including enticing the Jews to kill Jesus earlier in His ministry (Luke 4:28-30; John 5:16,18; 8:59; 10:31).

Since Satan failed to prevent Jesus from going to the cross, and failed to prevent His resurrection, the Devil has redoubled his efforts to prevent Jesus from fulfilling the remainder of His mission. To do so he has and continues to incite hatred and persecution of the Jewish people in order to prevent Jesus from being able to return to the earth to fulfill God’s promises to save all Israel (Romans 11:26-27), reestablish the throne of David and fulfill the kingdom promises made to King David and the Jewish people (Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:31-33), and to establish the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth (Psalm 72; Revelation 20:4).

The Devil’s efforts to impede Jesus explains the spread of antisemitism, anti-Jewish laws, expulsion of Jews, and anti-Jewish pogroms down through the Middle Ages into the modern era. Consequently, the

same spirit that motivated Herod to slaughter the Jewish babies in and around Bethlehem is the same spirit that motivated Hitler to exterminate the Jews in the Holocaust. The same spirit that motivated the Nazis to slaughter the Jews at Kristallnacht, November 9-10, 1938, is the same spirit that motivated Hamas and the residents of Gaza to rape, torture, slaughter, dismember, and burn alive Jews on the morning of October 7, 2023. It is the same spirit behind the lies and false claims of the rabidly antisemitic screed, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and is the same spirit behind the wild antisemitic lies and false claims leveled against Israel by Hamas and their supporters since the October 7 attacks.

Of course, as Christians, we should recognize the satanic nature of this spirit and guard against being infected with it ourselves. It is none other than the Mystery of Iniquity spoken of by the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:7. It represents the ongoing efforts of Satan and his allies to prevent Jesus Christ from fulfilling His promises to Israel and completing His prophesied mission in Daniel 9:27 "...to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy." To do this, Satan seeks to destroy both the Jewish people and the Jewish state, prevent the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple, and establish a rival global order or kingdom, led by the Antichrist, in order to prevent Jesus Christ from returning to this world and ruling and reigning over it from David's Throne in Jewish Jerusalem.

Thankfully, we know from God's Word how it ends. The devil will lose and Jesus will win. Until then, the same spirit that motivated King Herod, and all those who have sought to destroy the Jewish people and prevent Jesus from accomplishing His mission is still alive and well. It is up to us to keep our eyes fastened on Jesus in the midst of the storm and "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. (Psalm 122:6)"

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