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## The First Messianic Prophecy

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### Genesis 3:15

*"And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel."*

**T**here is always something unexpected about Christmas, even when you have been expecting it for months. It is not just the presents, which you somehow anticipate anyway. It is the grace of God in sending his Son as our Savior. Grace is always unexpected. So whenever we capture even a small part of what Christmas means, the message of grace is somehow always there and surprises us.

We should not be surprised that this is the case, however, for all biblical references to the coming and birth of Jesus, including all the prophecies of his coming in the Old Testament, have this characteristic. This is particularly true of the first messianic prophecy, occurring as early in the Bible as chapter 3 of Genesis. It is unexpected because the scene in which it occurs is of judgment. Satan had tempted Eve to sin. She had believed Satan rather than God

and then had sinned in eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which both she and Adam had been instructed not to eat from. Adam had also sinned in eating of the tree. Now God had come into the garden to call them to task for their sin and to mete out judgment. What fears they must have had! How terrified they must have been as they waited for a punishment perfectly suited to their crime! Do you remember that song from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado* in which the Lord High Executioner sings of his desire to have each punishment perfectly suit the crime? He sings:

My object all sublime  
I shall achieve in time:  
To make the punishment fit the crime,  
the punishment fit the crime.

My favorite verse is the one about billiard players.

The billiard shark, whom anyone catches,  
His doom's extremely hard.  
He's made to dwell in a dungeon cell  
In a spot that's always barred.  
And there he plays extravagant matches  
In fitness finger stalls,  
On a cloth untrue with a twisted cue  
And elliptical billiard balls.

Well might we shudder as we think of a punishment suited to the greater crime of Adam and Eve in their unjustified and totally heinous sin against the Creator. But we find only a token judgment—pain upon the woman in childbirth, grief for the man in earning a living—and, wonder of all wonders, a promise of a deliverer to come.

This is the unexpected wonder of Christmas in its very first form: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

### God of Conflict

At first glance this verse does not seem particularly wonderful, for it is talking about a conflict that began between the devil and Eve and continues up to the time of Christ and beyond. The verse speaks of "enmity," which means "ill will on one side or on both; hatred; especially mutual antagonism" (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*). It is hard to see how this can be good. But this enmity is good, and we should be alerted to this by the fact that it is God who creates it.

A person might ask how evil can be good or how God can be the author of enmity in any form. But the context readily explains this. We remember that Satan is a fallen angel whose original sin consisted in trying to replace

God as the chief being in the universe and in trying to gather the worship of the creatures about himself rather than about God. His attempt proved unsuccessful. Now he had appeared on earth to attempt to do among the new race of human beings what he failed to do earlier. Undoubtedly, his temptation of Eve and Adam had in mind, first, seducing our parents away from the worship of God and, second, winning their allegiance and worship for himself. We know sadly that he succeeded in the first objective. He did break the fellowship of the man and the woman with God. But he did not succeed in his second objective, for God announces here that he is putting enmity between Lucifer and the woman.

It is significant that these words are spoken to Satan. For the new thing was not Satan's hatred of Eve. Satan hated Eve from the moment of her creation, even when he was pretending to be her friend and confidant in tempting her to eat of the forbidden tree. The new thing was to be Eve's (and Adam's and all their true offspring's) hatred of Satan as one aspect of God's gracious preservation of and provision for the race.

What a blessing that was! We think many times of the love, joy, and happiness that the coming of Jesus Christ brought us, and we thank God rightly for those things. But we should not forget to thank him for a corresponding hatred of sin, sorrow at sin's ways, and increasing misery when we find ourselves ensnared in sin's tentacles. When we sin, we often find that we like the sin but want to escape sin's consequences. We would like to destroy ourselves in comfort, like the addict destroying himself in the dreamlike stupor of debilitating drugs or booze. We would like to go to hell happy. But it is one aspect of grace that God does not allow that to happen. God makes sin miserable and sets up an antagonism between ourselves and Satan that modifies the hold of sin and makes it possible for us to hear God's loving voice, even in our misery.

### The Two Humanities

The enmity established by God was not only to be between the woman and Satan, however—that is, an enmity merely on the personal or individual level. It was also to be an enmity between her offspring and his. This could presumably mean between human beings and the demons, but it is unlikely that it does. For one thing, Satan does not really have offspring. He is not engendering little devils. The demons were created once by God, before their fall, and they are not now increasing in number. For another thing, the passage moves in the direction of one specific descendant of the woman, Jesus Christ, who shall defeat Satan. That is, it is moving from the general to the specific. In view of these facts, the verse probably refers to the godly descendants of the man and woman, influenced by God himself, and the ungodly descendants of the man and woman, influenced by Satan. Certainly, the Book of Genesis goes on to distinguish between the two humanities (chapters 4 and 5).

If this is so, this is a message for the godly in every age. There is a divinely created animosity between the people of God and those who are not his people, and it is for our good. It is to sharpen our will to serve God. One of Isaac Watts's great hymns ("Am I a Soldier of the Cross") asks:

Are there no foes for me to face?  
Must I not stem the flood?  
Is this vile world a friend of grace,  
To help me on to God?

In the context of that hymn the answer is clearly no. Watts wants us to fight against the world for Christ's sake, which we must certainly do. But there is also a sense in which the world is a "friend of grace," for its animosity toward us pushes us to a greater measure of dependence on God.

There is also a more specific meaning to this verse. As the Book of Genesis unfolds we see God calling out Israel as a special nation through whom he would work, and we see the animosity of Satan (who heard and well understood this prophecy) directed particularly against the Jews. Here is the birth of anti-Semitism. It begins in Genesis and stretches all through history even to the end times described in the Book of Revelation. "A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne" (Rev. 12:1-5). In this passage the dragon is certainly Satan, the woman Israel, and her child the Lord Jesus Christ.

Satan's strategy is to destroy Israel in order to destroy Christ. This is the reason for anti-Semitism, and also the reason why no Christian should ever have a part in it.

### Christ versus Satan

There is a third antagonism in these verses, more beneficial even than the others. The first two give us room for hope; they tell us that God has not abandoned us, that he has established a beneficial enmity between those who desire good and those who desire evil. This last enmity assures us, not only of hope, but also of victory. It is the antagonism between Jesus, as the specific and climactic seed of the woman, and Satan himself. It was to result in the bruising of Jesus but also in the crushing of Satan and his power.

Donald Grey Barnhouse traces the conflict like this:

When the Lord Jesus Christ was born Satan's hatred came to white heat. We can see the hatred of Satan at every point in the earthly story of the life of our Lord. Joseph was moved to cast off Mary because he knew that she had not been his wife as yet and drew the natural conclusion that there was sin on her part. But the Lord manifested himself and Joseph accepted Mary because of this divine revelation. The child of promise, the seed of the woman, the branch of David, was born, the Eternal Word was made flesh. Satan moved Herod to kill all of the babies from two years old and under according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. But God had arranged escape in advance, and had brought gifts of gold to the family of the young child so that a flight into Egypt was made possible.

At twelve years of age he was left behind in Jerusalem among the followers of Satan and the enemies of God. The child was growing up before his Father as a tender plant and the heavenly care was about him.

As soon as our Lord was publicly manifested, Satan immediately confronted him and sought in the three temptations to turn him aside from the path laid down for him in the counsels with the Father. When he had been routed with the sword of the Word, Satan left the Lord, but returned again and again, both personally and through the religious leaders who had become veritable children of the devil, to destroy the Lord before he could come to the hour of the cross. It was Satan who stirred up the people of Nazareth to take Christ to the brow of the hill and thrust him to his death on the occasion of his first public sermon. He had announced the doctrine of salvation by grace apart from works on the basis of the sovereign will of God (Luke 4), and the heart of man rebelled against it and turned easily to the enemy who would exalt the flesh. "But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way."

Again and again Satan played the old plot with different scenes and characters. Sometimes they picked up stones to stone him; they sent officers to arrest him; their leaders attempted to incite the people against him. Always the nerve of their action was paralyzed. Their desire was that of the carnal mind which is enmity against God. Now, for the first time in history, God was visibly before them as the object of their hatred. They were the sons of those who had killed the prophets, but they themselves would have killed their God. He described them fully in the parable of the tenants who killed the messengers and when the owner, last of all, sent his son, cried, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance" (Matt. 21:38). Always he escaped unhurt. He was master of every situation. He said, "No man taketh it [my life] from me; but I lay it down of myself" (John 10:18).

When human allies failed, Satan moved directly to kill the Son of God. On one occasion the Lord's disciples were with him in a boat on the sea of Galilee. They were lifelong fishermen who were in their home waters. They had thought that there was not a wave that could be unfamiliar to them. But suddenly a storm of such fury broke out that even these hardened mariners were chilled with fright. They rushed to the Lord as he lay asleep in the boat and roused him with their cry of anguish, as they deemed themselves on the point of death, "Master, save us; we perish!" The gospel narrative states that the Lord arose at

the call of the frightened disciples and "rebuked the wind." Let the deniers of Scripture realize that if Satan were not behind the power of the storm, then the action of Christ must be compared with that of a child who, hurt by stumbling against a chair, begins to kick at the chair, crying out with petulance against it. But if we understand that Satan had raised that storm to kill the Lord Jesus, . . . we see the whole pattern of these attacks, and understand the force of the words addressed to the storm, "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:35-41). The verb in Greek means "to muzzle," and in ancient domestic life was sometimes addressed to a dog to silence him.

Finally, the prophecies were fulfilled and Satan bruised the heel of the Lord Jesus Christ and had his own head crushed in the bruising.<sup>1</sup>

## Two Victories

We know how the bruising of the Lord Jesus Christ took place. It happened at the cross as Satan finally succeeded, so it seemed, at striking back at God and silencing his meddling in human affairs forever. It was bruising with a vengeance. It included the hatred of the religious leaders, the mocking of the crowds, the beatings, eventually the crucifixion with its great agony. And yet, it was only a bruising, not a defeat, for on the third day after the crucifixion Jesus rose from the tomb triumphantly.

On the other hand, although Satan achieved what he believed to be a true victory, it proved to be a Pyrrhic victory, for his power over us was broken. I do not know precisely what Satan was thinking of as he finally achieved his goal of having Christ crucified, but I am sure he had at least forgotten this prophecy or else had dismissed it as applying to other times and circumstances. He failed to see how even his moment of triumph was to be turned to defeat in accord with this prophecy. John Gerstner declares, "Satan was majestically triumphant in this . . . battle. He had nailed Jesus to the cross. The prime object of all his striving through all the ages was achieved. But he failed. For the prophecy which had said that he would indeed bruise the seed of the woman had also said that his head would be crushed by Christ's heel. Thus, while Satan was celebrating his triumph in battle over the Son of God, the full weight of the Atonement accomplished by the Crucifixion (which the devil had effected) came down on him, and he realized that all this time, so far from successfully battling against the Almighty, he had actually been carrying out the purposes of the all-wise God."<sup>2</sup>

Satan's only true power—quite unlike his pretensions to power—comes from the character of God that declares that sin must be punished. Satan's power consists in working within the laws of that character. He reasoned that if he could get the man and woman to sin, which he did, the wrath of God against sin must inevitably come down on them. God's good designs would be thwarted. What Satan failed to see (and what no one ever did see clearly before the death of Christ) is how God could be both just and the justifier of the ungodly (Rom. 3:26). He failed to see how Jesus would take the place

of sinners, bearing their punishment, and how he, Satan, would have his power broken in the process.

But now we do see it, if we will, for Christ's was an open triumph. Paul says, "Christ . . . canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:13-15).

In view of this victory (and echoing the language of Jonathan Edwards), Gerstner calls Satan "the greatest blockhead the world has ever known." He says, "The very fact that he is probably the most intelligent being ever created makes him the greatest blockhead, for he was supremely stupid to suppose that he could outthink the All-wise or overpower the Almighty."<sup>3</sup>

Although the victory has been won for us by the Lord Jesus Christ, there is nevertheless still another to be won by those who follow Jesus. It is a victory certain of being achieved, but it is still in the process of being achieved and will be achieved only as we who profess the name of Jesus actually draw close to him and fight in his power. Paul referred to this victory when he wrote to the Romans, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom. 16:20). John referred to it in Revelation, saying, "They overcame him [the accuser of our brothers] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Rev. 12:11).