

## STUDY 7

# Born King of the Jews

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## THE KINGDOM IS IN JESUS—CONFLICT AND TRIUMPH

### Introduction

Jesus of Nazareth was announced King of the Jews at the time of his birth. Perhaps prophetically the announcement was made by Gentiles from the east:

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him’ (Matt. 2:1–2).<sup>1</sup>

There can be no doubt that Herod understood the question of the Magi, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?’ to be, ‘Where is He that is born the Messiah of the Jews?’ for he immediately gathered the chief priests and scribes to ask them where the Messiah was to be born (v. 4). The leaders directed Herod to a part of what the prophet Micah said:

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.  
His goings forth are from long ago,  
From the days of eternity (5:2).

As a Roman-appointed ‘king’, Herod’s concern was to avoid the kind of uprising caused by popular messiahs, particularly one from a Davidic line. Nevertheless, his irrational rage was swift and focused, becoming an indicator of the fierceness and intent of the battle to come. But behind and manipulating Herod’s political fears lurked one whose hatred of God’s King was far more than Herod’s. Satan would stop at nothing but the total eradication of God’s King; after all, the Kingship of the Father had always infuriated him.

But the prophet Micah had seen far more in God’s coming King than a man like Herod ruling Israel. God’s King would win the nations. It would be against the full expression and outworking of the Son’s Kingdom that Satan would act:

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the New American Standard Bible.

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‘His goings forth are from long ago,  
From the days of eternity.’  
Therefore He will give them up until the time  
When she who is in labour has borne a child  
Then the remainder of His brethren  
Will return to the sons of Israel.  
And He will arise and shepherd His flock  
In the strength of the LORD,  
In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God  
And they will remain,  
Because at that time He will be great  
To the ends of the earth.  
This One will be our peace (Micah 5:2b–5).

### The Battle Perimeters

To be called ‘King of the Jews’ could mean only one of two things. Either Jesus was the next Herod, to rule the Jews in a political/social sense, or he was the anointed One, the Messiah, successor and fulfilment of the Davidic line. Matthew was portraying Jesus of Nazareth in the latter way; as God’s King of Psalm 2. So his birth would be the catalyst for the kind of opposition spoken of in that Psalm:

Why are the nations in an uproar  
And the peoples devising a vain thing?  
The kings of the earth take their stand  
And the rulers take counsel together  
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,  
‘Let us tear their fetters apart  
And cast away their cords from us!’ (Ps. 2:1–4).

David asked the unanswerable question concerning the reaction of evil to God. Why, in the light of the unconcealed glory of the Father and His plan for the nations, would humanity hate Him so violently that they would seek to destroy Him? This horrible sight of sin’s intent must have always been deeply confronting to Christ. It must have been a primary means for Satan to accuse the Father to Jesus. The universal presence of sin’s pollution of the human conscience was a huge offence and a seemingly irreversible problem. Never deceived by sin, he saw and felt its sting in others more deeply than any other human. This would culminate in the horror of feeling that sin totally on the cross. As it pressed in against him in his meeting with every human being who crossed his path, it would have been a continual reminder that his triumph over sin would be costly indeed.

Psalm 2 identifies several elements of the battle against the Lord. It is an international rebellion of insane rage. See Acts 4:25–27 where Calvary is portrayed as a Roman, Gentile and Jewish attempt to, ‘tear the fetters’ of God apart. This rage and false wisdom is a calculated and concerted opposition by the nations and stirred by their rulers. The leaders rule in a conspiracy against God rather than a unity with His Son whose inheritance it is to rule them while they rule. The starting point is the imagination of ‘a vain thing’, their believing a lie about the nature and action of God. This vain imagining seeks to establish a new wisdom. This wisdom is not from above and so cannot comprehend a King on a cross, thus spawning a multitude of world views all orchestrated by Satan. The rulers, then, falling for the lust of Satan, seeing

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an opportunity for personal power and aggrandisement, foment the rage of the people by careful orchestration.

But none of this opposition to the King has ever been arbitrary. It had always been against God's Lordship expressed in making a worshipping people for His own possession and glory. When the Man Christ Jesus appeared as the true Temple to establish the Temple universally, then it was inevitable that the opposition would concentrate inexorably in and upon him. Yet Psalm 2 prophesied that it would be the Son who, established as King in Zion, would inherit the nations:

But as for Me, I have installed My King  
Upon Zion, My holy mountain.  
I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:  
He said to Me, 'You are My Son,  
Today I have begotten You.  
Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance,  
And the very ends of the earth as Your possession' (vv. 6–8).

The immensity and greatness of his Kingdom will consist of entering the land of vain imaginings, raging principedoms all bent upon His destruction, and not only bring the vanity to an end but also reverse the intent of the nations from hatred to love, from rejection of him to refuge in him (v. 12). Psalm 2 then catches up in concentrated form the conflict and the triumph of Father's King.

### **Satan Stirred to Violence against the King**

It is true that the battle between God and the powers of darkness has never not been engaged, and that at cosmic, international as well as social levels:

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 (Gen. 3:15).

See too Isaiah 14:12–15:

How you have fallen from heaven,  
O star of the morning, son of the dawn!  
You have been cut down to the earth,  
You who have weakened the nations!  
But you said in your heart,  
'I will ascend to heaven;  
I will raise my throne above the stars of God,  
And I will sit on the mount of assembly  
In the recesses of the north.  
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;  
I will make myself like the Most High.'

With the coming of God's Son/King, Satan's rage comes to its full pitch. This rage takes many forms, from full frontal attack to subtle persistent opposition, even from within the Lord's own followers.

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Revelation 12 begins the second major section of the book in which the intent of Satan (the dragon) and his helpers (the beast from the sea, the beast from the earth, Babylon and those who bear the mark of the beast) to destroy the King and his triumph is revealed. The cold calculating conspiracy of the leaders in Psalm 2 is seen to be a pale reflection of Satan's scheming. Two moments when it must have appeared to Satan that the King was 'in his hands' and doomed would have been at his incarnation as a small defenceless babe, and then again at his 'weak' hour of the cross:

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child (vv. 1–4).

The scene seems hopelessly one-sided. Satan stands before the woman in some sort of 'holy array'. This was no ordinary 'dragon', but one mighty enough to sweep a third of the stars of heaven away from their ontology. Red, he was, imposing with murderous intent. His crowned heads proudly claimed royalty. 'These were not wreaths of victory but merely crowns of arrogated authority.'<sup>2</sup> The dragon appears to come from heaven as he first appears to the woman in the sky (better rendering than 'heaven' in vv. 1, 3).<sup>3</sup> So with a ferocious display the dragon menaced the woman. The woman is herself glorious but the spirit of the vision seems to indicate a huge power mismatch. Energised with hatred for the redeeming purpose of God in the incarnate Son, the dragon stood ready to attack him at birth.<sup>4</sup> However, in definitive triumph, the boy was snatched away from the dragon to God and to the throne (referring to the resurrection and ascension—see Phil. 2:9; Rev. 5:7). Enthroned through Calvary, resurrection and ascension, Christ triumphs through the final age.

### The King Engages in the Battle

It was at his baptism that Christ was crowned by his Father—King. The pronouncement from his Father as he came up out of the water was a reference to Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1:

After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased' (Matt. 3:16–17).

Here is the One who will work out the suffering and triumph of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and the Messianic King of Psalm 2. Immediately following the affirmation of his Father at the baptism, Satan attacked. Whereas the failed attack at his birth had

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<sup>2</sup> W. Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, IVP, London, 1973, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> See L. Morris, *The Book of Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (rev. edn), TNTC, IVP, Leicester, 1987, p. 153.

<sup>4</sup> T. F. Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today*, James Clarke & Co. Ltd, London, 1960, p. 93:

... the birth of Jesus was the signal for the powers of evil to launch their desperate attack upon the redeeming purpose of God. Just as at the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, as the Gospels tell us, Herod sent his men to slay the little Child, so now we see in that historical incident a picture of the reaction of evil in the whole of life and history.

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been what we could call a full-frontal attack, Satan's attack in the Temptation was to deflect the Lord from his commissioned ministry or, perhaps more to the point, his communion with the Father through the Spirit which flooded him in his baptism.<sup>5</sup> If the true last Adam could be deflected from worshipful communion with the Father, dependence on the Father and trust in the Father's way, then nothing that he did from that point would have effected anything. It was from within this communion and trust that he went willingly to Calvary. It was the triumphing in this communion as a man that held out hope for the multitudes of his 'brethren' who would follow him there. The battle and the triumph of Christ in the Temptation was fully significant for us as well as the glory of the Father because the Lord battled and triumphed in our humanity. In other words Satan's attack was an attempt, as it had been in Eden, to kill and destroy by bringing corruption into the human heart. To do this in the One fully living in the image of God would be to strike at the heart of God. The battlelines had been drawn back in Eden. With the coming of the King these literally became lines in the sand of Palestine for Jesus. It might have appeared from the Temptation that Satan was the one making the rules of engagement. However, it was Christ who came with the specific task of destroying the works of the evil one (1 John 3:8). What that meant for Jesus became clear when he spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth after his Temptation:

And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
Because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives,  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set free those who are oppressed,  
To proclaim the favourable year of the Lord’ (Luke 4:17–19).

The stunning revelation which followed a few seconds later was the Lord's great battle cry:

And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’ (Luke 4:21).

This was no mere challenge to Satan. It was the clear revelation that in the presence of God's King nothing which had previously seemed inviolable—the sin, corruption, sickness, demonism, death and the fear of death which Satan wielded—could stand. Nothing like the ensuing ministry of Jesus had ever come to Israel before. By revealing the clear direct words and works of the Father, Jesus was directly exorcising the power and control of the evil one in the lives of the people. Through his work, the eschatological powers which mark the final manifestation of the Kingdom broke into the everyday lives of the people. In this sense, whenever Jesus ‘released the captives’, brought sight to the blind and exorcised the demonic powers, then the Father's Kingdom had come upon them:

But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you (Luke 11:20).

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<sup>5</sup> See this argument put forward by Marshall in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke as indicated by Noel Due, *The Gospel According to Luke*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1992, p. 30.

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The direct engagement of Christ with Satan is clearly seen in the teaching on the strong man which follows this verse:

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are undisturbed. But when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armour on which he had relied and distributes his plunder (Luke 11:21–22).

The Father's King is stronger than the strong man (Satan). Satan's 'house' seemed secure and well guarded. However, when the authority of God, present in Jesus, attacks the house, Satan's weaponry and his spoils are taken away. It is little wonder then that Satan is flushed out into violent attack by the presence of Jesus.

The signs (miracles and wonders) recorded by John show us Messiah attacking not only the old wine skins of Israel, but also the strong man's house. Israel's plight was not simply a slippage of faith, but that slippage had been used by Satan to bring Israel under a whole new 'fatherhood':

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

The signs of Jesus portray the power and presence of God the Father for His people. Peter made this clear at Pentecost:

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know (Acts 2:22).

They showed that Jesus was from God and not self-appointed, and they gave a taste of what was to come in the outworking of God's Kingdom.

John has the ministry of Jesus beginning with the sign at the Cana wedding. The wonder of the wine from water and in such abundance, demonstrated the end of the old and the breaking into the world of something extraordinarily new, strong and effusive. Israel and in turn all humanity lay in a helpless 'old' condition that only the Father's Messiah could turn around. Here was the Father directly declaring Satan's house to be bankrupt. As with all the signs, there was a strong element of judgement upon the old worn-out and perverted systems of man's religion as directed by Satan. Israel could not simply be revived; it must be resurrected from the death in which it was held.

Later Jesus would heal a Gentile nobleman's son (John 4:46–54), restore a man crippled for thirty-eight years (5:1–18), feed a huge crowd (6:1–14), walk on the sea (6:16–21), restore sight to a blind man (9:1–12), raise Lazarus from death (11:1–44) and superintend a miraculous catch of fish (21:5–11). All of the signs needed to be read. That is, they must be received as revelations of the Father's glory. In the Father's home there is no blindness, deafness, sickness, suffering or death. Where the King did the works of his Father, then all that was corrupted gave way to the foretaste of the perfection to come (Rev. 21:1–5). It was one thing to be impressed by the sign, quite another to receive the glory Jesus was displaying. Satan too must have read them and faced the certain truth that nothing of his house would remain where the Kingdom was established. These were signs of absolute war, not merely impressive domestic help. Jesus had said in the context of his battle in the strong man's house:

He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters (Luke 11:23).

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The signs of Jesus then were a direct judgement upon Satan and his demons and therefore a sign to them of their total eradication from the Kingdom of God.

### The Hideous Distortion

We have sought to show that in the presence of the King, Satan's kingdom is shown up for what it is. The hideous distortion and bondage he initiates and protects was clearly seen when Jesus did the work of his Father. The range of Satan's corruption and distortion of the Father's creatures is wide. All to whom Satan 'ministers' are oppressed (Acts 10:38). This oppression manifests in many ways, including blindness and dumbness (Matt. 12:22), suicidal tendencies (Mark 5:5), violent physical seizures and convulsions, foaming at the mouth, grinding of teeth (Mark 9:17f.), murderous intent (Matt. 8:28), sicknesses including bodily crippling for long periods of time (Luke 13:11), divination (Acts 16:16f.), and idolatry (1 Cor. 10:20).

In Revelation 18, John saw that Babylon was saturated by demons:

Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird (Rev. 18:2).

So every manifestation of Babylon is demonic, filled with 'wine of the passion of her immorality' (Rev. 14:8).

Humanity possessed by demons reveals the grotesque nature of Satan's control and kingdom. With nothing true (loving or holy) to give, the demons reduce humanity to non-communal, irrational shells, roaming in a sonless despair. Being swept down from Glory, the throne and the Father's presence, these spirits have no true home and so cannot bring a human being to anything other than a waterless place of no rest:

Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it (Matt. 12:43).

Legion, the demonised man of the Gerasenes, existed unclothed, homeless among the tombs and shackled lest the demon drive him off into the desert. His life was devoid of hope, being subject to the violent seizures of the spirit. Satan's abuse was clear. The response of the demons to the presence of Jesus was knowing and fearful. They recognised the Lord's authority and knew that they would have to be subject to Him:

Seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice, 'What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me' (Luke 8:28).

The demons always recognise Jesus in his divinity. On this occasion they addressed Him as 'Son of God the Highest'. However, Jesus never accepted their testimony about him. He would reveal the Father by the words and works he did. It may have been too that the spirits were attempting to 'out' Jesus in a way that would have been distracting from his true mission. Whereas others dared not go near Legion for fear of their lives, Mark tells us that he ran to Jesus and bowed before him. One would have thought that with their knowledge of the Lord's power and purpose they would have run the other way. It was clear that the Lord's authority was complete. They could not resist him and must do his bidding.

No greater contrast could be imagined than the 'before' and 'after' for Legion. When the people went out to see what had happened, they came to Jesus and found



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the man with him, sitting at his feet, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened. In the place of driving rage and destruction, the Lord had brought this man the peace of the Father's Kingdom. In the place of a tormented mind, split by multiple spirits driving him insanely to do their master's wish, he sat with Jesus, in his right mind (Lenski prefers, self-controlled).<sup>6</sup>

### The Hideous Deception

We noted that when Jesus did the signs of the Kingdom of God as present reality, then a moral blindness was judged and in fact became more entrenched in many of the people. Not to see the glory behind the signs was to remain in the non-glory that the signs were highlighting. For example, not to see the glory of the Father's provision and lavish giftings in the Kingdom was to simply enjoy more wine. Not to see Jesus as the bread of life meant following him for another belly full of bread and fish. Satan's blindness was behind all this:

... in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4).

This battle of satanic blindness came to full pitch in Christ's contact with the Jewish leaders:

'So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.' They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do' (John 8:36-40; see too 5:36-40).

The Lord battled this blindness within his own band:

But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's' (Matt. 16:23).

The point is this: everything Jesus faced in his ministry in our flesh was subject to the distortion and corruption of Satan.

### The Final Attack: The Final Triumph

We said in opening that there were two moments when it would have seemed to Satan that the Father's King was in his grasp to destroy. The first we saw was at Christ's birth. The second was Calvary:

When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him (Col. 2:15).

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<sup>6</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Luke's Gospel*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1946, p. 477.



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‘The Greek fathers thought that at chapter 2:15 Christ divested himself of the principalities and powers. These hostile forces had clung to him on the cross like an alien garment. (Lightfoot, 188, who agreed with this general view of the Greek fathers commented: “The powers of evil, which had clung like a Nessus robe<sup>7</sup> about his humanity, were torn off and cast aside forever”).<sup>8</sup>

Geoffrey Bingham said of this verse:

The word **disarmed** can mean ‘stripped off’ either the possessions the powers had acquired, or the weapons they had, or even Christ stripped off the evil powers that had taken possession of him.<sup>9</sup>

Satan and his minions are portrayed as rushing the cross to oppress and destroy the Lord and thus the Father’s victorious rule over them. How the jolt of his final words ‘It is finished’ brought their heightened arrogance to nought. Only then did it become clear to Satan that he was ‘dead in the water’.

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<sup>7</sup> The Nessus robe or shirt was the poisoned garment that killed Hercules in Greek mythology.

<sup>8</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC vol. 44, Word, Milton Keynes, 1987, p. 127.

<sup>9</sup> G. C. Bingham, *The Fulness of Christ: The Epistle to the Colossians*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1987, p. 28.