

# Jesus the Troubler of Jerusalem

by Horatius Bonar

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*Jesus' birth was a quiet arrival, but His message was a call to repentance and a demand for a response, which troubles those who are not prepared to meet a holy God.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 2:3, Luke 2:10, John 1:11

**Topics:** "The Troubling Presence of Christ", "Readiness for the King"

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## Description

Horatius Bonar explores the troubling arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem, emphasizing how the news of His birth, rather than bringing joy, caused fear and unrest among the people and their king, Herod. The wise men from the East, however, approached with faith and reverence, seeking to worship the newborn King, highlighting the contrast between their eager acceptance and Jerusalem's troubled response. Bonar reflects on the deeper implications of Christ's coming, suggesting that His presence stirs the conscience and reveals unpreparedness, prompting a call to repentance and readiness for His reign. Ultimately, he reassures that while Christ's arrival may trouble, it is also an invitation to grace and joy for those willing to receive Him. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the joy and hope found in Christ's birth, death, and resurrection.

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## Transcript

"When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."--Matthew 2:3.

So quietly had the Son of God stolen into our world, that his arrival was unknown in Jerusalem till these wise men came from the East. Either the Shepherds had not told their tale of the heavenly vision, or they had been unheeded, perhaps ridiculed as fanatics. As the morning star rises without noise; as the seed shoots up and the flower opens in silence; so was it with the Christ, the rose of Sharon, the bright and morning star. No thunder woke up the hills of Palestine; no trumpet-peal went through its cities; no herald went before him, nor royal salute greeted him.

His mother, and the few of her circle who believed in "the child that was born," made no proclamation of the heavenly wonder; they received all in silent happy faith, and pondered the things in their heart, leaving it to God to bring them forth in his own time and way. They did not get excited; it was too great a thing to excite, and they were too calm and child-like in their faith to be fluttered, or agitated, or elated. They allowed these great things that had happened in their family circle to take their course, assured of their truth and magnitude, and therefore confident that they would ere long grow till they could not be hidden,

but must perforce make them selves known. Such is the confidence which faith has in the great things of God! A man who has got hold of something which is great and true, need not be afraid but that it will spread. Let him hold it fast.

These wise men come with a tale, and a vision, and a miracle. They are not of Israel, though more ready of faith than Israel. They are not from Nazareth, or Bethlehem, or any part of Palestine. Their testimony is independent of Israel's; it is a Gentile testimony; from the land of Israel's enemies. They are recognized as "wise men,"--magi, Chaldeans, perhaps; or men from the land of Balaam or Job. Men of the East, the seat of all human science; the wise and far-seeing East; the thoughtful and star-gazing East. They come, not with an uncertainty, or an opinion, or a fable, or a vision of the night, but with actual and personal eyesight,--"We have seen"! Yes, it is with "we have seen" that they come,--a word like that of John's, "We beheld his glory,"--"That which our eyes have seen." They come to Jerusalem! They come seeking Jerusalem's King; as if Jerusalem were to them the center of hope; as if there were nothing in their own land like what they expected to find in Jerusalem; no king worthy of the name, or to whom they could pay homage, but the King of Jerusalem! This is Gentile faith, fixing its eye upon the star of Jacob.

But Jerusalem has not heard of Him, and is amazed; nay, her king does not know where He is to be born till he has consulted the scribes. The visit and errand of these Eastern Gentiles take Israel by surprise. Nor are they roused to take any interest in the matter, save, as we shall see, that of being troubled. He was in the world, yet the world knew Him not; would not recognize Him when pointed out! He came unto his own, and his own received him not!

This is strange. Had the like happened elsewhere,--in Babylon, or Rome, or Egypt,--it would not have surprised us. Or had these been "troubled," it would have been natural enough. But it is Jerusalem! She is troubled! Nay, it is "all Jerusalem." Troubled at the news of her King's arrival! Not excited, or agitated, but "troubled." Had it been said, "rejoiced," we could have understood it, but "troubled,"--how strange!

Let us inquire into Jerusalem's trouble and its causes. The simple visible cause was the statement of the wise men that one had been born King of the Jews. And how this could trouble Jerusalem is not easy to see. For,--

1. It contained nothing alarming. It was but of a babe that the wise men spoke; only the birth of a babe,--no more. They did not come to tell that some Eastern King had espoused the cause of this babe, and was on his way, with an army, to secure a throne for him. Their question simply pertained to a babe whom they desired to worship. It was a religious act entirely that they had come to perform. The name they gave the babe, "King of the Jews," might trouble Herod; but surely there was nothing to alarm Jerusalem. Herod was a tyrant,--a foreign tyrant, moreover,--only indirectly a Jew; he might be troubled; but it ought not to have awakened fear in any Jew, especially in any citizen of the royal city.

2. It was good news. A king born to Jerusalem; this was a good report, even had it afterwards turned out untrue. The people might have said, it is too good news to be true; but the very mention of it ought to have called forth gladness, not trouble.

3. It was just what they were expecting. Messiah, King of Israel, Redeemer of the nation, son of David, heir of David's throne, He was the great national hope; a hope that had been cherished age after age, and had not died out; nay, was now more cherished than ever because of present oppression, and because the time foretold was fast running out. Now wise men came from the far East telling them they had seen the star of their new-born King; now the Gentile came to say that he had heard of the glorious birth.

Should they be troubled? Should they not rejoice? Should they not say like Jacob, "I have waited for thy salvation," or like Simeon, "Now let thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." But the announcement that their hope is realized, their great national expectation fulfilled, occasions only trouble!

How is this? Why are they troubled? Some might be troubled because the tidings had come upon them in this strange and unlooked for way; others might be so because they did not know what such tidings foreboded. But the chief trouble, and that of the greatest number, would arise from the consciousness of their not being prepared. The tidings would go through Jerusalem,--poor and rich, Priest, Levite, citizen, Scribe and Pharisee,--the Messiah has come; and then this would awaken within the immediate question, am I ready for his coming? For every Jew had, more or less, an idea of Messiah, according to the prophets; so that carnal as many of their notions were, they yet knew He was coming on an errand against evil,--on a righteous mission,--and they could not help asking, in such a case, am I ready for Him? They knew He was to be great, glorious, just;--could they then meet Him face to face?

Ah, yes, they are troubled, because they are not ready! The news went to their consciences. They might desire his advent on some accounts, but the thoughts of it troubled them because of others. He was to be the messenger of a holy God. He was to be himself a holy one. He was coming to do holy things and speak holy words. This could not but alarm them. Hateful as was the Roman yoke and Herod's tyranny, these were better to them than the scepter of a holy king.

The news of his coming searched them. It awoke within them thoughts and fears that had lain dormant. They expected Messiah, they wished him to come; but there were so many things connected with his character and reign that made his presence undesirable, that they could not hear of his arrival and not be troubled.

A man's conscience is sometimes more enlightened and better instructed than his mind; and when an appeal is made to it by some solemnizing piece of news, it immediately responds. Some sudden stroke of God's hand upon a man, or his family, or his nation, hits his conscience with special force; and conscience asserts her supremacy. As when the Sareptan widow's son was taken from her, immediately her conscience responded with, "O man of God art thou come to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" A holy man of God enters a worldly man's house, or the house of an inconsistent Christian, and immediately the man is uneasy. His conscience is disturbed. He is troubled as was Jerusalem when the tidings came, He is come!

Yes; Christ came not to send peace, but a sword; and it was the flash of this sword that troubled Jerusalem. There is something in Christ that troubles,--alarms. We know that it shall be so when He comes the second time. They shall look on him and mourn; all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. But his first advent has something about it to trouble, too. It is not all peace. Even apart from the glory, and terror, and judgment of his second, there is something in the announcement of his first that startles the man and rouses the conscience. The very grace that is in it is of an awfully solemnizing kind; and no man can hear of that grace without feeling that there is something in it from which he must of necessity shrink, unless he is prepared to surrender himself unreservedly and believingly to Him whose grace it is.

He comes as an infant, yet He comes as a King. He comes, offering rest, and forgiveness, and life; yet He, at the same time, makes a claim upon us which none will accept save he whose heart has been touched

by the Holy Ghost. He speaks to us in grace, he looks at us in grace; yet in doing so He presents us with a cross which we must bear, with a yoke which we must take on. He announces himself as Jesus the Saviour, yet, in doing so, He lets us know that He is as a Saviour from sin, a deliverer from this present evil world. Therefore it is that He is not always welcomed; nay, so often rejected. Therefore it is that his presence in love and lowliness troubles the sons of men. They are disarmed,--perhaps attracted, by that love and lowliness; but the demands which these make upon their whole being and life, their allegiance, their obedience, their affection, are such as they will not submit to. So they are troubled, and bid Him depart out of their coasts.

The wise men were not "troubled." They were eager and earnest in pursuit of Israel's King. They saw his star in the East, and they made haste to seek Him out. They saw nothing to alarm them, for they were prepared at once to own Him for what He was revealed to be nay, to worship Him. And being thus minded, what had they to fear? "Fear not ye; I know that ye seek Jesus." Being prepared to take Him, at any cost, they had nothing to shrink from. For it is only they who are not disposed to admit his entire claims that can be troubled at the announcement of his advent,--either his first or his second. Take Him for what He is; take Him for what He contains and offers; take Him for what the Father testifies of Him,--take Him entire, and you have nothing to fear.

It seems strange to say, and yet it is true, that Christ comes to trouble us,--"Be troubled ye careless ones." Woe to those who have never been troubled by Him; into whose hearts or consciences He has never looked with his solemn eye, as in that day when He troubled Jerusalem. Elijah of old was counted the troubler of Israel, so is Christ the troubler of the world.

He will not let men alone. He is ever and anon announcing himself, coming into the midst of them, now here and now there, and troubling them. He came to Corinth, and it was troubled. He came to Thessalonica, to Philippi, to Derbe, to Lystra, and they were "troubled." He did not come with fire, or sword, or sweeping judgment, yet they were "troubled." Wherever He comes, He troubles. He came to Germany in the 16th century, to Switzerland, to Scotland, to England, and they were troubled. He comes to a town, a city, a village, or a family, and they are "troubled." He comes to a soul lying asleep or dead, and it is "troubled."

What is at the bottom of all the persecutions of various ages? It is Christ troubling the world. If He would let it alone, it would let Him alone. What means the outcry, and alarm, and misrepresentation, and anger, in days of revival? It is Christ troubling the world. What means the resistance to a fully preached gospel? It is Christ troubling the world. A fettered gospel, a circuitous gospel, a conditional gospel,--a gospel that does not truly represent Christ,--troubles no man; for in such cases it is another Christ that is announced, and not the Christ, the King of the Jews, that troubled Jerusalem. But a large, free, happy, unconditional gospel, that fully represents Jesus and his grace, Jesus and his completeness, does trouble men. It troubles all to whom it comes, in some measure. Some it troubles and then converts; some it only troubles. But its announcement does, more or less, for all who hear it, what it did for Jerusalem in the days of Herod,--it troubles.

The world's only hope is to be "troubled" by Christ. If He let it alone, all is over. Christ's errand just now is to trouble men,--to awaken them,--to call them to repentance. And the more fully He is preached, the more are men troubled. Has a preached Christ ever troubled you? Has the thought of his coming near you troubled you more? And have you found that the only quieter of such alarms is receiving Him as King and Saviour?

But Christ troubles the churches. As He did to Jerusalem, so does He often to his churches. He troubled Ephesus with, "Thou hast left thy first love." He troubled Sardis with, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." He troubled Laodicea with, "Thou art neither cold nor hot." So does He oftentimes trouble his backsliding churches. He speaks, He comes, He acts; and they are alarmed. They feel they are not ready to meet Him. They are troubled.

Yet all this troubling is in love. He sounds his trumpet to awake the sleepers. He comes to us in grace as he came to Jerusalem. Why should we be troubled? We need not, if we be willing to receive Him and to worship Him. He does not wish to terrify or to repel. His desire is to attract: to get entrance for Himself into our hearts. Of course, if the world be there, and you are unwilling to part with it, his coming will trouble you, his knock will alarm you. If your idols refuse to be displaced, if another king reigns within and is resolved to keep his throne, the coming of Messiah must be the cause of unmingled trouble. It cannot be otherwise; for He demands your whole man complete and without reserve. But if, through grace, you are weary of your present occupants, and would fain be dispossessed of the world and Satan, then here is the Christ, the Son of God,--He wants to come into your city, your house, your heart. Give Him free welcome and glad entrance. Let Him come in and sup with you. Let his grace constrain you to willing obedience. He is thy Lord, worship thou Him.

The Christ has come! The angels announced Him, the shepherds sought Him, the wise men worshipped Him. Unto us a child is born! O glad tidings of great joy! Tidings not meant to terrify or overwhelm, but to gladden and to comfort.

And we can add to this, the Christ has died! Nay, He has risen ! Ah! this is not sorrow, this is joy. It is the silver trumpet sounding out love,--the love of God; not the iron trumpet, breathing vengeance in its blast. O men of earth, sons of Adam, hear the proclamation. Seek his face and live. Deal with Him in simple trust; He waits to deal with you in free and boundless love.

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