

The King of the Jews

Written by David Wise

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“And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.” (John 19:19)

Pilate here, like so many events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, unwittingly declares a great spiritual and doctrinal truth, as he gives Jesus the title of “The King of the Jews”. Jesus was by and large rejected by his own natural kindred, the Jews, during his earthly ministry – *“he came unto his own and his own received him not”*

(John 1:11). However, Jesus was and is the King of not the natural Jews (although some natural Jews are certainly included in the broader Israel of God) but rather Jesus is the only Potentate and King for those spiritual Jews who have received the inward circumcision of the heart and been adopted into God’s chosen family.

The motif of Jesus’ Kingship is painted all throughout the Apostle John’s gospel. After the feeding of the five thousand men, Jesus was then at the height of his popularity (particularly among the natural Jews) and then the multitudes were ready to *“take him by force and make him a king”*

. However, Jesus, knowing the mind of the multitudes to exalt him to some earthly throne, departed away from them into a mountain alone to quell that uprising (John 6:15). When Jesus entered into Jerusalem the final time just a week before his death, the people laid down palm branches before him and proclaimed

“Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord”

in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (John 12:13-15, Zech. 9:9).

After Jesus’ arrest in his first trial before Pilate, he was asked directly by Pilate if he was the King of the Jews, to which Jesus answered that was correct (Matt. 27:11). Then, in that same conversation with Pilate, Jesus declared that *“My kingdom is not of this world... but now is my*

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kingdom not from hence.”

(John 18:36). Jesus rules and reigns over a spiritual and eternal kingdom (not an earthly and temporal kingdom) that is “in this world” but yet “not of this world”. Christ’s kingdom is of a heavenly origin, not of an earthly origin – “my kingdom is not from hence”. This spiritual kingdom over which Christ presides as King was established during Jesus’ ministry, during the days of the Roman empire in precise fulfillment of the prophecy in Dan. 2:31-45. The initial message of the gospel that Jesus preached in his ministry here was

“repent”

; Why?

“for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”

(Matt. 4:11). The spiritual kingdom that Jesus established

“shall never be destroyed; shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms, and it shall stand forever”

(Dan. 2:44). We don’t need to look to a fictitious one-thousand-year reign in the future for Jesus to reign here on this earth, but we need to see Jesus as the ruling and reigning King of the Jews in his spiritual kingdom today.

Back to the Apostle John’s narrative, Pilate asked the Jews if they desired for their supposed king, the King of the Jews, to be released unto them in accordance with the Passover tradition of releasing one prisoner to the people. However, these wicked Jews chose Barabbas, a robber, to be released unto them instead of “their king”. They chose a wicked criminal over the sinless, innocent Son of God (John 18:39-40). Couple that decision with the Jews declaration a little later that “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). These Jews chose a robber and chose Caesar as their king instead of their natural kindred, Jesus Christ, rejecting his authority as the Messiah. I think the Jews are still bearing the brunt of these decisions today to choose a criminal over Christ and choose Caesar (pagan, secular government) as their king because as a whole the Jews today are still given over to a judicial blindness from the Lord to not see and understand the gospel. Much of that judicial blindness might have to do with the affirmations of these Jewish leaders (in representing the Jewish nation as a whole) to reject the authority of Christ and instead choose criminals and ungodly rulers.

The Roman soldiers mocked Jesus as the King of the Jews, placing upon him a crown of thorns and a purple robe, and they blasphemously mocked him, *“Hail, King of the Jews”* as they smote him with their hands (John 19:2-3). After Jesus returned from his scourging, Pilate mockingly

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pointed to Jesus, wearing his crown of thorns and purple robe and told the Jews,
"Behold your King!"

The Jews instead cried out to crucify him, and Pilate asked

"Shall I crucify your King?"

. The Jews then fully rejected the authority of their Messiah, declaring

"We have no king but Caesar"

(John 19:14-50). I love how the KJV translators in these accounts, essentially every time Jesus was addressed as King they capitalized the word, even when the speaker did not say it in reverence (John 18:33,39; 19:3,14,15,19,21). But then when the Jews declare Caesar as their king, they leave it lowercased (John 19:15). There is only one King of kings and Lord of lords, and even if men do not recognize Jesus as the King that in no way restricts his authority and power as the king.

Pilate relents to the will of the Jews, perverting justice and decreeing for Jesus Christ to be crucified on Golgotha's hill. Pilate commanded his soldiers to write a title to place above Jesus at the top of his cross, a title that read *"JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS"* (John 19:19). When men were crucified, having been condemned to the death penalty by Roman authority, it was customary to put a superscription at the top of their cross of their name and their crime they were convicted of so that passersby would know who that was and what they had done to merit the Roman death penalty. In Jesus' case, he was innocent, guilty of no crime other than speaking the truth of his divinity as the Son of God. Pilate could not put on Jesus' superscription a crime that he was convicted of like other common criminals. We don't know the names of the other two men crucified with Christ, but we do know the crime for which they were condemned to death; they were both convicted malefactors (violent robbers). That would have been on their superscription; that they were convicted of violent robbery.

Therefore, Pilate (almost in a sarcastic manner and mocking of the Jews) writes Jesus' "offense", his crime worthy of death, as being "the King of the Jews". Ironically, it was not Jesus' declaration as king of the natural Jews that was the offense and crime that necessitated Jesus' penalty of death. Rather, it was Jesus' position as the King of the spiritual Jews that was the reason that he must die for the sins of the people. Jesus' death was necessary and the only hope of salvation for the elect, chosen family (the Israel of God), those circumcised in the heart and spiritual Jews (Rom. 2:28-29), for those to be saved from their sins. Therefore, Jesus' offense that did lead to death was his identity as the King of the Jews and he fully saved all

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those “spiritual Jews” that he died for on the cross.

When Pilate wrote Jesus’ title as King of the Jews on that sign, the Jews bristled at that title and asked Pilate to change it to say “I am the king of the Jews” (that Jesus portrayed himself to be their king but wasn’t truly the king). Nevertheless, Pilate refused to change it, leaving Jesus title for his death as “Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews” (John 19:19-22). Pilate’s refusal to change the wording of Jesus’ title, despite the complaining of the Jews, is significant as well, *“What I have written, I have written”*

(John 19:20). In other words, “It is what it is” and I’m not changing it. Whether someone accepts or rejects Jesus as the King of the Jews (or complains about it was these scoffing Jews did), has no bearing on the authenticity or validity of that truth. The truth of Jesus’ identity as the Savior of sinners (of all kinds of natural men and women included in the spiritual Jewish family) is true whether men like it or accept it or not. Let God be true and every man a liar.

The title of Jesus as the King of the Jews was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin (John 19:20). Therefore, this plaque above Christ at the top of his cross had three lines, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” written in Hebrew, the next line written in Greek, and the third line written in Latin. Another decision made unwittingly by Pilate that teaches us the broad and inclusive nature of God’s elect family. This signifies that Jesus was not just the King of the natural Jews who would read it in Hebrew, but also the Savior of men of all nations, Romans who read it in Greek, and then people from many other nations as well who would read it in Latin. God has an innumerable elect people out of every nation, kindred, people, and “tongue” (literally languages), Rev. 5:9 & 7:9. People from all languages and nationalities are members of God’s elect family. Jesus’ authority as the King of the Jews does not end at the borders of Canaan or Judea, but God’s family of “inward Jews” (Rom. 2:28-29) extends all throughout the world, encompassing people from every language and tongue under heaven.

Jesus’ kingdom was established and made manifest during his ministry, but it is not an earthly

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kingdom but rather is a spiritual kingdom. We don't need to look to some fictitious future period where Jesus will come back to this earth and set up an earthly kingdom to rule and reign for a thousand years to put eternity on hold for a thousand years because Jesus was unsuccessful in setting up his kingdom the first time around. We don't need to be looking to the small country of Israel in the middle east for a revival and turning to the Lord to fulfill Jesus' rightful position as the King of the Jews. Jesus is ruling and reigning at this time here today over "His Jews", those that have received the inward circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:28-29), and been chosen by God as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were sovereignly chosen to receive blessings from the Lord. Jesus is currently the King of kings and Lord of lords. He's not waiting for a later time period to take the scepter of rule over a kingdom. Christ is the King of the Jews among us right here today!