

Give Us A King!

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Scripture 1: (1 Sam. 8:1-22 ESV)

When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations."

But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD.

And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."

So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him. He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day."

But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, "No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD.

And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey their voice and make them a king."

Samuel then said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city."

Scripture 2: (Zech. 9:9 ESV)

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Scripture 3: (Jn. 19:12-22 ESV)

From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."

So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"

They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!"

Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?"

The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'"

Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

Sermon:

It has been said that "God has a sense of humor" (He does), but the popular proof and evidence is usually flippantly cited, such as by directing our attention to "funny-looking" creatures like the platypus (the Kevin Smith film, *Dogma*; 1999). We can find the idea of a creature¹ that combines defining traits from several different types of creatures humorous, since:

- the platypus is warm-blooded, has a tail like a beaver, and is a mammal with fur;
- the platypus lays eggs, has webbed feet, and a bill like a duck;
- the male platypus is venomous like a snake, or perhaps more like a scorpion; and
- the platypus uses a form of echolocation like a bat, to find its way in cloudy waters;

Personally, I would rather use the platypus as evidence in favor of God's miraculous work of creation, and argue against the suggestion that it is a kind of intermediate species, because random chance alone cannot support a reasonable plausibility for this creature's existence, their reproductive viability, or historic longevity. Instead, rather than being found expressed by specific animals, God's sense of humor is more clearly manifested across Scripture in various ways:

- by God doing things which are contrary to our human expectation or wisdom, as Paul says, "*For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.*" (1 Cor. 1:21 ESV);
- or, by God openly mocking the foolishness of those who belong to the world and its infernal prince, such as the forced homage of the Philistine's idol of Dagon, "*And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.*" (1 Sam. 5:3-4 ESV). Their lifeless, stone representation (image) of their demonic patron was compelled to worship and glorify the LORD; forced into self-abasement and into an act of self-destruction before the only truly Sovereign Creator God.

¹<https://www.britannica.com/animal/platypus>

- It is really no wonder that the Psalmist wrote, “*Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."*” (Ps. 2:1-6 ESV).
- But really, I think that God's favorite form of humor is irony, even including tragic irony, because that is what the whole story between Palm Sunday, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection demonstrates by:
 - the Jews receiving and welcoming Jesus as king, at the beginning of the week; and,
 - then, the Jews rejecting and forsaking His Lordship and authority in favor of a lesser and non-benevolent king (Caesar), near the week's end.

They abandoned and denied the True King, whose Sovereignty is absolute and unassailable; the One to whom we owe our allegiance by nature, and to whom they had purposefully sworn their personal allegiance to. The possibility for successful rebellion against God was Zero, but they went “All In” on it, anyways. Then, even after they knew that they had lost, they continued to deny it; thereby making themselves look even more foolish. Ironic, indeed.

The worst part is, this was not the first time the Jews had rejected the LORD's Kingship and Authority, nor would it be their last. If we look back into the past of ancient Israel, to the time of the Judges when Scripture says, “*In those days there was **no king in Israel**. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*” (Jdg. 21:25-1:1 ESV), we observe how the Israelites always wanted a king for themselves, but sadly, they have not always wanted the king of God's own choosing.

Samuel {an Ephraimite} was the last Judge before the Israelite monarchy. Ever since the days of Moses, Israel had no formal, cohesive system of government, but instead functioned as a loose confederation of tribes that were united by a common ancestral heritage and a nominally shared religion. Without any centralized authority, important judgments or decisions were simply made locally, without widespread application or acceptance, but occasionally, whenever necessary, the LORD would raise up a wise leader to serve as a “Judge” and a deliverer, people like: Othniel, Gideon, Deborah, and even Samson. Meanwhile, the final court of appeal was always the priesthood of the LORD at Shiloh, where the LORD's Tabernacle was kept. But, when Samuel was young, the priesthood became so corrupt and unreliable that God ended the priestly line of Eli and allowed the Philistine's to capture the Ark of the Covenant, before they restored it to Israel in terrible, holy fear. Soon afterwards, Samuel led the people in covenant renewal and repentance, and then he judged Israel in the LORD's name for the rest of his life. “*When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice.*”. Unfortunately, they were just like the sons of Eli, the priest.

The Israelites had an unstable and inconsistent political and social situation. Their obedience and faithfulness to the LORD would barely last for a single generation because there was no force of continuity. Instead, any sense of authority was subject to the populism of ever-changing cults of personality. This was could not remain a sustainable solution in the long term; they had already had the proof from Gideon's later days and the aborted reign of his son Abimelech, the volatility of Samson, and then the whole debacle with the tribe of Benjamin {their near extinction for their collective sin in the matter of the Levite and his concubine; Judges 19-21}. So, on the one hand, part of us can understand and empathize with the Israelites and what they do next but, in hindsight, we can also see why it all went wrong.

“Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, “Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations.””. It is clear that the Israelites were happy and satisfied with Samuel and the job he was doing. Samuel was fair and honest. He was reliable and accessible. But, the future did not look as good. It looked far less stable and far more corrupt, just as in the days of Eli.

However, even the most wicked of sinners do not appreciate utter chaos and anarchy since it is always easier to work within (and corrupt) a system that has known and generally accepted rules, than in a system where almost anything could happen, at anytime; people like and need to be able to plan ahead. So, the best solution that they could think of was to do the same thing that everyone else did; to institute the same kind of political system that everyone else had. Even if other folks had some problems, everything still worked pretty well for them, most of the time.

Having a king generated stability within a nation because it united people around a central figure. They were the focal point for civic and nationalistic pride. They could make laws because they had the power and willingness to enforce them. They could defend their land and their people from any and all invaders that might think to threaten them. You could count their victories as your own saying, “My king can beat up your king”. You could point at their treasury and brag about how much gold they had, saying “My king is richer than your king”.

- That is what every other people had and that is what the Israelites thought they wanted.
- They thought they wanted that because they did not understand what they really had.

They did not understand that they had the only perfectly powerful and most rich King of all: the only Sovereign of the Universe, the LORD, God Almighty. He should have been their unifying central figure, by the mere virtue of their shared faith in Him. But they just did not understand since to a worldly mind, appearances matter more than reality. Everyone else had kings and their victories to point to as a deterrent. Everyone else had idols: statues and monuments; of their gods that they could point to, to show how “great” their gods were. Therefore, victorious kings would collect the idols and holy objects of their defeated foes, and put them in their gods' temple as a sign that they were greater than the others; which is what the Philistine's tried to do with the Ark of the Covenant.

All this is why Israel thought that wanted a king because, while their true King is “Immortal, Invisible, God only Wise”, they were the only ones who could see it and know it; if they believed it with faithful hearts.

- They had no king to whom they could point.
- They had no great storehouses of wealth that would be the envy of nations.
- They had no idols or representations of their divine protector and patron.
- They felt like they were missing out: as if they were lacking something necessary; because they did not have the lesser copy, but instead possessed the actual true reality.
 - Ironical indeed!

But Samuel knew and Samuel understood the truth, which is why their request so greatly *“displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.””*.

- Although Samuel had been called by God to serve as a judge and a prophet (1 Samuel 3:20), he was not a king.

- Although he was recognized as an authority figure within Israel, and he was obeyed as God's representative, the people also knew that Samuel would not be around forever and that his sons were already not following in his footsteps.
- Although Samuel was respected and honored wherever he went, he was not loved, respected, or obeyed because he was Samuel the Ephraimite, but because he was Samuel the prophet, and known to be especially favored by God and people hoped that they could get in good with God through his favor.

I am sure that his feelings were hurt when he heard their request. I am sure that his pride was wounded. But, I am also confident that he understood that their demand was not really meant as an insult against him; it was not personal. I expect that he felt the insult was against God, which is why the LORD comforted him by telling him to *“Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, **for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.** [Thus the LORD became king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together. (Deut. 33:5 ESV)] According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; **only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.**”*. God explained that Israel was not rejecting Samuel's authority and leadership but were rejecting the LORD's instead. They were forsaking and rejecting God's sovereignty, just as they had with their idolatry countless times before, over and over, ever since Moses led them out of Egypt. Yet, just as Moses had warned them about what demanding an earthly king would mean for them (Deuteronomy 17:14-20), by outlining all of the king's specific obligations and rights, so too the LORD commanded Samuel to warn them again, so that they would clearly understand **exactly** what they were asking for. There should be no question about what they were going to get. So, Samuel did as the LORD commanded and he explained to all the people, *“These will be the ways of **the king** who will reign over you:*

- *He will **take** your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. ...*
- *He will **take** your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.*
- *He will **take** the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants.*
- *He will **take** the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants.*
- *He will **take** your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work.*
- *He will **take** the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”*

Samuel explained that any human king chosen to rule over them would simply take, take, take, take, and then take some more, out of all their “everything”. They would effectively transform the people into “slaves of the State”. They would be utterly subject to the despotism of a sinful person, without any reasonable expectation or promise of justice, righteousness, or anticipation of benevolence. Simply put, the rule of any mere human king would be the antithesis of YHWH's divine rule, because although the LORD demands our absolute obedience and fidelity, He is righteous and just, promising and providentially delivering every good blessing in the world.

- A worldly, human king only takes, but the only Sovereign LORD, gives.

You would think that when presented with the choice between these two options, the decision would be easy and straight-forward, yet *“...the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, “No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us*

and fight our battles.” They chose the lesser option instead. They were so enamored with the idea of being like all the other peoples, that they considered their different-ness and their separate-ness as a curse rather than as God's intended blessing. They could not understand that by having the LORD as our King, by being under His benevolent authority, we are free to be who we were always intended to be: free from slavery to the devil and sin; free to follow Christ.

There is something within our human nature, even within the innocence of our original nature, which understands that we are not the true top of the food chain; that recognizes we are not the ultimate authority; that knows of our need to be subordinate to a higher power. There is something within us which understands that we all need a King. Yet now, our sinful nature recoils at the thought of God as our King so, our hearts constantly seek out every possible alternative. This flaw was introduced into our human nature by our first forebears, Adam and Eve, when they tried to declare independence from the LORD's authority by trusting to their own wisdom, trusting to their own understanding and asserting their own authority by choosing to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit. That was humanity's **first** rejection of the LORD as our King. But, although they impudently and imprudently defied the Eternal Sovereign and tried to deny or ignore His authority over them, God was still able to impose His divine judgment upon them by means of the curse, but He also granted them grace by giving them a reprieve: granting a stay of execution, and giving them time to repent of their sin, and to return to covenant fidelity.

Although God is the only Eternally Sovereign King, humanity has repeatedly demonstrated that our preferred allegiance is to sin and the deceiver, Satan. We just cannot help ourselves because we need a King, and if we refuse to recognize God as our King, then there is only one other option and the devil is a terribly wicked dictator.

But God {my favorite expression} had and has a plan. He chose for Himself a family line, from Adam down to Abraham, to be His people and He preserved them in His favor, even promising Abraham that He, the LORD, would be God to him and to his descendants and that they would be His people. Then God delivered that people, a vast multitude of people, from out of slavery and bondage in Egypt, proclaiming to them that “*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.*” (Exod. 20:2-3 ESV); that I AM your God and your King, to which they answered “Ok, yes sir!”. But, as God reminded Samuel, they did not remain faithful for long since they quickly began to sin with their idolatry to Baal at Peor (Numbers 25). Then, in the aftermath of the Canaanite conquest, the Israelites repeatedly alternated between faithfulness and disobedience, repentance and deliverance by the LORD through the Judges.

Despite their repetitive rebellion, God continued to favor them and the people continued to understand that God always remained in charge, as a king; but, they also seemed to begin thinking that the **real reason** for this cyclical problem was the absence of a formal and visibly present king. Therefore, they asked Samuel to give them a king. But there is something particular I want you to notice, because it is something we are liable to gloss over whenever we read this passage during our devotional reading, because we assume too many things.

- The people asked Samuel to “appoint” them a king.
- The people did not ask Samuel to ask God to “appoint”, or delegate, a king for them.

That little detail is a very big distinction and it makes a great deal of difference for understanding the early Israelite monarchy, because when Samuel heard them make their decision: that they wanted a king so that they “...*may be like all the nations...*”; he went to the LORD in prayer, and God answered him, telling him to “*Obey their voice and make them a king.*”. God told him to give them what it was that they thought they wanted.

King Saul was not God's choice of king for Israel; he was the people's choice. God certainly affirmed him, God aided him, and God used him to deliver Israel from the Philistines, but God did not choose him except in that he

was what they wanted: he was “*taller than any of the people*” (1 Sam. 10:23 ESV) and there was “*none like him among all the people*” (1 Sam. 10:24 ESV). Samuel anointed Saul as king, but He was not the king {after God's own heart} (1 Samuel 13:14). Saul was not David, God's true choice for Israel's throne. Yet, even David was fallible and flawed. Most of his descendants were not as faithful as him and eventually, their earthly throne was lost, but the line remained unbroken and one day, a Davidic King would return to claim His promised throne.

After the Babylonian Exile, during the reign of Darius I Hystaspes (521-486 B.C.)², or Darius the Great, during a period of restoration for the Jewish people, the prophet Zechariah received a series of visions {the imagery of many are heavily featured in John's Revelation} and prophecies, including one that is a feature of every Palm Sunday service, “*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*”. This prophecy was meant to describe the return of the Davidic king: God's King, their hoped for Messiah; but, this King did not arrive in the way that the 1st Century Jews hoped.

- A worldly king, a king like all the nations had, would not arrive “*humble and mounted on a donkey*”. No, a king like the nations had would arrive as a conquering hero, riding tall and mounted upon a warhorse, or in a chariot, at the head of a triumphant army.
- But God's King, Jesus Christ, arrived in a peaceful manner (even if it might have been a bit civilly disruptive). He arrived teaching the way of righteousness and bringing salvation and eternal blessings for His people.

Wanting and expecting the first example, the people of Jerusalem welcomed the second instead and then, less than a week later, they disavowed, rejected, and collaborated to execute God's King while simultaneously swearing their allegiance to the world's greatest contemporary king, Tiberius Caesar.

Pilate “...said to the Jews, “*Behold your King!*”

They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!”

Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?”

The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”

So [Pilate] delivered [Jesus] over to [the Jews] to be crucified.”

So, what seems most clear is that, God knows we need a king. We all know that we need a king. But, we never seem to want the king that God wants for us. But, the final irony appears in the fact that, after the Jews (God's chosen, ethnic people) had rejected Jesus Christ as their King and claimed Caesar instead, the Roman authorities (the Gentiles) publicly recognized, affirmed, and proclaimed Jesus as Israel's King.

“Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “***Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.***”

Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’”

Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

- Irony, indeed.

The world admitted and confessed to the truth about Jesus Christ and the LORD, even though the world hates it.

² <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Darius-I/Darius-as-an-administrator>

Although this inscription might have been intended as a not so subtle “dig” at the Jewish religious leadership, who were often at odds with Pilate, over this course of events:

- Pilate, the duly appointed representative {image} of Rome and Caesar, verbally proclaimed Jesus as their King: *"Behold your King!", "Shall I crucify your King?"* .
- The Roman soldiers “crowned” Jesus and exclaimed, *“Hail, King of the Jews!”* (Jn. 19:3 ESV); affirming Him as King by acclamation.
- Then, Pilate printed and publicly posted the notice, *“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”*.

These three instances and affirmations were all required elements for the inauguration of the Caesar in Rome. So, while the Jews denied the Kingship of Christ, the wicked and pagan Gentiles affirmed it.

Again, we need a King and we know it, but our sin keeps us blind to the truth that we already have a King: the most benevolent Ruler and only Eternally Sovereign LORD, Jesus Christ; and that He rules with all authority over heaven and earth, with justice and in truth, showing mercy and giving peace to all those whom He has chosen, out of His abundant love. Everybody who accepts His authority and is brought into His Kingdom, receives forgiveness for their sin and are justified by their faith and trust, their *pisteuo*, their hope and confidence in Him and God's promises; therefore, they then will live obediently to all of His righteous and authoritative commands. We all need a King and we all want a king, whether or not we want to admit to it. Everyone knows that we must answer to an authority and power which is greater and higher than ourselves, but whose rule do we honestly want to live under?

- Do you want God's King, or do you want to choose your own king? Perhaps even choosing yourself as your own king or queen?

This is why we must constantly be dying to our self, so that we may live for and live to Christ (Matthew 10:37-42; Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10); our remaining sin nature is always looking for a way to try and take over your heart. This requires great intention, discipline, and diligence and we require the Holy Spirit's help if there is to be any hope for our success and perseverance unto the very end. How often do we look elsewhere for our hope and our help in this world and our present life; elsewhere other than in Christ?

- Some people may look for it in drugs, alcohol, sex, or illicit behavior.
- Some people may look for it within the civil government; in whichever political party they might choose to favor or, in government divisions and programs.
- Some people may look to social organizations, like Rotary or the Lion's Club; or international organizations like Samaritan's Purse or UNICEF.
- Some people may look to their neighbors, or their family and friends as a source of hope.
- Some people might even look to their local church, but the only True Hope and the Greatest Help that we can offer (even as we might try to meet their present or other physical needs), is to direct them to Jesus; to remind them of Him and of God's promises, and to show them that they are loved and valued, no matter what they do, look like, or who they are.

So, who is your King? To whom do you owe your everything to? To whom are you most grateful? Who shall you obey in love and fidelity? God's King or the king of your own desire?

Choose wisely. Long live the King!

AMEN