

John 19:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.

Analysis

But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. This tragic exchange reveals the depth of spiritual blindness and religious apostasy. The Greek *āron* (ἄρον, "away with him") literally means "lift up, take away"—the same word used for lifting Christ on the cross. The crowd's frenzied repetition intensifies their rejection.

Pilate's question drips with irony: "Shall I crucify your King?" The Roman governor recognizes what Israel's leaders refuse to acknowledge. The chief priests' response—"We have no king but Caesar"—constitutes theological and national betrayal of catastrophic proportions. For centuries, faithful Jews had declared "We have no king but God" (see 1 Samuel 8:7). Now religious leaders pledge allegiance to a pagan emperor, denying both the Davidic covenant and messianic hope.

The Greek phrase *ouk echomen basilea* (οὐκ ἔχομεν βασιλέα, "we have no king") represents complete rejection of God's kingdom. This statement fulfills centuries of prophetic warnings about Israel's hardening. By choosing Caesar over Christ, the religious establishment chooses political expediency over divine truth, temporary power over eternal salvation, and human authority over God's anointed King.

Historical Context

This confrontation occurs during Passover week, likely Friday morning around AD 30-33, at Pilate's judgment seat (the Pavement, Gabbatha in Aramaic). Pontius Pilate served as Roman prefect of Judea from AD 26-36, known historically for his harsh governance and contempt for Jewish sensibilities.

The chief priests' declaration "We have no king but Caesar" would have shocked faithful Jews. Since the Maccabean revolt (167-160 BC), Jewish identity centered on resistance to foreign rule and allegiance to God alone. The Zealot movement actively opposed Roman taxation and authority, making this priestly capitulation to Caesar especially stunning.

Historically, this statement proved tragically prophetic. Within forty years (AD 70), the Romans under Titus would destroy Jerusalem and the temple, ending the sacrificial system these priests served. Their choice of Caesar over Christ resulted in the very Roman devastation they sought to avoid by crucifying Jesus (John 11:48). Archaeological evidence from this period, including the Pilate Stone discovered in 1961, confirms the historical reality of these events and the tensions between Roman authority and Jewish expectations of messianic deliverance.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What spiritual blindness causes religious leaders to reject their true King in favor of a pagan emperor?
2. How does the irony of Pilate recognizing Jesus as King while Jewish leaders reject Him challenge our understanding of faith?
3. In what ways do we, like the chief priests, sometimes choose worldly security and political expediency over Christ's kingdom?

4. What does this passage reveal about the tragedy of prioritizing institutional preservation over truth and righteousness?
5. How does the priests' statement "We have no king but Caesar" fulfill prophetic warnings about Israel's rebellion and point to the New Covenant?

Interlinear Text

οἱ	δὲ	ἐκραύγασαν	ἄρον	ἄρον	σταυρώσω	αὐτοῖς	
G3588	But	they cried out	Away with	Away with	Shall I crucify	him	
	G1161	G2905	G142	G142	G4717	G846	
λέγει	αὐτοῖς	ὁ	Πιλάτος	Τὸν	βασιλέα	ὑμῶν	σταυρώσω
saith	him	G3588	Pilate	G3588	King	your	Shall I crucify
G3004	G846		G4091		G935	G5216	G4717
ἀπεκρίθησαν	οἱ	ἀρχιερεῖς	Οὐκ	ἔχομεν	βασιλέα	εἰ	
answered	G3588	The chief priests	no	We have	King	G1487	
G611		G749	G3756	G2192	G935		
μὴ	Καίσαρα						
G3361	Caesar						
	G2541						

Additional Cross-References

Luke 23:18 (Parallel theme): And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas:

Acts 21:36 (Parallel theme): For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.

Acts 22:22 (Parallel theme): And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.

John 19:6 (Cross): When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him.

Genesis 49:10 (Parallel theme): The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

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