

# John 19:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews.

## Analysis

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The chief priests' objection—**Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews** (Μὴ γράφῃς, Ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἐκεῖνος εἶπεν, Βασιλεὺς εἰμι τῶν Ἰουδαίων/Mē graphe, Ho basileus tōn Ioudaiōn, all' hoti ekeinos eipen, Basileus eimi tōn Ioudaiōn)—reveals their desperate concern for public perception. They want it framed as Jesus's claim, not Pilate's declaration. The difference is monumental: fact versus fiction, reality versus delusion.

Their protest backfires. By demanding the change, they implicitly acknowledge the current inscription declares truth—which is exactly what they wanted to suppress. They manipulated Pilate into executing Jesus, now they can't control the narrative. Pilate's refusal (v.22) means truth remains posted above the crucified King. Their attempted cover-up fails; the proclamation stands.

## Historical Context

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The chief priests had successfully pressured Pilate to crucify Jesus by threatening to report him to Caesar (v.12). But Pilate's passive-aggressive revenge was writing 'King of the Jews' in three languages for maximum exposure. Their manipulation of him left residual resentment, which he expressed through this inscription. God's sovereignty operates through human motives—even petty ones—to accomplish His purpose.

## Related Passages

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**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

## Study Questions

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1. Why were the chief priests so concerned about how Jesus's kingship was publicly framed?
2. What does their attempt to control the narrative reveal about the human impulse to manage truth?
3. How does God's sovereignty work through human conflict and even spite to proclaim His purposes?

## Interlinear Text

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ἔλεγον οὖν τῷ Πιλάτῳ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς τῶν Ἰουδαίων  
**said** **Then** G3588 **to Pilate** G4091 **the chief priests** G749 **of the Jews** G2453

Μὴ γράφε· Ὁ Βασιλεύς τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἀλλ' ὅτι  
**not** **Write** G3588 **King** G935 **of the Jews** G2453 **but** **that** G3754

ἐκεῖνος εἶπεν Βασιλεύς εἰμι τῶν Ἰουδαίων  
**he** **said** G2036 **King** G935 **I am** G1510 G3588 **of the Jews** G2453

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