

# Choosing Jesus as King

Total Time: 55-85 min

## INTRODUCTION | 10 min

*If there are new people, be sure everyone gets introduced (name, where you're from, major). Even if everyone was here last time, make sure everyone knows each other's names.*

**Opening Question:** What are you looking forward to during this time?

Last time as we began our five-part discussion of the intersection of faith and politics, we looked at Starting Points—our personal starting points and the starting point of the Bible, God creating humans in His own image and giving us a role to play, stewarding this amazing and interdependent world that He had created. We considered what it would mean to treat others as image-bearers and discussed the challenge of pressing in and continuing to do that, especially with people who differ from us politically.

**Pray to Begin:** Let's begin by centering ourselves with The Lord's Prayer<sup>1</sup>.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

## STORY | 10 min

### Who Will Sit on the Throne?

As with the story from our first study, InterVarsity Area Director Andrew Berg was challenged because real world events seemed to make Jesus' clear teaching impossible.

*Please have someone read this story by Andrew aloud.*

I still remember exactly where I was when Scripture began to shake the foundations of my political convictions. Late one Thursday night, I sat with a few

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<sup>1</sup> English translations of *The Lord's Prayer*, © 1998, English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC), and used by permission. [www.englishtexts.org](http://www.englishtexts.org)

friends in a musty, third-floor lounge of a college dormitory. We were studying a passage from the Bible, Matthew 5:38-48. Chris and Joe, the two student leaders, were guiding us through Jesus' command to "love your enemies." Candidly, I pushed back hard against it. As a New Yorker, I had grown up in the wake of 9/11 and supported the American invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq. Clearly, these were very real enemies; how could I be expected to love them? Chris and Joe acknowledged the tensions the passage might bring up, but gently challenged me. They asked me if being obedient to Jesus might require decisions that are unexpected, costly, and countercultural.

**I realized I had a choice.** I could choose to follow Jesus as King and find ways to love these enemies, or sit on the throne of my life myself. I could insist that my theology and political understanding supersedes what Scripture says, or I could choose to sit in the tension and wrestle with the implications of Jesus' words—even if I felt deeply uncomfortable—and yield to Him.

It was not quick or easy, but I ultimately chose the second option. That night initiated a long process of choosing to intentionally let Jesus challenge my beliefs and actions. Since then, I have attempted to pray for my enemies and bless those who I see as persecutors. I try to consider what it might mean to "turn the other cheek" when I face acts of aggression and hold in tension different ideas about war and conflict. And as I've grown older, though who I consider my "enemies" has changed, the call of Jesus remains the same – to see them as people made in the image of God and love them, just as God loves them.

## RESPONSE

Let's take a moment to reflect on how we are responding emotionally to this story.

1. What emotions came up for you as you heard this story?

*Potential Examples:*

- *"I felt defensive and confused because loving a wartime enemy doesn't even make sense."*
- *"I felt inspired when Andrew decided to let Jesus challenge him like this. I don't know if I could ever have that much faith."*
- *"I felt encouraged because this study is going in a different way than I had expected. I was afraid we would just argue about who to vote for, but this is getting at deeper issues."*

2. Have you ever allowed Jesus to challenge your beliefs and practices? Right now, would you say that you are on the throne of your life, or that as much as you can, you try to yield to Jesus as King? **Write down your answer in the first box on your handout.**

## SCRIPTURE STUDY | 30 min

# The Israelites Demand a King

### INTRODUCTION

This week we are looking at a passage of Scripture that takes place after God's people, the Israelites, have multiplied and become a nation (large people group made up of various tribes). This is in the Old Testament, so it takes place long before Jesus' birth.

Up to this point in the Bible, the Israelites' leaders were various judges and prophets that God appointed from the various tribes. In a political move to be like the surrounding nations, the Israelites asked God for a king. The Prophet Samuel took this personally, and God reminded Him that it was not Samuel who was being rejected - they were rejecting the Lord. This shift in the political system marked a significant period in Israelite history spanning many years. There were some kings that obeyed God and pursued justice, but there were others that disobeyed God, seeking after dominance and power.

Before we look at the text on your page, I'm going to read the verses that precede this. Context is an important part of studying Scripture. (*Read verses 1-10 aloud. It's not on their handout.*)

<sup>1</sup>When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. <sup>2</sup>The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second was Abijah; they were judges in Beer-sheba. <sup>3</sup>Yet his sons did not follow in his ways but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice. <sup>4</sup>Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah <sup>5</sup>and said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations." <sup>6</sup>But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the Lord, <sup>7</sup>and the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to 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. <sup>8</sup>Just as they have done to me from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. <sup>9</sup>Now

then, listen to their voice; only, you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.”

God told Samuel to give the people the following warning. As you read this silently, **make notes in the second box on your handout.** What observations can you make about the who, what, where, and why of this passage?

### **PASSAGE: 1 SAMUEL 8:10-22 (NRSVue)**

<sup>10</sup>So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. <sup>11</sup>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, <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. <sup>14</sup>He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. <sup>15</sup>He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. <sup>16</sup>He will take your male and female slaves and the best of your cattle and donkeys and put them to his work. <sup>17</sup>He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. <sup>18</sup>And on that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you on that day.” <sup>19</sup>But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, “No! We are determined to have a king over us, <sup>20</sup>so that we also may be like other nations and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.” <sup>21</sup>When Samuel heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the Lord. <sup>22</sup>The Lord said to Samuel, “Listen to their voice and set a king over them.”

### **OBSERVATION QUESTIONS**

1. Who are the characters and what is happening?
2. What tensions or challenges between characters do you see in the text?
3. What are God’s warnings to the people about life under a king?
4. What else stands out to you?

### **INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS**

1. Imagine you were a witness in this story. What might you be feeling as you heard what Samuel said or observed the people’s response?

2. The Israelites wanted a king. What are their motivations for this, and what do you think of their reasons?
3. Why do you think the people dismissed God's warnings?

### APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. The Israelites mirror the practices of other nations, asking for a king, even if it's not God's best. In politics, we might be tempted to mirror the behaviors and practices of the people around us or those we see on social media, justifying anger, impatience, or shady tactics to get ahead. Where do you see this happening in modern politics?
2. Reflect on the recent social media posts, conversations, and news stories around politics that you've seen or engaged with. Do you notice any patterns of expectation that the solution to many of the problems in our world centers around getting the right human leader or leaders in place? What have you been asking God for?

### CONCLUSION

Just as the Israelites wanted a human king, we are tempted to look to political leaders for hope in hard times, deliverance from troubles, and even our salvation. Human leaders can have a lot of power, but they are nothing compared with almighty God. God might not be the political king in our country, but as Andrew learned in our opening story, He can be King in our lives as we look to Him instead of insisting on doing things according to our own ways. Daily praying "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" as a discipline is a formative practice that can lead us away from this temptation, deliver us, and give Him the glory and honor He deserves.

### CHALLENGE

In Matthew 6:10, Jesus said that we are to pray, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Spend 5 minutes going to your favorite news site or social media feed and praying that God's will would be done for two situations that concern you. Take out your calendar, set a reminder and repeat this process for a week. Come back to your group next week and share how doing this impacted you.

## CLOSING | 5 min

*If you have time, please continue to the Beyond the Text section!*

*Make sure to thank participants for coming and invite them back, sharing the date, time and location for the next meeting.*

*Ex. "Thank you for joining in this conversation. Next time (remind them of the date, time, and place) we'll continue the conversation and look at a different passage of Scripture. I hope you'll join us again—and feel free to bring friends. While these sessions are designed to build on one another, we'll always make sure newcomers can fully participate!"*

*If you look at the bottom of your handout, you'll see a QR code. This code takes you to an electronic version of today's study. And if you'd like to dig deeper, the electronic version also includes several images that illustrate how politics and Christianity can be intertwined along with reflection questions.*

*Please save this handout along with the ones you will get in each succeeding session. We'll refer back to them as a way of reviewing what we've learned."*

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, thank you for your love towards us, your love for all people, and Your Will for us to be reconciled to you, one another, and all of creation. Give us the strength, courage and wisdom to love you with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves. Amen.

*Scan the QR code for more resources  
on God's Good News About Politics*



BEYOND THE TEXT (OPTIONAL) | 30 min

## Which King Do You Serve?

*This session requires viewing images by a QR code. Have them ready so that students can scan the QR codes.*

The Israelites chose a king after being warned by Samuel to do otherwise. For followers of Jesus in our context, our call is to follow Jesus as King. But often in the United States, we are tempted to believe otherwise. Both political parties, their politicians and promoters often conflate their candidates and platforms with Christ and His Kingdom. This entangling of Christianity and politics is unfaithful to the teachings of Jesus.

Take a close look at the following images using the QR code or links below:



*Painting of George W. Bush as Jesus Christ*

George W. Bush was one of the most publicly religious presidents in recent US History. This image, lifted from [a profile by GQ magazine](#) explains that the dominant philosophy of his time in office was American evangelicalism. Yet to fuse faith and politics in a way that makes them one in the same – an act that is incompatible with the word and work of Jesus.



*Painting of Obama crucified*

This painting is by [New York-based artist by Michael D'Antuono](#). The title is "The Truth" and featured former Obama with a crown of thorns on his head and arms outstretched like Christ during the crucifixion at the hands of the Roman government and religious leaders. Like the Bush photograph, the image conflates a politician with the Messiah. This is not faithful civic engagement but another example of a false Gospel that is not the Good News at all.



*Painting of Jesus surrounded by American individuals and institutions*

In this painting called, [“One Nation Under God” by Jon McNaughton](#), we see a Jesus figure of European heritage holding the Constitution of the United States. The central image implies that our founding document equals Holy Scripture. Many people today venerate America's Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Pledge of Allegiance as if they are part of the Bible itself. The people surrounding the Christ-figure represent significant individuals and institutions in our country (see key). This painting reinterprets the past, recasts important Americans as apostolic figures, and portrays the United States as being uniquely Christian and God-ordained.

### DISCUSS THE TEXT AND IMAGES

*After reading, invite the group to take a few minutes to reflect on the text images. Ask the following questions as time permits:*

1. What are your thoughts and feelings when you consider that neither political party is the “Christian” party? What resonates with you, and where is there tension?
2. We all can feel tempted to pledge allegiance to a party, politician, or platform, especially during an election season. Let’s pray this closing prayer together:

*“Our Good Father, we ask for your kingdom to come to this country as it does in heaven. Only You are worthy of our worship, honor and glory. Guide our leaders, whoever is elected, and give them wisdom, courage, and strength to love and serve the least of these, especially those most vulnerable. Help me not to bless things you would curse and curse things you would bless. Keep me from idolatry and my identity rooted in you. Amen.”*

*After the closing prayer, make sure to invite everyone back! See “Closing” for a script.*