

ABOUT THAT FOREIGN KING

A Devotional Meditation on Shoftim (Judges)

Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9; Isaiah 51:12-53:12;
Matthew 23:1-3; Acts 15:12-21; Hebrews 2:14-18

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The Scottish House of Stuart reigned over Britain for more than a century, but in 1714 they were replaced by the German House of Hanover. In truth, though, the last reigning Stuart monarch, Queen Anne, was no more Scottish than her sister, Mary. In 1688, Mary and her Dutch husband William deposed the last male Stuart monarch, James II. That's what ignited a generation of war as Scottish supporters of the Stuarts fought to restore them to the throne. I don't know what role my ancestors played in those wars, but the final defeat of the Stuarts in 1746 happened in the very year my ancestors emigrated from Scotland to North Carolina.

It's an oversimplification to say that the Scots objected to a foreign king. The Stuarts were intermarried with the royal houses of England, Ireland, and France, just as the royal houses of those nations had intermarried with ruling families of other nations. Still, it was a jolt to have Scotland's national wishes repudiated by Parliament's acceptance of kings from the Netherlands and Germany. Yet that has been the history of Britain. The Stuarts came to power because the line of the Welsh-born Tudors ended with Elizabeth I, just as the Tudors had come to power because the French-born houses of York and Lancaster had exhausted themselves in the Wars of the Roses. The French dynasties had ruled ever since the Normans (Vikings from France) conquered Saxon England in 1066. Even the Anglo-Saxons were foreigners; they had pushed aside the native Britons after the Romans left.

Each change of national leadership brought generations of conflict as the new rulers imposed a new language, legal standards, and cultural norms, all of which favored the new elite over the native-born. This pattern of foreign rulers caused those who understood their Bibles to ask whether God had something to say about the matter. Pastor Matthew Henry was one of those. He witnessed the Glorious Revolution that brought Dutch King William to power in 1688, and the Act of Settlement in 1701 that opened the way for coronation of German King George I in 1714. In his commentary on Deuteronomy, Henry wrote:

They must not choose a foreigner under pretence of strengthening their alliances, or of the extraordinary fitness of the person, lest a strange king should introduce strange customs of usages, contrary to those that were established by the divine



George I (1660-1727) was the first German king over the English-speaking peoples of Great Britain. Portrait by Georg Wilhelm Lafontaine, c. 1720-27, The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, [Royal Collection Trust #RCIN 405247](#).

law; but he must be *one from among thy brethren*, that he may be a type of Christ, who is bone of our bone, Heb. 2:14.*

Henry's comments refer to this instruction of Moses:

When you come to the land that *ADONAI* your God is giving you, possess it and dwell in it, and you say, "I will set a king over me, like all the nations around me," you will indeed set over yourselves a king, whom *ADONAI* your God chooses. One from among your brothers will be appointed as king over you—you may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.

Deuteronomy 17:14-15 TLV

Pastor Henry is right in applying this to Messiah Yeshua as God become human so that He would not be a "foreign king" over us mortals. That's why Henry refers to this passage from Hebrews:

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared the same humanity—so that through death He might break the power of the one who had the power of death (that is, the devil) and free those who by fear of death were in bondage all their lives. For surely He is not concerned about angels, but about the seed of Abraham. Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in all things, so He might become a merciful and faithful *Kohen Gadol* [High Priest] in matters relating to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. Because He Himself suffered when put to the test, He is able to help those being tested.

Hebrews 2:14-18 TLV

This central tenet of Christianity has roots in the same section of Torah that addresses Israel's kings. In the next chapter, God says to Moses:

I will raise up a prophet like you for them from among their brothers. I will put My words in his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I command him. Now whoever does not listen to My words that this prophet speaks in My Name, I Myself will call him to account. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My Name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods—that prophet will die.

Deuteronomy 18:18-20 TLV

These passages introduce the stumbling block that is the Messiah. Christians understand Yeshua of Nazareth to be the prophet like Moses – the King of the World who, being fully human and fully God, both rules over humanity and mediates between us and our Creator. What we don't understand is that the Jesus Christ we profess as Savior is not only very different from the Mesiah Yeshua of the first century, but also a foreigner whom Jews cannot possibly accept.

A friend of mine explains this in a story about his first trip to Israel. He says a revelation came to him as he observed Orthodox Jewish men praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. He had known that Jesus was a Jew, but until that moment, he never realized that Jesus was Jewish. My friend says he began to understand that Yeshua would have

* Matthew Henry, *Commentary, Vol 1: Genesis to Deuteronomy* (Chester, England, 1706). Blue Letter Bible. Last Modified March 1, 1996. https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Deu/Deu_017.cfm

looked and acted a lot more like those Jewish men than like him, a Pentecostal pastor from the American South.

Think about this for a moment. Since before the time of Yeshua, Jews have awaited a Messiah who would teach them the Torah as Moses did, reign from Jerusalem as David did, and elevate Israel as a kingdom of priests to judge the nations and teach them the ways of God. That's precisely the Messiah who came in the first century – the Messiah who understood the shortcomings of the religious system and leadership of the day, but who still exhorted people to listen to them, as we read in Matthew:

Then *Yeshua* spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying, "The *Torah* scholars and Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses. So whatever they tell you, do and observe. But don't do what they do; for what they say, they do not do."

Matthew 23:1-3 TLV

This same reasoning is what informed Yeshua's brother, James, to propose minimal guidelines that Gentiles coming to faith in Yeshua should follow so they could enter fellowship and learn the ways of God. Those guidelines were essential because the only place they would learn was where Jews proclaimed the word of God, as James said:

For Moses from ancient generations has had in every city those who proclaim him, since he is read in all the synagogues every *Shabbat*.

Acts 15:21 TLV

The portrayal of this Jewish Messiah teaching Torah to Israel and those from the nations grafted into Israel was erased by political, military, and demographic developments over the next generations. That Messiah was replaced by the Greco-Roman *Christus* whose followers demanded that Jews reject their very identity and all that God had commanded them in Torah and follow what was to them a foreign king.

This is the legacy we have inherited. If we wonder why evangelism of Jews is so reprehensible to them, we should perhaps consider what kind of Messiah we are presenting. We've been praying for a long time that God open the eyes of the Jews to the identity of their Messiah. Maybe we should pray instead that He open our eyes to the identity of our Messiah. When we do, then we begin to realize that the King of Israel is no foreigner to Israel.