**WHY WAS JESUS CHRIST JEWISH?**
Genesis 44:33, Matthew 1:1-3
By Raymond White

Why was Jesus Christ a Jew? By that I don't mean why was he not a Greek or a Roman, I mean why was he not a Levite or a Reubenite?

*Matthew 1:1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ … :2 … and Jacob begat Judas … :3 And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar …*

Why was he descended from Judah specifically and not from any of Judah's brothers? After all, Levi was the priestly tribe, Reuben was the firstborn, and Joseph ended up with the double portion, the birthright blessing that Reuben had lost. With so many choices, why did God pick Judah for the linage of Christ? And it didn't just happen. It was known in the mind of God from the very beginning.

## [1] THE PROMISE

*Genesis 49:10 The scepter 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.*

*1 Chronicles 5:2 For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler: but the birthright was Joseph's.*

To Judah "shall the gathering of the people be." And that's just what happened.

The Davidic dynasty was of Judah. The temple was built in Judah. When the nation split in two, the true worshippers from all the tribes moved south to Judah. When the ten tribes were conquered and exited their homeland, it was Judah that preserved remnants of all the tribes. And when Judah was finally conquered, when they returned, with them returned remnants of all Israel. And finally, it was to Judah that Christ was born offering salvation to the world.

But still, why Judah?

## [2] JUDAH

Judah made lots of bad choices in his life. He hated his brother Joseph, tried to kill him then at the last minute decided instead to sell him into slavery. He lied to his father and stood by that lie for perhaps a decade. Although married, he had a passion for prostitutes, yet when his own daughter-in-law, Tamar, became pregnant "by whoredom" he ordered her burned.

Such self-righteous hypocrisy is sickening. Judah lived a life of wrong choices.

But there was one day when Judah made absolutely the right choice, the choice that altered his destiny and his family's forever. Here's the story.

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The family was suffering because of famine, and so Judah and his brothers traveled to Egypt for food. They didn't know that their brother Joseph had risen to high office and was the second in command just under Pharaoh.

They met with Joseph not knowing who he was. In that meeting Joseph demanded to know if there was another brother. They confessed, yes there was, the youngest, Benjamin, who had remained at home with their father Jacob.

Then Joseph made a demand. He demanded to see this youngest brother. If they would not bring him, they would receive no food.

The reason Joseph wanted to see Benjamin was simple: Benjamin was Joseph's only full brother, they were sons of Rachel. All the others were half brothers, sons of Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah.

This demand was bad news. Not only did they return home empty handed with no food, but now they had to report this unreasonable demand to their father.

Jacob was understandably reluctant to give up Benjamin. After all, Jacob had loved Rachel best. She had given Jacob two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, and Joseph was dead, or so he thought. So all that Jacob had left of his beloved Rachael was her young son Benjamin.

Judah and the rest understood their father's reluctance to give up the boy, but they had no choice. Either Benjamin would go with them to Egypt or they would starve.

In order to persuade their father, Judah stepped up to the plate and did an amazing thing.

*Genesis 43:9* *I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever.*

Judah offered himself as a personal surety for Benjamin. What that actually means, we're about to see. They were not empty words.

So they returned to Egypt and brought Benjamin with them.

Now the story gets complicated. Here is the short version: Joseph framed Benjamin with an invented theft and threatened to keep Benjamin for his personal slave.

That was Judah's undoing. Panic overwhelmed him and all thoughts of personal safety fled. He had made himself a personal surety for his brother and he was on the hook.

But it was not just his promise that hooked him, it was his own personal guilt, and his love for his father, and his love for Benjamin. He knew that he was responsible for his brother's death and for his father's grief, and now he was about to double-down on all that and lose Rachel's second son as well. It was not just guilt that motivated him, it was a deep sense of sorrow for his father's pain that was now his own. He had caused his father pain once, he would not allow it to happen again.

What could he do prevent this horrible thing from happening?

*Genesis 43:13* *Then they rent their clothes…and returned to the city.*:14 *And Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house…and they fell before him on the ground.*

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They came back to Joseph begging. They could have left safely and gone home. But their own personal safety was no longer important. They must risk everything for the boy. But what could they do?

Then, at a moment, Judah made good on his promise and did exactly the right thing, a deed of highest courage. He exchanged himself for his brother.

> ***Genesis 44:33*** *Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren.*

That was it. That was Judah's moment of greatness. For all his faults, he, and he alone, offered himself in exchange for Benjamin. "Let *me* live the life of a slave and let my brother go free."

How different now was Judah. Once he had hated a brother enough to kill him. Now he loved a brother enough to die for him. Once he had scorned his father and was not mindful at all of his pain. Now his father's pain moved him to self-sacrifice. Once he cared only for his own station enraged with jealousy. Now he cared only for others, letting go of all concern for his own personal safety. Once he had sold a brother into slavery, now he sold himself into slavery to save a brother. Judah had, at that moment, rose to greatness and made himself the forerunner of Christ.

And that was Joseph's undoing.

> ***Genesis 45:1*** *Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.*

And of course the whole family moved to Egypt and they lived happily ever after. I love happy endings, don't you?

But there was more to the story.

### [3] THE BLESSING

When it was all explained to their father Jacob what had happened and how things stood, Jacob took it all to heart. Then some time later just before Jacob died, he gave blessings to his sons. And this is the blessing he gave to Judah —

> ***Genesis 49:8*** *Judah, thou are he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. :9 Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he crouched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? :10 The scepter 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. :11 Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes.*

Judah would rule until Shiloh come. Shiloh means, "he whose right it is to rule." And thus began Israel's notion of a coming Messiah.

Why Judah? Because he was the one who offered himself in exchange for his brother.

That's what I believe. And then down through the centuries as the destiny of the tribes of Israel played itself out, it was Judah that survived — (and part of Benjamin, Judah once again protecting Benjamin) — and brought the savior into the world to save the world.

## [4] MOMENT OF DESTINY

For many people, greatness is a moment. For one, it's exchanging his life for a child in a burning building. For another, it's giving her blood, her kidney, or half her liver to someone who desperately needs it. I once read a story of a prison riot where a mob was about to kill a guard. Then unexpectedly, one prisoner, a lifer, stepped between the guard and the mob and protected him, risking his own life.

A Roman soldier faced down an angry crowd to save Paul (***Romans 21:31-40***).

A harlot of Jericho risked her life to save two Israelite spies (***Joshua 2:3-4***).

Some people live a life of spectacular failure. And then at a moment of destiny, dig down and find the supreme courage to do the right thing and offer themselves for some great cause.

If that's you, maybe no one will know it. But God will. And in that moment of greatness, your courage and determination will change your destiny forever, whether you survive or not.

When we think of Christ, we would do well to sometimes reflect on his ancestor Judah. He is in many respects a picture of ourselves and our failures, and our redemption.

Oh, and what about Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law that he wanted to burn? Fortunately, Judah changed his mind about her and said —

***Genesis 38:26*** *She hath been more righteous than I.*

Saving her was a good thing. Not only because it was the right thing to do, but because by saving her, he saved the family line that produced Jesus Christ.

Judah was a man of many mistakes. But finally he repented, saw others as better than himself, and offered himself in exchange for someone else. That, in my opinion, is why Christ was a Jew.

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