

Why Do Christians Forget This Vital Thing About Jesus?

Jesus was a Jew.

That should not come as a shock, and yet it is astounding how many believers disregard this fundamental fact and trade it in for a “Christianized” version of Jesus.

In its purest form, the term Christian describes a person who follows the Christ. The word Christ is the Greek translation of the original Hebrew word *Mashiach*, which means “anointed one.” So a Christian is simply one who follows the anointed one. And who is the anointed one? Jesus, *HaMashiach*—the Messiah, the Anointed One sent to save and redeem the Jewish people, just as the prophets foretold.

In Matthew 15:24 Jesus declared, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” This did not mean that Jesus’ plan was not to save all but simply that His mission had to begin—as previous prophets’ missions had begun—with Israel. Similarly, Paul, upon entering a city where Jews lived, would always begin his ministry in that city by going first to the synagogue. He told the Romans that the power of God for salvation was “first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” (Rom. 1:16, NIV).

Although He was the Son of God, existing far above any religious boxes or labels, He came to a specific, chosen people as one of their kind. Jesus is called “Son of David” at least 15 times in the Gospels, and this reiterates His completely Jewish roots.

What is fascinating to consider is that Jesus chose to be Jewish. He is the only naturally born Jew in history who chose His Jewishness. He made this decision in heaven with full intentionality, laying aside His deity in humility to become a

man—a Jewish man—so that He would fulfill God's plan for salvation to come from the Jews first (John 4:22). If Jesus chose this way, then how can we disregard His choice by neutering His Jewishness to make Him fit a more religious "Christian" mold? Sadly, this is what the Christian church has done throughout history.

To understand why Jesus chose to do everything through the Jewish context, let's take a closer look at the extent of His Jewishness.

Jesus was born into Jewish royalty. Matthew 1:1 (MEV) establishes this in the very first verse of his Gospel by calling Christ "the Son of David, the son of Abraham." Not only is Jesus genetically linked to the original Jewish covenant through Abraham, but He is also linked by blood to the house of Israel's kings, from which the Messiah had to come. Being born into the tribe of Judah in the house of David was genetic gold, and yet isn't it interesting how fervently the priests and religious leaders of Jesus' day opposed Him for power once He began to talk of another kingdom?

Jesus was born King of the Jews. This was not just declared over Him with a sign upon the cross. Jesus was correctly recognized as the King of the Jews even as a baby (Matt. 2:1-2).

Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. Luke 2:21 records the normal procedure for any Jewish boy, physically marking Him as part of God's covenant people.

Jesus was dedicated in the temple. After Joseph and Mary had Jesus circumcised, they took their firstborn to the temple in Jerusalem to have Him presented, or dedicated, to the Lord, according to the Mosaic Law that every firstborn child is to be set aside to God (Luke 2:22-23).

Jesus was raised by practicing Jewish parents. Luke 2 gives us even more insight into just how law-abiding Joseph and Mary

were. As observant Jews, they made a trip to the temple 40 days after Jesus' birth to make sacrifices as part of Mary's purification rituals after giving birth (verses 22-24). They then offered a pair of doves or pigeons in obedience to the Torah's instructions.

Jesus celebrated Passover every year. Jesus' parents established a standard during His childhood by making an annual pilgrimage to the holy city for Passover (Luke 2:41). Based on the other indications we have of Joseph and Mary's adherence to the Jewish Law, it is likely they made many other trips to Jerusalem, as Passover was one of three feasts that had to be observed in Jerusalem. This means Jesus probably grew up accustomed to visiting His Father's house, the temple.

Jesus read and studied a Hebrew Bible. All Jewish children grew up learning from the Tanakh, as Deuteronomy 6:7 commanded parents to teach the Lord's ways "diligently" to their children and "talk of them" throughout everyday life. Given Joseph's and Mary's faithfulness to follow the rest of the Law, Jesus likely spent significant time as a young boy under Joseph's tutelage, hearing and discussing the Hebrew Bible.

But Jesus probably did this outside His home as well. At age 5, most Jewish boys began attending school at the local synagogue, where six days a week their studies—reading, writing, arithmetic and other subjects—all centered on the Torah. Here, Jesus would have memorized entire chapters from Moses' writings under the guidance of a rabbi.

As He grew older, Jesus would have moved on to study and memorize the Nevi'im and Ketuvim, the typical educational progression for Jewish adolescents. By the time He was a young man, He knew entire books of the Hebrew Bible by heart and could discuss interpretations of the Tanakh with rabbis and adults alike.

Finally, at the start of His ministry, we see that Jesus

related to the Tanakh not only as a teaching document but also as a weapon against the enemy (Matt. 4:1-11).

Jesus was recognized as a Jewish rabbi. We know Jesus followed in the footsteps of Joseph, His earthly father, by training and working as a carpenter (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). But Jesus was obviously so remarkable in His understanding of the Hebrew Bible that He earned the respectful title of rabbi—teacher, master, great one—by people in all social spheres (Matt. 19:16, 22:35-36; Luke 12:13).

Jesus chose 12 Jews to be His disciples. The dozen men Jesus chose to invest in may have been from completely different walks of life, but those walks were all within Jewish society. The fact that He chose only Jews already tells us just how targeted His ministry was to the descendants of Abraham.

Jesus ministered mostly to Jews. It is easy for us today to see how Jesus' main mission and ministry on earth extended far past the Jewish people. If you are a Gentile, you are a product of that extension, having been "grafted" into the Jewish covenant with God (Rom. 11:17-24). But we also must not forget that saving Gentiles was not Jesus' initial focus, which is why He spent the overwhelming majority of His time ministering to Jews.

Granted, the Gospels record instances where Jesus broke with Jewish tradition and did the unthinkable by touching, healing and teaching "unclean" Gentiles. And yes, some of Jesus' teachings blatantly foretold that Gentiles would benefit from the salvation He offered. But if you listed the amount of time Jesus spent among Jewish people compared with Gentiles, His target audience would quickly become evident.

Jesus was crucified on Passover as "the King of the Jews." I doubt Pontius Pilate knew the true significance of his words when he insisted on posting a sign that heralded Jesus as "The King of the Jews" (John 19:19-22). The entire ordeal

surrounding Jesus' arrest, trial, sentencing and crucifixion was, at its core, a Jewish matter taking place on Passover. Even with Roman government involved, the question still was whether Jesus was indeed who He claimed to be: the King of the Jews.

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on the Jewish feast Shavuot. It is no coincidence that the Lord fulfilled His promise of sending the Holy Spirit on a deeply significant Jewish holiday. Most Christians think of the Holy Spirit's outpouring in Acts 2 as a "Christian" event that birthed the church in fire and power. Yet hundreds of years before this, the Jewish people celebrated *Shavuot* ("Pentecost" is the Greek term) to mark a different yet equally significant arrival—that of the Torah. Shavuot falls on the 50th day after Passover and was set aside as a day of rest to remember God giving the Torah.

We do not know exactly how long the early believers gathered together to wait for the Holy Spirit's arrival; we know only that He came 50 days after Passover—which means they would have been celebrating Shavuot. It is possible they were gathered at a home eating the traditional holiday dairy meal, giving thanks to God for giving the Torah hundreds of years earlier and praying for His timing on giving the gift of the Holy Spirit. But undoubtedly Jesus knew the significance of that day and the power that would mark it in both the Word and now the Spirit as well.

Jewish tradition teaches that it was on this day of Shavuot, or Pentecost, when God appeared to His people on top of Mount Sinai and spoke to them so that they heard His voice. It is amazing to me that on this same day 1,500 years later God once again appeared in fire as He had on Mount Sinai and that He again spoke to His people by His Spirit, whom they no longer saw on top of a mountain but instead experienced within them.

Jesus sits in heaven as the Lion of Judah. Although it is difficult to ignore Scripture's clear depiction of Jesus as a

Jew while He lived on earth, some might argue that this was just a temporary circumstance for God's Son and that His Jewishness therefore matters little in the long run. Yet the Bible itself proves how much Jesus' Jewishness still matters, and one of the most convincing evidences of this is found in Revelation 5. During John's incredible vision of the worship surrounding God's throne, the apostle weeps when he discovers no one can open the scroll held in God's right hand, which will usher in a new glorious era for the world. But before John's grief escalates, an elder sitting around the throne tells him, "Do not weep. Look! The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals" (v. 5).

Isn't it interesting that even in heaven, countless generations after He physically walked upon earth, Jesus is still referred to in connection with one of Israel's tribes? This is because Jesus has no plans of shedding His Hebrew identity. He is just as Jewish in heaven as He was on earth! This is significant, as it proves Jesus will always be the living fulfillment of every Scripture related to Him.

In the very first book of the Bible, Genesis, we find a prophetic reference to Jesus as the Lion of Judah. Genesis 49:9-10 says, "Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches and lies down like a lion; and as a lion, who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to him will be the obedience of the people." And in the very last book of the Bible, Revelation, we find the same reference to Jesus as the Lion of Judah. Out of all the titles given to Jesus in Scripture's Messianic prophecies, I find it fascinating that this one continues in heaven, as recorded by John. Jesus was Jewish, and He will forever be Jewish.

Jesus is coming back as the Root and Offspring of David. Jesus is called the Lion of Judah in heaven, yet there is also one title He gives Himself that again shows His continuing

Jewishness. In fact, this self-description is found in His last words recorded in the Bible. Jesus says in Revelation 22:16b, "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." The same person who created the Jewish line lives today as its ultimate fulfillment. {eoa}

Kirt A. Schneider is an evangelist and author who serves as rabbi of Lion of Judah World Outreach Center. He is the host of Discovering the Jewish Jesus.

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