

JUDAH & BENJAMIN

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Kempis wrote: *Just men depend on the grace of God rather than on their own wisdom in keeping their resolutions. In Him they confide every undertaking, for man, indeed, proposes but God disposes, and God's way is not man's.* (The Imitation of Christ, book-I, chapter 19). This article is an attempt to explain analytically from the Bible, how God personally accomplishes the fulfilment of noble human vows. The amazing case of **Judah and Benjamin** demonstrates God's unswerving fidelity spanning several millennia, providing some rare and fresh insight into God's way.

EXCERPTED TEXTS

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A verse from **The Imitation of Christ** by Thomas A. Kempis, Copyright, 1940. The Bruce Publishing Company, the USA, www.saintworks.net

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A native of Tamil Nadu, voluntarily engaged in the spiritual formation of youth in the Catholic Diocese of Dharmapuri. He took to spiritual writing in 2005 under the pen-name Pitcharan and has since written six books, all on spiritual theology.

Man proposes, God disposes, is a popular quote that is invariably attributed to Mahatma Gandhi. But very few people know that Gandhiji actually quoted this from one of his favourite reads — *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas A. Kempis.

Many years ago, probably some day in 2002, I happened to ponder over the extraordinary manner in which St. Paul was wooed to conversion by our Lord Jesus and could wherefore undergo a ‘change of heart’. The episode really baffled me as I felt ‘why would Jesus bend backwards’ to save someone who decisively rejected His teaching and even went beyond that to mercilessly and brutally persecute His disciples, both men and women. My pondering led me to a rare discovery and an in-depth analytical understanding of how **God personally accomplishes the fulfilment of noble human vows**.

After being struck by famine Jacob sent his sons to bring food grains being sold by the governor of Egypt. Having already lost his favourite son Joseph, *Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him.* (Gen 42:4) Later when his sons returned without grains saying that the governor of Egypt demanded to see the youngest son Benjamin (unaware that the governor was indeed his own son Joseph, who was still alive), he was wary and unwilling to do so. But Judah stood guarantee for the life and safety of Benjamin and decisively declared his **noble vow**: *Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life.* (Gen 43:8-9)

Centuries later when the sons of Israel had multiplied into populous tribes, it so happened that the ravenous Benjamites stooped so low as to gangrape to death, the concubine of a Levite. He demanded justice from the rest of the Israelites

who then decided to chastise the Benjamites. *The Israelites went up to Bethel and inquired of God. They said, "Who of us shall go first to fight against the Benjamites?" The LORD replied, "Judah shall go first."* (Jgs 20:18)

And many more centuries later, David came to represent the tribe of Judah while Jonathan son of Saul represented the tribe of Benjamin. They became very close friends and one day *Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.' "* Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town. (1Sam 20:42)

Years later, after the death of Saul and Jonathan when he had become ruler of all Israel, *David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Ziba answered the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet." When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, "Don't be afraid", David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons.* (2Sam 9:1, 3b, 6a, 7, 11b)

Decades later, when David and Solomon were no more, during the rule of Rehoboam son of Solomon and grandson of David, the kingdom of Israel split into two. Benjamin remained with Judah while the remaining ten tribes separated themselves from Judah and Benjamin. *Then he said to Jeroboam, "Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes. When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David. When Rehoboam arrived in*

Jerusalem, he mustered the whole house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin-a hundred and eighty thousand fighting men-to make war against the house of Israel and to regain the kingdom for Rehoboam son of Solomon. But this word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God: "Say to Rehoboam son of Solomon king of Judah, to the whole house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, 'This is what the Lord says: Do not go up to fight against your brothers, the Israelites. (1Kgs 11:31, 12:20-24)

About a millennium later, the promised Messiah and Lion of Judah, was born a descendant of David: *A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, (Matt 1:1)*

After Jesus' departure from earth, His disciples were continuing His work empowered and led by the Holy Spirit, when Saul the Pharisee opposed their teaching and brutally persecuted them. But our Lord chose this very Saul to proclaim His name among the Gentiles: *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. (Acts 9:15, 20-22)*

But who was this Saul who would later be known as Paul: *I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from **the tribe of Benjamin**. (Rom 11:1b)*

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