

PART 16

Typical Jewish Objections to the Gospel

The Virgin Birth

In our continuing discussions about Jewish objections to Jesus, we come to this argument: “Christian claims about the virgin birth are simply legends borrowed from pagan religions and have no scriptural basis (basis in the Hebrew Scriptures).”

According to one story, the mother of Roman Emperor Augustus was worshipping in the temple of Apollo when she fell asleep and was impregnated by the god Suetonius. In others, Krishna was born of the virgin Devaki, Dionysus was born of the virgin Semele, and Buddha was born of a virgin as well.

Josh McDowell notes:

“Some have claimed that Buddha, along with a host of other pagan ‘gods’, also have had virgin births. Some have attempted to account for the virgin birth by tracing it to Greek or Babylonian mythology. They argue that the Gospel writers borrowed this story from the mythology of their day. This view does not fit the facts, for there is not any hero in pagan mythology for which a virgin birth is claimed, and moreover it would be unthinkable to the Jewish mind to construct such a story from mythology.” (note: the writers of the Gospels were all Jews – RS)

“Many deities among Greeks, Babylonians and Egyptians were reported born in an unusual manner, but for the most part these beings never actually existed. The accounts are filled with obvious mythological elements which are totally absent from the Gospel narratives. They are reports of a god or goddess being born into the world by sexual relations between some heavenly being or by some adulterous affair among the gods and goddess.”¹

There is probably no aspect of the Christian faith that has been subjected to more abuse than the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus. But the virgin birth is not just a Christian doctrine, it is rooted in the Jewish scriptures as well.

The very first prophecy concerning the virgin birth comes from Genesis 3:15, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.” This is God speaking to the serpent after Eve had been enticed by him to eat of the forbidden fruit. It was through the woman that sin was

introduced to the race. By the seed of the woman also, salvation would come. The rabbis teach this as well. Rabbi David Kimchi in his commentary on Genesis 3 interpreted it as messianic because he wrote, "As thou wentest forth for the salvation of Thy people by the hand of Messiah the son of David, who shall wound the head of Satan, the head, the king and prince of the house of the wicked." Also Midrash Rabbah 23 states, "Rabbi Tanchuma said in the name of Rabbi Samuel, Eve had respect to that seed which is coming from another place. And who is this? This is the Messiah, the King."

In Isaiah 7:14 the prophet says, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." While it is true that the Hebrew word for "virgin" means "a young, unmarried woman" and not literally a virgin, the word was later translated "virgin" by the rabbis in the authorized Greek translation known as the Septuagint.

If the virgin birth is to be regarded as a myth similar to Greek and Roman mythologies, who is to say whether the Resurrection and the Second Coming of Jesus are in the same Category. The testimony of the New Covenant

stands or falls as a whole. Either you accept all of it or you reject all of it, one of the two.

The virgin birth of Jesus takes the crucifixion of Jesus out of the category of human sacrifice which is strictly prohibited by God's law, and puts it in the category of God's justice and mercy. In His death, Jesus was carrying out the purpose for which He entered the world: that justice might be executed through Him. God was punishing man's sin but providing His righteous servant to take man's place as the prophet Isaiah foretold in chapter 53.

He was God, voluntarily paying the penalty He had imposed on sinful man. The virgin birth attests to the identity of Jesus – namely, that He was God in the flesh. If Jesus was not God, then His sacrifice for our sins was meaningless. No imperfect man could have died for our sins, because his death would not have satisfied God's demand for justice. To bear our sin, the Messiah had to be a perfect man and thus he had to be divine.

The Jewish prophets pointed to the divinity of the Messiah. Isaiah said

He would be "Immanuel," meaning "God with us." (Isaiah 7:14) Isaiah also said the Messiah would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Might God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6) Micah stated that the Messiah would be one who had existed "from the days of eternity." (Micah 5:2)

If Jesus was the Messiah, as He claimed to be (Mark 14:61-64 & John 4:25-26), then He had to be God in the flesh. That requires a miraculous conception, because all people born of human parents are born with a fallen sin nature. (Psalm 51:5) To deny the virgin birth is to deny the deity of Jesus.

The virgin birth is essential to the deity of Jesus. And the deity of Jesus is essential for His death to have the effect that it has had upon the world. A rabbi from Tarsus named Saul ties it all together in Galatians 4:4-5: "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Roy Schwarcz