

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST (December 2013)

The former Jewish talk show host Larry King once said that if he could choose one person to interview from the course of history, he would interview Jesus Christ and he said he would like to ask Him one question—“Were you virgin born?” He went on to say that the answer to that question would define history for him.

The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is the defining moment in all of history. It is the belief that Jesus Christ was conceived in the womb of Mary by the Holy Spirit and was born while Mary was still a virgin.

This teaching is critical to identifying who Jesus Christ is and it is obvious that believing in the Person of Jesus Christ is the whole matter of our salvation. It was Jesus who said in John 8:23-24, “I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world... unless you believe that I AM He, you will die in your sins.” So if one does not want to die in his or her sins, it is imperative that we believe in who Jesus Christ is, the virgin born Son of God.

The specific details pertaining to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ comes from two gospels—Matthew and Luke. It is clear from church history that by the second century the Christian church not only had accepted the doctrine, but was defending the doctrine. The Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ is a believed and accepted doctrine of the Catholics, Protestants and even Muslims. The Qur’an says that Jesus was the result of a virgin birth. In fact, there are some early church records that say Mary conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit somewhere near the date of March 25. So to deny the virgin birth is to deny what has been taught and believed ever since Jesus was here on earth.

It wasn’t until the 18th century A.D. until the doctrine of the virgin birth was seriously challenged. Oh, there have always been a few who tried to attack the doctrine. In the 1st century A.D. a heretic named Cerinthus attacked the doctrine. In the 2nd century a pagan Greek philosopher Celsus said that Jesus’ real father was a Roman soldier named Pantera, but not too many ever took their views seriously.

Recently, in our times the virgin birth has come under attack again. A documentary put together by the TV stand-up comedian and political commentator Bill Maher attacks the idea of the virgin birth, and, more recently, the History Channel has put a woman teacher of some Hebrew modules, Francesca Stavrakopoulou, who describes herself as an atheist and she repeatedly states that the word translated “virgin” is a mistranslation of the Hebrew word *Almah*.

But the attack against the virgin birth is more than just a religious or grammatical difference of opinion; because what really is at stake in this question is **“Did God become human? Did God become man?”** **The virgin birth of Jesus Christ makes it possible for full deity and full humanity to exist in One Person.** If there is no virgin birth, then Jesus Christ is just like the rest of us. But if Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, then, as one theologian said, it is the invasion of God in history “through One who is uniquely both God and man.”

We would like to offer two main evidences that the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ is true and we must believe it. This is actually the only logical conclusion that is worthy of our faith.

EVIDENCE #1 – The specific details of the virgin birth are given in two independent inspired accounts in the Bible and both accounts give statements of things that historically happened to real people, in real time and real places.

One of the arguments against the virgin birth that Bill Maher used was that only Matthew and Luke give the details and it is not mentioned in Mark or John. Well, this is a relatively easy argument to refute. Let me begin by saying that the “Sermon on the Mount” only occurs in Matthew and Luke and not Mark or John, but those who use this argument do not deny that.

First of all, Mark is writing to reveal data on the public ministry of Jesus Christ as a servant. John writes that Jesus is, in fact, God and He clearly starts off by saying, “the word, who was God, became flesh.” In fact, John went into a bathhouse in Ephesus, which I have seen with my own eyes, and Cerinthus was there, who attacked the virgin birth, and John ran out of the bathhouse because he was such a heretic.

Furthermore, both Mark and John were familiar with Matthew and Luke and they assumed all others were as well. Matthew wrote in A.D. 50 and Luke in A.D. 60 and their work was so thorough, neither felt the necessity to write on the subject again. We have very specific details about the virgin birth in Matthew and Luke and there is no need to write more on the subject.

One writer observed that when you read the two accounts in Matthew and Luke, it is obvious that the virgin birth was a real historical event.

Now **Matthew** begins his account by saying, “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows” (**Matt. 1:18**) and just as soon as he says that, he brings up the fact that Mary was a virgin. The way he stresses her virginity is by saying that Mary was found to be with child “**before they (Joseph and Mary) came together.**” This is the opening statement about the birth of Christ and it certainly establishes the virgin birth.

Matthew records the fact that Mary was betrothed to Joseph and had not had any physical intimacy and he found out that Mary was going to have a baby. Joseph was going to privately put her away and an angel of the Lord appeared to him and told him that the baby had been conceived of the Holy Spirit and that the child would be named Jesus and He would save His people from their sins. Joseph did not put Mary away but took her as his wife (**Matt. 1:18-25**). Then Matthew says Jesus was born in Bethlehem and wise men from the east follow a star and show up in Jerusalem and Herod sends them to Bethlehem and they worshipped the child.

Luke was a medical doctor and he claimed that he carefully investigated and researched everything so that people could know exact truth (Luke 1:3-4). Luke specifically says that the events occurred in the days of Herod (Luke 1:5).

Luke claims that an angel of the Lord, whose name was Gabriel, showed up in the Temple in Jerusalem to a priest named Zacharias and informed him that his wife Elizabeth would give birth to a son who would be the forerunner of the Lord (Luke 1:5-17).

Then Luke says that Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she would conceive and bear a son named Jesus (Luke 1:26-27), who he specifically said was a “virgin” (Luke 1:27).

When Mary was informed that she would have a baby, she responded by saying how can that be because “I have not known a man” (Luke 1:34). The King James translates this verse “I know not a man” and it is exactly how the Greek text reads.

Now here is what no one can deny. The Greek word that Luke uses in **verse 27** is the word “virgin” (παρθενος), which specifically means Luke is claiming that she was completely chaste and had never had any sexual experience (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 345). Mary says she had not known a man and the negative particle “not” is a fact statement, not a possible statement.

The angel said to Mary, the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and she would produce a “holy offspring” who would be called the “son of God” (Luke 1:35).

Then Luke says that Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem and she gave birth to Jesus and laid Him in a manger and an angel appeared to shepherds and they showed up and saw it with their own eyes and then they actually went out and told people what happened (Luke 2:18). When the baby is 8-days-old, Joseph and Mary take Him to the Temple and a Jewish man named Simeon and a prophetess named Anna, who was 84-years-old, both recognized that this baby was the Savior and Redeemer.

Now you must admit when you read these two accounts given by Matthew and Luke these accounts appear to be given with great historical accuracy. There are names, places and people involved in this story that are undeniable. The data is factually presented and obviously this was a real historical event that took place in real time.

EVIDENCE #2 – The virgin birth is specifically predicted and implied in three Old Testament passages.

1) **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 the first statement in Scripture that infers there would be a virgin birth. In this one verse there is a discussion between God and Satan and God pronounces a judgment on Satan that says there would be enmity between Satan and his seed and the woman and her seed. The inference is Satan will produce a godless offspring, but a woman will give birth to a seed that would be Holy. When the Apostle Paul spoke of this “seed” he specifically said it was “seed” singular, not plural (Galatians 3:16).

In other words, Satan would produce an offspring through Adam, but through a woman would come One Person, one seed who would crush Satan

Now normally descendants were traced through a father, but in this case the allusion is to one who would come through a mother. **The clear assumption is that some woman will have a baby that will be different than all other babies.**

This baby would not come through the fallen Adamic line that had been touched by Satan; this baby would be born of a virgin. The fact is the virgin birth becomes a potential reality based on this one verse.

2) **Jeremiah 22:30** - “Thus says the LORD, Write this man down childless, a man who will not prosper in his days; for **no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah.**”

Now this is tricky, but if we carefully consider this prediction, it does lead to the virgin birth conclusion. This verse pronounces a curse on Jeconiah and predicts that no one from his line will sit on the Davidic throne. Now we learn from Matthew 1:12 that Joseph was from the line of Jeconiah and that Jesus is the King of Kings who will sit on the Davidic throne.

The only possible way that it is possible for Jesus, who is connected to Joseph, to sit on the Davidic throne, is for Jesus to have been born of a virgin and not through Joseph, who was connected to Jeconiah. Jesus could be born of Mary and be Davidic and still reign and not be connected to Jeconiah if Mary were a virgin.

3) **Isaiah 7:14** - “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign; **behold a virgin will be with child and bear a son and she will call His name Immanuel.**”

This is the most famous verse pertaining to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ given in the Old Testament. It is clearly predicted by Isaiah some 700 years before Christ was born that a virgin would conceive and bear a Son and His name will be Immanuel, meaning God with us.

Now this is the one passage that is attacked most by liberals. The typical way they attack this is by saying the word “virgin” (almah) in Hebrew may be translated “young girl of marriageable age” or “young maiden” and not necessarily refer to a virgin. They cite passages such as Gen. 24:43; Ex. 2:8; Song of Solomon 1:3; 6:8 to prove their point. However, in none of these passages can you prove the young girl is not a virgin, and, in fact, we would argue she is.

By the way, what is almost always overlooked by liberals in Isaiah 7:14 is that **the noun “virgin” has an article “the” preceding it in both the Hebrew and Greek texts, which indicates this is a very specific prediction pertaining to a very specific woman.**

One of the great Hebrew and Biblical scholars to ever live was a Jewish man who went to be with the Lord in 1995 whose name was Charles Feinberg. Charles Feinberg was raised an orthodox Jew and came to faith in Jesus Christ in 1930 and devoted himself to becoming a Biblical scholar and professor of Semitics and Old Testament.

Dr. Feinberg said this about Isaiah 7:14—“No student of the Old Testament need apologize for a treatment of Isaiah 7:14 in relation to the doctrine of the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, July 1962, p. 251). Because Isaiah 7:14 clearly predicts Jesus Christ would be born of a virgin.

But let’s settle this once for all and prove that **the word “virgin” in Isaiah does mean “virgin” and we offer ten proofs of this fact:**

Proof #1 - The word “almah” is never used in the Old Testament to refer to anything but a young unmarried girl who was a virgin.

The word is used in seven passages of the Old Testament—Gen. 24:43; Ex. 2:8; Ps. 68:25; Song of Solomon 1:3; Song of Solomon 6:8; Is. 7:14. In each one of these uses virginity is assumed. There is no place where one may assume the girl is not a virgin. In fact, in this Isaiah text, since it is stated that the sign will be that a woman will conceive and bear a son, we must assume she is a virgin or the statement doesn’t make much sense. The only way this makes sense is if she is a virgin.

Proof #2 - The Hebrew word “bethulah” was not used.

Now those who attack the doctrine of the virgin birth say that the normal Hebrew word which should have been used for “virgin” is bethulah. In fact, liberals make a big deal of this point. Well, here is the problem with the use of the word “bethulah.” It is true that it is a word that may be used for virgin but it also may refer to a woman who has had sexual relations (Joel 1:8; Est. 2:17; Ez. 23:3).

By selecting the word “almah,” Isaiah is using a Hebrew word that never was used for a woman who was not a virgin. Almah specifically refers to a young virgin who has never had sexual relations (R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Bruce K Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, p. 138).

Furthermore, the famous Jewish archeologist scholar Cyrus Gordon found a clay tablet from 1400 B.C. and he said on that tablet was the Hebrew word “almah” and it did refer to a virgin. In fact, he conceded that “almah” meant virgin and that is exactly the word Isaiah used.

Proof #3 - The Greek O.T. Septuagint, which is a translation of the Hebrew O.T. into Greek by 70 linguists and scholars, specifically uses the Greek word “virgin” (παρθενος) which specifically means this woman is a virgin who has not been with a man.

One of the great Jewish historical scholars was a man whose name was Alfred Edersheim. One of the things he is specifically known for was his lectures on the “Septuagint.” He said the fact that 70 of the most eminent Hebrew scholars translated Isaiah 7:14 with the Greek word “virgin” is sufficient evidence that this word “almah” in Isaiah can have no other meaning.

Proof #4 - When Matthew quotes this very verse in his account of the birth of Jesus Christ, he specifically uses the same Greek word “virgin” as in the Septuagint. He uses it to show that Mary had not had physical intimacy with a man in fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy (Matt. 1:23)

Proof #5 - When Matthew describes the conception of Jesus, he specifically says that Mary was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit “before they came together,” which means before she had any physical intimacy, which means she is a virgin. (Matt. 1:18).

Proof #6 - Since the word “almah” refers to a young virgin who is not yet married, to deny the virgin prediction means that you assume she is married or not married but will have a son by normal natural means. This makes the prediction by Isaiah meaningless; of no value.

Proof #7 - There are statements made about the birth of Jesus Christ that demand He is born of a virgin.

For example, He is called “Immanuel,” meaning God with us. Paul said, “when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). Simeon takes an 8-day-old baby in his arms and said this Baby is God’s salvation and the glory of Israel and that he could now die because his eyes had looked at that baby (Lk. 2:29-32). This is obviously not a normal baby and these statements demand He is virgin born.

Proof #8 - The statement in Isaiah 7:14 is that the Lord would give a sign that His Son was here and the sign is the virgin birth.

If it isn’t a virgin birth, it cannot be a sign that points out God’s Son because His Son would be born like every other son. Now a “sign” (oth) is something that points to something else before you get there. A sign is something that clearly points to something specific.

Proof #9 - After Matthew gives his virginity statements about Mary, he says all of this was done to fulfill Isaiah 7:14 so that God could actually be here on earth (Mt. 1:22).

So Matthew believed the fact that Mary is a virgin is a critical factor in fulfilling the Isaiah prophecy, which proves Isaiah predicts He would be born of a virgin.

Proof #10 - All of the early records we have of the infant days of the church clearly state that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin.

Ignatius, who was the Bishop of Paul’s home church, Antioch of Syria, who was a student of the Apostle John, who was martyred in A.D. 117, said, “For our God, Jesus the Christ, as conceived in the womb by Mary...and hidden from the prince of this world were the virginity of Mary...”. He also wrote “our Lord...is truly of the race of David according to the flesh...truly born of a virgin” (J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth*, p. 6).

There is a famous doctrinal statement of faith that is called "The Apostles Creed" that some believe was in existence in its primitive form by the year A.D. 150. In that creed it is stated that "I believe Jesus Christ born of the virgin Mary." The virgin birth was an important doctrine to early Christianity.

At the council of Nicea in A.D. 325 the Nicene Creed was formed and it, too, stated that Jesus Christ was born of a "virgin."

The evidence is overwhelming. Whether you analyze the grammar of Hebrew or Greek or whether you analyze archeological discovery or whether you analyze historical statements or whether you analyze your English Bibles, it is very clear that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin and that is exactly how Isaiah 7:14 predicted He would be born.

Now Isaiah is an O.T. prophet who had much to say about Jesus Christ.

He said He would be born of a virgin.

He said that He would be wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.

He said that He would come the first time to save and the second time to condemn.

The wise thing to do is believe exactly what Isaiah said. Place your faith in Jesus Christ, the virgin born son of God and Savior of the world and you will be saved. But don't place your faith in Jesus Christ and you will be forever condemned.