

THE MIRACLE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

By: Bob Stewart

When I was in seminary, I had a good friend who was in youth ministry, and an evangelist. We often had discussions about theological issues and I was surprised one day to find out he didn't believe in the virgin birth of Christ. Over the years, I have found many Christians with doubts about this truth. I have never had a doubt about it myself, but spent time studying the issue about why it seemed a necessary part of God's plan. Jesus never referred to it, nor did His disciples. But people were aware of it. Jesus' enemies referred to His being conceived out of wedlock, and called him a bastard during a discussion with the people and their religious leaders as recorded in John 8:37-45;

"I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak the things which I have seen with *My* Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from *your* father." They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, 'We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.'

It could be that Jesus and His parents were scorned for this event all through His youth. It had to be difficult for both the boy and His family. One couldn't blame people in those days, after all who was going to believe the virgin conception and birth story? So little is said of it and nothing is made of it outside the gospels. Neither Paul nor any other writer mentions it. It is only mentioned once each in Matthew and Luke. Was it really necessary that Jesus be born of a virgin? And if so, why?

The first thought is that somehow the virgin birth relieves the person of Jesus of the contamination of sin. The Catholic Church proposes this view but has to go a step further and state that Mary had to be sinless as well so that the conception by The Holy Spirit, in a "sinful" person Mary, could not transfer sin to Jesus. This is called the "Immaculate conception". But if you take this to the extreme, and ask the question, "How was Mary born without sin?" (accepting that sin is genetically transmitted as the Catholics do), then you have a contradiction bordering on stupidity for this means that all of Mary's blood ancestors have to be sinless, including David, not to mention Adam. Further, there is no mention of Mary's sinlessness in the scripture.¹ So one of these doctrines is untrue. Either sin is not genetically transmitted, or Mary was not sinless – or both. There is a wise saying, "If the premise upon which the argument is based is flawed or false, so will be the argument and its conclusion." Let's set all that discussion aside for now, and look at the truth because we could go on and on, on that one. So let's look at one real reason for the virgin birth.

¹ Looking carefully at Mary's statements regarding herself in Luke 1:26-30, 34,37-38; 46-55 (esp. verse 48) it seems apparent that Mary held herself to be a common person whom God had chosen for reasons unknown to her. She had more children after Jesus was born and none of them was deemed "sinless" either. Jesus never exalted her for being "sinless" but saw her as one of many called his mother, sister or brother (Mark 3:31-35) who do the will of God.

Travel back with me three thousand years to the time of David's reign over Judah and Israel in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a small, rather primitive fortress originally of pagan origins located Southeast of the present temple plateau. It was yet to become the great city and spiritual center of Israel. Bethel and Gil-gal were the spiritual centers at this time. Right now it was simply a command post from which David continued Saul's effort to organize the scattered tribes of Israel and Judah into a united fighting force to thwart the efforts of the Philistines and others to drive the Jews into the sea. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Several years later, after David had solidified his rule and been accepted as the King of Judah and Israel, God made him a promise with these words, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." (II Samuel 7:16)

Then later to David's son Solomon God said, "As for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you *and* will keep My statutes and My ordinances, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David, saying, You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel". (I Kings 9:4-5) See also: I Kings 2:1-4; I Chronicles 22:6-10;

In Psalm 89:35-36 God states, "Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. His descendants shall endure forever And his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful."

Isaiah 9:6-7 reads, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this."

It is this "zeal of the Lord" we will learn to appreciate.

These promises were spoken over a period of two hundred years between 700-900 years before Christ was born. There are more like this, of course. Then Luke records the angelic visit of Gabriel to Mary with these words, "Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord *is* with you.' But she was very perplexed at *this* statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

Now, the contradiction. In 600 B.C., as the Davidic dynasty was continuing on, the last good king of Judah – Josiah - had restored in Judah the spiritual centrality of the worship of God. The previous two kings, Manasseh and Amon, had destroyed this. The Lord, we are told, was not amused by how the descendants of David, generally speaking, were handling the spiritual affairs of their people. Even after Josiah's reforms, the Lord decided Judah would be destroyed, because Manasseh had so thoroughly corrupted the people and the worship of God. Josiah's successors to the throne were Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin – also known as Jechonia, or Coniah - and Zedekiah. Every one of these men did evil in the Lord's sight and "played the harlot" with Egypt, Babylon, and their gods.

So God made a pronouncement upon the house of David through Jeremiah the prophet in his 22nd Chapter saying,

"As I live," declares the LORD, "even though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were a signet *ring* on My right hand, yet I would pull you off; and I will give you over into the hand of those who are seeking your life, yes, into the hand of those whom you dread, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of the Chaldeans. I will hurl you and your mother who bore you into another country where you were not born, and there you will die. But as for the land to which they desire to return, they will not return to it. Is this man Coniah a despised, shattered jar? Or is he an undesirable vessel? Why have he and his descendants been hurled out and cast into a land that they had not known? O land, land, land, Hear the word of the LORD! 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.'" (22:24-30)

Then in his 36th chapter Jeremiah reiterates this curse.

"Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah, "He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. I will also punish him and his descendants and his servants for their iniquity and I will bring on them and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah all the calamity that I have declared to them--but (because) they did not listen." (36:30-31)

We have quite a challenge here. One the one hand, God promised that the throne of David would endure for all time and saying, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." But on the other hand He said, "For no man of David's descendants will ever sit on the throne of David and rule again in Judah."

So, how do we reconcile these contrary declarations? And, let me say, they are contrary. But, we don't reconcile them. God does. And this is where it gets astonishing and we see how the "zeal" of the Lord accomplishes this.

Matthew does us the favor of listing the royal genealogy of Jesus as it came from David through Joseph in the first chapter of his gospel. Note especially verses 1, 6, 11-12, and 16-17.

Jechonia's presence in the lineage (verse 11) does two things. (1) It substantiates the Davidic lineage of Jesus but (2) It negates Jesus' right to the throne of David because of the curse. None

of the rest of the Davidic line after Jeconiah ever sat again on the throne of David as king ever again, even to our present day. The last king of Judah, appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, was Zedekiah, a kinsman but not a son of Jehoiachin. Further, in Jesus' day, three objections were made to the possibility of his being the promised Messiah/King of Israel. (1) His origin or lineage, John 6:41-42, 7:40-44, 50-52 and (2) the circumstances of His birth which we have already discussed from John 8:39-41. Finally, the Jews accused Jesus, in John 8:48 of being a Samaritan and having a demon. Jesus did not deny the charge He was a Samaritan but used the "demon" comment to continue His debate with the Jews.

Further, and even more astounding, the same prophet, Jeremiah, who pronounced God's judgment upon the house of David claims in his 33rd chapter, 'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is *the name* by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.' "For thus says the LORD, 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.'" (33:14-17)

Now Jeremiah is starting to annoy me. Why doesn't he make up his mind? Is this an unsolvable contradiction? At first glance, perhaps. I stated earlier that Jesus' right to the throne as a descendant of David was nullified by the curse on David's line – and it would be absolutely a fact if Jesus was born of Joseph! That's right! If he were born of Joseph!

Okay, now we are seeing the answer. We find it in Luke 1:30-35:

"The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.' "Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel answered and said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God."

And now also note Matthew 1:16 as well as Luke 3:23.

Matthew 1:16: "Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah."

Luke 3:23: "When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being, *as was supposed*, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli..."

He wasn't the son of Joseph, but of the Holy Spirit by Mary, also of the house and lineage of David. But her line is traced not from David's son Solomon, but from his son Nathan (Luke 3:31).*

“...the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David...”,

We read in Gabriel’s announcement to Mary that Jesus “would reign over the house of his father David.” This makes it clear that Mary is of the house of David, even though Jesus’ real father is the Holy Spirit. Thus, Mary’s line being from David, legitimizes Jesus’ claim to the throne of David! But at the same time He escapes the curse on the descendants of David through Jeconiah.

Further, Biblical laws pertaining to marriage, adoption and inheritance allow the legacy of the father, upon his death, to fall even to a slave if he is accepted as a son.** In Joseph’s case, he decided not to put Mary away at the discovery of her unwed pregnancy, and though disgraceful in the eyes of the community, he legally “adopted” Jesus as his own son. This is why we read nothing of Joseph after Jesus begins his ministry at the accepted age of 30. Joseph has already died, leaving Jesus as sole heir to the throne of David. This answers the mystery of Joseph’s disappearance from the Gospel narratives after Jesus’ Bar Mitzvah and why.

But it was the miraculous virgin birth that resolved the irresolvable conflict of the two contrary divine declarations regarding the house of David and provided the fulfillment of all of God’s promises, in both cases. Joseph will be accorded, I believe, great reward for his faith for believing the impossible.

Isaiah had foretold the miracle that God had to produce in order to fulfill His promises in both cases.

“Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make *it* deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? "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.” (Isaiah 7:13-14)

At his annunciation to Mary, Gabriel the Archangel answered her question, “How can these things be?” with the words, “Nothing is impossible with God”!

In our lives, sometimes we wonder if God is really all that concerned about us. We silently ask, “Will all the promises we believe in really come true?” “Is being faithful to God and denying ourselves all the worldly pleasures in this brief life really worth it?”

Paul answers this for us writing to the people at Philippi, “*For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

To Rome he wrote, “What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate

us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The virgin birth should demonstrate to us that the “zeal of the Lord” in fulfilling His promises to us who await these things will work in our behalf in due time to bring about the fulfillment of all His promises to us. In days of despair or doubt, the virgin birth becomes a beacon of hope and courage to the faithful of God.

*; ** See the two excurses on, “Mary’s lineage from David through Nathan” and “The Levirate law and laws of inheritance” available upon request.