

Isn't a Virgin Birth Inconceivable?

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The Controversy: Of all the miracles the Bible attributes to God, it seems the 'virgin birth of Messiah' arouses the most controversy. But the same Bible that reveals God declares the virgin birth to be a historical fact. Some question whether it can be considered a scientific fact since it cannot be observed nor repeated. But then what miracle can be? The virgin birth of Messiah is simply another unique and miraculous work of God!

An Issue of Miracles: Miracles may be irrelevant for those that dismiss the possibility of God. But if God is even a possibility, then so are miracles. "Still," you might think, "the virgin birth is hard to believe." Actually, it depends on how big your God is! For the One who is the Creator of all, no miracle is too difficult, and thus, no miracle should be dismissed out of hand.

Moreover, for Jews, miracles are the only rationale for our own existence. After all, if left to the preferences of the Egyptians and Pharaoh, the Persians and Haman, or the Nazis and Hitler, we Jews wouldn't be here at all! Yet while other ancient peoples have come and gone (do you know any Hittites?), the Jewish people remain. God promised to keep us as a people, and miraculously He has done it.

Miraculous births are a big part of that story. God decided to bless the world through a people by whom the Messiah would come (Genesis 12:3). God chose to use Abraham and Sarah, and as the Scriptures teach us, Abraham was old, and Sarah was barren (Genesis 11:30). Thus the obvious problem is that God purposely chose to make a nation from the one couple that couldn't have kids!

Rather than this being a problem, this was the point. If the promise of God would effectively bless the world, then it would take the power of God to make it happen. And miracle of miracles, Isaac was born. Isaac then marries Rebecca. She too was barren, but again God intervenes (Genesis 25:21). And again with Jacob, and Rachel, who was barren (Genesis 29:31), again, God miraculously provides a miracle birth (Genesis 30:22-24).

To recap, biblical history shows that the existence of the Jewish people is based upon miracle births from God. So rather than seeming abnormal, a miracle birth for the Jewish Messiah should be expected. After all, shouldn't we expect the most unusual Person in the universe to have a most unusual entrance through His birth? His unique nature would actually require it!

The Prophecy of a Virgin Birth: God actually told us to expect a virgin birth for the Messiah. As far back as the very first messianic prophecy we see this same hope: “And I will put enmity between thee (Satan) and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). God promised to remove that Serpent of old, Satan, the father of lies and anti-Semitism, through the Redeemer, who would come from ‘the seed’ of the woman. This is God’s first attention-getting clue: a woman would be the instrument of Messiah’s coming.

In the prophet Isaiah we read Messiah’s prophetic birth announcement: “The Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). Some object to the word ‘virgin’ as an accurate translation of the Hebrew word *almah*. Yet in the Hebrew Scriptures, the word *almah* is used seven times (Genesis 24:43; Exodus 2:8; Proverbs 30:18; Psalm 68:25; Song of Solomon 1:3; 6:8), and every time it speaks of young women who have not had sexual relations.

In the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE, the Hebrew Scriptures were for the first time translated into Greek. According to tradition, it was done by seventy Rabbis, which accounts for the name Septuagint, which means 70. They translated *almah* as *parthenos*, or “virgin.” This was centuries before Messiah and thus objective, rightly used by the New Covenant (Matthew 1:23). There is no solid ground for thinking ‘virgin’ is an inaccurate reading of the Isaiah text.

It is sometimes argued that a different Hebrew word, *betulah*, would have served as a closer word for ‘virgin’. However, the two Hebrew words are largely synonymous (cf. Genesis 24, where Rebecca identified as both), and therefore either would make the point. In fact, it is not clear whether *betulah* would actually have been a good choice, since it is also used for a widow in Joel 1:8.

What’s in a Name? But why the name “Emmanuel” in Isaiah 7 rather than Yeshua (Yeshua is the name Jesus in Hebrew)? Many places in the Hebrew Scriptures tell us about Messiah, each giving us a different “name.” In Isaiah 9:5(6), His name is called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince Of Peace.” In Jeremiah 23:6, He is called “the Lord our Righteousness.” In Isaiah 7:14 it is “Emmanu El.” As opposed to a “given name,” each of these names describe some quality of God’s nature or character.

Emmanu El (two words) means “God is with us.” God will neither leave nor forsake us in our sins, for Messiah, the hope of the House of David, will come. We have, by faith in Messiah, the eternal relationship with God that we desperately need. For in Messiah Yeshua “God is with us!”

Isaiah told wicked King Ahaz, “if you will not believe you not will be established” (Isaiah 7:9). The same is true for each of us. Let us have faith in the God of Israel’s greatest miracle, Messiah, that we may be eternally established before Him.