

Born Of A Woman

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Once the trick-or-treaters all go home to eat their confections, the public is made increasingly aware of the year's most awaited holiday, Christmas. Unlike most who call themselves Christians, those who adhere to biblical Christianity feel a kind of dread for this year-end marathon of Yuletide "cheer." Beyond the easily proved fact that Jesus was *not* born on December 25 or even January 6, non-Christmas-keepers bristle at the blatant obscuration of the astounding and meaningful biblical truth found in the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Over the past century, Christmas—with its roots in ancient pagan winter solstice festivals—has become so commercial and secular that some church members have avoided all consideration and study of the few chapters of Matthew and Luke that describe the momentous events surrounding the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Like the rest of Christianity, we have been steeped in the traditional Christmas stories, music, and customs to the point that we prefer not to dwell on them at all. This is unfortunate.

That Matthew and Luke record the facts of the coming of God in the flesh means that God wants us to be aware of the truth of Jesus' birth. True, God has not commanded us to celebrate the day of His Son's birth, and it is equally true that it is not as important as the day of His death (I Corinthians 11: 23-26; Ecclesiastes 7:1). However, that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14) is awesome and significant of itself as a vital prerequisite to the great sacrifice Jesus Christ made by His death.

So important is it that God caused at least twelve separate prophecies of His birth to be written in the Old Testament. These prophecies are not just general predictions that a Messiah would come in some future time to save Israel. To the contrary, God made sure that we would have a detailed witness to His revelation of this part of His plan from the very beginning of humanity. By considering them, we will see that no other person but Jesus of Nazareth qualifies as Messiah and Son of God.

The Twelve Prophecies

Genesis 3:15

Immediately after the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, God pronounces curses on the serpent and the two sinful humans. Concluding His curse on Satan, God says, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed" (Genesis 3:15). Important to us is the prediction that Messiah would be the child of a woman, and arguing from silence, that His father would not be a man.

The apostle Paul writes of this prophecy's fulfillment in Galatians 4:4: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman" (see Matthew 1:24-25; Luke 2:7). All humanity has been "born of a woman," and because of this fact, we all share this trait with our Savior. Like us, He was a human being.

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

Genesis 12:3

A turning point in the saga of God's people occurred when God called Abram to leave Mesopotamia for a land he knew little or nothing about, Canaan. He promised him great blessings of wealth and rulership, as well as spiritual blessing: "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3; also 22:18). This could only be a reference to the work of the Messiah.

Paul mentions this prophecy in Galatians 3:16: "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ." It is evident from the genealogies in both Matthew 1 (Joseph's) and Luke 3 (Mary's) that both legally and naturally Jesus is a descendant of Abraham.

"And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). We Christians are also children of God through our faith in Jesus (verse 26), and this makes us spiritual descendants of Abraham and co-heirs of the promised blessings.

Genesis 21:12

From what we have seen so far, one could argue that the Messiah could descend from either Ishmael or Isaac. However, as biblical generation follows generation, God narrows the lineage of His Son further. As He reassures Abraham in Genesis 21:12: "For in Isaac your seed shall be called."

Again, the genealogies of Jesus confirm He is a descendant of Isaac (Matthew 1:2; Luke 3:34). Spiritually, this fact becomes significant, as Paul explains in Romans 9:6-8:

For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. (See also Galatians 4:21-31.)

The apostle makes clear that physical descent from Abraham is not enough to qualify a person as an Israelite. As Paul intimates in Galatians 4:29, God considers Israelites those who have become His through regeneration by His Spirit, for the Spirit is "the Promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). Just as Isaac was conceived through a promised miracle, so His promised Spirit given to us spiritually regenerates us as spiritual Israelites and children of God.

Genesis 28:14

Another generation appears on the scene, and again God chooses the line of descent for His Son. As God had promised his father and grandfather, He tells Jacob at Bethel, "In your seed all the families

of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 28:14; 35:11). Centuries later, He inspires Balaam to prophesy: "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel. . . . Out of Jacob One shall have dominion" (Numbers 24:17, 19).

Paul considers this "election" of Jacob to be significant:

And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." (Romans 9:11)

The lesson in Jesus descending from Jacob focuses on God's sovereign prerogative to call whomever He wills to be His children and servants (John 6:44). We have a heavenly calling into the Family of God if we continue to endure and grow in this way (see Hebrews 3:1, 6).

Genesis 49:10

The patriarch Jacob had twelve sons, and God had to choose from which tribe His Son would descend. He proclaims His choice through Jacob's prophecy in Genesis 49:10: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people." Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew, as many scriptures record (Matthew 1:2; Luke 3:33; Hebrews 7:14, etc.).

This fact also has spiritual implications for us. Jesus says to the woman at the well, "For salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). Paul explains what this means:

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God. (Romans 2: 28-29)

Isaiah 11:1

Several generations pass before God decrees the direction of Jesus' lineage: "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1). Jesse lived at least eight generations after Judah during the days of the prophet Samuel. He and his family had lived in the town of Bethlehem in the territory of Judah for several generations—at least since the time of Boaz (Ruth 2:4). Matthew 1 and Luke 3 both mention Jesse in their genealogies.

In Romans 15:12, Paul connects Jesus descending from Jesse to the hope of the Gentiles: "And again, Isaiah [11:10] says: 'There shall be a root of Jesse; and He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, in Him the Gentiles shall hope.'" Jesse's female ancestors include three Gentiles—Tamar (Genesis 38), Rahab (Joshua 2; Matthew 1:5), and Ruth (Ruth 4:13-22)—who are also Jesus the Messiah's ancestors. As Paul says, Jesus Christ became a servant "that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy" (Romans 15:9).

Jeremiah 23:5

Jesse had at least eight sons (II Samuel 16:10-11), the youngest of which was David. God chose the line of this young shepherd boy to reign over Israel and ultimately to produce the King of kings: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, 'that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth'" (Jeremiah 23:5; see Isaiah 9:6-7).

Both of Jesus' human parents were of the line of David (Matthew 1:1, 6; Luke 3:31), and it was well known during His ministry that Jesus was a "son of David" (Matthew 9:27; 15:22; 21:9; etc.). Before His conception, Gabriel tells Mary, "The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). Paul reminds Timothy of what this means to Christians: "Jesus, the seed of David, was raised from the dead. . . . This is a faithful saying: 'For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him'" (II Timothy 2:8,11-12).

Psalm 2:7

Jesus' most important descent, of course, is from God the Father: "The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'" (Psalm 2:7; see I Chronicles 17:11-14). The angel Gabriel tells Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Later, after Jesus' baptism, "a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3:17).

This fact has so many meanings to us, but maybe the most wonderful is found in I John 5:20: "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." Because Jesus is the Son of God, we can have a relationship with the Father and thus understand and receive eternal life.

Isaiah 7:14

The prophecy of Jesus' birth much of the world recognizes is that of Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." This, of course, came to pass precisely: "After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:18). Mary herself confirms she was a virgin: "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (Luke 1:34).

His "immaculate conception" (not in the Roman Catholic sense) decreed His worthiness to be our High Priest and Mediator before the Father. Though not of Levi, Jesus qualifies as a priest "according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:14-15):

Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens. (verses 25-26)

Micah 5:2

Not only did God foretell His lineage and manner of conception but also the exact place He would be born, Bethlehem: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of

Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose going forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). Both the learned and the common people knew that the Messiah would come from this little Judean town (Matthew 2:4-8; John 7:42). And, indeed, so it happened (Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4-7).

His birth in Bethlehem ties Jesus directly to the house of David, cementing His claim to his everlasting throne. However, the meaning of the name, "house of bread," points to another title of Christ, "the bread of life" (John 6:35, 48). As Jesus says in verse 51: "If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever." This sign guarantees that Jesus Christ is the true Messiah through whom we can receive eternal life.

Hosea 11:1

A short while after Jesus is born, God warns Joseph in a dream to leave immediately for Egypt to escape persecution from Herod the Great (Matthew 2:13). Once Herod dies, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus return to Judea (verses 15, 19-21), fulfilling the prophecy of Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."

This recalls God's redemption of Israel from bondage, suggesting the later work of Jesus as Redeemer of all mankind. Paul encourages Titus by saying that Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people" (Titus 2:14).

Jeremiah 31:15

Finally, Jeremiah 31:15 foretells Herod's slaughter of innocent boys in the Bethlehem area: "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." Only Matthew mentions the fulfillment of this prophecy in Matthew 2:16-18.

This atrocity is a precursor of the reactions of both Jewish and Gentile leaders who, instead of submitting to Him, put Him to death. It thus indicates the normal experience of Jesus' followers in this world: "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (II Timothy 3:12). Peter writes:

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. (I Peter 4:12-14)

He is Coming Again!

God left nothing to chance, predicting the course of His plan for His Son down to the smallest detail. This should give us great confidence and faith in our God and Savior Jesus Christ as the true Messiah. And if all of these things have come to pass so very exactly, why should not the dozens of other prophecies of Jesus Christ also happen just as He has said?

Most of the remaining prophecies concern His second coming, when He returns as King of kings and Lord of lords to judge the earth and set up His Kingdom on the earth (Revelation 19:11-16; 5:10; 20:

4; etc.). He tells us in Revelation 22:7: "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

Do we believe it? Are we keeping it? As we have seen in these prophecies of His first advent, we have no reason to disbelieve and ignore that He is coming again!