

Gracia a Vosotros :: *desatando la verdad de Dios, un versículo a la vez*

The Assault on the Virgin Birth of Christ

Scripture: Matthew 12:46–50; John 6:42; John 8:41

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Years ago I read an interview with the pastor of one of our nation's largest churches. Asked specifically what he believed about the virgin birth, he said, "I could not in print or in public deny or affirm the virgin birth of Christ. When I have something I can't comprehend I just don't deal with it."

He was subtle about it, but that pastor was challenging the virgin birth. His statement implied that the virgin birth is somehow optional or irrelevant truth. It isn't. Satan knows that, even if we don't. Perhaps that is why he has worked so hard to discredit the virgin birth.

Attacks by Unbelievers

The challenges have taken many forms, from mockery to outright denial. One book claimed that Jesus was the illegitimate child of a Roman soldier who had a love affair with Mary. The author cynically pointed out that Nazareth was located on the main highway between Jerusalem and the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon. Nazareth, he said, was notorious for corruption, vice, and prostitution. Perhaps that is true since Scripture itself reflects that sordid reputation. Before he met Christ, Nathaniel asked Philip: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). But to concoct an elaborate story about Jesus' birth on that basis requires a stretched imagination.

There's nothing new about that theory of Christ's origin. Jesus' enemies often questioned His parentage (John 6:42; 8:41). As early as the eighth century, an extremist anti-Christian cult popularized the teaching that after Mary married Joseph, she unwittingly conceived a child by a neighbor who came in the dark of the night and had sex with her. She assumed the man was Joseph and because she never saw his face in the dark, she never knew the difference. According to the legend Joseph knew he was not the father, so he left Mary after she delivered a son. Of course none of that has any basis in historical fact; its sole purpose was to make Jesus illegitimate and remove His divine nature. The antagonists who concocted the story wanted only to invalidate Jesus' claim to be Messiah.

Similar attacks have been made on the virgin birth, even in our own generation. Hugh Schoenfield in *The Passover Plot*, a popular book during the sixties, postulated that Jesus was the natural son of Joseph and Mary. Schoenfield viewed Jesus as nothing but a master conspirator who thought he could be the Messiah and purposely tried to fulfill Messianic prophecies. Schoenfield wrote, "There was nothing peculiar about the birth of Jesus. He was not God incarnate and no virgin mother bore him. The church in its ancient zeal fathered a myth and became bound to it as dogma."

Attacks by Professing Believers

Those attacks, coming from avowed unbelievers, are predictable. Other attacks—more dangerous because of their subtlety—have been made against the virgin birth by those who masquerade as friends of Christianity. Several years ago, one influential theology professor concluded that it makes no difference if the virgin birth really happened. We can view it as a myth in the highest and best sense of the word, he said. Unfortunately, this has become a popular way of thinking. Another church leader called the virgin birth a story on the level of an Andy Capp comic! That's okay, he hastened to add, because Andy Capp is true—he is true in our imagination, and so is the virgin birth.

That's nonsense—the virgin birth means nothing if it resides only in the collective imagination of humanity. If the virgin birth was anything less than literal in the fullest sense, Christ would be just another man. And that is what the adversaries of the virgin birth want to prove.

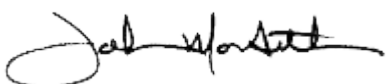
Attacks by Counterfeits

Another way Satan attacks the virgin birth is through counterfeits. A number of religions have claimed the equivalent of a virgin birth. For example, Greek mythology taught that Dionysus, the god of wine, was born out of the union of his human mother, Semele, and the god Zeus. In ancient Assyrian mythology, Semiramis, wife of Nimrod, gave birth to Tammuz, who was supposedly conceived by a sunbeam. That legend was absorbed into Egyptian mythology, where the two are known as Isis and Osiris. In India the same tale is told of Isi and Iswara. The Chinese have evidence of an ancient mother cult known as the Shing Moo. Their artwork, picturing the holy mother holding a baby in her arms, looks strikingly similar to Christian art portraying Mary. In Phoenicia it was Ashtoreth, and Baal was the child. One legend about Buddha claims he was miraculously conceived when an elephant entered his mother's belly. Ten months later Buddha was born. Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great, often asserted that he was conceived by the gods.

Other, more subtle counterfeits have obscured the truth in the Christian world. Don't confuse the virgin birth with the Roman Catholic doctrine of Immaculate Conception. That is the teaching that Mary was conceived in her mother's womb as a sinless being, preserved from the effects of Adam's sin. (As we've [previously discussed](#) in this series, Mary was not sinless.) However, Scripture says nothing about that; it is an invention of the medieval church, not even recognized as official Catholic Church dogma until Pope Pius IX declared it so in 1854.

Sadly, the doctrine of Immaculate Conception is only one more counterfeit of the virgin birth. It makes Mary's own conception and birth supernatural and elevates her to a level she does not occupy in Scripture (Matthew 12:46-50). Mary herself has become an object of veneration, contrary to the spirit of Christ's teaching (Luke 11:27-28). She has been made into a legend no different from Semiramis or Shing Moo. Such is the confusion the enemy has sown.

Some scholars who want to deny Christ's birth have characterized the biblical account as just another in a long line of legends. But all the bizarre myths of human religions stand in stark contrast to the simple reality of Jesus' conception, and none of them is rooted in history.



(Adapted from [The Miracle of Christmas](#).)

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