

JESUS: BORN OF A VIRGIN

Series: *The Messianic Prophecies of Jesus*

by Ron Ritchie

The September 13 issue of *Christianity Today* had an interesting article entitled "The New Unimproved Jesus." Scholars are piecing together a new picture of the prophet, and the editor asked the question, "Will Christians recognize their Lord?" One of these so-called scholars, Bishop John Spong, in his book, *Born of a Woman*, said that Jesus was not born of a virgin, since Mary had probably been raped. Another "scholar," A.N. Wilson, in his book entitled *Jesus*, wrote, "[Jesus her son] ...was a good, Jewish lad with a brilliant flair for shrewd moral teaching and he would have been horrified to think of a 'church' let alone people worshipping him as if he were 'divine.' He certainly did not rise from the dead; that was all a mistake." A Jewish rabbi named Jacob Neusner, in his new book entitled *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*, wanted to ask Jesus, "Who do you think you are---God?"

As we approach another Christmas season, it is appropriate, based on these statements by some religious critics, for us to look at some of the Messianic prophecies which establish Jesus as the Son of God, not because *we* say he is, but because the Scriptures have spoken, and the Scriptures are the word of God. The Old Testament Scriptures contain several hundred references to the actual Son and Servant of God, the true Prophet, Priest and King who was to be the Messiah, God's Anointed. The One promised of God was to be the great deliverer who would save mankind from Satan, sin and death, and establish his kingdom of righteousness in the hearts of men and women on earth. Out of those hundreds of Messianic prophecies I have selected a few in which to answer Rabbi Neusner's question, "Jesus, who do you think you are---God?" In order to do that we must go back to the beginning.

Messiah Will Be Born of a Woman

Genesis 3:14-15

Why a Messiah? What is the need? In Genesis 3 we will see the most amazing prophecy, that Messiah, God's anointed one, will be born of a woman. We have in the early chapters of Genesis the foundational stories of our humanity, our relationship with God. As most of us are aware from Genesis 1-3, God created man and woman in his own image and then placed them in a garden, providing everything they could possibly need physically forever. God told Adam that he could eat of all the trees within the garden, including the tree of life, but he was forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "...for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Only God can define good and evil as it relates to his character; in his book, *Understanding Man*, Ray Stedman writes: "that which is consistent with his [God's] character and his nature is good; that which is inconsistent with it is evil...." This command was designed by God to keep us in constant loving relationship with him. After that God created woman and brought her to Adam. When we come to Genesis 3 we discover that not only were Adam and Eve living in the garden but also, as the Scriptures would reveal later, a rebellious and fallen created angelic being named Satan, who had been cast out of heaven, was found indwelling a serpent there (Luke 10:18). This crafty creature tempted the couple to rebel against God, resulting in a spiritual, emotional and finally physical death.

The serpent said to Eve, "God has told you that you can't eat out of this tree, and it's because he's trying to restrict you from being like him. If you really want to experience abundant life, have some of this fruit."

We all wish Eve and Adam, who was standing near by, would have consulted God first. But the temptation was overwhelming, and the creature was not only crafty, but beautiful and convincing. So there were terrible consequences, as Adam and Eve hid from God.

God appeared in the garden and began to explain the deadly consequences of Satan's actions---future humiliation and degradation---as well as the equally deadly consequences of Adam's and Eve's sin. Genesis 3:14-15:

And the LORD God said to the serpent,
"Because you have done this,
Cursed are you more than all cattle,
And more than every beast of the field;
On your belly shall you go,
And dust shall you eat
All the days of your life;

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."

Suddenly we see the first indication of the nature of prophecy. In prophecy God speaks directly to his created beings or indirectly through one of his Spirit-filled prophets or prophetesses to inform an individual, his people Israel, or the nations of his divine purposes of salvation and future glory. Prophecy involves both future prediction (foretelling) and present proclamation and exhortation of God's word (forth-telling). At times a prophet or prophetess would speak on behalf of God to an immediate situation as well as to a future event in the same message.

The spiritual war between God and Satan which began in heaven (Isaiah 14) would now continue on earth, but not without spiritual consequences. "I will put enmity between you and the woman..." From that day until the final judgment of this fallen angelic being there would be hostility between Eve and him. She would hate Satan because of the way she was tempted to disobey God by believing in half-truths and false promises, and Satan would hate her now because she had become the center of God's love, promise and protection. But this hostility would continue beyond the time of Adam and Eve, "between your seed and her seed," (between children of Satan and children of God).

Who is Satan's seed? The apostle Paul would later write to the Roman Christians in 56 A.D., "...just as through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned..." (Romans 5:12). All of mankind since the beginning have been born in Adam and have the rebellious seed of Satan within their hearts. The apostle John made this even more clear when he wrote to Christians living in Ephesus, Turkey in 90 A.D., "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother..." (1 John 3:10-12). Cain was Exhibit A, the first son out of the womb of Eve, and later Jesus would call the Pharisees the "seed of the devil" (John 8:44).

Who is the seed of Eve? According to John it is all those who practice righteousness and love their brother. This lifestyle can only be accomplished when, as sons of Adam, we come to God in faith and acknowledge our sin of rebellion and then ask him for a new heart, and he fills us with his Holy Spirit, which provides the power to walk with his righteousness and to love our brothers and sisters. And God planned to accomplish this spiritual renewal at this time when any one of the sons of Adam would place his faith in him and eventually in the hope of the promised one, the Redeemer.

In Genesis 3:15 we find the first promise of a Redeemer. This prophecy was that out of the seed of Eve would come a Redeemer, a Savior; one who was powerful enough to defeat Satan, and able to deliver humanity from his power, which led to sin, shame and death. God told Satan that a hatred would come between his seed and the seed of the woman. We usually think of posterity as coming through the "seed of man," but in this one case, a son would be born of her seed and not man's seed. In Genesis 4 Eve gave birth to a son she called Cain. "I have gotten a man-child with the help of the LORD" (Genesis 4:1). She hoped that this son would be

the one who would "bruise the head of Satan." He turned out to be a seed of Satan, but she continued to hope in the promise of God, as did every godly mother after her, that she would be the mother of the Redeemer, that her son would be the promised "seed" who would save the human race from the power of Satan.

As the Scriptures unfold, we begin to see the spiritual line through which the Redeemer, the seed of Eve, would come. Special importance is attached to five men who will lead up to a single woman in this line: (1) Abraham, to whom a promise of this glorious seed was given; (2) Isaac, a type of Christ; (3) Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes; (4) Judah, whose tribe was the chosen one from which the Messiah would be born; and (5) David, through whom God promised an eternal kingdom, throne and King (2 Samuel 7:16).

A thousand years after that promise to David, Mary gave birth to the God-Man Jesus. Once the Messiah, God's Anointed One, was born, God's prophecy, "He shall bruise you [Satan] on the head [a death blow], and you shall bruise him [Christ] on the heel," would be fulfilled.

Let's look at this in reverse order. Satan's bruising Jesus on the heel was seen in Jesus' humble birth in a rented stable; Herod's persecution of the baby Jesus and his forced trip to Egypt; his temptation by Satan on the mountain; the hatred toward him from the sons of Satan wrapped in the robes of religion; his pain in the garden of Gethsemane; and the mocking, whipping, cursing and blood-letting at his trial which finally led up to the cross. The cross looked like the final defeat of our Lord Jesus, but was it? No!

Jesus' bruising Satan on the head symbolizes a fatal blow to Satan by Jesus' resurrection and his defeat over the last enemy, death. John tells us in Revelation 20:10 of the final blow to Satan at the end of the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth: "And the devil who deceived them (the nations) was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that the Messiah took on humanity "...that through death [on the cross followed by his resurrection from the grave] He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." (Hebrews 2:14-15.)

This week I sat in a local restaurant and listened to the story of a man who been a prisoner in the kingdom of darkness and a slave to sin and the fear of death. But three years ago, while driving down highway 280, he cried out to Jesus Christ to deliver him from this slavery and became a new creature in Christ. Now he is eternally alive. He found out this summer that he has contracted a serious form of cancer, but instead of feeling fear, he kept telling me he is experiencing joy, rest and trust in our risen Lord Jesus, and he said he couldn't wait to find out what Jesus was going to do next in his life.

As we search the pages of God's redemptive history we see hints of the Promised One who will come out of the seed of the woman. Those who lived in the time of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and David were all looking for God's Redeemer. Peter tells us, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow." (1 Peter 1:10-11.) But eventually, some 750 years before the birth of the Messiah, God sent the prophet Isaiah to speak to King Ahaz of Judah, and in that conversation the light at the end of the long, dark tunnel became a little brighter....

Messiah Will Be Born of a Virgin Woman

Isaiah 7:10-16

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. "He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good. For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken."

Ahaz was the thirteenth king of Judah of the line of David (742-725 B.C.). In 741 B.C. this wicked king was alarmed that Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, had joined forces to invade Judah and place their own king on the throne in Jerusalem. Ahaz refused to trust God to provide protection; instead, he took some gold out of Solomon's temple and sent it to the king of Assyria, hoping for his protection. It was at this time that God told the prophet Isaiah ("The Lord Saves") to go with his son Shear-jashub ("A Remnant Shall Remain") and meet Ahaz in an attempt to ask him to trust God rather than Assyria, for all three nations had already been scheduled to be destroyed by God within the next sixty-five years (676 B.C.). (Assyria invaded Syria and Israel, taking them into captivity in 721 B.C. [Isaiah 7:1-9].) "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven" (Isaiah 7:11).

Isaiah said to King Ahaz, "You are surrounded by the kings of Syria and Israel, and you are placing your hope in Assyria to save Judah. I have good news: God wants you to ask for a sign which he will accomplish based on your faith in him on behalf of his people. Ahaz, you have a history of God's actions in the past, from the redemption of the Jews from the land of Egypt and the destruction of their army, to the crossing of the Red Sea and the conquest of Canaan, to the establishment of the kingdom of David and Solomon. So, Ahaz, think deeply, so that God's people will have their faith in him restored and the surrounding nations will be drawn to him for salvation, as they see how he delivered you from your enemies." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" The king told Isaiah in so many words, and with a proud heart, "I don't need God's help. I have already hired the Assyrian army to save us."

Isaiah responded: "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?" (Isaiah 7:13). Note at this point that Isaiah directed his message away from King Ahaz and to the whole house of David. "Therefore the LORD Himself will give you [plural] a sign: Behold, a virgin [or maiden or young woman] will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel [God with us]." (Isaiah 7:14)

Since Ahaz would not reach to the heavens for some supernatural sign in order to experience redemption from their enemies, God himself would give them, the house of David, a sign beyond their wildest imagination. He would choose a young Jewish maiden (*ha almah*), a virgin ready for marriage or just married. Further, in this context the Hebrew word *almah* takes the literal meaning "virgin," and in Matthew 1:23 *almah*, translated into the Greek *parthenes*, must take the literal meaning "virgin." This virgin would have a son (no mention of a husband), and she would call his name Immanuel. This young woman would not be out of Ahaz' harem, nor was this the wife of the prophet, as some Jewish scholars believe, for she already had one son (Isaiah 7:3), Shear-jashub ("A Remnant Remains"), and was to give birth shortly after this confrontation to a second son called Maher-shalal-hash-baz ("Swift Is the Booty, Speedy Is the Prey") (Isaiah 8:3). This child of the virgin would be a sign to the whole house of David, and as Isaiah was speaking for the Lord he not only saw the Messiah who was to be born in Isaiah 7:14, but the Messiah who was born in Isaiah 9:6 and the Messiah who would rule and reign over the hearts of men and women in every generation, as well as over the world in the final generation (Isaiah 9:6-7). This Messiah would be called Immanuel, meaning that God will be with us in his deity and humanity. No one on earth, including Isaiah, had any idea as to when Immanuel would be born, only that he would be. And at this point there was no indication of the virgin conception which would be accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah then warned the disbelieving King Ahaz, saying, "Before my young son here will eat the food of poverty and have the ability to choose between good and evil, Syria and Israel will be destroyed by Assyria, and Judah will be left desolate. But a remnant will return, as symbolized in my son Shear-jashub."

I just received a phone call from Dudley Weiner, the pastor of L'Eglise Emmanuel in Paris, and he was delighted to share the good news that three Parisians had personally invited Immanuel into their hearts this week. God is with the Parisians in his risen Son Jesus, and God is with us here in California.

God, through his risen Son Jesus, is willing to redeem all who are living in the kingdom of Satan if they will

but call out to him in faith. When they do that, Christ Jesus not only forgives them of their sins, but breaks the power of Satan over their lives, giving them a new life in him as well as the gift of eternal life. And he gives them the person and power of the Holy Spirit to live out their new life here and in eternity.

Rabbi Neusner wanted to ask Jesus, "Who do you think you are---God?" According to Genesis 3:15 God had promised the world a Redeemer out of the womb of a woman. And according to Isaiah 7:14 God had promised the world a Redeemer out of the womb of a *virgin* woman and prophesied that the male child would be named Immanuel---God with us. Now we are going to discover that God continued to keep his word over thousands of human years.

Messiah Will Be Born of the Virgin Mary

Luke 1:30-35; Matthew 1:18-23

Some 750 years after the prophet Isaiah spoke to the house of David about the coming of Messiah through a young Jewish virgin, God began the fulfillment of that prophecy by sending his angel in dreams to a young Jewish couple from within the house of David.

In Luke 1:30-35 the angel Gabriel appeared before the virgin Mary and said,

"...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." And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" And 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 offspring shall be called the Son of God."

Matthew 1:18-23 says,

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins." Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means "GOD WITH US."

The eternal Son of the eternal God had existed as one with the Father from all eternity. The One who by his power had created the universe would come into human flesh through Mary's womb. Jesus, the Messiah of God, the Eternal One, reached out through his birth and took to himself a complete humanity, uniting that with true deity into one person. Such was the revelation given to Joseph. He was hearing the fact that in this male child all the fullness of the Godhead would be manifested in human flesh. The apostle John would later record, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

The apostle Paul would write some thirty years after Jesus' life on earth, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the

likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:5-8.)

Paul would then add in a letter to the Colossians, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." (Colossians 2:9.)

And finally, in a letter to his disciple Titus, Paul wrote: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men...our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us..." (Titus 2:11, 13).

What is the meaning of the virgin birth? The virgin birth was necessary in order to preserve Jesus' deity. The language of the Spirit's coming upon Mary and "overshadowing" her revealed that this baby would be a special creation whose father would be God himself. That Jesus was born apart from human fatherhood points to his divine nature as the Son of God (R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*).

The virgin birth was necessary in order to preserve Jesus' humanity. This birth was designed by God so that his eternal Son could take on the body of flesh without the tainted human nature, the inward desire to sin, that we all have inherited from Adam. He became the second Adam, man as God desired man to be before he sinned. "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17). "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). "He [God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him [Jesus Christ]." (2 Corinthians 5:21) When we place our faith in him as our sin-bearer He is willing to take our sins on himself, and then imparts to us his righteousness.

The virgin birth was necessary in order to deal with the sin of humanity. The issue that breaks the relationship between God and man is sin, as we witnessed in the Garden of Eden. Adam was told that if he sinned before God he would surely die. The only way man can come back into a relationship with God is to have his sins forgiven. In the Old Testament days a sinner would come before God with a perfect and innocent lamb and offer its life blood up to God as an atonement for his sin. This was a symbolic act which looked forward to God's perfect Lamb who would take away the sin of the world and would deliver "his seed" from the power of Satan and render him powerless. The virgin birth, which perfectly preserved Jesus' deity and his humanity, provided that perfect Lamb - a lamb without blemishes (Leviticus 1:3).

Recently, I was invited to speak at a most unique ministry designed by Jeff Farrar and his staff at Central Peninsula Church in Foster City. It included many different "recovery groups," most of which acknowledge their need of a higher power to overcome their addictions. At the meeting I attended, they had some great modern music, and then they invited me to speak of my relationship with my higher power. I am sure it goes without saying that I told them about Jesus! Then men and women from every walk of life shared their struggles and how they were trying to reach out to their higher power, as well as to their friends, for courage, strength and support in order to get through one more day without failing. The evening ended with a tribute to one of their friends, Eric, who died last week of AIDS, and how he had found that his higher power was Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the only one who could forgive his sins and deliver him into heaven.

Rabbi Neusner wanted to ask Jesus, "Who do you think you are---God?" The answer for all eternity is that Jesus does not *think* he is God---he *knows* he is God. And this one and only living God was willing, as soon as Adam and Eve rebelled against him, to set in motion a plan to become the necessary and perfect Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

God placed that hope in the heart of Eve when he said her seed would bruise Satan on the head. (Genesis 3:15)

God renewed the hope of a coming Redeemer by the prophet Isaiah when he spoke to the house of David, "...Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel [God with us]."

God fulfilled the hope of a coming Redeemer when Mary was told by the angel, "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 Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' And the angel answered... 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God...' For nothing is impossible with God.

Rabbi: "Jesus! Who do you think you are---God?"

Jesus: "Yes!"

Thank God Jesus says, "Yes."

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Various

First Message

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