

Compelling Historical Evidence for the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ

Here are some historical evidences for the virgin birth of Jesus Christ:

- A physician and world-class historian documented it
- Modern archaeology affirms it
- An agnostic professor of mythology is convinced
- Old Testament prophets predicted it centuries in advance
- The earliest Christians believed it universally

1. Documented by a physician & world-class historian.

The virgin birth of Jesus Christ was documented by a physician and world-class historian who interviewed eyewitnesses, probably including Mary herself, for his account of this world-changing event. Luke gives the most detailed account of the Nativity and mentions Mary 12 times, more than any other biblical writer. In addition to the birth of Christ, he also gives special, detailed attention to the birth of John the Baptist and many see his gynecological interests to be a result of his training as a physician.

At the beginning of his Gospel, Luke indicates that he has made a thorough investigation of the things about which he is writing, which included his utilization of eyewitness accounts. He spent extended periods of time with Paul in Jerusalem and Judea and would have had the opportunity to interview those who were closest to the event, including Mary herself.

There is no reliable information on how long Mary lived, but

some traditions say she lived as much as 24 years or longer after the resurrection. The detail Luke presents does indicate that he has derived his information from a primary source, either Mary herself or someone to whom Mary had relayed the intimate details of the event.

The well-known Greek scholar, Kenneth S. Wuest, noted Luke's attention to detail. In his book *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, he said, "If Mary was still alive, he, a doctor of medicine, investigated the story of the virgin birth by hearing it from Mary's own lips."

The accuracy of Luke as a historian was confirmed by the famous historian, A.N. Sherwin-White, who carefully examined his references in Luke/Acts to 32 countries, 54 cities, and nine islands, finding not a single mistake. Sir William Ramsay, who spent years in Asia Minor following and examining Luke's account of Paul's travels, wrote in *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, "You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian's and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment."

Challenging the claims of critics that the story of the virgin birth was based on a hoax, the noted Greek scholar, Professor John A. Scott, reminded the naysayers of Luke's reputation as a historian and that he had based his account on primary sources. Wuest says Scott then declared, "You could not fool Doctor Luke."

2. Affirmed by modern archaeology.

Luke's status as a world-class historian, accurate in even the smallest details, has been brought to light by modern archaeology. For example, Sir William Ramsay, considered one of the greatest archaeologists of all time, originally thought he would scientifically discredit Luke's accounts by visiting and examining the places mentioned in his Gospel and Acts.

Ramsay was a student of the skeptical, German higher criticism of the 19th century and was taught that the New Testament was an unreliable religious treatise written in the mid-second century by individuals far removed from the events described. But after years of retracing Luke's account of Paul's travels and doing archaeological digs along the way, Ramsay completely reversed his view of the Bible and first-century history.

Ramsay became convinced that Acts was written in the first century by the traditional author, and he acquired a very high regard for Luke as a historian. He wrote, "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense; in short, this author should be placed along with the greatest of historians."

In 1896, Ramsay began publishing his discoveries in a book entitled *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*. The book caused a furor of dismay among the skeptics of the world, for its affirmation of the biblical record was totally unexpected. Over the next 20 years, he published other volumes showing how he discovered Luke to be accurate in the tiniest details of his account. The evidence was so overwhelming that many atheists gave up their atheism and embraced Christianity.

William F. Albright, archaeologist and late professor of Semitic languages at John Hopkins University, is considered by many to be the greatest of archaeologists. Like Ramsay, he began as an agnostic, skeptical of the Bible as a reliable book of history. But, like Ramsay, his views were also completely changed by doing the hard work of an archaeologist in the field.

Albright discovered that not only was Luke reliable, but that the entire Bible was a reliable source of history. According to *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Albright wrote, "Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and brought increased recognition to the

Bible as a source of history.”

At one time, it was thought that Luke had completely missed the boat concerning the events he portrayed surrounding the birth of Christ (Luke 2:1-5). Critics argued that there was no census and that everyone did not have to return to their ancestral home. They also pointed out that Josephus had dated the governorship of Quirinius of Syria, whom Luke mentions, as beginning in A.D. 6, too late for the birth of Christ.

In every case, however, archaeological discoveries proved the critics to be wrong. In the case of Quirinius, it was found that he had actually served two separate terms as governor, the first beginning around 7 B.C., which fits perfectly with the time of Christ’s birth. F. F. Bruce, one of the most respected of New Testament scholars, noted that where Luke has been suspected of inaccuracy by modern critics, archaeology has again and again proved Luke to be right and the critics wrong.

The evidence begs the question that if Luke was this careful to get his facts right about names, places, events and dates, can we not be confident that he was just as careful to get his facts right concerning the more important things about which he reported, such as the virgin birth of Jesus Christ?

3. An agnostic professor of mythology is convinced.

C. S. Lewis was the agnostic professor of Renaissance literature at Oxford University, a prolific author and a recognized expert of mythological texts. He too had bought into the idea that the Bible was not a book of reliable history and that the New Testament was filled with all sorts of mythical stories, created by individuals far removed from the events described.

But through the influence of his childhood and friends who challenged his atheism, Lewis began to read the Bible. He was astounded at what he encountered in the Gospels, for it was

obviously a different genre from the ancient mythologies with which he was so familiar. His surprised response was, "This is not myth!" Lewis went on to become a dedicated follower of Christ and perhaps the most significant Christian apologist of the 20th century.

At the time, higher criticism was being popularized in German seminaries. Certain theologians, such as Rudolph Bultman, were claiming that the New Testament accounts of the virgin birth of Jesus, His miracles and His resurrection were myths created by His followers.

Lewis challenged these theologians, saying, "I would like to know how many myths these people have read!" He went on to explain that he had been a long-time professor and critic of mythological literature and knew how a myth sounded and felt. "And the gospel story," he said, "is not myth!"

4. Predicted centuries in advance by OT prophets.

Genesis 3:15 said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel."

These words were spoken by God to the serpent after the fall of our first parents. The "seed of the woman" in this passage is an allusion to a future descendant of Eve who will defeat the serpent and reverse the curse brought on by his deception.

The Bible normally speaks of the seed of men, but in this case it is the "seed of the woman." This is a prophecy that clearly anticipates the future virgin birth of Christ—a birth in which the seed of a man is not involved. The beloved Methodist theologian, Adam Clarke, wrote in *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments with a Commentary and Critical Notes*, "The seed of the woman is to come by the woman, and her alone without the concurrence of man."

According to this prophecy, the "seed of the woman" will

receive a temporary wound from Satan—"you will bruise His heel"—but the "seed of woman" shall inflict on Satan a final and mortal wound—"He will bruise your head." This Messianic promise was fulfilled through the virgin birth of Jesus and through His death and resurrection.

Isaiah 7:14 said, "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: The virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

The Hebrew word translated "virgin" in this passage is *almah* and refers to a young woman of marriageable age, but would usually include the idea of virginity, since that was expected of a young Jewish woman being married for the first time.

That "virgin" is an accurate English translation is confirmed by the Septuagint, which uses the Greek word *parthinos* to translate *almah*. *Parthinos* specifically means a young woman who has never had sex with a man. *Parthinos* is the word used by both Matthew and Luke in their description of Mary, affirming that she was a young woman who had never had sex with a man when Jesus was born.

Further evidence that this Son born of a virgin is a Messianic prophecy referring to Jesus is indicated by Isaiah's statement that he shall be called *Immanuel*, which means "God with us." This is a clear statement concerning the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, and reminds us of the words of Gabriel to Mary that the Son she will bear "will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest" (Luke 1:32).

5. Believed universally by the earliest Christians.

That the virgin birth was universally believed by the earliest Christians is verified by "The Apostle's Creed," an early confession of faith that dates from the second century and was used throughout the church. By including the virgin birth in their creedal statement, these early believers made clear that

they considered it an essential doctrine of the Faith. The Creed reads in part:

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord:

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, *born of the Virgin Mary*” (emphasis added).

This belief in the virgin birth was confirmed by the Nicene Creed of A.D. 325 and has continued to be the belief of Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Christians.

Note the words of the 18th century hymn, “Hark the Herald Angels Sing,” written by Charles Wesley, an Oxford graduate and Anglican minister, and with his brother John, the leader of the great Methodist revival. Because of the references to the virgin birth, this hymn became a popular carol sung at Christmas:

“Christ by highest heav’n adored/Christ the everlasting Lord!/Late in time behold Him come/Offspring of a Virgin’s womb!/Veiled in flesh the Godhead see/Hail the incarnate Deity!/Pleased as man with man to dwell/Jesus, our Emanuel/Hark the herald angels sing/Glory to the newborn king!”

Conclusion

With such overwhelming evidence for the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, it raises the question as to why there remains so much skepticism about this event and other miracles recorded in the New Testament. This question was answered in *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Yale archaeologist and professor Millard Burrows, who said, “The excessive skepticism of many liberal theologians stems not from a careful evaluation of the available data, but from an enormous predisposition against

the supernatural.”

In other words, the barrier to faith is not an intellectual one, but a heart that is committed to unbelief. Believing in Christ does not require a so-called “blind leap of faith.” Any honest seeker who will lay aside their biased presuppositions and consider the historical evidence will also experience the affirming witness of the Holy Spirit in their heart and will know that Jesus was truly born of a virgin. And if that part of the story is true, then we can have confidence that the rest of the story is true as well.

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