

JESUS - SON OF GOD OR SON OF JOSEPH?

In relation to the biological begetting of Jesus, the majority of Christians believe that he was begotten by God. This involved Mary conceiving through the power of God's Holy Spirit. In the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary: "You shall conceive in your womb and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest: And the Lord God shall give to him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then Mary said to the angel: How is this possible seeing I am a virgin? The angel answered and said to her: The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the highest shall overshadow you; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the son of God."

Again in Matt. 1:18 we read that before Mary and Joseph were married and entered into a sexual relationship, Mary was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Then in v20 we read that the angel of the Lord told Joseph not to have any fears about marrying Mary because the child in her womb was conceived through the Holy Spirit.

In A.D. 110 Ignatius expressed his belief in the virgin birth; Aristides 15 years later, and Justin Martyr shortly after that. By the middle of the second century the belief was widespread and enshrined in the words of what is now called the apostles' creed: "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary." In the early third century Origen witnesses to its common acceptance: "For who is ignorant that Jesus was born of a virgin ...?" In more modern times Voltaire's scurrilous pen caused it to be doubted, and from the nineteenth century sceptics and higher critical theologians rejected it. Other leading churchmen jumped on the bandwagon resulting in the faith of many being undermined.

In spite of the statements in Scripture which clearly testify to the divine begetting of Jesus, it is now argued by some that he was not begotten by God but by Joseph, i.e. Mary conceived through human sperm, not through the Holy Spirit.

THE GENEALOGIES

The main reason for believing this arises out of a statement made in the genealogy in Lk. 3:23 which says: "When Jesus began his ministry he was about 30 years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, who was the son of Heli ..." On this basis some claim

that Jesus was Joseph's son and Joseph was the son of Heli.

However, in Matthew's genealogy, we read that Joseph's father was Jacob, not Heli. In order to get around this seeming discrepancy in order to prove that both the genealogies in Matthew and Luke give the ancestry of Joseph, one writer has written this:

“Note that the names Matthat and Levi (Lk. 3:24) are inserted by mistake. They occur further on in the genealogy. Joseph's grandfather Matthan (Matt. 1:15) married Estha and fathered Jacob, who became the father of Joseph (Matt. 1:16). Then Estha, either divorced or widowed, married Melchi (referred to in Lk. 3:24) and became the other mother of Heli. Thus Heli and Jacob were half-brothers. When Heli died without a child, Jacob, following the Levirate rule in Deut. 25:5-6, visited Heli's widow and fathered Joseph. Thus Joseph was the natural son of Jacob and the legal son of Heli. A similar arrangement must have applied in the case of Salathiel (“Shealtiel” in Hebrew), referred to in both genealogies in Matt. 1:12 and Lk. 3:27. He was a natural son of Neri (Lk. 3:27) and a legal son of Jechoniah (Matt. 1:12).”

In replying to this it should firstly be pointed out that there is no reference in the Bible to Estha and neither is there any Biblical evidence for Heli and Jacob being half brothers or of Jacob following the Levirate rule. Such information is taken from non-Biblical books which the providence of God deemed unfit to be included in the canon of Scripture. Secondly, the names Matthat and Levi (Lk. 3:24) have not been inserted by mistake. These names do occur in reliable Greek manuscripts and modern translations of the Bible. Yes, these names do occur further on in the genealogy in v29, but they refer to different men who lived 28 generations earlier, whose ancestors and descendants all have different names as the context reveals.

It is quite common in the Bible for different people to have the same name. For example, in Lk. 3:23-30 the name “Joseph” occurs four times and refers to 4 different men. “Melchi” occurs twice and refers to two quite different men. Melchi in v24 was the son of Janna, and Melchi in v28 was the son of Addi - two different men living about 18 generations apart.

The same applies to Salathiel (Shealtiel). In order to marry and merge the two genealogies in Matt. 1 and Lk. 3 it has been affirmed that the Salathiel in Matt. 1:12 and Lk. 3:27 is the same man. But this name was shared by two men of entirely different lineage at different times in history and both of them had a son named Zorobabel. The Zorobabel in Lk 3:27 came 34 generations after Abraham whereas the Zorobabel in

Matt. 1:12 came 28 generations after Abraham. The Zorobabel in Matt. 1 came through the high kingly line of David's son Solomon (Matt. 1:6), whereas the Zorobabel in Lk 3 came through the low line of David's son Nathan (Lk. 3:31). The grandfather of Zorobabel in Matt. 1 was Jechoniah whereas the grandfather of Zorobabel in Lk. 3 was Neri. The son of Zorobabel in Matt. 1 was Abiud, whereas the son of Zorobabel in Lk. 3 was Rhesa. The references to Zorobabel in these two genealogies clearly refers to two entirely different men with the same name, both living at different periods of history, and the same applies to Salathiel.

The genealogies in Matthew and Luke are clearly two different genealogies and are mutually incompatible. Any attempt to make them compatible requires twists and turns, adding, subtracting and juggling with names which result in contradiction and confusion.

There is no way in which Luke's genealogy can be related to Joseph. His genealogy is recorded in Matt. 1 and is traced through the high kingly line of Solomon, which, from the time of king Jechoniah (Matt. 1:11), disqualified all descendants from sitting on the throne and reigning as king (Jer. 22:30. Lk. 1:32).

This, I believe, is one of the reasons for Joseph's genealogy being given. It implies that he could not be the biological father of Jesus!

Another reason for Joseph's genealogy being recorded is because he was the legal father of Jesus and legally responsible for him. Had Joseph not been a descendant of David of the tribe of Judah, the Jews, who believed Joseph was the biological father of Jesus, would have leaped at the opportunity to show that Jesus could not therefore be the Messiah. It would have created an unnecessary prejudice against Jesus. It was therefore important that Joseph's descent from David could be proved, or Jesus' Messiahship would be immediately legally invalidated in the eyes of the Jewish community which for the most part, did not take into account the disqualification of Jechoniah's descendants. How do we know this? Because in spite of the Jews believing that Jesus was the son of Joseph, they never argued on this basis that this would disqualify him from being the Messiah.

So then, what about the genealogy in Lk. 3 which is traced through the low line of David's son Nathan? It would be very fitting if Jesus came through this low line because it was stated in Messianic prophecies that God would "bring down the high tree and exalt the low tree," and "exalt him who is low and abase him who is high" (Ezk. 17:24. 21:26. 1 Cor. 1:27-29).

The genealogies in Matthew and Luke are mutually incompatible if

they are both Joseph's but they are not so if one of them is Mary's; they would be in that case both correct, and both germane to the case.

That Mary does not appear by name in Luke's genealogy is not a difficulty when it is appreciated that it was not the normal custom to recognize the female element in the genealogies. There are only a few exceptions due to non-Jewish women being involved (Matt. 1:5). Normally, if the woman were an important link, she was represented by her father or husband. In Mary's case, because her husband was not the biological father of her son Jesus, she is represented by her father Heli, who was clearly of the tribe of Judah. Mary's mother was probably of the priestly tribe of Levi, giving Mary the link that made her a cousin of Elisabeth who was "of the daughters of Aaron" (Lk. 1:5).

It is evident from the fact that Moses, who was of the tribe of Levi, married a woman from the tribe of Judah, that members of the tribe of Levi were allowed to marry members of the tribe of Judah (Ex. 6:23. Num. 1:7). Also see Judg. 17:7. 19:1.

"AS WAS SUPPOSED"

The controversial verse in Lk. 3:23 in the A.V. reads: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, who was the son of Heli."

According to The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, the Greek text literally reads like this: "And himself was Jesus beginning about years thirty, being son, as was supposed, of Joseph, - of Heli." (The words "as was supposed" do belong to the original Greek text).

It is interesting to note that it does not say Joseph "begat" Jesus. Neither does it say that Jesus was the son of Joseph. No; it says it was supposed that he was the son of Joseph, and there is a difference. The Jews falsely assumed that Jesus was the biological son of Joseph (Matt. 13:54-55. Lk. 4:22. Jn. 6:42. 8:41).

We know from Joseph's genealogy in Matt. 1 that his father was Jacob, not Heli. So, in view of the fact that the only other alternative genealogy we have for Jesus is on his mother's side we are compelled to regard the one in Luke as her's. And, because her husband Joseph had no biological or genetic link with Jesus, Mary's father Heli is named, being the next or nearest genealogical link. For this reason Luke doesn't say that Jesus was "of" (from) Joseph, but he does say he was "of" Heli.

I believe therefore that Lk. 3:23 could be paraphrased like this: "Jesus ... being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph (but) of Heli." There

may even be a better way of looking at it. In view of the fact that the brackets are not in the original Greek text, but have been inserted by the translators, they could justifiably be placed as follows: “Jesus ... being (as was supposed the son of Joseph) of Heli” i.e. Jesus was of Heli, Mary’s father, but the Jews thought he was Joseph’s son. This is not tinkering with the text; it is a perfectly rational and logical conclusion, accepted by many intelligent and eminent scholars. One certainly has to tinker with the text, juggling with names, removing some and adding others, as we have seen, in order to make Heli the father of Joseph instead of the father of Mary.

As far as Matthew’s genealogy is concerned it certainly doesn’t say that Jesus was the son of Joseph: it says rather “Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ” (Matt. 1:16). This is very different from saying: “Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, who begat Jesus ...” It clearly does not say that Joseph begat Jesus!

Some scholars maintain that the words “as was supposed” in Lk. 3:23 could be rendered “as was allowed” or “as reckoned,” i.e. by law. If Joseph and Mary performed all things according to the Jewish law (Lk. 2:21-24), Joseph would have paid the 5 shekels redemption money (Num. 3:47. 18:16) when registering the birth of Jesus, giving him the right to be reckoned as the father, probably even naming him as his own son. Naturally many would therefore suppose that Joseph was the biological father of Jesus.

Because Joseph was the legal father of Jesus, even Mary referred to him as the father. But it has always been common practise for a man who adopts a child of whom he is not the biological father, to nevertheless be referred to as the father. Mary said to Jesus: “Your father and I have been worried about finding you” (Lk. 2:48). The reply of Jesus is significant: “How is it that you have been worried about finding me. Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s (God’s) house?” Critics have concluded from Mary’s remark that she regarded Joseph as the true biological father of her son, but it is evident that Luke intended her statement in no such way, inasmuch as he reports Jesus as setting the matter right, beyond all doubt. Joseph might have legal custody and authority in his own house, but God’s house is where Jesus’ true biological father dwelt!

At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, before the disciples came under his teaching, they naturally held to the Jewish view that Joseph was the father of Jesus. Philip for example gave expression to this (Jn. 1:45). However, once they came under the teaching of Jesus, they never referred

to him as the son of Joseph. Never! When Jesus asked them who they thought he was, Peter spoke up under inspiration from God and said: “You are the Messiah, the son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). If, as the critics argue, all Jews were regarded as sons of God and Jesus was just one of many, why would Peter need a special revelation from God that Jesus was the son of God? For the simple reason that Jesus was not one of many sons begotten by God; he was the “only” begotten.

ONLY BEGOTTEN

Now, it is stated 4 times in Scripture that Jesus was “begotten” by God (Ps. 2:7. Act. 13:33. Heb. 1:5. 5:5). The Greek word for begotten on these occasions is *gennao*, and it is translated “begat” many times in the genealogy in Matt. and other places in relation to begettal in a biological sense. However, *gennao* is also used in a metaphorical or spiritual sense, referring to those into whose minds the seed of the Word of God is planted, resulting in a spiritual conception and the birth of a new creature in Christ. Such people are “born” or “begotten” of God. (1 Jn. 5:1, 18. Jam. 1:18. 1 Pet. 1:23). Naturally, such people are called sons of God. (Jn. 1:12. Rom. 8:14, 19. 2 Cor. 6:18. Plp. 2:15. Heb. 12:7-8. 1 Jn. 3:1-2).

So then, *gennao* is used in both a biological and metaphorical or spiritual sense. Those who do not accept that Jesus was begotten by God in a biological sense, naturally apply the word begotten to him in a spiritual sense. However, Jesus is not merely referred to as being “begotten” by God; he is referred to on 5 occasions as being the “only begotten” (*monogenes*) of God (Jn. 1:14, 18. 3:16, 18. 1 Jn. 4:9). *Monogenes* literally means the sole, single, solitary begotten son of God, and it is impossible to apply this in a metaphorical sense, because, as has been pointed out, others besides Jesus were begotten in this sense.

We are therefore compelled to conclude that Jesus was begotten by God in a biological sense. *Monogenes* is never used in Scripture in a spiritual sense!

CAN'T ARGUE FROM SILENCE

Some argue that neither John, Mark or any of the epistles make reference to the virgin birth. But neither do they say that Jesus was the son of Joseph! So what does that prove? One cannot argue from silence. To do so would defeat the argument that Joseph was the father of Jesus.

While it may be true that there is no specific mention of the “virgin birth” by John, Mark and Paul etc, there are, as has been pointed out before, specific references to Jesus being divinely begotten, making him the “only begotten” son of God. Because the virgin birth necessitated divine begetting, all references to Jesus being the only begotten son of God imply the virgin birth. The two go hand in hand. The Holy Spirit preferred to emphasize the divine begetting and divine sonship rather than the virgin birth, because in so doing, the focus of attention is upon God the begetter rather than Mary the conceiver. When the focus is on Mary the conceiver, Mary gets the glory instead of God, and Mariolatry can be the result.

Those who do not believe that Jesus is the biological son of God, point out that God is referred to as the Father of the Jews and they are referred to as His son (Hos. 11:1. Mal. 2:10). They also point out that all true Christians are “begotten” by God, making Him their “Father” and themselves His “sons.” On this basis it is argued that the sonship of Jesus is to be understood in the same way and is no different.

However, Israel was not God’s “son” in a biological sense but in a nationalistic sense, and Christians are “sons” in a spiritual sense, not biological. Jesus alone is God’s son in a biological sense and for that reason he is solely and exclusively called “the only begotten” son of God.

Now, if it was commonly accepted by the Jews that every Jew was a son of God and that God was their Father, and Jesus was only a son of God in exactly the same sense, why did they accuse him of blasphemy and want to kill him, because he said God was his Father and that he was the son of God? (Jn. 5:18. 19:7). The reason why is because they knew he wasn’t claiming God was his Father merely in a nationalistic or spiritual sense, but in a biological sense. To them this was outrageous - blasphemous. They clearly knew that he wasn’t claiming to be the son of Joseph!

Also, if it was commonly believed that Jesus was the son of God in the same nationalistic or spiritual sense as others, why did Peter need a special revelation from God to inform him that Jesus was the son of God? (Matt. 16:13-17). If it was a foregone conclusion that every Jew was a son of God, why was a special revelation required to tell the apostles this? Jesus told Peter that “flesh and blood” was not the source of this revelation. What was flesh and blood saying about Jesus? The Jewish concept was that he was the son of Joseph, and only a son of God in a nationalistic sense. It is obvious from this that Jesus was not merely the son of God in a nationalistic or spiritual sense, but in a biological sense. The revelation to Peter was that Jesus was the son of God, not merely a

son of God, in the general sense.

Speaking in relation to an individual Christian, Paul says he is “a son of God” (Gal. 4:7). The definite article is never used in relation to an individual Jew or Christian. Such an one is never referred to in Scripture as “the son of God.” Christians are referred to collectively as “sons” (Jn. 1:12. Rom. 8:14, 19. 2 Cor. 6:18. Gal. 4:5-7. Plp. 2:15. Heb. 2:10. 12:7. 1 Jn. 3:1-2).

Only Jesus is referred to as “the son of God,” because the angel Gabriel told Mary that as a result of the divine begetting and conception, her son would be called “the son of God” (Lk. 1:32, 35). Every time that it is stated that Jesus is the son of God, expression is being given to the divine begetting which implies the virgin birth. In this respect, the New Testament is full of it, and it is quite ridiculous for anyone to say it is not taught by John, Mark, Paul etc just because the words “virgin birth” do not occur in their writings. It is affirmed over 50 times in the New Testament writings that Jesus is “the son of God.” And even Jesus himself stresses it (Rev. 2:18). Why is there such an emphasis if every Jew was regarded as a son of God in the same sense? It would not be a big deal!

The difference between the sonship of Jesus and all other Jews is conveyed in the parable recorded in Matt. 21:37-38 and Mk. 12:6. The Jewish prophets in the parable who were sent by God to receive fruit from the vineyard (Israel) are not referred to as “sons” but “servants.” “But last of all God sent His son, saying: they will reverence my son.” This conveys the fact that the sonship of Jesus was not the same as other Jews, including prophets. But according to the other view, the parable would mean: “God sent His sons to receive fruit, then He sent His son,” which would be weird!

If it was common knowledge that Jesus was the son of Joseph and a son of God in the general Jewish sense, why did Jesus say to the Jews: “I know where I come from and where I am going, but you cannot tell where I come from and where I am going.” ... “You do not know me or my Father ...” (Jn. 8:14-19). Again in Lk. 10:22 Jesus said: “No man knows who the son is, but only the Father (i.e. God, not Joseph) ... and he to whom the son will reveal him” i.e. as it was revealed to Peter. This is proof positive that the common Jewish conception of Joseph being the father of Jesus was wrong. If it was right, Jesus would not have said “You do not know where I come from” and “No man knows who the son is.” Neither would he have said that a revelation was required to know who he really is.

If Jesus is no more a son of God than any other Jew or Christian, then

why does the whole New Testament make such a big deal and place such an emphasis on him being the son of God? why do none of the Epistles say he was the son of Joseph? Never. Not once!

We read in Jn. 20:31 that believing Jesus is the son of God is necessary to gain life. We never read that believing he was the son of Joseph was necessary to gain life. I Jn. 4:15 says that it is necessary to confess that Jesus is the son of God if we want to dwell in God and have Him dwell in us. “He who believes on the son of God has the witness in himself: He who believes not God has made him a liar, because he does not believe the testimony that God gave concerning His son” (1 Jn. 5:9-13). In Acts 8:36-38 we learn that believing Jesus is the son of God is a vital prerequisite to baptism.

The huge emphasis in the New Testament on Jesus being the son of God, indicates it is a very important and fundamental truth. It demands that he is God’s son in a very special and exclusive way - in a way that no other man ever has or ever will be. Anyone who reduces his sonship to the same level as other men, making it commonplace, will have a lot to answer for, because they do not really believe he is the son of God in the full and true sense, and make the Lord a liar.

The Gospel records very clearly teach that God caused Mary to conceive (Matt. 1:18-20. Lk. 1:26-35). Conception involves the female seed or ovum being fertilized, and this is normally accomplished by the male sperm, but in Mary’s case it was accomplished by God’s power. For this reason, God was the father of Jesus in a real biological sense. As every man proceeds forth from his father in a seminal sense, so Jesus “proceeded forth” from his Father when His power issued forth from His presence and penetrated Mary’s ovum, causing her to conceive (Jn. 8:42). For this reason Jesus often said he came from heaven - from above not beneath, and had no control over it (Jn. 8:23). He said: “I came not of myself” i.e. I came not of my own accord or initiative (Jn. 7:28. 8:42). “I came from God. I came forth from the Father” (Jn. 16:27-28).

Never before or since has a man been begotten by God in this way. Jesus is uniquely and exclusively the only begotten son of God. For this reason Mary was told that “he shall be called the son of the Highest” (Lk. 1:32-35).

I believe that it is a fundamental mistake - a very serious error in fact to deny that Jesus was divinely begotten. Imagine how a man would feel if he begat a son and people denied that he was begotten by him and claimed he was begotten by another man. Would he not be upset and offended and angry, especially if someone went to the extreme of writing

a book, juggling with names and events in order to prove that his son was not begotten by him?

If Joseph believed he caused Mary to get pregnant, why did he want to terminate his engagement to her until an angel intervened and told him to marry her because her conception was caused by the Holy Spirit? And why, after marrying Mary, did Joseph not have sexual relations with her until after Jesus was born? (Matt. 1:25). Why not if he already had?

THE DIVINE BEGETTAL WAS FOREORDAINED

The divine conception of the redeemer was promised and foretold from the very beginning of the Bible in plain statements and in types or foreshadows. For example, Gen. 3:15 refers to him as the seed of a woman, not the seed of a man, which is very unusual and not normal. This was the first indication that Jesus would not be begotten by man.

Isaac, being the only son of Abraham through his wife Sarah, is referred to by the same term “only begotten” (monogenes) which is used of Jesus (Heb. 11:17). Being Abraham’s “only son” whom he “loved” (Gen. 22:2) and who he was asked to sacrifice at Jerusalem, Isaac was a type of Jesus. Due to the fact that Sarah was barren and had reached the age of 90, and Abraham was 99, and both of them had passed the age of being able to have children; it required the divine intervention of God’s Spirit-power for Isaac to be conceived and born. And so we read in Gal. 4:29 that Isaac was “born of the Spirit.” This remarkable intervention of God’s Spirit in order that Sarah could conceive and bear a son, was a foreshadow of greater things to come in relation to the begettal of the ultimate Redeemer seed of Abraham - Christ (Gal. 3:16).

A Messianic prophecy in Ps. 89:27 declares that Messiah would be God’s “firstborn,” higher than the kings of the earth. But if all other Jews born before him were also sons of God, why would the child born to Mary be referred to as God’s firstborn? The answer, again, is: because he was God’s “only begotten son” in a biological sense.

In Ps. 2:7 God comes right out into the open and makes a prophetic declaration concerning Messiah: “Thou art my son, this day have I begotten you.” (In prophetic discourse, God “speaks of things which have not happened as though they have already happened” Rom. 4:17). According to the apostle Paul, Ps. 2:7 refers to the divine begettal of Jesus (Act. 13:33), and I would give far more credence to Paul’s view on such matters than anyone else. Ps. 2:7 is also applied to the divine begettal of

Jesus in Heb. 1:5 and 5:5.

A LEVEL OF SONSHIP ABOVE OTHERS

Heb. 1:4-8 is particularly interesting. It teaches that Jesus is better or more exalted than the angels because “unto which of the angels did God ever say: “Thou art my son, this day have I begotten you,” and again: “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son?” In this passage of Scripture a contrast is made between the way in which Jesus and the angels were brought into existence. It says angels were “made” by God but Jesus was “begotten” by God. Being made by God, angels are referred to as “sons of God” (Job 38:7), and Adam likewise, being made by God, is referred to as son of God (Lk. 3:38). But neither Adam nor any of his descendants and not even angels were begotten by God. Only Jesus was begotten by God; he alone is the only begotten, and that puts him on a level of sonship above all others because being begotten is much more personal and intimate than being made or created.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

The divine begetting of Jesus is also implied in Isa. 7:14 where reference is made to a virgin conceiving and bearing a son, calling his name Immanuel. This is of course quoted in Matt. 1:22-23 in relation to the virgin Mary conceiving by the Holy Spirit before she and Joseph “came together” (v18). This clearly teaches that Mary conceived before she had conjugal relationship with Joseph. The Holy Spirit penetrated her ovum causing her to conceive, without breaking the hymen and terminating her virginity.

To offset this, some have pointed out that there was a measure of virginity given in the Mishnah (Jewish writings) at Niddah 1:4: “Who is the virgin? Any girl who never in her life saw a drop of blood (in menstruation) even though she is married.” Some also state that Mary may well have, as a married woman (to Joseph), conceived on her first ovulation and that would be a virgin conception.

It is rather sad how readily some turn to Jewish traditions and customs and other non Biblical writings preferring to accept them rather than the Biblical narrative. Jesus expressed his view of Jewish traditions by saying: “In vain do you worship me, teaching for doctrine the traditions of men.” Again: “How ingeniously you neutralize the Word of

God by your traditions.” The apostle Paul warned us to “not give heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men, that turn from the truth” (Tit. 1:14). “Beware lest any man lead you astray through philosophy and vain deceit, based on the traditions of men and the world” (Col. 2:8). Give me Matthew’s testimony any day over and above all Jewish traditions!

The prophecy in Isa. 7:14 implies that not only would a virgin conceive, but that she would still be a virgin when the time came to bear her son. Joseph made sure of this by not having sexual relationship with Mary until she gave birth. He was clearly not the father of Mary’s first born son!

Some contend that Matthew’s Greek copy of Isaiah had a mistake in it. They say that the Hebrew word “almah” which is translated “virgin” in Isa. 7:14 means young woman, not virgin, and that when Matthew quoted it, he should have used the Greek word for young woman (“neanis”) not the Greek word for virgin (“parthenos”). However, Matthew was inspired by God and He doesn’t make mistakes. The LXX translators, long before Jesus was born, considered “parthenos” a proper translation for “almah” in Isa. 7:14, for that is the word given in that translation.

The Hebrew word almah, translated “virgin” in Isa. 7:14 is also translated “virgin” or “virgins” in Gen. 24:43. Song Sol. 1:3. 6:8. It is also translated “maid” in Ex. 2:8. Pr. 30:19 and “damsels” Ps. 68:25. The word basically means a lass or young woman, and because young women in Israel in Biblical times were usually virgins, the word “virgin” is implied. All the verses quoted above where almah occurs, demand or suggest the idea of virginity. “Young woman,” “maid,” “damsel,” “lass” and “virgin” are therefore used synonymously. Because God had the virgin Mary ultimately in mind when He uttered those words in Isa. 7:14, He inspired Matthew to use the Greek word parthenos instead of neanis. So let’s not strive over words making distinctions that make no real difference!

Now, if Mary’s conception was natural and normal, caused by Joseph and not supernatural, why is it stated in Isa. 7:14 that it would be a “sign” from God? What is so divinely significant about a normal conception? In Isaiah and Matthew’s day, such conceptions were a dime a dozen!

To deny that Jesus was begotten by God in a biological sense, and to affirm that he was begotten by man, reduces him to the same level as ordinary man, who can only hope, ultimately, to be equal with angels, not above them (Lk. 20:36). Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, etc were also begotten by man, and to claim that Jesus was also begotten by man is to undermine his uniqueness and exclusiveness as the only begotten son of God - the only mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5) and therefore

the only name given under heaven by which we can be saved (Act. 4:12).

WHOSE SON IS HE?

The Jews of course denied the divine begettal of Jesus. They did believe however that their Messiah would be a son of David, due to his mother or father or both being descendants of David. As a result of this, they did not believe that their Messiah would be greater than David. David himself, being “anointed” by God was a Messiah in his time, and so they believed that when their Messiah arrived, he would be equal with David, but not greater or superior. Jewish custom or tradition did not allow for a son to be greater than his father.

Therefore, when Jesus presented the Jews of his day with the question: “What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?” They did not reply by saying: “The son of God.” Instead, they said: “The son of David.” This answer was half correct because Jesus was a descendant of David through Mary’s line on her father’s side. Due to Mary’s conception, she impregnated Jesus with genes from her father’s line, but God begat him, impregnating him with Himself, and that gave him a higher ancestry, putting him on a level above David.

And so Jesus, knowing that the Jews could not accept that Messiah would be divinely begotten and therefore greater and superior to David, put this question to them: “How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, called him Lord, saying: The Lord said to my Lord, sit on my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool. If David called him Lord how is he his son?” (Matt. 22:42-46). They had no answer!

Some of course would say that David acknowledged the superiority of Jesus and called him Lord because he was very God of very God and pre-existed as such before his birth. Well, calling a man Lord does not necessarily make him God. Sarah called Abraham Lord; Joshua called Moses Lord and Elisha called Elijah Lord, and there is a house of Lords in England! Calling Jesus Lord simply means acknowledging him as master and ourselves as his servants.

The reason for David being inspired to call Jesus Lord was because of divine begettal, and had nothing to do with a pre-existent status. The concept of a pre-existent God reducing Himself to an embryo and being planted inside Mary’s womb is bizarre to say the least. If such was the case, Mary would not have “conceived” in the true biological sense of the word; she would not be the true biological mother of Jesus; she would not impregnate Jesus with genes from David’s genealogical line, which means

Jesus would not be a son of David or Abraham. In short, he would be a false Messiah.

WHY THE DIVINE BEGETTAL?

At this point, some thoughts on why Messiah had to be divinely begotten:

When Adam and Eve made the choice to sin and disobey God, a propensity towards that choice became implanted in their spirit, resulting in them having a strong natural bias towards disobedience which is sin. In a conception, the woman's seed (ovum) impregnates the child with her genes and the man's seed (sperm) impregnates the child with his genes, which means the sinful propensities from both parents are passed on to their children. Each child receives a double whammy.

The propensity to sin, resulting in death, is so strong in the flesh that no one during the 4,000 years from Adam to Christ was able to fully conquer it and render 100% obedience. All sinned and all died. "Sin reigned unto death." Without divine intervention, this would have been the fate of every generation for eternity. But "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son ..." As pointed out before, this was hinted at in the promise in Gen. 3:15 of a woman's seed.

As a result of being begotten by God, Jesus was not impregnated with genes that had sinful tendencies from his Father, only from his mother. Due to inheriting propensities to sin from his mother, Jesus was tempted in all points like us, but due to inheriting a strong spirit due to genetic factors from his Father, he had the strength and moral fortitude to resist and conquer every temptation to sin. He rendered one hundred percent obedience - he never sinned.

The flesh by itself was too weak to conquer sin and open up the life-gate to glory and it would not have been good for the flesh to get the victory because it would give it ground for boasting. No! God wanted and deserved the glory, and He achieved it by providing salvation through His only begotten son to whom He gave His Spirit without measure. In a very real, physical, biological sense, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

Now, if no one begotten by man, including Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David etc, over a period of 4,000 years, could conquer sin in the flesh, how could Jesus have done it if he likewise was begotten by man? How could he achieve this when all before him failed? What made the difference? There is only one answer: Jn. 3:16; it was due to being the

only begotten son of God! But this is not to say that his birth made it impossible for him to be tempted and sin. He was clearly tempted and could have sinned had he chosen to do so. The virgin birth made sinlessness possible for Jesus but not inevitable. In the final analysis, sin was conquered not by human might nor by human power, but by God's Spirit. The Spirit was victorious over the flesh. The divine begetting along with Jesus' perfect submission to the promptings of the Spirit of God, was the power behind the victory over sin on the cross. It is that fundamental.

