

EXPLORATION: BIBLE

By Chip Thompson

Archeology in Nazareth Supports the Story of Jesus

Long before Jesus was born a prophecy about the future Jewish Messiah was given by the Prophet Isaiah. In about 720 BC, Yahweh, the God of Israel, spoke to King Ahaz saying, “The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, ‘the virgin’ shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14, NKJV). This prophecy was fulfilled in the small town of Nazareth.

First, let’s clear up a controversy. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and in the Hebrew scriptures, Isaiah 7:14 says, “The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the ‘young woman shall conceive’ and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel.” So, why do our Bibles say the ‘virgin shall conceive’?

Jewish skeptics like to accuse the early Christian church of changing this text to make it fit with their story of Jesus. But this is NOT true. Prior to the birth of Jesus, long before Christianity existed, Jewish scribes (not Christians) translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek (from about 280 BC to 132 BC). This translation is known as the Greek Septuagint. Jewish scribes translated Isaiah 7:14 to read the ‘virgin shall conceive.’

Why would Jewish scribes intentionally make this change? (It had NOTHING to do with Jesus.) When the Greek Septuagint was translated, the universal language of the civilized world was Greek. So, for the first time in world history, gentiles would be able to read the Jewish scriptures. In the Jewish Bible, a ‘young woman’ was expected to keep herself pure, to remain a ‘virgin’ until marriage. And, in the Jewish scriptures, with one possible exception, every time the term ‘young woman’ is used she was a ‘virgin.’ It was not, however, the cultural norm for young gentile/Greek women to remain virgins until marriage. So, in this case, translating the word ‘young woman’ to ‘virgin’ was to clarify the message of the text. This was not just a ‘young woman’ who would become pregnant, this was a ‘chaste young woman,’ a ‘virgin’ who would become pregnant.

This change also follows the context of Isaiah 7:14. The prophecy foretells a special sign from Yahweh God, an uncommon sign. Since it is common for young women to get pregnant, that would not be a miraculous sign, but if a virgin became pregnant that would be a one-of-a-kind sign. Also, the child was to be named ‘Immanuel’ which literally means ‘God with us.’ WOW what a sign that would be, a virgin giving birth to a Son who was God. In the eyewitness accounts of the life of

Jesus, 1st Century Jewish Christians affirm the fact that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy, that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah (Read: Matthew 1:18-25 & Luke 1:26-38).

You might ask, “How does the archeology in Nazareth support this amazing event?”



This is the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth today. It was built to commemorate the announcement of the angel Gabriel to a virgin named Mary that she would give birth to a son, and she was to call him Jesus.

If all we had was this modern church commemorating this event, that would not mean much, but that is not all we have. Below this modern church we have the ruins of a 1,000-year-old Crusader church, beneath the Crusader church we have the ruins of a 1,400 year old Byzantine church, beneath the Byzantine church we have the ruins of a Jewish-Christian Synagogue that was built sometime between 70 AD and 135 AD. And this synagogue was built over the home of the virgin Mary. Disciples of Jesus (possibly the Apostles themselves) built this synagogue to commemorate the miraculous conception of Jesus. These churches were built to proclaim the message that Jesus was born of a virgin and was Immanuel/God with us, the Jewish Messiah.

We know the above-mentioned synagogue was built in the late 1st or early 2nd century AD, but how can we be certain it was built by Jewish Christians?



In the plaster of this Synagogue the ‘Jesus Christ, Son of God Inscription’ was found. (It is faint, but this Greek inscription can be seen amidst the flowers if you look closely). It says, “The memory I made for the light + Christ Lord, save your servant... O Jesus Christ, Son of God, help... The servants of Jesus.”

Just as telling are the mosaic floor inscriptions found in this Synagogue.



Multiple crosses are seen in this first century mosaic floor: a ‘Jerusalem Cross’ (lower left); another cross (lower right); and a ‘Tau Rho/Cross’ (top). These crosses are the earliest Christian symbols found in archeology.

The evidence trail for the miraculous conception of Jesus leads back to the original Jewish disciples. You can agree or disagree with our faith based belief that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born, but you cannot deny the facts. This belief goes back to the earliest Jewish Christians and the virgin birth was prophesied long before Jesus was born. Yes, it takes faith to believe the evidence points to a Creator God who has the power to do anything. As Gabriel said to Mary, “For with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37). But it also takes faith to believe there is no Creator God and that our entire universe was created by some random explosion called The Big Bang. As for me, I choose to believe in the supernatural, to believe the eye-witness evidence offered by the Apostles that Jesus fulfilled, not just the prophecy of the virgin birth, but ALL the prophecies given in the Jewish scriptures. I choose to believe the angelic messenger who said, “You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).