

# Concerning the Miraculous Conception and Birth of the Messiah.

by John Gill

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*The miraculous conception and birth of the Messiah are prophesied in the Bible, and were fulfilled in the birth of Jesus.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:19

**Topics:** "Fulfillment of Prophecy", "Miraculous Conception"

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## Description

John Gill preaches on the miraculous conception and birth of the Messiah, emphasizing the fulfillment of prophecies that declare the Messiah would be born of a virgin, as foretold in Isaiah 7:14. He argues that this extraordinary event is a sign of God's divine intervention and a source of hope for the house of David amidst their fears. Gill further explains that the birth of Jesus Christ was a literal fulfillment of these prophecies, countering Jewish objections and affirming the uniqueness of the Messiah's incarnation. He highlights the significance of the virgin birth as a miraculous act of God, ensuring that Jesus was both fully divine and fully human, suitable to be our Savior. The sermon concludes by affirming the ongoing relevance of these prophecies and the assurance they provide to believers.

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## Transcript

The Prophecies Respecting the Messiah

CHAPTER V.

Concerning the miraculous Conception and Birth of the Messiah.

Having considered the lineage and descent of the Messiah, I shall proceed to inquire into the manner of his conception and birth, which were to be very extraordinary and unheard of; for it appears from several prophecies, that he was to be born of a virgin, which truth I shall endeavor to establish from the consideration of the following ones; and shall begin, First, With Isaiah 7:14; Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

This is the grand and principle prophecy which concerns this affair; for though it might be hinted before, yet it does not seem to be so clearly revealed till now.

The Messiah, in his person and office, was gradually revealed unto the sons of men; what some ages had but a very faint and glimmering view, others enjoyed a more perfect knowledge of: the first prophecy may indeed be well thought to contain this truth, when it speaks of the Messiah as the seed of the woman; but yet it does not so clearly express it as this, for Eve does not seem to be apprehensive of it, who, upon the birth of her first child, says (Gen. 4:1), I have gotten a man &#1488;&#1514;&#1470;&#1497;&#1492;&#1493;&#1492; the Lord; which Jonathan ben Uzziel paraphrases thus, "I have gotten a man, the angel of the Lord;" supposing that she had got the promised seed, the angel of God's presence, and messenger of the covenant; now had she clearly known that he was to be born of a

virgin, she could not have imagined that she had brought him forth and perhaps this may be the reason, why many of the good women of Israel, as Rachael, and Hannah, were so desirous of children, every one hoping that the Messiah would come of them, not being so well acquainted with the extraordinary manner of his birth; but this prophecy of Isaiah puts it beyond all doubt that he was to be born of a virgin; nor could the Jews ever after expect him to be born of any other, as will manifestly appear from the following considerations. 1st, The Hebrew word &#1510;&#1500;&#1502;&#1492; signifies a virgin, and no other, and is justly rendered by parqenoV, by the evangelist Matthew, as it had been some hundreds of years before by the Septuagint interpreters, and appears to be the constant and

universal sense of the word in all places of the Old Testament where it is used, which are these following, Genesis 23:43, Exodus 2:8, Psalm 68: 21, Canticles 1:3 and 6:8, and Proverbs 30:19 the latter of which the Jews have pitched upon, and chiefly insist on, as militating against this sense of the word &#1510;&#1500;&#1502;&#1492; used by Solomon for a maid, or virgin, where they say it cannot be meant of a pure and uncorrupted virgin; because, it is added, such is the way of an adulterous woman, she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness to which I answer, that it does not appear, that the maid and the adulterous woman, are one and the same person; but supposing they were, she might, though vitiated be called a maid, or virgin, according to her own

profession of herself, or as she appeared to others who knew her not; or as she was antecedent to her defilement, which is no unusual thing in scripture (see Deut. 22:28); though the genuine sense of the words seems to be this, that Solomon was not acquainted with, much less approved of the secret contrivances, artful ways, and hidden methods, which wicked men take to seduce and decoy innocent virgins, and compass their lust upon them; for had it been intended of the way of natural generation, he could not be ignorant of it; so that this instance makes nothing for them, nor anything against us; besides, the Hebrew word is derived from the root &#1510;&#1500;&#1502; which signifies to hide, or cover, which well agrees with the pure and incorrupt state of virgins; as also with a common

custom used in the eastern nations, where virgins were kept recluse, and shut up from the public company and conversation of men. 2dly, The birth of this son is represented as something stupendous and extraordinary, as a sign, &#1488;&#1493;&#1514;, a prodigy, wonder, or miracle; and for that reason has a behold prefixed unto it: Was the meaning of the prophet only this that a young married woman should be with child, where would the wonder be?

What surprising thing is this which every day gives us repeated instances of? And if this was all that is intended, what need of such a pompous apparatus as this to introduce it?

Near ye now, O house of David--the Lord himself shall give you a sign, behold, &c, Some of the Jewish writers would have the sign, or wonder, be, that this young woman was unfit for conception at the time of this prophecy; but no such intimation is given either in the text or context; others, that it lies in this, that it was a male child, and not a female which is predicted; but the sign or wonder does not lie in the truth of the prophet's prediction, but in the greatness of the thing predicted; besides, the verification of this would not have given the prophet much credit, nor Ahaz, or the house of David, much consolation for this might have ascribed rather to a happy conjecture, than to a spirit of prophecy; much less can the wonder be, that this child should eat butter and honey as

soon as it was born, as others, when nothing is more natural to and common with young children, than to take down any kind of liquids which are sweet and pleasant. 3dly, The scope of the prophecy is to comfort the dejected house of David, who appear to be in the utmost confusion, at the tidings of the conspiracy formed against them by the kings of Syria and Israel; upon which Isaiah is sent with a message to Ahaz, who, upon meeting with that prince, attended with his nobles, bids him ask a sign of the Lord his God, either in the height above or in the depth; but he, in a haughty, irreverent, and irreligious manner, rejected it, under a specious pretence of not tempting God; upon which the prophet turns himself from him to the distressed house of David, and comforts them with the news of

the Messiah's birth, who was to spring from them, than which nothing could be more supporting to them under their present fears; for hereby he assures them that they should never be destroyed or cut off before the Messiah came; who was to be born of a pure virgin; and consequently they need not fear anything from this formidable confederacy. 4thly, This prophecy had its literal accomplishment in Jesus, whose conception and birth were after this extraordinary manner, which cannot be said of any other person (Matthew 1:19, 22, 23); Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: when as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost--which was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, &c. which matter of fact, as it was not attempted to be disproved by the Jews in Christ's time, who were most capable of discovering the fraud or imposture, if there had been any, so it cannot by the malice and cunning of later ones, who, though in contradiction to it, do now assert, that the Messiah was to be born as other men are, in the ordinary and common way of generation; yet it appears, that they were formerly of different sentiments, as is manifest from several of their traditional sayings, recorded both in their own writings and in the writings of the evangelists, which Bishop Chandler has collected and laid together in his excellent Defense of Christianity, and it deserves to be remarked what that learned prelate observes, that those who set

up for Messiahs, as Simon Magus, and others, pretended to have God for their father, and to be born of a virgin; and no wonder they should, for how could they expect to be received, especially among the Jews, without such a pretence, when so glaring a prophecy as this respecting the manner of the Messiah's birth, stood so openly in their sacred books?

The Jews object several things to the application of this prophecy to Jesus, which are as follow: 1. They say, that the birth of this child was to be a sign to Ahaz, and to the house of David, of present deliverance, which say they, the birth of Jesus, seven or eight hundred years afterwards, could not be to which I answer, that this promise does not seem to be made to Ahaz; he having despised the prophet, and rejected his offer, but to the disconsolate house of David; who are hereby assured, that no conspiracy, now, or hereafter formed against them, should ever succeed to the extirpation or destruction of them,

before Immanuel came, who was to be born of a virgin; and indeed, as Mr.

Whiston well observes, "The longer that birth was future, the longer was the house of David secure by this prophecy of deliverance from destruction: because that family was by no means to fail till the birth of Immanuel, of a pure virgin, was come to pass." Besides, what, is suggested, that a thing future cannot be a sign of what is present, or of what was done long before the sign existed, is not always true; for Moses' serving God on mount Horeb, after he had brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, is mentioned in Exodus 3:12 as a sign or a token of his present mission to that people, which was some considerable time before this sign existed; so likewise the sign of the deliverance of the city of Jerusalem from the army of Senacherib king of Assyria, was not fully to exist until the third year after it (Isa. 37:30), moreover, the word sign is not to be taken relatively, but absolutely for a wonder or miracle; and we find that signs and wonders are frequently joined together in scripture, as explanative of each other; and it is easy to observe, that the miracles of Jesus Christ are sometimes called signs. 2.

They object that this deliverance was to be before this child came to years of discretion, and therefore cannot be understood of one that was to be born several hundreds of years after; to which it may be replied, there is no necessity of concluding, that the child, in verse 16 is the same with the son that was to be born of a virgin, in verse 14, but rather the prophet's son Shearjashub, whom he is bid to take with him (v. 3), and who must therefore be supposed to bear some part, or answer some end or other in this prophecy, which it is very probable may be this, namely, to assure the house of David, that the land which was abhorred by them, should he forsaken of both her kings, before the child, which was with him, was grown to years of discretion; though it may as well be understood of any child, and so of the promised Messiah; and the meaning be, that before any child, or new born babe, such an one as is promised in verse 14 arrives to years of discretion, that is, in the space of three or four years, this remarkable deliverance shall be wrought, and ye shall be freed from all fears of being destroyed by those princes. 3.

They further argue that this son prophesied of, was to be called Immanuel; whereas Jesus was never called so; in answer to which it will be sufficient to say, that the meaning is, that he should be so, and not that this should be the name whereby he should be commonly called, which is a very frequent use of this phrase in scripture; as for instance, it is said of the child prophesied of in Isaiah 9:6 that his name should he called wonderful, counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting father, and prince of peace; now let this child be who he will, Hezekiah, or the Messiah, or any other, it cannot be supposed that he should be usually called, and commonly known by all those several and pompous names, but only that there should be something in him, or done by him, which should answer to these characters given of him, which agrees with the instance under consideration; Jesus is the true Immanuel, God with us, God in our nature, who dwelt among us, and has, by his blood, procured peace and reconciliation with God for us.

Besides, though Jesus and Immanuel differ in sound, yet not in sense, the one signifying a Savior, the other God with us, who when he is so, is a Savior to us; so that Jesus is to us, what he is here promised he should be. 4. What they further object, that it is no where said of Jesus that he eat butter and honey, as is said of this child (v. 15) is very weak and ridiculous; for though the evangelist does not relate this, it does not from thence follow that he did not eat thereof, it is rather highly reasonable to suppose he did; for the land of Canaan where he was born, was a land flowing with milk and honey; so that there was plenty of this kind of food for poor families, in one of which Jesus was born, and therefore no doubt lived upon the common food of the country; besides, the phrase seems designed to express the truth of his human nature, that he should be educated as other children were, and does very particularly point out the land where he was to be born.

Now, for such reasons as these, they, as well as some others, would not have this prophecy understood of Jesus, but of Ahaz's wife, and his son Hezekiah, which cannot be; for Ahaz reigned but sixteen years (2 Kings 16:2), and Hezekiah his successor was twenty-five years old when he began his reign (2 Kings 18:2), so that he was nine years of age when Ahaz began to reign, and therefore could not be less than eleven or twelve years old when this prophecy was given; which some Jewish writers observing, have declined this sense of the words, and would have them be understood of some other son of Ahaz, by some young woman; but no other son of Ahaz, was ever lord of Judea, as this Immanuel is represented to be, in chapter 8:8, nor can the words be understood of Isaiah's wife and son, since Isaiah would never call her a virgin who had born him children, one of which was now with him; nor indeed a young woman, but rather the prophetess, as he does in chapter 8:3, nor was any son of his king of Judah, as this appears to be in the place before cited.

Therefore as this prophecy is applicable to none but Jesus, so it had a literal accomplishment in him only. R. Akiba explained it the same way as we Christians do. But I proceed, Secondly, To the consideration of Jeremiah 31:22, as another prophecy respecting the extraordinary conception and birth of the Messiah; where it is thus written, how long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? For the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth: a woman shall compass a man.

That the incarnation of the Messiah is here intended, will appear, if we consider that all other senses, whether of Jewish or Christian interpreters, are weak, ridiculous, and impertinent; as when they understand the text to refer to the heroic spirit which appears in some women, superior to men; to the unusual practice of women suing to men to be joined in marriage to them, as in Isaiah 4:1, or to the people of Israel's turning to God after their apostasy from him, with others of the same stamp.

Besides, the context manifestly shows, that this is a prophecy of the Messiah; from here are several blessings promised which only could be had from him, and which the Jews only expected in his days; (see vv. 10-14), and it deserves to be remarked, that the slaughter of the infants, at his birth, is prophesied of in verse 15, which I shall particularly consider hereafter: moreover, the scope of the text well suits with the incarnation of the Messiah, which is to excite the Jews to return to their own land, since nothing could more effectually do it, than to put them in mind that the Messiah was to be born there, whose incarnation was to be extraordinary: he was to be conceived by, and born of a virgin, which may therefore well be called a new thing, an unheard of one, and a creation; for the human nature was immediately prepared and formed, by the power of the Holy Ghost, without the help of man.

This phrase, a woman's compassing a man, does very aptly express her conception and bearing of a man child, and intends here such a conception as is extraordinary and miraculous, and therefore is called a new thing in the earth, produced by an almighty creative power. Besides, to whom can this &#1504;&#1489;&#1512;, this mighty man be so well referred as to the man, God's fellow, the promised Messiah. Some of the Jews themselves have acknowledged, that the Messiah is here intended, and that by this woman is to be understood a virgin: the version of the Septuagint very manifestly hints at it, which renders the words thus, *ote ektise kurioV swthrian eiV katafuteusin kainhn*, because the Lord hath created salvation for a new plantation; by which they seem to design no other than the promised Savior, the branch of the Lord's planting, which was to be beautiful and glorious, as well as to arise in a new, surprising, and unheard of manner.

Thirdly, This surprising mystery of the Messiah's incarnation, is represented in Daniel 2:45; by a stone cut out of the mountain without hands. That the Messiah's kingdom is intended in the former verse, the Jews

acknowledge, and what is said of it well suits with the kingdom of Jesus, which is not of this world; but is a spiritual one; set up by God himself, and not supported and preserved by human policy or worldly force, and so is such a kingdom as this was to be, notwithstanding the insinuations of a late author to the contrary; for though it shall break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms, yet this shall not be effected by force of arms, or worldly policy, but by the prevalence of the gospel, in rooting out from among them, idolatry, superstition, and every thing else which is opposed to his kingdom; and by subjecting them entirely to him, whose kingdom shall stand for ever, which cannot be said of any other; nor should the small beginnings of it, or time progress it has yet made in the world, be any hindrance to our faith in the full and complete accomplishment hereof; seeing it is manifest enough, that the Messiah's kingdom, in this sense, is set up, gains ground, and is daily advancing in the world.

But to proceed to the consideration of these words, let it be observed, 1st, That it is no unusual thing in scripture for a king or kingdom to be signified by a stone: nor is it any thing uncommon for the Messiah to be represented under the same metaphor; as in Genesis 49:24, from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel, that is, the Messiah, who is both the shepherd of his flock, and the rock and fortress of his people, who, as man, descended from Jacob, and as the God-man from Jacob's God.

R. Saadiah Gaon explains the text in Daniel, by this in Genesis. So Psalm 118:22, the stone which the builders refused, is become the head stone of the corner, is to be understood of the Messiah, as it is applied, both by Jesus Christ and his apostles (Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:10, 11; 1 Pet. 2:7); which is acknowledged by the Jews themselves; and is sufficiently evident from the context; (see also Isa. 28:16), and the Targum on the place, which tried stone there spoken of Jarchi understands of the king Messiah, agreeable to 1 Peter 2:6. 2dly, It deserves to be remarked, that natural generation, especially when there is something unusual and remarkable in it, is sometimes expressed by a cutting, hewing, or digging out of a rock, as in Isaiah 51:1, 2; hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that, seek the Lord, look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged; which metaphorical expressions are explained in the, following words, "Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you;" where the birth of Isaac, when his father was an hundred years old, and his mother ninety, which was something extraordinary, is manifestly referred to; to which might be, added, Deuteronomy 32:18 where a phrase is used which may deserve consideration under this head. 3dly, It ought to be observed, that this phrase without hands, is expressive of a work, not to be effected by the hands of man, but by the power of God, which is the constant use of the phrase in the New Testament, borrowed from hence (see 2 Cor. 5:1; Col. 2:2; Heb. 8:2); now this, as it is applied to the Messiah, who is here represented under the metaphor of a stone, and whose incarnation is expressed by being cut out of a mountain, signifies, that it was sine opere virili, without the help of man, and was brought about in a divine, supernatural, and extraordinary manner, as was the birth of the Messiah, Jesus, who was born of a virgin, through the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost, which is both an instance of almighty power on God's part, and wonderful condescension on Christ's, as well as gives a very great display of the divine wisdom, which has provided a Savior for us in our own nature, brought into the world in such a way, whereby he became entirely exempted from that pollution which has infected all human nature; so that hereby, that human nature, which was assumed by him, was very fit and proper to be united to a divine person, and he a very suitable Savior for us sinners (Heb. 7:26), for such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.

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