

# The Virgin Birth

The New Testament claims that Jesus was born from a Virgin, proving that he was divine. It quotes the verse Isaiah 7:14 as the prophecy which this supposed virgin birth is fulfilling. Here, we see the two passages:

## Matthew 1:22-23

Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "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".

## Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and will call his name Immanuel.

הרה וילדת בן וקראת שמו עמנו אל: העלמה לכן יתן ה' הוא לכם אות הנה

There are many problems with this proof-text, but we will just take a look at two problems. First, the verse is taken out of context. When read in context, one quickly discovers that this is not a messianic prophecy at all – it doesn't have either of the two necessary characteristics – it doesn't speak of a time of world-wide peace, nor does it speak of a time of universal belief in God. If after reading the entire chapter 7 of Isaiah, we go on to chapter 8, we even see that Isaiah himself tells us exactly who the child is.

Second, we have the problem of mistranslation. In the Christian translation into English, there are at least three words that are mistranslated either literally or conceptually. We will look at the mistranslation issue after first exploring the passage in context..

## Isaiah 7

(1) Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, *that* Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to *make* war against it, but could not prevail against it.

(2) And it was told to the house of David, saying, "Syria's forces are deployed in Ephraim." So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.

(3) Then Hashem said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Jashub your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller's Field,

(4) and say to him: 'Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and the son of Remaliah.

(5) Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying,

(6) "Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabeal"—

(7) thus says Hashem GOD: "It shall not stand, Nor shall it come to pass.

(8) For the head of Syria *is* Damascus, And the head of Damascus *is* Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, So that it will not be a people.

(9) The head of Ephraim *is* Samaria, and the head of Samaria *is* Remaliah's son. If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established." ' "

(10) Moreover Hashem spoke again to Ahaz, saying,

(11) "Ask a sign for yourself from Hashem your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above."

(12) But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test Hashem!"

- (13) Then he said, "Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?"
- (14) Therefore Hashem Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the young woman shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.
- (15) Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good.
- (16) For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.
- (17) Hashem will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father's house—days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah."
- (18) And it shall come to pass in that day that Hashem will whistle for the fly that *is* in the farthest part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that *is* in the land of Assyria.
- (19) They will come, and all of them will rest in the desolate valleys and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all thorns and in all pastures.
- (20) In the same day Hashem will shave with a hired razor, with those from beyond the River, with the king of Assyria, The head and the hair of the legs, and will also remove the beard.
- (21) It shall be in that day *that* a man will keep alive a young cow and two sheep;
- (22) So it shall be, from the abundance of milk they give, that he will eat curds; for curds and honey everyone will eat who is left in the land.
- (23) It shall happen in that day, that wherever there could be a thousand vines worth a thousand shekels of silver, it will be for briers and thorns.
- (24) With arrows and bows men will come there, because all the land will become briers and thorns.
- (25) And to any hill which could be dug with the hoe, you will not go there for fear of briers and thorns; but it will become a range for oxen and a place for sheep to roam.

## Isaiah 8

- (3) Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then Hashem said to me, "Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz;
- (4) for before the child shall have knowledge to cry 'My father' and 'My mother,' the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria."

## Context

Now that we've looked at the entire passage in context, we'll break it into pieces to get a better understanding of what is actually happening.

- (1) Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, *that* Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to *make* war against it, but could not prevail against it.
- (2) And it was told to the house of David, saying, "Syria's forces are deployed in Ephraim." So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.

Verses 1 and 2 tell the story of the King of Judah (Ahaz) who finds out that the King of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) has conspired with the King of Syria to march south and attack and conquer the Southern Kingdom (Judah). When Ahaz finds out that the Syrian forces have made their way into the heart of Israel, he and the residents of Judah became very scared.

- (3) Then Hashem said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Jashub your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller's Field,
- (4) and say to him: 'Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and the son of Remaliah.

- (5) Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying,  
 (6) "Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabel"—  
 (7) thus says Hashem God: "It shall not stand, Nor shall it come to pass."

In verses 3-7, G-d tells the Prophet Isaiah that he needs to pay a visit to Ahaz, and that he should take his son with him. It is also possible, depending on the age of the child, that this included his wife, although that is certainly not specified in the passage, but may be relevant later. Isaiah is told that he needs to tell King Ahaz not to fear the two kings, even though they are threatening to invade, because, as it says in verse 7, "It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass." Not gonna happen, Ahaz.

- (8) For the head of Syria *is* Damascus, and the head of Damascus *is* Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, So that it will not be a people.  
 (9) The head of Ephraim *is* Samaria, and the head of Samaria *is* Remaliah's son. If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established." ' "

In verse 8 we see that G-d says that within 65 years the Northern Kingdom will be destroyed, obliterated – "So that it will not be a people", but, warns the Prophet, you're not going to make it if you don't have faith. After all, 65 years is a long time to be quaking in your boots waiting for a prophecy to be fulfilled.

- (10) Moreover Hashem spoke again to Ahaz, saying,  
 (11) "Ask a sign for yourself from Hashem your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above."  
 (12) But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test Hashem!"  
 (13) Then he said, "Hear now, O house of David! *Is it* a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?  
 (14) Therefore Hashem Himself will give you a sign:

So, Isaiah tells Ahaz to ask G-d for a sign, any sign, the fulfillment of which will give Ahaz the strength to believe for the 65 years it will take to see the fulfillment of the prophecy. Remember, G-d Himself said that if Ahaz doesn't believe, he's not going to make it. Ahaz, out of a moment of humility, whether pure or feigned, says he's not going to test G-d, G-d forbid. When Ahaz says he's not going to ask for a sign, Isaiah tells Ahaz that G-d's going to give him a sign anyway. (It must have been very important to G-d that Ahaz have the strength to endure the long period he would have to wait).

- (14) Therefore Hashem Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the young woman (Christian translation: virgin) shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.  
 (15) Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good.  
 (16) For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.

Reading verses 14-16 as a whole, what do we see is the sign that G-d is giving Ahaz? Is the sign that a young woman (or virgin – it doesn't matter for the sake of this part of the discussion, we will address the translation in the next section) is going to conceive? Is the sign that she is going to give birth to a son? Is the sign that his mother will call him Immanuel? Is the sign that the child will eat curds and honey, or that he will know good from evil? NO, NO, NO!!!! The sign, as clearly pointed out in verse 16 is that before the child is old enough to know good from evil (3-5 years old), the King of Syria and the King of Israel are going to abandon their countries. That's the sign!

Isaiah is telling Ahaz that he doesn't have to wait 65 years to know that he's not going to be conquered, he only needs to wait 3-5 years, then, even before the time is up, the land will be abandoned by its kings and he can rest assured for the next 60 years that G-d will fulfill his word. The child is not the sign – not his birth, not his gender, not his name or his diet – the child is only a marker for the sign. That is, the King just needs to watch the child grow and develop and he will know that the fulfillment of the prophecy is at hand.

The rest of the chapter uses the phrase, "in that day" many times, indicating that this is a prophecy concerning what exactly is going to happen when the kings abandon the land. No, Ahaz, it's not going to be pretty – life's going to get nasty, but don't worry, as hard as it is, you will not be destroyed. That's the reason that G-d told him that he wouldn't make it if he didn't have faith – it's not going to be a cake walk.

There is no indication, anywhere in the chapter that there is a second, future fulfillment of this prophecy having to do with a virgin conceiving and giving birth to a divine god-man who would save his people from their sins. It's just not there. In fact, even if you could read a "miraculous" birth into the story, there is nothing in the text indicating that this child will be a messiah (of ANY sort). Now, let's briefly look at chapter 8:

- (3) Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then Hashem said to me, "Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz;
- (4) for before the child shall have knowledge to cry 'My father' and 'My mother,' the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria."

In chapter 8, Isaiah himself tells us that the child was the marker for the sign, and not only that, but that the child is HIS child, and the young woman is HIS wife.

## Translation

Now that we've seen that based on an honest look at the context of the passage, Isaiah 7:14 is not a messianic prophecy, let's look at the translation problems. Isaiah 7:14 reads in the Hebrew:

הרה וילדת בן וקראת שמו עמנו אל:העלמהלכן יתן ה' הוא לכם אות הנה

For approximately two thousand years, Christianity has maintained that the Hebrew word, עלמה (almah) can only mean a virgin. Matthew 1:22-23 translates עלמה in Isaiah 7:14 as a virgin.

It is interesting to note that this passage is the only proof text provided by the Christian bible from the Hebrew Scriptures to support the concept of the virgin birth. This is a significant issue because if the Hebrew word עלמה does not actually mean virgin, then the New Testament is misquoting the prophet Isaiah and a core doctrine of Christianity collapses.

The word עלמה has a masculine version of the word, עלם. Nowhere in the Christian bible is it translated as a male virgin, it is always translated as a young man. This is because the words עלמה and עלם have nothing to do with whether or not one is a virgin, it has to do with age only. Just as the word (na'arah) נער only refers to a young woman (or man); specifically, a teenager.

A standard missionary argument is to claim that Jews changed the definition of the word עלמה after Jesus' death to try to disprove his virgin birth. They claim that this is proven by the "fact" that the Septuagint translates עלמה in Isaiah 7:14 as "parthenos" which supposedly can only mean virgin in Greek. They claim that the translators of the Septuagint were Jewish scholars who knew what they were doing and knew that עלמה meant virgin.

There are several problems with this argument. First of all, the Septuagint was not translated by Hebrew scholars; only the first five books – the Torah – were. In addition to the fact that the Septuagint was translated by a variety of people, there is no solid proof that the book of Isaiah which is currently part of the Septuagint was even translated before the time of Jesus. In addition, a careful examination of the Septuagint shows at least one place where the word "parthenos" cannot refer to a virgin. See Genesis 34:1-7.

Below is an exact copy of the text of the Introduction to the Hendrickson version of the Septuagint. Hendrickson is a Christian publishing house.

## INTRODUCTION.

### AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE SEPTUAGINT VERSION.

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The earliest version of the Old Testament Scriptures which is extant, or of which we possess any certain knowledge, is the translation executed at Alexandria in the third century before the Christian era: this version has been so habitually known by the name of the SEPTUAGINT, that the attempt of some learned men in modern times to introduce the designation of the Alexandrian version (as more correct) has been far from successful.

The history of the origin of this translation was embellished with various fables at so early a period, that it has been a work of patient critical research in later times to bring into plain light the facts which may be regarded as well authenticated.

A writer, who calls himself Aristeas, says that when Ptolemy Philadelphus was engaged in the formation of the Alexandrian Library, he was advised by Demetrius Phalereus to procure a translation of the sacred books of the Jews. The king accordingly, as a preliminary, purchased the freedom of more than one hundred thousand Jewish captives, and he then sent a deputation, of which Aristeas himself was one, to Eleazar the high-priest to request a copy of the Jewish Law and *seventy-two* interpreters, six out of each tribe. To this the priest is represented to have agreed; and after the arrival of the translators and their magnificent reception by the king, they are said to have been conducted to an island by Demetrius, who wrote down the renderings on which they agreed by mutual conference; and thus the work is stated to have been completed in seventy-two days. The translators are then said to have received from the king most abundant rewards; and the Jews are stated to have asked permission to take copies of the version.

Other additions were subsequently made to this story: some said that each translator was shut into a separate cell, and that all by divine inspiration made their versions word for word alike; others said that there were two in each cell, accompanied by an amanuensis; but at all events miracle and direct inspiration were supposed to be connected with the translation: hence we cannot wonder that the authority attached to this version in the minds of those who believed these stories was almost unbounded.

The variety of the translators is proved by the unequal character of the version: some books show that the translators were by no means competent to the task, while others, on the contrary, exhibit on the whole a careful translation. The Pentateuch is considered to be the part the best executed, while the book of Isaiah appears to be the very worst.

*This is a word-for-word reformatted reproduction of the introduction of Hendrickson's version of the Septuagint.*

### Septuagint: Genesis Chapter 34:1-7

- 1 ἐξῆλθεν δὲ Δινα ἡ θυγάτηρ Λειας ἣν ἔτεκεν τῷ Ιακωβ καταμαθεῖν τὰς θυγατέρας
- 2 τῶν ἐγχωρίων. καὶ εἶδεν αὐτὴν Συχεμ ὁ υἱὸς Εμμουρ ὁ Χορραῖος ὁ ἄρχων τῆς
- 3 γῆς καὶ λαβὼν αὐτὴν ἐκοιμήθη μετ' αὐτῆς καὶ ἐταπείνωσεν αὐτήν. καὶ προσέσχεν τῇ ψυχῇ  
Δινας τῆς θυγατρὸς Ιακωβ καὶ ἠγάπησεν τὴν παρθένον καὶ
- 4 ἐλάλησεν κατὰ τὴν διάνοιαν τῆς παρθένου αὐτῆς. εἶπεν δὲ Συχεμ πρὸς Εμμουρ τὸν
- 5 πατέρα αὐτοῦ λέγων λαβέ μοι τὴν παιδίσκη ταύτην εἰς γυναῖκα. Ιακωβ δὲ ἤκουσεν ὅτι ἐμίανεν  
ὁ υἱὸς Εμμουρ Διναν τὴν θυγατέρα αὐτοῦ οἱ δὲ υἱοὶ αὐτοῦ ἦσαν μετὰ τῶν κτηνῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ  
πεδίῳ παρεσιώπησεν δὲ Ιακωβ ἕως τοῦ
- 6 ἐλθεῖν αὐτούς. ἐξῆλθεν δὲ Εμμουρ ὁ πατὴρ Συχεμ πρὸς Ιακωβ λαλῆσαι αὐτῷ.
- 7 οἱ δὲ υἱοὶ Ιακωβ ἦλθον ἐκ τοῦ πεδίου ὡς δὲ ἤκουσαν κατενύχθησαν οἱ ἄνδρες καὶ λυπηρὸν ἦν  
αὐτοῖς σφόδρα ὅτι ἄσχημον ἐποίησεν ἐν Ἰσραὴλ κοιμηθεὶς μετὰ τῆς θυγατρὸς Ιακωβ καὶ οὐχ  
οὕτως ἔσται.

### GENESIS 34:1-7

- 1 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land.
- 2 When Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her by force.
- 3 He was deeply attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her.
- 4 So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this young girl for a wife."
- 5 Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter; but his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob kept silent until they came in.
- 6 Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him.
- 7 Now the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved, and they were very angry because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done.

Clearly, after Dina had been raped by Shechem, she was no longer a virgin. The word in verse four which is translated in the Septuagint as "parthenos" and in English as "young girl" is the word ילדה which simply indicates that she was young. And yet, the Septuagint translates the word as "parthenos" indicating that the word "parthenos" does not always and exclusively mean virgin. Therefore, one cannot assert that the translators of the Septuagint, no matter who they may be, had any understanding that is different from that which we have today.

Whereas the word עלמה refers only to a girl's age, regardless of sexual status, there is a word that refers only to the sexual status of a woman, regardless of her age. That is the word בתולה (betulah). The word בתולה is used in the following verses – Deuteronomy 22:14, Isaiah 62:5, 1 Kings 1:2 and Judges 11:38. Additionally, the prophet Isaiah himself uses the word בתולה five times throughout the book of Isaiah (23:4, 23:12, 37:22, 47:1 and 62:5 as stated above), when he is specifically referring to a virgin. Had the prophet Isaiah not used the word בתולה (betulah), one would be left to speculate what he meant in verse 14, but given that he did use the word בתולה (betulah), it is clear that his use of the word עלמה (almah) here did not mean virgin.

It is significant that while the word עלמה has a masculine form – עלם, the word בתולה has no such male form. This is because when a woman goes from being a virgin to not being a virgin, there is a physical

change that takes place – one which can be verified by a Doctor. This is not the case with a man. When a man is intimate with a woman, nothing physically changes and a Doctor cannot tell through a physical examination whether or not he is, indeed, a virgin.

We see this fact born out in a passage from the book of proverbs.

### **Mishlei (Proverbs) 30:18-19**

(18) There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand:

(19) The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maiden.

The passage above describes four things which, when they are finished, leave no trace.

1. The way of an eagle in the air – when an eagle flies through the air, it leaves no trace that it had ever been there. You cannot look in the sky and see where the eagle was.
2. The way of a serpent on a rock – unlike a serpent in the sand or a slug on a rock, when a serpent travels on a rock, it too, leave no trace of its presence.
3. The way of a ship in the midst of the sea – while a ship does create a wake while it is travelling, once it has left the area, there is no evidence that it was ever there.
4. The way of a man with a maiden – the Hebrew word used here is עלמה (almah), and it is clearly not referring to a virgin. For when a man has had his way with a virgin, he leaves permanent evidence of his act – she is forever changed physically. However, when a man and a woman are intimate and the woman is not a virgin, there is no change and no evidence that he has been there.

Moving on to other translation issues in Isaiah 7:14, we find that the verse reads:

Behold the young pregnant woman will give birth to a son.

וקראת שמו עמנו אל:הנה העלמה הרה וילדת בן לכן יתן ה' הוא לכם אות

There are two problems with the Christian translation of the text here. First of all, when we examine the text we find that there is a ה (hey) in front of the word עלמה (almah), which tells us that the woman in the verse is a specific woman, most likely known to both the prophet and the king. In addition, it says, הרה (hara) – is pregnant, not will conceive as it is translated in the Christian translations. Clearly, the prophet is talking to the king about a specific woman, and he knows who she is (she is most likely in the room with them) and that she is already pregnant. The last part of the verse reads:

And will give birth to a son and she will call his name Emanuel.

Note that it says that the woman (the boy's mother) will call his name Emanuel. This is a different meaning from the verse quoted in Matthew:

### **Matthew 1:23**

(23) "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which is translated, "God with us."

It appears that Matthew misquotes the passage from Isaiah in order to avoid the obvious problem that Jesus was never called Emanuel by his mother as far as we know.



## **Isaiah's prophecy to Ahaz in Isaiah 7:14-16 is fulfilled!**

### **II Kings 15:29-30**

In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon and Abel-beth-maacah and Janoah and Kedesh and Hazor and Gilead and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria. And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and struck him and put him to death and became king in his place, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah.

### **II Kings 16:5**

Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to *wage* war; and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him.

In summary, we see that the entire virgin birth doctrine is based on a passage from Isaiah which must be both taken out of context and mistranslated in order to be used as a "proof" that Jesus was born of a virgin and is therefore divine; the child of a special birth, the messiah. Read in context, with even the most basic understanding of Hebrew, one sees that this is a prophecy, but not a messianic one. No, this is a short-term prophecy which was fulfilled within the lifetime of King Ahaz.