

FAQ

FROM THE MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS ARCHIVES (2000-2018)

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MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
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Frequently Asked Questions

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

- ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
Ara: Aramaic
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
CJB: *Complete Jewish Bible* (1998)
CJSB: *Complete Jewish Study Bible* (2016)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
ESV: *English Standard Version* (2001)
Ger: German
GNT: *Greek New Testament*
Grk: Greek
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
HCSB: *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (2004)
Heb: Hebrew
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
JBK: *New Jerusalem Bible-Koren* (2000)
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
KJV: *King James Version*
Lattimore: *The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore* (1996)
LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)
LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)
LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
LXX: *Septuagint*
m. Mishnah
MT: *Masoretic Text*
NASB: *New American Standard Bible* (1977)
NASU: *New American Standard Update* (1995)
NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
NEB: *New English Bible* (1970)
Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
NETS: *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (2007)
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: *New International Version* (1984)
NJB: *New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic* (1985)
NJSB: *Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (1999)
NKJV: *New King James Version* (1982)
NRSV: *New Revised Standard Version* (1989)
NLT: *New Living Translation* (1996)
NT: *New Testament*
OT: *Old Testament*
REB: *Revised English Bible* (1989)
RSV: *Revised Standard Version* (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: *Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version* (2014)
TNIV: *Today's New International Version* (2005)
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: *United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition*
v(s). *verse(s)*
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: *Latin Vulgate*
YLT: *Young's Literal Translation* (1862/1898)
WMB: *World Messianic Bible* (2020)

Isaiah 7:14

I heard a Jewish anti-missionary say that Isaiah 7:14 has been purposefully mistranslated with “virgin” in Christian Bibles, to fit a pagan concept of a virgin giving birth, specifically to Jesus.¹

Refuting the virgin birth of Yeshua is a common practice of liberal Christians, who often doubt anything supernatural. Consequently, anti-missionaries have joined the bandwagon by claiming Isaiah 7:14 is not a prophecy of the Messiah to come, that the Gospels have misapplied this word, and even that the concept of a virgin giving birth is “pagan.” Messianics who are unfamiliar with the Isaianic expectation of one to be born, can find themselves very easy to be manipulated.

It is undeniable that Isaiah 7:14 plays a role in the Messianic expectation of the Apostolic Scriptures. Matthew 1:22-23 attests, “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’” (NASU). Here as a prophetic support for Yeshua’s Messiahship and Incarnation, Isaiah 7:14 is quoted. When the Revised Standard Version was originally published in 1952, it caused quite a stir rendering Isaiah 7:14 as “Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Since then, the subject of the virgin birth and how Isaiah 7:14 should be viewed has been quite a debate.²

The original backdrop of this word concerned an alliance between Rezin, king of Aram (Syria), and Pekah, king of the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim, who were preparing to attack the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Isaiah 7:1-2). If this alliance was successful, and Judah was destroyed, so was all hope of God being faithful to His covenant promises. The Prophet Isaiah and his son Shear-Jashub were directed by God to go to King Ahaz of Judah (Isaiah 7:3-6), and he was to be specifically told, “It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass” (Isaiah 7:7, NASU). Isaiah asked Ahaz to request of God a sign of how He would be faithful to His promises, and although Ahaz refused (Isaiah 7:12), the Prophet told him what the sign would be:

“And he said, ‘Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.’ He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good” (Isaiah 7:13-15, RSV).

It is at this point that the anti-missionaries stop. Matthew is stated by them to have misapplied a word which was given to King Ahaz in ancient times, which only spoke of the conception of a child named Immanuel. People can then easily be led to conclude that the whole “Christian” idea of a so-called virgin birth is wrong.

First to take notice of is the first clause in Isaiah 7:14: *yitten Adonai hu l’khem ot*, literally “will give the Lord Him to you a sign.” The most overlooked part of this clause is how *l’khem* or “to you” appears in the **plural**, not the singular,³ thus indicating that the sign of which Isaiah spoke regarded the entire House of David, and not just King Ahaz as an individual.

¹ This has been adapted from the author’s article “Answering the ‘Frequently Avoided Questions’ About the Messiahship of Yeshua” (appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*).

² For a summary of this debate, consult “Virgin Birth of Christ,” in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), pp 759-764.

³ The LXX follows suit, rendering *l’khem* with the plural *humin*.

The second clause indicates what is going to happen: *hinneh ha'almah hara v'yoledet ben*, literally “behold the young woman/virgin look and bearing a son.” There is endless controversy as to how *ha'almah*, either “the young woman/maiden” or “the virgin,” should be translated. Note that it is insufficient for to just consider *almah* here; the definite article “the” in *ha'almah* is what is used in the text, and is intensified by being prefixed with the imperative *hinneh* or “behold.”

Is the scope of Isaiah’s prophecy here just limited to a young woman conceiving and having a child? Indeed, the most common anti-missionary tactic is to say that if Isaiah were truly speaking of a virgin, then the word *betulah*, used to describe Rebekah in Genesis 24:16, would have been used. However, when one examines varied Tanach usages of the word *almah* and weigh them into the equation, this is not the conclusion a responsible interpreter can draw.

It is very true that Rebekah was described as a *betulah* or “virgin” in Genesis 24:16, but later in Genesis 24:43, as an unmarried woman, she was also called an *almah*. The usage of *betulah* is unclear, necessitating the addition of the clause “no man had had relations with her” (NASU) in Genesis 24:16, whereas the usage of *almah* requires no such clarification. Miriam, the sister of Moses, was referred to as an *almah* in Exodus 2:8, being called by the daughter of Pharaoh to fetch Moses’ mother to nurse him, and we should surely not expect for Miriam to have had relations at such a young age.

The pre-Christian Septuagint translators undoubtedly understood the difference between *betulah* and *almah*, and thus they were able to render *almah* as *parthenos*, “female of marriageable age w. focus on virginity” (BDAG).⁴ Did Matthew misapply Isaiah 7:14? It is notable, as it concerns Yeshua’s conception, that Mary did say “How can this be, since I do not know a man⁵?” (Luke 1:34, NKJV). Matthew’s Gospel, employing the term *parthenos* as the LXX rendered Isaiah 7:14, did make a value judgment. Likewise, so have any Bible translators who have rendered *almah* as “virgin.”

This is only part of the issue, though. Did Matthew totally miss the point of the promise to King Ahaz? Examiners need not disconnect Isaiah 7:14 from the verses following in Isaiah 7:16-17:

“For before the boy will know *enough* to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken. The LORD will bring on you, on your people, and on your father's house such days as have never come since the day that Ephraim separated from Judah, the king of Assyria” (Isaiah 7:16-17, NASU).

Who was this child being talked about? Was this the child who was to be born to the virgin? It cannot go unnoticed that while the plural “you” appears in Isaiah 7:14, *l'khem*, that Isaiah 7:16 says *ha'adamah asher atah qatz m'pn'ei shnei malkeiyha*, with the singular “you,” *atah*, appearing instead. Previously, the dilemma of the House of David as a whole had been described, whereas here the more immediate problem of the Southern Kingdom for its leader, King Ahaz, was in view.

Many readers of Isaiah 7 have thought that there is a kind of dual reference here. A child born during the reign of King Ahaz of the Southern Kingdom would not live very long before the immediate problem threatening Judah, although with some negative aftermath, would be gone. Partial fulfillment of Isaiah 7 would lead to a greater degree of fulfillment in later history, via the virgin birth of Yeshua the Messiah.⁶

Another thought is seen in how Tim Hegg, in *Messiah in the Old Testament*, has suggested that the usage of *na'ar* or “lad” in Isaiah 7:16 is to be taken in a generic, somewhat proverbial sense. He indicates, “In a short time (illustrated by the time it takes for a child to grow into moral awareness) the land which the two kings...who had allied together against Jerusalem were fighting for would be forsaken, that is, laid waste.”⁷ From this perspective, the lad spoken of in Isaiah 7:16-17, is not to be viewed as the Messiah to come, but rather is an allusion to the fact

⁴ Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 777.

⁵ Grk. *andra ou ginōskō*.

⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), pp 160-162; Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume 3: Messianic Prophecy Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), pp 25-28.

⁷ Tim Hegg, *Messiah in the Tanach* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2003), 93.

that before a period of about twelve years (cf. Deuteronomy 1:39) has expired, King Ahaz' enemies would be dealt with.

This is a good enough proposal, but it has not taken into consideration why *ha'na'ar* or "the lad/boy," with the definite article, is what appeared in Isaiah 7:16, which would need to refer to some specific person. Was this specific lad or boy, the child to be born who would be known as Immanuel? An excellent answer is provided by Michael Rydelnik in his study *The Messianic Hope*, in that the boy being referred to in Isaiah 7:16 was actually Isaiah's young son Shear-Jashub, who accompanied the Prophet to witness what was said to King Ahaz. He eloquently addresses some of the difficulties seen in Isaiah 7:13-16:

"While many have considered v. 16 to be a continuation of the prophecy in 7:13-15, the grammar of the passage suggests otherwise. The opening phrase in Hebrew [*ki b'terem*] can reflect an adversative nuance, allowing for a disjunction between the child described in 7:13-15 and the one described in verse 16. There is a different child in view in this verse.

"*The Identity of the Child.* So who is the child in 7:16? In light of Isaiah being directed to bring his own son to the confrontation with the king at the conduit of the upper pool (cf. 7:3), it makes most sense to identify the lad as Shear-Jashub. Otherwise there would be no purpose for God directing Isaiah to bring the boy. Thus having promised the virgin birth of the Messiah (7:13-15), the prophet then points to the very small boy that he has brought along and says, 'But before *this* lad (using the article with a demonstrative force) knows enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.' In this way, Shear-Jashub functioned as a sign to the king. Apparently, Isaiah could tell Judah in the very next chapter, 'Here I am with the children the LORD has given me to be signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of Hosts who dwells on Mount Zion' (8:18).

"*The Identity of the Addressee.* To whom does Isaiah make this prediction? What is not evident in the English text is plain in the Hebrew. The prophet returned to using the second-person singular pronoun in 7:16 ('the land of the two kings you [sg.] dread'). In 7:10-11 he used the singular to address King Ahaz. Then, when addressing the house of David with the prophecy of Messiah, he shifted to the plural. But in 7:16, he addressed King Ahaz, using the singular pronoun once again and giving him a near prophecy: before Shear-Jashub would be able to discern good from evil, the northern confederacy attacking Judah would fail. Within two years, Tiglath-Pileser defeated both Israel and Syria, just as the prophet had predicted.

"Having completed his long-term prophecy, Isaiah gave a short-term prophecy. In doing so, he followed a frequent pattern of his book. He consistently did this so his readership could have confidence in the distant prediction by observing the fulfillment in the near one."⁸

Ultimately, the answer which the House of David and King Ahaz would have sought to all the problems of Judah, Israel, and even the nations at large—was only to be found in the far future by a miraculous birth of one called "Immanuel" or God with us. This is a Child who would live in a time when there would be "curds and honey" (Isaiah 7:15) present, which Rydelnik takes to represent "the food of oppression" (cf. Isaiah 7:21-22), in that "the prophecy of Messiah concludes with a hint that He will be born and grow up...at a time when Judah is oppressed by a foreign power,"⁹ which would surely be the case with Judea dominated by Rome in the First Century. The One prophesied to be born is a different kind of king who has never before been seen. Indeed, as Isaiah 9:6-7 further describes,

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this" (Isaiah 9:6-7, NASU).

⁸ Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Messianic?* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), pp 157-158.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

Rydelnik's specific reason for this is that "fields will not be cultivated and [they] will become pastures for oxen and sheep (7:23-25). The effect of this will be an overabundance of daily (or butter/curds) because of the pasturing of livestock, and an excess of honey because bees will be able to pollinate the wild flowers" (*Ibid.*). Assyria is said to have shaved the land of people (Isaiah 7:20), and a similar situation would be in place at the arrival of the Messiah during the Roman era.

For Matthew, Isaiah 7:14 clearly spoke of the Messiah to come, and the text can certainly be understood from this point of view. Indeed, many passages which appear throughout Isaiah 7:1-12:6 can only be applied to a figure to come, including: the wonderful ruling son (Isaiah 9:1-7) and the reign of Jesse's son (Isaiah 11:1-16), **not** someone from Ahaz' contemporary period. Michael L. Brown concludes in his *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume 3*, "as Matthew looked back at these prophecies hundreds of years later, it would have been apparent to him that (1) these chapters were clearly linked together, and (2) the promises of a worldwide, glorious reign of the promised Davidic king were not yet realized."¹⁰ Isaiah 7:14, as applied to the birth of Yeshua, would not have been provided isolated from other Isaianic expectations considered by Matthew.

The second criticism from anti-missionaries is that the virgin birth—perhaps more correctly termed, at times, the virgin conception—is “pagan.” This line of reasoning used to attack the Messiahship of Yeshua can find many who are eager to embrace it, primarily because of the negative venom too frequently witnessed in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement directed against the Christian Church. It has been too widely asserted by many Hebrew Roots groups that the Christian Church is “totally saturated” with paganism (and often *their* subjective views of paganism at that). Rather than choose a constructive way to dialogue with Christians about legitimate issues involving one's faith heritage in Israel's Scriptures—damning all Christians and the Church is the method which is preferred. So, we should not be surprised when all the rhetoric regarding “paganism” is unleashed, that anti-missionaries find a great opportunity to attack a significant area of Apostolic doctrine.

It is not impossible to find some possible parallels between a virgin conceiving by supernatural means, as depicted in the Gospels, and what one can encounter in pagan mythology. In fact, significant parallels exist between the execution and resurrection of Yeshua and the play *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus. If a misguided person wants to use these criteria to reject the Messiahship of Yeshua, and indeed the gospel message, one can choose to do so. But I would severely warn the person who takes this course of action **to be consistent in what he or she rejects** on the basis of “paganism”—something which anti-missionaries *fail* to do.

If the virgin conception of Yeshua is indeed “pagan,” then could it not also be true that the Creation account and Noahic Flood are likewise borrowed from paganism? The Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh strongly mirrors the story of the Flood described in the Bible. How can we know that the Epic of Gilgamesh was not picked up by the Jewish exiles in Babylon, and then repackaged for what is described in the opening chapters of Genesis?¹¹ Anti-missionaries are certainly not going to answer these questions, yet they are perfectly valid because liberals who deny Yeshua's virgin birth likewise deny that the opening chapters of the Bible, the Exodus, the Conquest, and possibly even treat the monarchy of Israel as being invalid history and exaggerated mythology. How far is one willing to go? Will one be consistent with how much of the Bible could in actuality be “pagan”? Or, will one have the discernment to see that the enemy has always had a counterfeit to God's truth?

¹⁰ Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume 3*, 25.

¹¹ Cf. Jon D. Levenson, “Genesis,” in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp 8-11.