

## ISAIAH 7:14 – PART 2: REFUTING CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS<sup>1</sup>

### I. INTRODUCTION

In Part 1 of this 2-part essay, several sets of Jewish and Christian translations of Isaiah 7:14 were quoted and compared, and a detailed and accurate grammatical analysis of the Hebrew text of this was presented.<sup>2</sup> It was demonstrated how some Christian translators had mistranslated key terms in this passage in order to change its original message and turn it into a prophecy claimed to have been fulfilled in the “Virgin Birth”, which has become a foundational doctrine of Christianity.

In this part, several popular apologetics that are used by Christian missionaries to defend their interpretation of Isaiah 7:14, the so-called “proof text” for the “Virgin Birth”, are presented along with their respective refutations.

### II. COMMON CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS ON ISAIAH 7:14 AND THEIR REFUTATIONS

Over the past 19 centuries, Christian apologists have been busy fashioning defenses (hence the term “apologist”) for their interpretation of Isaiah 7:14, a verse allegedly quoted by the author of the Gospel of Matthew in Matthew 1:23. Many Christian-Jewish debates took place, often by coercion, in which various claims were made by the Christian side and countered by the Jewish side. For every Jewish response that refuted a Christian claim, new apologetics were developed to prove the validity of the fulfillment in Jesus of Isaiah's prophecy and to try to invalidate the Jewish perspective. This was very popular in medieval times, and it has regained popularity in our times as part of the aggressive campaign by various Hebrew-Christian and evangelical missionary organizations to convert Jews to Christianity. Some of these claims presented below along with their respective refutations.

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<sup>1</sup> Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in ***bold italicized*** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in **SMALL CAPS** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letter that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
  - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
  - A vocalized letter י is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
  - The letter ה is transliterated as “h”
  - The letter ח is transliterated as “ch”
  - The letter כ is transliterated as “k”
  - The letter ק is transliterated as “q”
  - A vocalized **SHVA** (וְ נִשְׁׁ) – **SHVA NA** is transliterated as a superscripted “e” following the consonant
  - There is no “doubling” of letters in the transliterations to reflect the **dagESH** (emphasis)

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 7:14 - Part 1: An Accurate Grammatical Analysis – [http://thejewishhome.org/counter/Is714\\_1.pdf](http://thejewishhome.org/counter/Is714_1.pdf)

**A. Missionary Claim: עַלְמָה [alMAH] means "virgin", therefore, this prophecy foretells the miraculous birth of Jesus**

**1. Straightforward usage of עַלְמָה**

- † **Christian claim:** The Christian argument is that עַלְמָה implicitly indicates virginity of the female in question. This is based on the contention that the noun refers to a female who is a virgin in every other instance where this term or one of its other forms is applied in the Hebrew Bible.
- ☆ **Jewish response:** The noun עַלְמָה represents an age group and not a state of sexual purity. As was shown in Part 1, the term עַלְמָה means a **young woman of marriageable age**, i.e. of child-bearing age [the male equivalent of which is עֶלֶם (*Elem*)], irrelevant of the status of her sexual experience, i.e., whether the young woman is a virgin is not at issue, as its usage in the Hebrew Bible suggests. For example, when one would say in English, "A young woman went to the store", nothing in this sentence contains any information about her virginity – it is a non sequitur. When the term עַלְמָה is used in a sentence in spoken Hebrew, or in a verse in Biblical Hebrew, there is no implicit reference to the young woman's virginity. Those who are fluent in the Hebrew language know this. Other more accurate vocabulary was available to Isaiah had he desired to specifically refer here to a virgin – the Hebrew term בְּתוּלָה (*b<sup>e</sup>tulah*) means a **virgin**. In fact, the Prophet applied the word בְּתוּלָה on five occasions throughout his Book (Isaiah 23:4,12, 37:22, 47:1, 62:5).

As was shown in Part 1, the noun עַלְמָה appears in the Hebrew Bible seven times (Genesis 24:43; Exodus 2:8; Is 7:14; Psalms 68:26; Proverbs 30:19; Song of Songs 1:3, 6:8). A closer look at the remaining six instances of עַלְמָה in the Hebrew Bible helps demonstrate the correct meaning of this term (highlighting added for emphasis throughout this document unless otherwise noted).

**a. Genesis 24:43**

**Genesis 24:43** – Behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the young woman [הַעַלְמָה] comes forth to draw water, and I say to her, Give me, I beg you, a little water from your water jar to drink;

This is a reference to Rebecca. When Abraham's servant saw her and later related the story, all he could possibly determine (from her appearance) is that she was a beautiful young female, he obviously could not have known whether or not she was a virgin, since he did not know her marital status. Moreover, if עַלְמָה had meant "virgin", why

would the Torah be redundant and explicitly refer to Rebecca as בְּתוּלָה, a virgin, in Genesis 24:16?

**b. Exodus 2:8**

**Exodus 2:8** – And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the young woman [הַעֲלָמָה] went and called the child's mother.

Here the reference is to Miriam, the older sister of Aaron and Moses, though nothing more is known about her at this point. There is no other information given in this or any other passage within the Hebrew Bible that could help determine whether Miriam was a virgin in the scene described in Exodus 2:8.

**c. Psalms 68:26**

**Psalms 68:26** – The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; among them were young women [עֲלָמוֹת] beating tambourines.

There is absolutely no way to determine from the context whether any or all of those tambourine-playing young women were virgins. To assume that all were virgins is a rather bold leap of faith. To simply conclude that none of them were married, given the fact that Jewish women often displayed their joy in dance and by playing musical instruments when rejoicing at a wedding or when welcoming their husbands from the battlefield (e.g., Exodus 15:20; 1 Samuel 18:6), would be a difficult position to defend.

**d. Proverbs 30:19**

**Proverbs 30:18-19** – (18) There are three things which are too wonderful for me, indeed, four which I know not; (19) The way of a vulture in the sky; the way of a serpent on a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a [virile] man [גִּבּוֹר] (GEBER) with a young woman [בְּעֲלָמָה].

The only time that "... the way of a [virile] man with a young woman ..." does not leave a trace (i.e., a broken hymen) is if the hymen of the עֲלָמָה were already not intact.

**e. Song of Songs 1:3, 6:8**

**Song of Songs 1:3** – Your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is oil poured out, therefore maidens [עֲלָמוֹת] love you.

The עֲלָמוֹת, young women, loved King Solomon! Could they have been among his many concubines or wives?

**Song of Songs 6:8 – There are sixty queens, and eighty concubines, and maidens [וְעַלְמוֹת] without number.**

60 wives, 80 concubines, and countless עַלְמוֹת were listed as being among King Solomon's lovers.

Of the six applications listed above, only the first one is about a young woman, Rebecca, who is also explicitly identified as a virgin. There is no indication in any of the other five cases that the females were virgins.

## 2. Another proposal for the use of עַלְמָה and not בְּתוּלָה

- ✚ **Christian counter-claim:** Isaiah used the term עַלְמָה to remove ambiguity and add precision. The claim is that, had Isaiah used בְּתוּלָה, the reader could be confused thinking that the prophet may have intended to metaphorically refer to a nation and still maintain the core concept of virginity; an argument based on four cases where Isaiah uses the term בְּתוּלָה in this fashion (Isaiah 23:12, 37:22, 47:1, 62:5). The claim is that, in these four applications, on three occasions the reference is metaphorical to a nation, and on the fourth occasion, it is used as a pattern argument for the nation. It is further claimed that this pattern was also utilized by the Prophet Jeremiah on seven occasions.
- ✧ **Jewish response:** When all the relevant applications are examined, this proves to be a false counter argument. First, Isaiah actually uses the term בְּתוּלָה on five (5; not four) occasions, which includes Isaiah 23:4, the one left out by the Christian missionaries. Isaiah 23:4 together with Isaiah 62:5 constitute an effective counter-argument, since they demonstrate that the Prophet knew how to apply the term בְּתוּלָה:

**Isaiah 23:4 - Be you ashamed, O Sidon; for the sea has spoken, even the strength of the sea, saying, I labored not, nor brought forth children, nor did I nourish up young men, nor brought up virgins [בְּתוּלוֹת] (*b<sup>o</sup>tuLOT*).**

**Isaiah 62:5 - For as a young man marries a virgin [בְּתוּלָה], so shall your sons marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.**

Second, the appeal to Jeremiah's use of בְּתוּלָה on seven occasions to support some alleged pattern is incomplete, since he applied this term a total of 15 times in his two books (Jeremiah and Lamentations). Clearly, he used it more often to speak specifically of a female who was a virgin rather than as a metaphorical reference to a nation.

Third, the comparison between Isaiah and only Jeremiah is flawed by being inherently biased. Would it not be more appropriate to study the

usage of the term in the entire Hebrew Bible? The term בְּתוּלָה appears in the Hebrew Bible 50 times – 9 times in the Pentateuch and 41 times in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Such a study would leave no doubt that בְּתוּלָה is the correct term to use when referring to a **virgin**.

**Conclusion:** The Hebrew terms עֲלֻמָּה and בְּתוּלָה are not interchangeable. It is ludicrous to suggest that Isaiah did not know that fact

## **B. Missionary Claim: This is a "dual fulfillment" foretelling the miraculous birth of Jesus**

‡ **Christian claim:** Given the obvious problem created by the context of Isaiah 7:14 vis-à-vis Matthew's claim that the verse foretells the "Virgin Birth" of Jesus, the proposed solution is that Isaiah 7:14 must be a "dual prophecy", a prophecy that was fulfilled twice. The claim is that Isaiah's words to King **AHAZ** had two separate and distinct applications. Christian missionaries will concede that the first application of Isaiah's prophecy was addressed to King **AHAZ** and his crisis at hand. The child, **Immanuel**, was born contemporaneously, and the "first leg" of this "dual prophecy" was fulfilled in the eighth century B.C.E. They insist, however, that there was a "second leg" of this "dual prophecy", and that it applies to the "Virgin Birth" of Jesus at the turn of the Era. With this elaborate explanation, they maintain that the apparent use of Isaiah 7:14 in the Gospel of Matthew is entirely appropriate. In short, it is claimed that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled twice: once in 732 B.C.E., and a second time at the dawn of the Christian era.

☆ **Jewish response:** The notion of a "dual prophecy" is unbiblical. This idea appears to have been crafted in order to explain away a serious theological problem that a correct reading of Isaiah 7:14 creates for Christianity. No hint or evidence of a coming second fulfillment exists anywhere in this chapter or elsewhere in the Book of Isaiah. Moreover, if, as claimed, the word הָעֲלֻמָּה means "a virgin" and Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled twice, then who was the first virgin that conceived in King **AHAZ's** time? Were there two virgin births? In other words, if Christian missionaries claim that the "Virgin Birth", allegedly prophesied in Isaiah 7:14, was fulfilled twice, then who was that first virgin about to give birth to a baby boy in 732 B.C.E.? Bearing in mind the claim by Christian missionaries that the word הָעֲלֻמָּה can only mean "a virgin", does this not imply that Mary was not the first and only virgin to conceive, remain a virgin, and give birth to a male child? If this happened before the "Virgin Birth" of Jesus, why would the latter be so special? Think about that!

Furthermore, if it is claimed that Isaiah 7:14 is a "dual prophecy", how could Isaiah 7:15-16 apply to Jesus when these verses continue to speak of this lad Immanu'el?

**Isaiah 7:14-16 – (14) Therefore the Lord will Himself give you a sign: Here! The young woman is with child, and she shall give birth to a son; and you [young woman] shall call his name Immanu'el. (15) Cream and honey he [Immanu'el] shall eat when he knows to reject bad and choose good; (16) for, when the lad [Immanu'el] does not yet know to reject bad and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread, shall be abandoned."**

If Isaiah's words are the substance of a "dual prophecy", the claimants should be expected to provide answers to the following questions:

- At what age did baby Jesus mature?
- What are the implications that Jesus sinned up to this age?
- Which two kingdoms were abandoned during the lifetime of Jesus?
- How could the Kingdom of Israel be dreaded during the first century C.E. if it did not exist since the eighth century B.C.E.?
- Where is the account of Jesus eating cream and honey recorded?

Does any of this make sense? From the Jewish perspective, it does not, and from the Christian point of view, it is indefensible.

✚ **Christian counter-claim:** Isaiah hints at a "dual prophecy" by using two different pronouns in addressing King **AHAZ**, which, they claim, makes the idea biblical. The argument is that, in the seventh chapter of Isaiah the prophet addressed King **AHAZ** both in the singular "you" and in the plural "you".<sup>3</sup> They claim that, at times, Isaiah addressed King **AHAZ** alone, and in other places in this chapter, he addressed the House of David. Therefore, they conclude that, whenever the prophet addressed the House of David, or spoke in the plural "you", he was addressing the future Davidic dynasty (i.e., Jesus, the claimed heir to it, some seven centuries later). On the other hand, whenever the Prophet directly addressed King **AHAZ**, or spoke in the singular "you", it concerned the crisis at hand created by the two kingdoms that were poised to defeat him. The missionaries further argue that in using Hebrew word לָכֶם (*lACHEM*), (to) [plural] you, in Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah addresses the future House of David and, thereby, points to the "Virgin Birth" of Jesus, which was associated with the House of David, not with King **AHAZ** and military crisis he was facing.

☆ **Jewish response:** In this chapter, it is clearly demonstrated that *both* the House of David *and* King **AHAZ** were threatened by the situation, not just King **AHAZ** himself. Every reference to the House of David and the plural "you", which was addressed to the entire Davidic House, *referred only to the military crisis* described herein. In fact, in the second verse of this chapter, Isaiah relates that both, King **AHAZ** and the House of David, were informed of the crisis created by the two warring kingdoms. This verse goes on to declare that both **his heart** לִבָּבוֹ (*l'vavo*); of King **AHAZ** – singular! **and the heart of**

<sup>3</sup> Unlike the English language, the Hebrew language has distinct singular and plural pronouns.

his nation [וּלְבַב עַמּוֹ] (*u'f'vav amo*); of Judah – plural!] were trembling with fear. Not only King **AHAZ** alone was terrified of these two hostile armies, the entire House of David was scared as well.

Isaiah delivered the message in this fashion, by repeatedly addressing King **AHAZ** as the House of David and in the plural "you" throughout this chapter, for a reason. King **AHAZ** was a wicked king and, as such, was personally undeserving of God's merciful intervention. Nevertheless, King **AHAZ** was spared through the merit of the House of David. The two kingdoms intended to conquer Jerusalem in order to undermine the throne of David (Isaiah 7:6). God promised King David that his dynasty would be preserved regardless of the worthiness of the king on the throne (2Samuel 7:12-16). King **AHAZ** was saved by God in the merit of the House of David, not through his own worthiness.

**Conclusion:** "Dual prophecy", which is contrary to the teachings of the Hebrew Bible, is an idea born out of desperation.

### C. **Missionary Claim:** Biblical Hebrew has no tenses

- ✠ **Christian claim:** Missionaries argue that tenses do not exist in Biblical Hebrew. Although they admit that Modern Hebrew has tenses, they insist that both medieval and modern grammarians recognize that Biblical Hebrew is an "aspectual" language rather than a language with tenses.<sup>4</sup> This means that the same form of a verb can be translated as past, present, or future, depending on the context and various grammatical cues. Some of the Jewish sources being quoted as examples (all are single sentences or portions of a sentence, possibly taken out of context) are RaDaQ (R' David Qimhi; 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century), R' Isaac Ben Yedaiah (13<sup>th</sup> century), R' David Altschuler (commentator; 18<sup>th</sup> century), Nahum Sarna (commentator; contemporary). Also quoted are passages from Gesenius' (1786-1842) *Hebrew Grammar*, and Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi's *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* – the former by a Christian theologian and grammarian, and the latter by Christian authors whose product received less than a glowing review in the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*.<sup>5</sup>
- ☆ **Jewish response:** This argument is irrelevant. At issue is the term הָרָה in Isaiah 7:14. As was previously demonstrated (see Section II.E.3 in Part 1), הָרָה can be either an adjective in the feminine singular gender that describes a **pregnant** female, or the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person, singular, masculine, past tense, conjugation of the verb לְהָרֹת (*laharot* – **to conceive**), meaning, **he impregnated**. Therefore, הָרָה is clearly not a verb in Isaiah 7:14. The relevant verb is the present tense of the verb "to be", i.e., **is**, which is used

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *Hebrew Tenses* - <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/answers/prophecy/tenses>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/reviews/review162.htm>

implicitly in the Hebrew Bible in all but two cases (Ecclesiastes 2:22; Nehemiah 6:6).

Although there are cases in the Hebrew Bible where the proper tense of a verb used must be inferred from context, the three perfect tenses, and even imperfect tenses, are generally present in the Hebrew Bible. The grammatical details of perfect/imperfect tense application are very complex and do not apply to Isaiah 7:14.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the specific 3<sup>rd</sup>-person, singular, feminine, future tense conjugation of the verb לְהָרִית (tahAREH), which is תִּהְרֶה (tahAREH), is not present in the Hebrew Bible applied as such. Rather, a poetic form of this verb conjugation, תִּהְרֶר (taHAR), appears in the Hebrew Bible combined with the conversive-vav, i.e., וַתִּהְרֶר (va'taHAR), on 28 occasions, thereby having the tense change from future to past to give it the meaning **and she conceived**, or **she became pregnant**.

**Conclusion:** The claim that Biblical Hebrew has no tenses cannot be supported from the text of the Hebrew Bible. Although there are instances where the tense of a verb must be gleaned from the context of a passage, the presence of all tenses, plus the imperative, proves the claim to be false.

#### D. **Missionary Claim:** בְּתוּלָה is not exclusive to "a virgin" in the Hebrew Bible

✠ **Christian claim:** The term בְּתוּלָה, as applied in the Hebrew Bible, is ambiguous since it is applied to cases that specifically denote "a virgin", to cases that are not general and non-specific, and to cases where the female is definitely not a virgin. As examples of the first type, verses such as Leviticus 21:3,14 and Ezekiel 44:22 are cited. For examples of applications where it the status of the female is not known, verses such as Deuteronomy 32.25, Psalms 148:12, and 2Chronicles 36.17 are referenced. Lastly, the passages in which it is claimed there are specific references of בְּתוּלָה to women who are not virgins are Joel 1:8, Esther 2:17, and Ezekiel 23:3, and the following interpretations are offered, respectively:

In **Joel 1:8**, a **virgin** [בְּתוּלָה] is called upon to lament over the death of her husband. The word used for husband in this verse is בַּעַל (BA'AL), a term they claim is never used of a bridegroom, only of a "full husband". In other words, the בְּתוּלָה in this passage cannot be a virgin since she was married.

In **Esther 2:17**, the girls are called **virgins** [בְּתוּלוֹת] after spending a night with the king.

In the parable of **Ezekiel 23:3**, the “virgin breasts” of the sisters, **Aholah** and **Aholibah**, were being handled in harlotry, leaving the impression that the notion of a virgin is quite removed.

- ☆ **Jewish response:** The claims about Esther 2:17 and Ezekiel 23:3 are easily refuted in terms of the Hebrew language and the context of the passages. The response to the claim regarding Joel 1:8 is more involved, though it is effective and conclusive.

In order to counter the claim about **Esther 2:17**, it is necessary to consider all four applications of the term **בְּתוּלָה** in the Scroll of Esther, which are found at Esther 2:2,3,17,19. The meaning of **בְּתוּלָה** at Esther 2:2,3 is not in question – it clearly refers to a **virgin**. The first case in question, then, is the following:

**Esther 2:17** - The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found more favor and kindness before him than all the other **virgins** [בְּתוּלוֹת]; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen in place of Vashti.

Nowhere is it stated in Esther 2:17 that those other **virgins** had already spent a night with the king. Being a **virgin** was the pre-requisite for being placed in the king’s harem. From that point on, it was merely a beauty contest. The Jewish tradition was that a woman would remain a **virgin** for up to one year following her betrothal. There is no reason to assume, nor is there any indication in the entire Scroll of Esther, that Esther spent a night with the king before he named her and she became the queen. In fact, Esther 2:20 supports this conclusion:

**Esther 2:19-20** – (19) And when the **virgins** [בְּתוּלוֹת] were gathered together the second time, and Mordochai sat at the king’s gate, (20) Esther still told nothing of her kindred or her people as Mordochai had instructed her; for **Esther continued to obey Mordochai, just as when she was reared by him.**”

Clearly, utilizing Esther 2:17 as an example that **בְּתוּלָה** can be used to refer to a woman who is not a virgin is an error made from a lack of knowledge and understanding of the Hebrew language and Jewish customs and traditions. Finally, in Esther 2:19 a second roundup of new virgins for the king’s harem is mentioned. Nothing in the text indicates these women were “recycled virgins” who had already spent a night with the king.

**Ezekiel 23:3**, too, is an example that demonstrates both a flawed contextual interpretation as well as a lack of knowledge and understanding of the Hebrew language by Christian missionaries:

**Ezekiel 23:3** – They indulged in promiscuity in Egypt; they were promiscuous in their youth. There their bosoms were pressed and there their **breasts of their virginity** [דְּדֵי בְּתוּלֵיהֶן] (*dadei b<sup>e</sup>tuleihen*) were squeezed.

The nation is likened to prostitutes, whose infidelity earns them the contempt of all, including their paramours. Israel's two branches, Judah and Ephraim [also often referred to as Israel], began as a united nation in Egypt. But even while still in Egypt, they were promiscuous, as described through this metaphor, i.e., they picked up the idolatrous practices of Egypt. Later, the two branches, Judah and Ephraim, each followed the idolatrous ways of its neighbors and fell away from obeying the Torah's Commandments. It is important to note, however, that in all three places in this chapter where the graphic description of squeezing the sisters' **breasts of their virginity** [דְּדֵי בְּתוּלֵיהֶן] is depicted, it mentions that it was done in their youth, i.e., their first sexual experiences (until that point they were indeed **virgins**) occurred in Egypt, which is where they "lost their virginity", metaphorically speaking. In other words, the expression דְּדֵי בְּתוּלֵיהֶן refers to their youth just prior to losing their innocence. Moreover, it should also be noted here that the noun בְּתוּלָה is not used in this verse. Rather, the noun בְּתוּלִים (*b<sup>e</sup>tULIM*), **hymen** (the sign of virginity), is used – a noun that appears ten times in the Hebrew Bible in various forms. Following that first "sexual" experience, the notion of virginity is far removed and, as one reads on in Ezekiel, the term is no longer used beyond that first time in reference to **Aholibah**, and then once more, at Ezekiel 23:8, in reference to her sister **Aholah's** youth.

The last case, **Joel 1:8**, is a bit more intricate and, therefore, requires a more elaborate explanation:

**Joel 1:8 - Lament/wail like a virgin** [כְּבִתּוּלָה] (*ki'vtULAH*) **girded with a sackcloth** [mourning] **for the husband of [or, man of] her youth** [עַל-בַּעַל נְעוּרֶיהָ] (*AL-BA'at n<sup>e</sup>UREIha*).

In the translation above, the expression "**man of**" is shown in addition to the common expression "**husband of**" to indicate a specific application, unique to this verse in the entire Hebrew Bible but appropriate in this instance. The Hebrew noun בַּעַל (*BA'at*), which normally means **husband**, appears here in a possessive construct, which gives it the meanings, **husband of ...**, **man of ...**, or **owner of ...**.<sup>6</sup> The missionary's claim that the noun בַּעַל is used only of a "**full husband**" and never of a "**betrothed bridegroom**" is simply untrue.

According to the ancient custom, the Jewish marriage process consisted of two separate events. The first event was אֶירוּשִׁין (*eirusin*), a **betrothal** {a term that does not appear in the Hebrew Bible, but is a later derivative of the Biblical root verb אָרַשׁ (*eiras*), [to] **betroth**}, which is when the couple

<sup>6</sup> In general, and there are numerous examples of this in the Hebrew Bible, when the noun בַּעַל appears in a possessive construct, בַּעַל-, the full expression may take on various meanings, depending on what the other component is.

became "engaged". Betrothal could last for a period of up to one year, during which time the man generally got himself established in a position that would enable him to support his wife and future family, and during which time the couple did not cohabit. At the end of the betrothal period came נְשׂוּאִין (*nisu'in*), the actual **marriage** {a term that does not appear in the Hebrew Bible, but is a later derivative of the Biblical root verb נָשָׂא (*NASA*), [to] **marry**}, took place, which is when the marriage was consummated by way of the first sanctioned sexual contact. The בְּתוּלָה in Joel 1:8 is grieving for her man who died (for some unknown reason) before their marriage was consummated. This man was the "husband-to-be" who had the claim to, i.e., who was the **owner of ...** [בְּעַל-] her virginity, had he lived. In other words, he owned the right to (take) her virginity [remember these were Biblical times!]. To attach a dual meaning of "a non-virgin" to בְּתוּלָה from this verse is simply an act of desperation.

The salient point in Joel 1:8 is that the "... **virgin lamenting for the husband of her youth ...**" is a "married virgin" (a betrothed woman who has not been with a man sexually) whose betrothed husband (from her youth) died (for some unspecified reason) before the marriage was consummated with the נְשׂוּאִין, i.e., before she had her first sexual intercourse with him.

Where would a "married virgin", such as the one in Joel 1:8, be **in her youth** [בְּנְעוּרֶיהָ] (*bin'ureha*)? The answer can be found in the following passages:

**Numbers 30:4,17 – (4) And if a woman makes a vow to the Lord, or imposes a prohibition [upon herself] while in her father's house, in her youth [בְּנְעוּרֶיהָ], (17) These are the statutes which the Lord commanded Moses regarding a man and his wife; between a father and his daughter, in her youth [בְּנְעוּרֶיהָ], while in her father's house.**

A "married virgin", such as the one mentioned in Joel 1:8, would be found in her father's house in her youth! Additional support for this paradigm is found in several places in the Hebrew Bible:

**Deuteronomy 22:23-24 - (23) If a girl who is a virgin [בְּתוּלָה] is betrothed [מְאָרְסָה] (*m<sup>o</sup>rasah*) to a husband [אִישׁ] (*ish*), and a man [אִישׁ] finds her in the city, and lies with her; (24) Then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them with stones that they die; the girl, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man [אִישׁ] (*ha'ish*), because he has humbled his neighbor's wife [אִשֶּׁת רֵעִהוּ] (*Eishet re'Elhu*); so you shall put away evil from among you.**

Note in the above passage that the "fiancée" of the betrothed virgin is referred to as "a husband" [Deut 22:23; one of the meanings of אִישׁ], and that she is referred to as her fiancée's "wife" [Deut 22:24; one of the meanings of אִשָּׁה]

(*ISHAH*)]. From this passage it is clear that the בְּתוּלָה in Joel 1:8 is a **virgin** in the strictest sense of the word, i.e., a betrothed woman who has not had sexual intercourse with a man.

Christian missionaries have argued with this interpretation of Deuteronomy 22:23-24 on the basis that the translations of אִשָּׁה and אִשָּׁה are subjective, even though the context is clear. This argument is easily defeated by quoting this passage from the KJV:

**Deuteronomy 22:23-24(KJV) - (23) If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; (24) Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you.**

There is another way to argue, using the Hebrew Bible, the validity of the Jewish perspective, that the בְּתוּלָה in Joel 1:8 is, indeed, a **virgin**. It is not even necessary to venture out of this chapter (Joel 1) to demonstrate the correct context, since it is part of the metaphorical description of the prophecy of the devastating plague of locusts.

A careful analysis of Joel 1 reveals the following observations:

- According to Joel 1:5, the drunks *will not get to taste the fine wine*:  
**Joel 1:5 - Awaken, you drunkards, and weep; and wail, all you wine drinkers, about the good wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth.**
- According to Joel 1:7, *the vine and fig tree that were planted and have grown will not yield the fruits*:  
**Joel 1:7 - It [the locust] has laid my vine waste, and splintered my fig tree; it has stripped its bark, and thrown it down; its branches have turned white.**
- According to Joel 1:10, *the grain, wine, and oil will not be consumed*:  
**Joel 1:10 - The field is wasted, the land mourns; for the grain is wasted; the new wine is dried up, the oil languishes.**
- According to Joel 1:11, *there will be no harvest*:  
**Joel 1:11 - Be ashamed, O plowmen; wail, O vine dressers over wheat and over barley, for the harvest of the field has been lost;**
- Joel 1:12 is a reprise of the same theme yet again:  
**Joel 1:12 - The vines have dried up, and the fig trees have been cut off; the pomegranates, also the date palms and the apples, all the trees of the field have dried up, for joy has dried up from the people.**
- Joel 1:13 takes this to the next level:  
**Joel 1:13 - Gird yourselves and mourn, you priests; wail, you ministers of the altar; come, sleep in sackcloth, you ministers of my God, for the meal offering and the libations have been withheld from the house of your God.**

The epitome of man's relationship with God, the communion with God via the meal offerings and libations, will not occur without the harvest. The symbolic parallels with Joel 1:8 are striking.

The message is clear: The "second phase" of the process in each case will not be realized in parallel to the lamenting virgin whose betrothed husband, בַּעַל נְעוּרֶיהָ (**husband of her youth**), had died before their marriage was consummated. Scripture validates itself right here!

Two additional examples of parallel metaphoric passages support this interpretation of Joel 1:8 as shown:

**Deuteronomy 20:6-7** – (6) And who is the man [הַאִישׁ] that has planted a vineyard, and has not used the fruit thereof? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man use the fruit thereof. (7) And who is the man [הַאִישׁ] who has betrothed [אֵרַשׁ] a wife [אִשָּׁה], and has not taken her? let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her.

**Deuteronomy 28:30-31** – (30) You shall betroth [אֵרַשׁ] a wife [אִשָּׁה], and another man shall lie with her; you shall build a house, and you shall not live in it; you shall plant a vineyard, and shall not gather its grapes. (31) Your ox shall be slain before your eyes, and you shall not eat of it; your ass shall be violently taken away from before your face, and shall not be restored to you; your sheep shall be given to your enemies, and you shall have none to rescue them.

The structure of the Joel 1 passages clearly parallels the two-phase Jewish marriage custom, a paradigm that is supported by similar passages from elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The Prophet Joel indicates in this way that his application of the noun בְּתוּלָה in Joel 1:8 means exactly what it has always (i.e., exclusively!) meant in Hebrew (both Biblical and Modern) – a **virgin**, a woman who has not had sexual intercourse with a man.

**Conclusion:** The claim that בְּתוּלָה, as used in the Hebrew Bible, is not the exclusive term for "a virgin" cannot be supported from within the Hebrew Bible and, in fact, is a false claim.

## E. Other Missionary Claims

Christian missionaries use many other arguments to try and defend Isaiah 7:14 as a "proof text" for the "Virgin Birth" of Jesus. Some are summarized below.

### 1. **Missionary Claim:** To rule out a "Virgin Birth" is to limit the power of the Creator

- ✠ **Christian claim:** A persistent Christian missionary may attempt to challenge the Jewish perspective by claiming that, by ruling out the possibility that the female in Isaiah 7:14 was a virgin who conceived of

God and remained a virgin (*virgo intacta*), one places limitations on what God can do.

- ☆ **Jewish response:** The Sages of the Talmud recognized the possibility that a woman can conceive with her virginity remaining intact, but they declared that it can occur only by means of normal fertilization.<sup>7</sup>

Jewish polemicists of the medieval period, who feared the retributions that could result from open discussion of this subject, did not attack the doctrine of the "Virgin Birth" directly. Rather, they used philosophical arguments to reject the idea that God could incarnate by impregnating a virgin and fathering an offspring who was God Himself. The noted Jewish polemicist and geographer, Rabbi Abraham Farissol (1452-1528) wrote:

**We cannot deny the possibility that God, may He be blessed,, could create a creation in a virgin, even one whom no man has known, For He created everything out of nothing. Rather, we deny that there was a need for incarnation.<sup>8</sup>**

**Conclusion:** Given the accepted Jewish view of God, which includes His incorporeal and omnipotent nature, it is not a question of *whether* God is able to affect a "Virgin Birth". The issue is the need for self-incarnation, the realization of which is excluded by God's incorporeal nature.

## 2. **Missionary Claim:** הַעֲלֵמָה is rendered παρθενος (parthenos) in the Septuagint (LXX)

- ✚ **Christian claim:** Christian missionaries argue that the Septuagint (LXX), allegedly an ancient translation into Greek of the Hebrew Bible by Jewish scholars, has the Hebrew term הַעֲלֵמָה at Isaiah 7:14 rendered as παρθενος in Greek, meaning a **virgin**. Surely, they argue, the Rabbis who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek would know how to correctly translate this term.
- ☆ **Jewish response:** The Jewish response is based on extant evidence, which has convinced scholars (of all persuasions) that today's LXX is not the original Septuagint, which was a mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E translation into Greek of only the Torah (the Five Books of Moses), commissioned by King Ptolemy II of Egypt, and which was carried out by 72 of the most learned, bi-lingual Jewish scholars of the time. Rather, the LXX is a Church-rendered Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. The evidence includes:

<sup>7</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *HagiGAH*, Folios 14b-15a.

<sup>8</sup> From Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages*, p. 153, KTAV Publishing (1977)

- Historical accounts (the writings of Josephus and St. Jerome, the Letter of Aristeas)
- Scriptural items (statements in the Talmud, errors of omission in the LXX)
- Linguistic data (comparative linguistic analysis of the Greek in the LXX vis-à-vis the Greek spoken in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E)
- Inconsistencies in the way the Greek word παρθενος is translated in the KJV (e.g., at Gen 24:43 it is rendered **the virgin**, while at Gen 38:24 it is rendered **the maid**, so that it does not exclusively mean **a virgin**)
- The Church-rendered LXX defeats the standard Christian argument as well. The claim is that, at Isaiah 7:14, הַעַלְמָה is translated into Greek as παρθενος, which means **a virgin**. Yet, the LXX is not consistent in all its translation of this noun. The LXX renditions for the seven instances of הַעַלְמָה in the Hebrew Bible are shown in Table III.E.1-1.

**Table III.E.1-1 – LXX translations of הַעַלְמָה**

Reference	Greek Translation in LXX*
Genesis 24:43; Isaiah 7:14	παρθενος ( <i>parthenos</i> )
Exodus 2:8; Psalms 68:26 [67:26 in LXX] Proverbs 30:19; Song of Songs 1:3, 6:8	νεανισ ( <i>neanis</i> )

\* Nouns are shown in "root" form, i.e., singular and without prepositions

- According to Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott's (L&S), *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, the noun παρθενος may take on the following meanings: **a maid, a maiden, a virgin, a girl**. The noun νεανισ is shown in the same source to have the following meanings: **a young woman, a girl, a maiden**. The application in the Church-rendered LXX of two distinctly different terms to the Hebrew noun הַעַלְמָה, rules out any proof that the Greek term exclusively means "a virgin". [The LXX rendition of the masculine counter-part of הַעַלְמָה, namely, הַעַלְמָה, is νεανισκος (*neaniskos*), which, according to L&S, has the following meanings: **a youth, a young man**. Clearly, there is no definite indication of virginity in these terms.
- According to the LXX, Genesis 34:3 also defeats the claim that παρθενος is used exclusively to describe "a virgin". Dinah, who was raped by Sh'chem, is referred to as παρθενος after being raped, which refutes the claim on its exclusive use for identifying "a virgin".

**Conclusion:** This claim is false on three accounts. First, the LXX is a Christian, not Jewish, translation of the Hebrew Bible. Second, the two different LXX translations of הַעַלְמָה demonstrate that the Greek term παρθενος is not used exclusively in references to "a virgin". Finally, the LXX uses παρθενος to describe a woman after she was raped.

**3. Missionary Claim:** Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) cognate languages support the use of הַעַלְמָה over בְּתוּלָה to describe "a virgin"

- ‡ **Christian Claim:** This Christian missionary argument utilizes the terminology found in several of the ANE Cognate Languages (Akkadian, Egyptian, Sumerian, Ugaritic, and others) to justify the claim that עַלְמָה is just as acceptable as, and probably even more accurate than בְּתוּלָה, for conveying the idea that a young female is "a virgin".<sup>9</sup>
- ☆ **Jewish Response:** References to such extra-Biblical sources are simply diversions that have no place here. Professor Gordon's work on this topic was studied and analyzed. Of particular interest are his comments on a related Ugaritic poem,<sup>10</sup> which lead to the following observations:
- The Christian analysis quotes only a small portion of the full analysis by Professor Gordon. When the entire published note is taken in its proper context, together with the text of the poem in question, the claimed inference is, at best, a stretch of the true meaning.
  - Given Isaiah's stance against idolatry, the use by the Prophet of terminology from a language and poem that represented an idolatrous culture is rather doubtful.

Christian missionaries typically adhere to religious fundamentalism, which generally includes the notion of *sola scriptura*, Latin for **by scripture alone**, the idea of the singular authority of scripture. In other words, scripture (the Bible) is the only infallible rule to be used for deciding issues of faith and practices that involve doctrines. Yet, in order to defend their interpretation of Isaiah 7:14, missionaries are prepared to reach outside the bounds of their Bible and rely on the ANE languages of pagan nations. They cannot have it both ways!

While Judaism rejects the concept of *sola scriptura*, in the case of Isaiah 7:14 there is no need to go outside the Hebrew Bible to demonstrate the validity of the Jewish position. Using *Scripture to interpret Scripture* is a powerful analytical tool for supporting the Jewish interpretation against the claims made by Christian missionaries.

### III. SUMMARY

The detailed analysis of Isaiah 7:14 presented in this 2-part essay demonstrates, both grammatically and contextually, that a valid connection cannot be established between the doctrine of the "Virgin Birth", a foundational doctrine of Christianity, and Isaiah 7:14. This verse from the Hebrew Bible has been mistranslated and claimed, first by the author of the Gospel of Matthew, and later by many others, as a

<sup>9</sup> This claim is based on a published note by the late Professor Cyrus H. Gordon, '*Almah in Isaiah 7:14*, Journal of Bible and Religion, p. 106, Vol. XXI, No. 2 (April 1953)

<sup>10</sup> See *Exposing A Missionary Deception* - <http://thejewishhome.org/counter/j4jexposed.pdf>. [A side note: In a private communication to a third party, Professor Gordon, who has since passed away, voiced his dismay at how Christian missionaries were misapplying his published note on the subject, and he confirmed that their conclusions are erroneous.]

“messianic prophecy” from the Prophet Isaiah that was fulfilled in the alleged “Virgin Birth” of Jesus.

The claim that Isaiah 7:14 is the so-called "proof text" of the "Virgin Birth" of Jesus is merely an attempt to retrofit Christology into the Hebrew Bible. This verse is part of an historical event, described in detail in the seventh chapter of the Book of Isaiah, something that has already occurred and cannot apply to an event claimed to have taken place some seven and one half centuries later in history.

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