

[F-2] Does Isaiah 7:14 refer to a virgin? -- Yes

www.TheWordNotes.com

Concerning the use of the Hebrew word "alma" {העלמה} - literally 'the virgin'

First let me say that I believe that Jesus truly was born of a virgin and truly God. If He wasn't, then He was not 'without sin' and He could not be our Savior. I strongly disagree that the Hebrew word 'alma' {העלמה} does not specifically mean virgin. Modern 'pop' theology has too long quoted misled, unscholarly men without taking the time to actually examine the Biblical text. I am quoting the following quote verbatim from the Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible, copyright 1991 by AMG International, Inc, and edited by Spiros Zodhrates which gives probably the most concise arguments I have seen related to this issue. Please note section (1) concerning the Hebrew. At the end of this note, I am including the verses cited in King James Version, my own King James Paraphrase, and the Hebrew [with an inter-linear translation to assist those who know some Hebrew to examine the text for themselves]. I have also added the Hebrew and Greek words referenced in the quote in { }.

"Is. 7:14 The famous prophecy of Christ's virgin birth is contained in this verse. The events of chapter seven occurred about 734 B.C. Isaiah was sent to King Ahaz with a reassuring word (Is. 7:4-9), but Isaiah's word also challenged him to exercise faith in God during this crisis (cf Hezekiah's response in Is. 36-38). The Lord generously offered to grant a sign to Ahaz to bolster his faith (Is. 7:11) However in this crisis, Ahaz was not trusting in God, but in his alliance with Assyria (2 Kgs. 16:7-9). His reply, "I will not ask ..." was pure hypocrisy (v. 14)

Few passages have provoked such controversy as this verse, even among those who hold to a conservative viewpoint. Recent studies have a uniform tendency to downplay the miraculous aspects, and rationalize that this verse is a prophecy that some young woman would shortly bear a child in the normal way, and the brief time of his youth would see the downfall of those countries now threatening Judah and King Ahaz. It is believed that these approaches do not do justice to the text, and some reasons are summarized below.

(1) The meaning of the Hebrew word {העלמה} 'almah (5959 [Strong's Concordance number]). It has become commonplace to suggest that 'almah does not mean virgin, and that in fact, had Isaiah meant "virgin," he would have used the Hebrew word bethula (1330). **The facts of the language are otherwise.** {emphasis added} 'Almah is the clearest word Isaiah could have chosen to convey the idea of virginity. There is no appearance of 'almah in the OT where the meaning "virgin" cannot be used. Bethulah, on the other hand often needs qualification to clarify whether or not "virgin" is intended (e.g., Gen. 24:16, where Rebekah is described as a "virgin"

[bethulah], "neither had any man known her." Note that 'almah, which occurs later in the same context [Gen. 24:43], needs no such qualification. The qualification is doubtless needed because bethulah, unlike 'almah, can sometimes refer to a married woman [Deut. 22:24; Joel 1:8].)

It is evident that 'almah ought indeed be translated "virgin" on the basis of Hebrew usage. But this is not the extent of the argument. The Greeks, who translated the OT into their language hundreds of years before Christ, had no question; they translated Isaiah 7:14 in the Sept., with the Greek word parthenos {ἡ παρθένοσ}, the word for "virgin." Finally, the Holy Spirit affirmed this as the meaning when He guided Matthew to use parthenos {παρθένοσ} when quoting Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23.

(2) The meaning of the word {אוֹת} 'oth (224), "sign." Those who suggest that the birth mentioned in Isaiah 7:14 would be a normal birth contradict the significance of 'oth. This word never refers to ordinary events, but always to special or distinctive actions or things. With reference to God, it is commonly translated as, or understood to refer to, "miracle." This is particularly true of its uses in Isaiah, which, aside from this context, are concentrated with reference to God's miraculous sign of the sundial (chaps. 37;38), and with God's miraculous millennial dealings with Israel (chaps. 55;56). Therefore, the "sign" would need to be something extraordinary, not merely the normal birth of a male child who would live to see the downfall of Syria. It certainly would not be the defeat of Syria and Israel by Assyria! That was the very thing Ahaz was scheming to do without God's involvement!

(3) The specific reference of the prophecy. One must note that after Ahaz refuses a sign, God does not address him again. Verse fourteen is addressed to the whole "house of David." This immediately takes us beyond a rigid focus on the current scene. Moreover, the language of the announcement "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bring forth ..." is reminiscent of pagan phraseology used to announce the birth of "gods." It is not suggested that Isaiah is likening Christ's birth to that of some pagan idol, merely that the idol-worshiping Ahaz would recognize the significance of the prophecy. Note also that both 'virgin' in verse fourteen and "child" in verse sixteen have the definite article. It is agreed that these articles of general reference, and that "a virgin" is the proper translation in verse fourteen. But note what happens if we translate "a child" in verse sixteen. The prophetic verse makes excellent sense on its own as a statement about the length of the crisis, with no reference to verse fourteen. One must also observe that the Hebrew word {בֶּן} ben (1121), which means "son," is used in verse fourteen, while a completely different Hebrew word, {נָעַר} "na'ar" (5288), meaning "young man," appears in verse sixteen.

(4) The child born. The name is "Immanuel," or "God with us." He cannot be just any child for in Isaiah 8:8 (and probably 8:10), "Immanuel" is presented as the true owner of the land (cf. the implications of Lev. 25:23), and the one who will vanquish Assyria. Further, the "son" to be born is mentioned again in Isaiah 9:6 and 11:1-5, and is clearly seen there to be a divine Person, No child of normal parentage could be so understood; certainly not the child of Isaiah or Ahaz, as some commentators have suggested.

(5) The nature of messianic prophecy. Throughout the OT, passages of messianic importance are presented without chronological separation or distinction. Peter explicitly states that the prophets were ignorant regarding when the messianic prophecies would be fulfilled (I Peter 1:10-12). It was indeed this prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 itself which was to be a sign. Its mysterious reference to a virgin birth would remain (as it did) to challenge students of God's word until the proper time came for it to be fulfilled.

Is. 7:14

(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. KJV

--

(14) Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign; Behold, a [the] virgin will conceive, and bear a Son, and will call His name Immanuel {God with us}. KJP

(2)

-- [note: Hebrew is read from right to left]

14)	לכן	יתן	אדני	הוא	לכם	אות	הנה	העלמה	הרה	וילדת	בן	וקראת	שמו	עמנו	אל:
	therefore	shall	the	Himself	to you	a sign	Behold	the	will	and	a son	she will	His	Immanuel	
		give	Lord					virgin	conceive	bear	call	Name			

===

Gen. 24:16

(16) And the damsel *was* very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up. KJV

--

(16) And the damsel *was* very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her {sexually}: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up. KJP

--

והנער	טבת	מראה	מאד	בתולה	ואיש	לא	ידעה	ותרד	העינה	ותמלא	כרה	ותעל:
and the	was good	of form	very	a young	and	not	knowing	and she	to the	and	her	and came
girl				woman	a man			went down	well	filled	pitcher	up

===

Gen. 24:43

(43) Behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin cometh forth to draw *water*, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink; KJV

--

(43) Behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin comes forth to draw *water*, and I say to her, I urge you give me a little water from your pitcher to drink; KJP

--

הנה	אנכי	נצב	על־עין	המים	והיה	העלמה	היצאת	לשאב	ואמרת	אליה	השקיני־נא
Behold	I	stand	at the well	the water	and behold	the virgin	comes	to draw	and I say	to her	please let me
							forth	water			drink

מעט־מים	מכוד:
a little water	from your pitcher

Deut. 22:24

(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. KJV

--

(24) Then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them with stones so that they die; the young woman, because she did not cry out, *being* in the city; and the man, because he has humbled his neighbor's wife: so you shall put away evil from among you. KJP

--

את־הנער	ומתו	באבנים	אתם	וסקלתם	ההוא	העיר	אל־שער	את־שניהם	והוצאתם
the girl	so that they die	with stones stone them	them	and you shall	that	the city	to the gate	them both	you then shall bring out

רעהו	את־אשת	אשר־ענה	ואת־האיש	על־דבר	בעיר	אשר	לא־צעקה	על־דבר
his neighbor's	the wife	he violated	because and the man	in the city	she did not cry out	because		

מקרבך:	הרע	ובערת
from among you	the evil cut off	and you shall

===

Joel 1:8

(8) Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. KJV

--

(8) Lament like a virgin [young woman] clothed with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. KJP [[Note the Hebrew bethulah { בתולה }]]

--

נעוריה:	על־בעל	חגרת־שק	כבתולה	אלי
of her youth	over the husband	girded with sackcloth	like a young woman	wail

=====

Isaiah 7:14 [Septuagint]

διὰ τοῦτο δώσει κύριος αὐτὸς ὑμῖν σημεῖον· ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ

through this He shall give the Lord Himself to you a sign behold the virgin in the womb shall conceive and bear a son and

καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ	Εμμανουήλ·
call the name of Him	Immanuel

One further note: Matthew was a tax collector. As such he had to be proficient in both the Hebrew and Greek languages as well as having a thorough knowledge of both systems of weights and measures and how they related to each other. There are passages which suggest that Matthew may have actually originally written his gospel in Hebrew and then translated it into Greek. Certainly the genealogy of Joseph was in all probability in Hebrew and although it is primarily a list of names, still required translating into Greek. **To say that Isaiah 7:14 does not refer specifically to a virgin accuses Matthew of not being led by the Holy Spirit and suggests that his gospel is not inspired by God and that Matthew himself was ignorant of his own native language and also the New Testament Greek language his gospel was written in.**