

**Scriptures and Doctrine :: and a virgin shall conceive...****and a virgin shall conceive... - posted by philologos (), on: 2003/12/2 6:16**

This has a seasonal flavour to it. I have recently come across two very different challenges to the 'virgin birth'. The first was from a militant Judaistic site which sees itself as a bastion against 'Messianic Judaism' and 'Jews for Jesus'. The second was from a liberal Bible Seminary in Hong Kong. The thrust of both was that the word translated 'virgin' in Isaiah 7:14 does not mean 'virgin' but a 'married woman'. The implication being that either Christians have interfered with the text or that Mary was not necessarily 'virgin'.

The simple answer is that 'almah' means a sexually mature woman with no other specific implications. However the Hebrew bible was translated into Greek in the Septuagint (LXX) where the Hebrew word 'almah' is translated by the Greek word 'parthenos'; 'parthenos' can only mean 'virgin'. The Holy Spirit endorsed this by using the word 'parthenos' in Matt 1:23.

The Old Testament revelation is brought into clearer focus by the New Testament. It is not different it just has more precise definition. In the light of the full revelation of scripture our faith rests easy, a virgin conceived and brought forth a child.

If you would like a scholarly defense of the simple truth above there is one available in pdf or rtf formats. It is worth reading if you are likely to be talking to militant Jews or liberal theologians. "What does 'almah' mean?"

Re: and a virgin shall conceive... - posted by Chosen7Stone (), on: 2003/12/2 11:40

The other thing was that Mary wasn't technically married yet when the Holy Spirit made her conceive Christ. She was still in that one-year engagement period, in order to make sure that she was still a virgin. That testifies to the faith of Joseph, too, in that he didn't divorce her like most would, though the Bible says he was going to do so "quietly" so her reputation wasn't trashed (what a gentleman).

It has to mean "virgin" -- Mary wasn't married yet. And the fact that the Spirit verified in Matthew 1:23...

Re: and a virgin shall conceive... - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2003/12/2 13:00

Quote:

-----The implication being that either Christians have interfered with the text or that Mary was not necessarily 'virgin'.

Sadly, to the man whose philosophy is naturalism, these implications you mention are the only options left.

The Jesus Seminar came to the same conclusion that the virgin birth is a myth. Naturalism rules out the possibility of miracles for them. The problem is that they never start with historical evidence but instead they start with presuppositions and therefore they're not dealing with history, they're dealing with philosophy.

In Christ,

Ron

Re:, on: 2003/12/17 13:23

Ron,

I've had questions about Mary being a virgin, mostly because virgin birth is part of several other religions. Lord Krishna was supposed to have been born of a virgin etc. Seems like it may have been added in to make an impression.

What I come down to is, well it just doesn't matter to me. I don't need a virgin birth to have faith in Jesus. In fact, I don't need any of the reported miracles he performed. His words of loving your neighbor as yourself and loving your enemy ri

ng true and profoundly alter the way I look at (and hopefully live) life. This is sufficient for my faith.

Jake

Re: and a virgin shall conceive... - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2003/12/17 14:18

I've always understood that almah meant "young maiden." A maiden is of course, an unmarried woman. And being that fornication was a sin, I don't see how she could be depicted as anything else but a virgin.

Re: and a virgin shall conceive... - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2003/12/17 14:21

What about the interpretation that the virgin-birth prophecy in Isaiah was not, in its immediate context, specifically referring to Christ? Rather, it was speaking of a conflict specifically in that time?

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/1/3 15:53

Hi P2C

you wrote I've always understood that almah meant "young maiden." A maiden is of course, an unmarried woman. And being that fornication was a sin, I don't see how she could be depicted as anything else but a virgin.

As far as my researches have taken me 'almah' really means a sexually mature young woman. As you say, in the OT context, this should have meant a 'virgin'. By the times of the gospels the stringent implications of the OT law were not always carried out. According to OT law Mary ought to have been stoned to death rather than privately 'divorced', as was Joseph's intention.

Liberal bible scholars have suggested various scurrilous possibilities for a father, including the suggestion that Galilee was notoriously promiscuous as a result of Roman legions stationed there. There is a hint of local scandal in the thrust of the Pharisees in John 8:41 'Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God....' implying that He was?

the 'almah' has become a sort of favourite target for people who want to discredit scripture. Even Richard Dawkins has a go in one of his books on Darwinian evolution.

I had been asked by some Christians in Hong Kong for some comment on the matter as a local Denominational Theological College was also targetting 'almah' as a way of undermining the 'verbal inerrancy of scripture'. My own answer was in terms of 'parthenos' being the Spirit's translation for 'almah' but I stumbled on the article which I thought might have been of interest to some who like to think things through.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/1/3 16:08

Jake wrote I don't need a virgin birth to have faith in Jesus. In fact, I don't need any of the reported miracles he performed. His words of loving your neighbor as yourself and loving your enemy ring true and profoundly alter the way I look at (and hopefully live) life. This is sufficient for my faith.

This effectively means that your faith is based on your faith. By this standard your impressions are only subject to self-authentication and are without any 'second witness' validation.

Jake, The consequences are serious. Which Jesus are you putting your faith in? The Jesus of biblical revelation or the Jesus of your own fashioning? I am desperately trying not to make this personal, but this methodology can only lead to idolatry. There is only one Jesus, and any modifying of the biblical revelation results in a false image, and putting our faith in a false image is idolatry.

It has another serious consequence. If Jesus was not born of a virgin, who is He? Is He the second person of the trinity who 'became flesh' or is He an ordinary human being like the rest of us who 'became God' by obedience? If He is God/man how did that happen? How did God become perfectly manifest in flesh if it was not by incarnation, and how could incarnation take place without a unique union of God and man which produced a virgin 'conception'?

Jesus was, without contention I hope, Mary's child? Who was His father?

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/1/3 16:48

Hi P2C

this is from the Jameson, Faussett, Brown commentary.

virgin—*from a root, "to lie hid, " virgins being closely kept from men's gaze in their parents' custody in the East. The Hebrew, and the Septuagint here, and Greek (#Mt 1:23), have the article, the virgin, some definite one known to the speaker and his hearers; primarily, the woman, then a virgin, about immediately to become the second wife, and bear a child, whose attainment of the age of discrimination (about three years) should be preceded by the deliverance of Judah from its two invaders; its fullest significance is realized in "the woman" (#Ge 3:15), whose seed should bruise the serpent's head and deliver captive man (#Jer 31:22 Mic 5:3). Language is selected such as, while partially applicable to the immediate event, receives its fullest, most appropriate, and exhaustive accomplishment in Messianic events. The New Testament application of such prophecies is not a strained "accommodation"; rather the temporary fulfillment of an adaptation of the far-reaching prophecy to the present passing event, which foreshadows typically the great central end of prophecy, Jesus Christ (#Re 19:10). Evidently the wording is such as to apply more fully to Jesus Christ than to the prophet's son; "virgin" applies, in its simplest sense, to the Virgin Mary, rather than to the prophetess who ceased to be a virgin when she "conceived"; "Immanuel, " God with us (#Joh 1:14 Re 21:3), cannot in a strict sense apply to Isaiah's son, but only to Him who is presently called expressly (#Isa 9:6), "the Child, the Son, Wonderful (compare #Isa 8:18), the mighty God. " Local and temporary features (as in #Isa 7:15,16) are added in every type; otherwise it would be no type, but the thing itself. There are resemblances to the great Antitype sufficient to be recognized by those who seek them; dissimilarities enough to confound those who do not desire to discover them.*

I think I am comfortable with this. I would make one other observation that the word of Isaiah is specific and local, and at the same time specific and predictive. I observe that part is addressed to the 'house of David' which could imply a time-zone much more extensive than that of Ahaz. However, other parts are quite specifically addressed to Ahaz.

This is one of the facets of prophecy; a telescoping of events, and a statement which has an immediate local application but which awaits a more perfect fulfillment at a future time. Time is not always linear in the prophet's vision of things.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/3/10 9:32

I came across this on another website and thought it would go well here.

parthenos - 'a person in a virgin state'

The Greek word parthenos (Strong's #3933) is used fourteen times in the New Testament. It is significant because the Holy Spirit, evidently anticipating the liberal pretensions of the "modern scholarship," chose this word to supply us with an infallible interpretation of the Hebrew word 'almah' (Strong's #5959) in Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus, the Christ (Isaiah 7:14). Matthew, the inspired biographer to the Jews, wrote of the birth of Jesus, and quoted from Isaiah's prophecy regarding the birth of a son by a 'parthenos,' a "virgin," and applies the term to Mary, mother of Jesus (Matthew 1:18-23). Luke, another inspired biographer of Jesus, recorded how God sent the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary and informed her that God had chosen her to conceive in her womb His Son Jesus, who shall reign upon the Davidic throne over His kingdom forever (Luke 1:26-33). Meyer affirms that the Greek word 'parthenos' used by both of these authors corresponds to the Hebrew word 'almah.'¹ Parkhurst says, "The Hebrew name for a virgin, 'almah' (to which 'parthenos' several times answers in the LXX), refers to the secluded, concealed state in which she lived."² He also defines the term as, "a person in a virgin state and plainly includes both sexes, but generally denotes the female, a virgin, a maiden, a maid."³ Young adds, "A virgin, one put aside."⁴ Thus, both words refer to "a young maiden put aside or kept apart who has never had sexual intercourse with a man; or a man who has kept his chastity and has never had intercourse with a woman; hence, "a virgin, one never having known man or woman." The words do not simply mean as many of the modern scholars of today profess, "a young woman of marriageable age." Moreover, it can be seen that the Hebrew word 'almah' signifies only a "young unmarried woman and a true virgin." A careful analysis of all the Old Testament passages where the Hebrew word 'almah' appears reveals that the term is never applied to a married woman, never designates a non-virgin, and never alludes to an impure woman: Genesis 24:43 (maiden— the maiden Rebekah by the well); Exodus 2:8 (maiden— the maiden Miriam by the river, the baby Moses young sister, a girl of tender years); Psalms 68:25 (damsels— the damsels in David's chorus of praise); Proverbs 30:19 (maiden— the maiden and her wooer in courtship); Song of Solomon 1:3; 6:8 (virgins— the Shulamite virgins that surround the Beloved); and Isaiah 7:14 (virgin— the virgin Mary, who became the mother of Jesus).

Hundreds of years before the virgin birth of Jesus, prophecy had established the supernatural and miraculous manner of the Savior's birth. That prophecy came from the prophet Isaiah to Ahaz, king of Judah, and is quoted in Matthew's gospel, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, And they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us" (Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14). Let's first take note of the political scene surrounding the kingdom of Judah which formed the basis for Isaiah's prophecy. Ahaz, the king of Judah was besieged at Jerusalem by a coalition between Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Syria to depose the reigning family of David. Once news of this confederacy was told to Ahaz and the house of David, they became fearful and fainthearted so the Lord commissioned Isaiah the prophet to meet with king Ahaz and reassure him that the conspiracy would fail. Isaiah prophesied to the king that because of Ephraim's actions, they would cease in 65 years from the time of this prophecy (Isaiah 7:5-8). It was in the exact mathematics of this prophecy that in 65 years, Ephraim, the kingdom of Israel, ceased; but Judah continued. God stated to Ahaz through his prophet that He would be faithful to His covenant with David and the house of Judah but He told Isaiah to have the king to ask Him for a sign, which the Lord would provide in token of the truth of the promise. But, Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!" He therefore, spurned God's suggestion for an immediate sign and instead turned to the king of Assyria for help. In consequence of this action, Ahaz earned the severe denunciation of Isaiah who communicated the information to him by prophecy that God was still going to provide a sign to Judah, a sign for the future, not contemporary but prophetic, of how God would fulfill the Davidic promise in its ultimate meaning. That this is the correct exegesis of the text is clear from the fact that there was no need for Isaiah to give Ahaz a sign for a present deliverance. He had already done so in assuring the king that the siege would fail and he had already prophesied that the northern kingdom of Israel would cease in 65 years but that the southern kingdom of Judah would continue. The sign conveyed by the prophet Isaiah was of the "virgin" born son (Hebrew 'almah,' and Greek Septuagint 'parthenos;' Isaiah 7:14), which reached its culmination of the Child and the Son that he later prophesied concerning (Isaiah 9:6,7), and the words of its fulfillment are recorded through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:26-33) and refer to Jesus.

Being deity, Jesus is related to God, the Father. Having a human mother, He has close kinship with mankind. Like the Father, He is eternal, from heaven. Like man, He experienced the trials, and bore the burdens of all mankind, on earth. Thus, He alone, through His own personal experiences, has been privileged to know, the highest joys of heaven, and the bitterest sorrows of earth. Because He is unique, His birth had to be one of a kind. It should not be surprising that God would choose to bring His only-begotten Son into the world by having Him be born of a 'parthenos,' "virgin." Jesus was to be called, Immanuel, which being translated is God with us, which, of course, alludes to the coming down of deity into human form (Philippians 2:5-11). The Word "was made flesh and dwelt" (literally, pitched His tent) "among men." (John 1:14). Of no other, aside from Jesus, our Savior is such affirmed. These prophecies were all focused on Christ and the redemption of mankind entrusted to the house of David through Judah, and the sign of Isaiah 7:14 extending to the Child and Son of Isaiah 9:6,7 was connected with the virgin birth of Jesus, who now reigns from heaven on the Davidic throne forevermore.

Re: "philosophy and vain deceit" - posted by hijode1dios (), on: 2004/3/16 22:32

InTheLight wrote:

Quote:
.....
...The problem is that they never start with historical evidence but instead they start with presuppositions and therefore they're not dealing with history, they're dealing with philosophy.

Ron
.....

Well, I guess you can say that again! You are right on target there.

1 Timothy 6:20 "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called:"

Colossians 2:8 "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

Re: - posted by jeremyhulsey (), on: 2004/3/17 0:20

That ancient Jewish scholars would translate "alma" into "parthenos" a long time before Christ was born tells me that we don't completely understand the total implied meanings of alma. It is obvious to me that the translators of the septuagint believed that, in certain contexts, alma was to mean virgin.

Hulsey

Re: - posted by Agent001 (), on: 2004/3/17 10:43

From the footnote on Isaiah 7:14 from the (<http://www.netbible.com>) NET Bible:

Quote:
-----Traditionally, "virgin." Because this verse from Isaiah is quoted in Matt 1:23 in connection with Jesus' birth, the Isaiah passage has been regarded since the earliest Christian times as a prophecy of Christ's virgin birth. Much debate has taken place over the best way to translate this Hebrew term, although ultimately one's view of the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ is unaffected. Though the Hebrew word used here, *almah* (אִלְמָה), can sometimes refer to a woman who is a virgin (Gen 24:43), it does not carry this meaning inherently. The word is simply the feminine form of the corresponding masculine noun

Re: - posted by Agent001 (), on: 2004/3/17 11:18

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The NET Bible is the product of a team of conservative scholars. I am sorry the Greek and Hebrew fonts did not come out right after copying and pasting.

I want to point out a few things:

1) Even conservative scholars currently hold different views regarding the translation of "alma" in Isaiah 7:14. The issue is not that they do not believe in the virgin birth; contrarily, they all agree to the virgin birth of Jesus. For some, the issue is simply exegetical--they believe the word in its *original OT context* simply refers to "young woman".

2) To these scholars, their concern is primarily on the meaning of the word in its *original OT context*, i.e. what the original author intended to convey. However, they do recognise that the translators of the Septuagint where the citation in Matthew comes from, rendered its translation into a Greek term with a narrower sense, "virgin".