

The Virgin Birth of Christ Prophesied

Isaiah 7:14

Introduction:

- **Isaiah 7:14** is probably one of the most oft-quoted verses of Scripture every year around Christmas time. It is also one of the most powerful prophecies of the Messiah in the entire Bible. It clearly states that the Messiah's birth would be a miracle—that He would be born of a virgin. Obviously, this means that the Messiah would have no human father. The theological importance of this verse cannot be overstated.
- Secular scholars who refuse to believe that the Bible is God's Word, as well as "religious" scholars who refuse to believe that Jesus is God in human flesh, understandably hate **Isaiah 7:14**, and do their best to convince people that this verse is *not* speaking of a miraculous, virgin birth—for if the virgin birth be true, the Gospel is true. Despite the denials of unbelievers, the meaning of this verse is crystal clear, and cannot be refuted.
- This prophecy was given through the prophet Isaiah about 740 years before Christ's birth. The prophecy was spoken in the audience of Ahaz, the king of Judah, during a time of national crisis. It is important to understand what was going on at the time of this prophecy, and how King Ahaz reacted to it. It is especially important to understand to *whom* the prophecy was actually addressed.

Isaiah 7:14

I. The background of the "virgin birth" prophecy (Isaiah 7:1-13)

- At the time when Isaiah gave this prophecy, the kingdom of Judah was under the rule of Ahaz, who was, like all the kings of Judah, a descendant of King David. However, unlike his ancestor David, Ahaz chose to reject the LORD, and to worship idols. Because of Ahaz's apostasy, God allowed Judah to be under almost constant attack from enemy nations, including Northern Israel, Syria, Edom, and Philistia.

2 Kings 16:1-6

- As the above verses show, Pekah, the king of Northern Israel, and Rezin, the king of Syria, joined forces to attack Judah. They may have launched this attack in retaliation for Ahaz's refusal to join with them against their common enemy, Assyria. (At any rate, we know that shortly after this, Ahaz actually surrendered to the king of Assyria, and made an alliance with him. See **2 Chronicles 28:16-21** and **2 Kings 16:7-9**.)
- In this invasion, Syria and Northern Israel devastated Judah's army, and took away many captives; but God, in His mercy, did not allow them to destroy Judah and Jerusalem completely. Pekah and Rezin also intended to dethrone Ahaz, and to set up a traitor, the son of Tabeal, as a "puppet king," to do their bidding; but God did not allow this to

happen, either. [Interestingly, the name Tabeel means “God is good”; but the name Tabeal means “good (for) nothing.” Tabeel was probably this traitor’s real name; but God called him Tabeal—“good for nothing”!]¹

2 Chronicles 28:1-15 (Note that God used a single prophet, Oded, to prick the consciences of the entire army of Northern Israel, and to stop them from completing their purpose!)

- It was shortly before this invasion, when Pekah and Syria were marching toward Judah, when Isaiah gave this prophecy of the virgin birth of the Messiah. God commanded Isaiah to take his son Shear-jashub with him, and to meet King Ahaz at the city’s water conduit. (Ahaz was probably inspecting Jerusalem’s water reserves, to see how prepared the city was for a siege.)²

Isaiah 7:1-13

- Initially, the purpose of this visit was for Isaiah to give Ahaz comforting information about what would happen in the coming invasion. God commanded Isaiah to inform King Ahaz that the kings of Northern Israel and Syria would not succeed in their mission to overthrow the line of David (v. 7). God then invited Ahaz to ask for a sign (i.e., a *miraculous* sign) to confirm that this prophecy was true--any sign whatsoever, whether in the "depth," or in the "height above" (v. 11).
- This was quite an offer! Not many people in history have been personally given a choice of any miracle that they want to see in order to prove God’s Word. Yet, what was Ahaz’s reply to this gracious invitation from God? Ahaz responded that he would "not ask," neither "tempt the LORD."
- On the surface, this answer *sounds* pious. Indeed, God *had* commanded the children of Israel not to "tempt" the LORD (**Deuteronomy 6:16**). However, this was not a case of "tempting" the LORD, since God had invited Ahaz to ask for a sign. (God’s invitation was, in fact, a command.) The fact of the matter is that Ahaz simply did not believe that God could or would perform His word. He was probably already working on his own solution to this crisis, such as asking the king of Assyria for help.
- Ahaz was probably so self-deceived, that even *he* thought that his excuse for his unbelief was legitimate. But God’s view of Ahaz’s answer was that it made Him "weary" (v. 13). (In our modern way of speaking, we might say, “Give me a break!”)
- Fortunately, God gave the house of David a miraculous sign *anyway*, despite Ahaz’s unbelief; and this sign turned out to be one of the most wonderful prophecies of the coming Messiah that God ever gave. But God was "wearied" by Ahaz’s unbelief, nevertheless. God warned Ahaz, "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established" (v. 9).

¹ Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, p. 161

² *Ibid*, 159.

- There is much personal application in this for us, as Christians. Ahaz, of course, was a wicked idolater, and did not know God. However, how often do we who *do* know God give pious-sounding excuses for our unbelief in God's promises--and even back up our unbelieving reply with Scripture (which we have misinterpreted)? We do it far too often. Christians should not “weary” the LORD. All His promises are true, and will surely come to pass. We must trust His Word, so that He may establish us in our Christian lives.

II. The content of the virgin birth prophecy

Isaiah 7:14

- It is important to remember the setting in which this messianic prophecy was given. As we have just seen, the setting was that the Lord (through the prophet Isaiah) had just invited King Ahaz to ask for a sign to confirm the promise that God had just given him. (The promise was that King Rezin of Assyria and King Pekah of Northern Israel would *not* succeed in their attempt to destroy Judah, and would *not* remove Ahaz from his throne.) Ahaz, being an unbeliever, refused to ask for any sign (**verse 13**), and thereby showed his total lack of faith in the God of Israel. Since Ahaz would not respond to God's invitation, the "*Lord himself*" graciously gave a sign.

A. “The sign” that God would give

- The “sign” that the LORD promised to give was not one that would come to pass in the near future: rather, it was for the distant future. It was the promise that the Messiah would one day be born, and that He would be born of a “virgin.” Such a miracle had never happened before; and it will never happen again.
- Sadly, many modern Bible translations have deliberately replaced the word “virgin” with “young woman” or “young lady.” Obviously, this word-change completely removes the miraculous nature of Christ’s birth, since a woman can be young, but not a virgin. This false translation “young woman,” which appears in many modern versions, reveals the unbelief of most modern Bible translators. Most modern Bible translators are apostates who do not believe the Bible themselves, and desire to destroy people’s faith in God’s Word.
- The Hebrew word for “virgin” is *alma*. This word *never* means “married woman.” Nor is it ever applied to an unmarried woman who has had sexual relations with a man. It *always* means an unmarried woman who has *never* had an intimate relationship with a man. (In contrast, the Hebrew word *bethulah* can mean “young woman”; but it also can mean “bride” or “married woman.”)
- The idea that Isaiah is speaking merely of a “young woman” does not even make sense. What kind of “sign” would it be for a young married woman (or a young, unmarried woman who is not a virgin) to have a child? The marvel of this sign was that a *virgin* would conceive.
- The New Testament strongly affirms the truth of the virgin birth of Christ.

Luke 1:26-35 (The word “know” in **verse 34** is the Hebrew way of saying “to have intimate relations.” Mary did not “know” a man. She was chaste.)

Matthew 1:18-23

- Both in **Luke 1:27** and in **Matthew 1:23**, the Greek word *partnenos* (“virgin”) is used. Like the Hebrew word *alma*, the word *partnenos* always means “virgin,” and nothing else.
- The Lord made it very clear, through the New Testament writers, that His Son did not have a human father; and He declared it 740 years in advance, so that no one could accuse the Apostles of “making it up.” The virgin birth of Christ truly is a marvellous “sign”!

B. The virgin whom God would use to perform this sign

1. She was specially chosen of God—but not to be worshipped.

- In **Isaiah 7:14**, the Hebrew text literally reads *ha alma* (“the virgin”). The definite article “the” in front of “virgin” shows that God had specially chosen Mary, from among all other women, to be the mother of the Messiah. Only one woman in history could fulfil this one-time task. She was truly “*the* virgin.”
- It is important that we keep Mary in her proper place. God called her “*the* virgin” because she was specially chosen by God, from eternity past, to fulfil a one-time task—but not because she was worthy of worship. She was morally chaste, and she was a humble, faithful, willing servant of God; but she was not sinless, as the Roman Catholic Church teaches. She, too, was in need of the Saviour.

Luke 2:46-47

- The infinite superiority of Jesus to His earthly mother is emphasised from the beginning of the New Testament.

Matthew 2:11 (Notice that the wise men worshipped “him”—not “him and his mother.”)

Matthew 2:14, 20 (The Bible consistently refers to “the young child and his mother”—*not* “the mother and her young child.” Jesus is always preeminent.)

- The Roman Catholic Church claims that worship of Mary is warranted since the angel Gabriel told her, “Blessed art thou among women” (**Luke 1:28**). However, if the words “Blessed art thou among women” be an indication that Mary deserves worship, then there is another woman in the Bible who should be even more deserving of worship than Mary!

Judges 5:24-26

- If Mary should be worshipped because she was “blessed among women,” then surely Jael, the assassin of Jabin, the king of the Canaanites, should be worshipped even more, since she was “blessed above women” for her deed!
- Obviously, neither Mary nor Jael are to be worshipped. Mary is called “*the virgin*” because of her unique task, and nothing more. Furthermore, she did not remain a perpetual virgin, as the Roman Catholic Church teaches. She had normal marital relations with her husband Joseph, and had children by him.

Matthew 1:24-25 (The word “knew” means “had intercourse with.”)

Matthew 13:54-56 / Mark 6:1-4

2. She was qualified to be “the virgin,” because she was of the lineage of David.

- As we have seen repeatedly, God promised that the Messiah would come from the line of David. Since Jesus had no human father, this prophecy could be fulfilled *only* if His mother were a descendant of David. Jesus received His blood from David through the gene pool of Mary.

Luke 3:23-31 (The words “*Joseph, which was the son of Heli*” are actually the introduction to the lineage of Mary. The word “son” in **verse 23** is what we would call “son-in-law” in modern English. We know from **Matthew 1:16** that Joseph’s actual father was named Jacob. This passage shows that Mary’s line goes back to David, through David’s son Nathan.)

Side Note: It is important to realise that Jesus, humanly speaking, has the right to the throne of David both by blood, and legally. The *blood* of David runs in Jesus’ veins because of His conception through Mary, who was a descendant of David. However, Mary was not from the actual royal line of David (she was not from the royal line of the kings, which descended from David’s son Solomon, and ended with Jechoniah). Joseph, on the other hand, *was* descended from the royal line of kings; and he was Jesus’ *legal* father.

Luke 2:4

Matthew 1:6-16

Ironically, Jesus could not have been a blood descendant of Jechoniah and still have fulfilled Scripture! Though God had promised David that his descendants would sit on the throne of Israel, and that the Messiah would ultimately come from his line and sit on the throne of David, the LORD *also* later swore that no man of the seed of Jechoniah (the last king of Judah) would sit on the throne of David, because of Jechoniah’s wickedness!

Jeremiah 22:24-30

There is only way that Jesus could have *legal* right to the throne of David, yet not be a blood descendant of King Jechoniah. That was for Jesus to be the *blood* descendant of David through a son of David other than Solomon, yet be the legal, adopted son of a male descendant from the royal line of David (the line of David-Solomon-Jechoniah).

Jesus' lineage met this requirement. He was the blood descendant of David through Mary (the line of David-Nathan-Heli), yet the legal son of Joseph (who was from the royal line of David-Solomon-Jechoniah-Joseph). By being the blood descendant of David through Mary, and the legal descendant of David through Joseph, Jesus met all the Scriptural requirements for being the King of Israel, yet did not fail to meet the requirement of **Jeremiah 22:30** (that no actual *seed* of Jechoniah would be king of Israel). Only an all-powerful, sovereign God could have arranged Jesus' family lineage so precisely!

C. The divine Person who whose birth would be a sign

- The “sign” of **Isaiah 7:14** includes not only the fact that the Messiah would be born of a virgin, but also the fact that the Messiah would be God in human flesh. Isaiah prophesied that the Child's name would be *Immanuel*—which means “God with us.” The Child would be fully God, yet fully Man (“born of a woman”).

Matthew 1:22-23

1 Timothy 3:16

Galatians 4:4

- It was absolutely necessary for Jesus to be born of a virgin. If Jesus had had a human father, He would not have been divine; He would have been merely a man. Also, if Jesus had had a human father, He would have inherited the sin nature of Adam, and thus could not have been the sinless Substitute for our sin. (Sin is passed down through the genetic material of one's father.) Jesus was truly a descendant of Adam; yet He did not inherit Adam's fallen nature, because he had no human father.

Romans 5:12

1 Corinthians 15:20-22, 45-47

- While we are on this point, it is important to remember that Mary was the mother of Jesus in his humanity—*not* in His divinity. Mary is *not*, as the Roman Catholic Church calls her, the “Mother of God.” Not once in Scripture is she called by this title: nor is it suggested that she is anything of the sort. If she were the “Mother of

God,” it would mean that she had a pre-existence before God, and that she is, somehow, a progenitor of God! (Of course, it would also mean that God is not eternal, as the Bible says He is.) This blasphemous “Mother of God” idea plays right into the wicked theology of countless pagan religions that worship a “goddess mother.”

D. To whom the “sign” was given, and when it would be given

- It is important to realise exactly to *whom* the sign was given. Notice that the Lord did not give the sign to Ahaz personally. Rather, He gave the sign to the "house of David" (anyone and everyone who would be born in the family of David).

Isaiah 7:13

*The word “ye” in **Isaiah 7:14** also shows that this sign was not given to Ahaz personally. If the sign had been given to Ahaz, the verse would read “thee” (the singular pronoun) instead of “ye” (the plural pronoun).

- If Ahaz had been the one to whom the sign was given, the prophecy would have been false—because Ahaz himself never saw the "sign" of the miraculous birth of Messiah. The Messiah would be born 740 years later.
- God gave only one hint concerning how long it would be until this sign would come to pass.

Isaiah 7:15-16

- God said that the land of Judah would be "forsaken of both her kings" before this Child would be old enough to know the difference between good and evil (**Isaiah 7:16**). In other words, before the Messiah would reach toddler age, the two enemy kings who were threatening Ahaz (Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Northern Israel) would fail in their purpose of overthrowing Ahaz, and would go back to their countries. Ahaz did see the defeat of Rezin and Pekah in his lifetime (in fact, it happened only a short while later); but he never saw the "sign" of the birth of the Messiah.
- The way the prophecy is worded, there is no actual indication of how much time would pass between the defeat of Rezin and Pekah and the infancy of the Messiah. As far as the time element is concerned, the prophecy is left almost open-ended. God did not specify whether this prophecy was for the near future, or for the far future. He did not say, “This virgin birth will happen very soon.” He did not even say that it would happen within their lifetimes. All that is said is that the toddler years of Messiah would come at some unspecified amount of time *after* the defeat of these kings. The “house of David” was thus given the responsibility, from this point onward, to watch and wait for the coming of this sign.

Side Note: Many of today’s evangelical scholars teach a false and confusing doctrine concerning **Isaiah 7:14**. While they acknowledge that Jesus’ birth is the “ultimate” fulfilment of **Isaiah 7:14**, they say that there was also a “near fulfilment” of the prophecy in the birth of Isaiah’s son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, shortly after this prophecy was given (**Isaiah 8:1-9**). They say that the “virgin” in this “near fulfilment” must have been a “second wife” of Isaiah’s, whom he married shortly after this prophecy was given. They say that she is called “the virgin” because she was still an unmarried virgin at the time when the prophecy was given.

This idea has no true basis in Scripture. Though there are sometimes “near fulfilments” of prophecy (types or *foreshadowings* of the ultimate fulfilment, which come to pass in the near future) in addition to the “far fulfilment” (the true, ultimate fulfilment), **Isaiah 7:14** is not one of those cases. Even if Isaiah *did* take a second wife (which the Bible gives absolutely no indication that he did), in what sense would Isaiah’s son have been born of a “virgin,” when the boy’s mother was no longer a virgin? Furthermore, Isaiah’s son was *not* named Immanuel, but rather Maher-shalal-hash-baz (“Haste, haste to the prey”)! (This name was an indication to Judah and Israel that judgment was coming upon them soon.)

The Messiah’s name, Immanuel, is a reminder to everyone that He is God in flesh; and His miraculous virgin birth is, all by itself, a “sign.” In contrast, the *name* of Isaiah’s child (*not* his birth, since his birth was completely ordinary), was a “sign” to Israel and Judah that judgment was coming in their day. **Isaiah 7:14** points to one Person only—the Lord Jesus Christ.

- As it turned out, the Messiah was not born until a full 740 years after the defeat of these two kings. However, this was not a meaningless sign--because the sign was *not given to Ahaz*. Ahaz had forfeited his right to see any sign because of his unbelief. But the sign *was* to the "house of David." In giving this prophecy, God was officially putting all members of the family of David on notice that one of their women would, at some point in the future, miraculously give birth to the Messiah, despite being a virgin. Mary was that favoured member of the house of David.
- Ironically, Ahaz, though an unbeliever, was nevertheless an ancestor of Joseph—who, by adoption, gave Jesus the legal right to the throne of David! Not only did God use Mary and Joseph, who were *believing* members of David’s house, to accomplish His plan of redemption for mankind; but He also used unbelieving Ahaz (as well as many other unbelievers in David’s lineage), to accomplish His plan, as well. God always accomplishes His will, despite man’s unbelief!

Conclusion: Not only is **Isaiah 7:14** one of the most beautiful prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament: but it validates, in advance, the most important miracle that God

would ever perform (other than raising Jesus from the dead): namely, the virgin birth of the Son of God!