

## **VIRGIN BIRTH? REALLY?**

by Kenneth G. Symes

Today, one of the most controversial subjects in Scripture is the issue of the virgin birth. The Jewish Rabbis, along with many Christian leaders, do not believe that Isaiah 7:10-16 teaches that the Messiah was to be virgin born. Does this passage really teach a virgin birth? Is this doctrine an absolute essential to the compendium of material proving that Jesus, and only Jesus, could be and is the Messiah?

### **The Seven Players**

There are seven players mentioned in Isaiah chapter seven. The first is Ahaz, king of Judah from 735 to 715 B.C. (cf. (2 Kings 16:1-20; 2 Chronicles 28:1-27). Ahaz was a wicked king (2 Kings 16:2-4) who desecrated the Temple by robbing its treasures to hire Assyria to defeat Damascus (2 Kings 16:8, 9). Furthermore, he had a copy of an Assyrian field altar constructed and placed in the Temple at which he worshipped and offered sacrifice. In the process of doing this, he removed the Brazen Altar from its place, giving the new altar the place of prominence. Later, Ahaz actually shut up the Temple and built altars all around Jerusalem offering burnt offerings to other gods and causing the people to sin (2 Chronicles 28:24). According to 2 Kings 16:3, he also began the practice of child sacrifice, as well as multiplying the worship of Baal, Moloch, and others in all of Judah (2 Kings 16:4; 2 Chronicles 28:16). Instead of trusting in the power of the true God, he put his trust in the kings of Assyria. As a result of calling on Assyria for assistance, Ahaz became a vassal to Assyria. At his death, Ahaz was neither mourned nor placed in the royal tombs (2 Chronicles 28:27).

The second player is Pekah, king of Israel, who ruled from 740 to 732 B.C. (2 Kings 15:27-31; 2 Chronicles 28:5-8). He was an evil king who followed in the sins of Jeroboam. Hoshea, who would be the last king of the northern kingdom Israel, ultimately conspired against Pekah and murdered him (2 Kings 15:30). Rezin, the third player, was king of Syria from 752 to 732 B.C. He was killed by the Assyrians (2 Kings 16:9).

The fourth player is the prophet Isaiah. The fifth player is Shear-Jashub, the son of Isaiah. The sixth player mentioned in this chapter is the House of David. These are the royal descendants of David. The final player is Tiglath-Peleser III, king of Assyria from 745 to 727 B.C.

### **The Circumstances**

Consider the circumstances. Israel, the Northern Kingdom, had already become subject to Assyria. Israel and Syria formed an alliance against Assyria in 735 B.C. When Ahaz refused to join the alliance, Syria and Israel attacked Judah (2 Chronicles 28:6-8). Jerusalem was besieged, but not taken. However, Syria took Elath from Judah. One hundred twenty thousand were killed and two hundred thousand were taken captive by Israel.

While Ahaz was examining the water supply to see if it could be stopped up and kept from his enemies in the coming siege, Isaiah confronted him. It actually took place "in the highway of the fuller's field." This was a public road by the field where the fullers divided their freshly dyed cloth.

Verses one and two of Isaiah chapter 7 describe the threat against the House of David (Judah). In verses three to nine, Isaiah offers encouragement. Following God's instructions, Isaiah tells Ahaz not to

worry; that the fierce anger of Syria and Israel will come to naught. Ahaz was to be confident in God's help, because God doomed the conspiracy. Thus did Isaiah discourage Ahaz from seeking help from Assyria.

Verses ten to thirteen describe the divine offer to the House of David. Ahaz is commanded to ask for a sign. It was to be a miraculous sign (*owth* – Hebrew meaning "miraculous sign"). God was prepared to do for Ahaz what He had done for Moses in Egypt. The intent of this miraculous sign was to prove to doubting Ahaz that Isaiah's message was, indeed, from God. But Ahaz refused for his mind was made up to reject Isaiah's message. He had already determined to place his trust in Assyria. Ahaz chose the way of unbelief. Rather than revealing his real reason, he quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 out of context (vs 12). Ahaz knew that God, many times in the past in His sovereign will, offered signs of His power and will. He also knew that when God offered him a sign as a confirmation of His Word that he would not be testing or tempting God if he asked for a sign. (cf. Judges 6:36-40).

Thus Isaiah rebukes the "House of David" which is represented by Ahaz (vs 13). The unbelief and subsequent rejection by Ahaz, and the wearying of God by the unbelieving Jews, does not stop God from doing what He intended to do: a sign will be given!

### The Sign

Verses 14 to 16 give us the Messianic sign God would give, not to Ahaz, but to the House of David. Note that the antecedent of "you" in verse 14 is the "House of David" in the previous verse. The Hebrew term *lakem*, translated "to you", is in the plural form and designates: "given to you but fulfilled later."

The sign would involve an unusual birth, a "virgin" birth (vs 14b). The Hebrew word used is *almah* which means "a young woman of marriageable age". This particular word is used only seven times in the Jewish Bible: Genesis 24:43; Exodus 2:8; Psalm 68:25; Song of Solomon 1:3, 6:8; Proverbs 30:19, and here. It is **never** used of a non-virgin! Furthermore, the Hebrew has the definite article *ha*, "the," before *almah*. The use of the word *ha*, in the Hebrew, tells us this is a specific person in mind, "the" virgin.

*Bethulah* is the other Hebrew word used in Scripture but does not necessarily mean "virgin" as the modern Rabbis and liberal Christian theologians would have us believe. It always needs clarification when used to designate a virgin. In Joel 1:8, *bethulah* is used of a married woman. A *bethulah* spent the night with the king in Esther 2:12-17. In Deuteronomy 22:13-19, a married woman after her wedding night was called *bethulah*. In Jewish tradition the marriage is consummated in the bed and the bloody sheets were required to prove the marriage had been consummated! Clearly, these were not virgins. In Genesis 24:16, Rebekah is described as a *bethulah* (here the context indicates virgin [*neither had any man known her*]). But in verse 43 of the same chapter, she is described as *almah*. Why? Because, by verse 43 she had become betrothed to Isaac! *Almah* is used to describe a betrothed woman, one who belongs to a man though the marriage has not yet been consummated.

Rabbi Rashi (1040-1105 A.D.) wrote: "*Behold the almah shall conceive and bare a son and shall call his name Immanuel. This means that our Creator shall be with us. And this is the sign: the one who will conceive is a girl (Naarah), who never in her life has had intercourse with any man. Upon this shall the Holy Spirit have power.*" (Mikraoth Gedoloth on Isaiah 7:14). The Septuagint (Greek revision of the Hebrew text 100 A.D.) translated the verse: "*Behold a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring*

*forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Immanuel.*" "This is Messiah," says Rabbi Hona (Zohar, in Gen. Fol.-3, 4, written about 1306 A.D.).

### **The Necessity**

In Jeremiah 22:24-30, God places a curse upon the line of David through Solomon. Coniah and Jeconiah are one and the same (cf. Jer. 24:1). He is listed in the geneology of Joseph in Matthew chapter 1. No person of the seed of Jeconiah (Jeconias) could ever sit on the Davidic throne, but notice that Matthew never says that Jesus is the physical son of Joseph: "*And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ (Messiah)*" (Matthew 1:16). Jesus was the adopted son of Joseph. He had the legal right to the throne. Through Mary, His physical mother, He received the physical right to the throne (cf. Luke 3:23ff). Without the miracle of the virgin birth, Jesus could not be the Messiah (Christ). To the miracle of the virgin birth, God added the miracle of bringing two descendents of David together (Joseph through Solomon [legal right], Mary through Nathan [physical right] in order to bring forth the true Messiah, meeting all of the requirements!

### **Conclusions**

We have noted that this miraculous sign in Isaiah 7 was not given to Ahaz (he refused it) but to the House of David. We have further seen that the sign was to be related to the coming of Messiah. This passage teaches two important truths about the Messiah. First, Messiah will be a human, miraculously born of a virgin. Second, Messiah will be God (Immanuel - "God with us"). We also have noted that the virgin birth was absolutely necessary. There is only one in whom all of this came together at just the right time. That person is Jesus! He is Israel's Messiah and the Redeemer of all who will humble themselves and by faith receive Him. Consider the evidence. Receive Him today! Then you will truly be blessed.