THE HEBREW OF "A VIRGIN"

The amazing use of "*HA ALMA*" in Isaiah 7:14

The Paradox

In the 8th. century BC the prophet Isaiah told the Jews that God would give them a sign - this would be a virgin giving birth to a son. In the King James translation (AV) it reads:

"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, **a virgin** shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." [Isaiah 7:14]

This would have to be a miracle, because only men can pass on the male chromosome.

In the original language (Hebrew) the phrase "**a** virgin" is "*HA ALMA*" and should be translated "**the** virgin". They were to anticipate a particular virgin giving birth to a male child.

Some modern critics contest this translation saying that it should read: "... **a young woman** will conceive and bear a son ..." claiming that the Hebrew word "*ALMA*" simply means "a young woman" [Strong's number 5959].

If that is the case - why does Matthew 1:23 have "the virgin" (Greek "*hay parthenos*")? In this passage, a companion of the Lord Jesus - Matthew - is claiming that the birth of the Lord Jesus fulfilled this prophesy. Was Matthew mistaken?

The Hebrew words for "young woman" and for "virgin"

The Hebrew word "*ALMA*" is not the usual word for "young woman". The usual Hebrew word for a young woman is "*NA'ARAH* [5291] which does not mean that she is necessarily a virgin. To stress virginity it is used in conjunction with "*BETHOOLAW*" [1330], "*BETHOOLAW*" being the usual word for virgin.

The following passages are examples of "*NA'ARAH*" used with "*BETHOOLAW*" to stress that the young women referred to are virgins:-

Genesis 24:16 ... the **damsel** [5291] was ... a **virgin** [1330], neither had any man known her ...

Deuteronomy 22:19 ... A hundred shekels of silver, and give them unto the father of the **damsel** [5291], because he hath brought up an evil name upon a **virgin** [1330] of Israel ...

Deuteronomy 22:23 ... a **damsel** [5291] that is a **virgin** [1330] be betrothed ...

Deuteronomy 22:28 ... a **damsel** [5291] that is a **virgin** [1330], which is not betrothed ...

Judges 21:12 ... **young** [5291] **virgins** [1330], that had known no man by lying with any male ...

1 Kings 1:2 ... Let there be sought for my lord the king a **young** [5291] **virgin** [1330] ...

Esther 2:2 ... Let there be fair **young** [5291] **virgins** [1330] sought for the king:

Esther 2:3 ... that they may gather together all the fair **young** [5291] **virgins** [1330] ...

Back to Isaiah 7:14:-

1) If Isaiah simply meant "young woman" why did Isaiah not use the usual word for "young woman" - Why did he not use "*NA'ARAH*" ?

2) If Isaiah meant simply "a virgin" why did he not use the usual word for "virgin" - Why did he not use "*BETHOOLAW*" ?

3) Was there some special significance in the word "*ALMA*" that was lacking in "*NA'ARAH*" and in "*BETHOOLAW*"?

The Hebrew word "*ALMA*"

Let us examine the use of the word "*ALMA*" in the Hebrew scriptures.

Below is every occurrence of the word "*ALMA*" [5959] excluding the passage in question:-

Genesis 24:43 ... it shall come to pass, that when the **virgin** [5959] cometh forth to draw water, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink ...

Exodus 2:8 ... the **maid*** [5959] went and called the child's mother. [* i.e. Moses' sister Miriam]

Psalms 68:25 ... the **damsels** [5959] playing with timbrels.

Proverbs 30:19 ... the way of a man with a **maid** [5959]

Song of Solomon 1:3 ... therefore do the **virgins** [5959] love thee.

Song of Solomon 6:8 There are ... **virgins** [5959] without number.

From an examination of the contexts of the examples cited above, it is evident that the young women referred to were virgins. They were eligible young women of marriageable age. They were of necessity chaste single young women.

Why did Isaiah use the word "*ALMA*" rather than "*NA'ARAH*" or "*BETHOOLAW*" ?

1) The word "*NA'ARAH*" signified a young woman whether single or married.

2) The word "*BETHOOLAW*" signified a virgin but not necessarily of marriageable age.

3) Only the word "*ALMA*" signified an eligible young woman, both single and chaste.

An astounding sign fulfilled in detail.

God gave a sign that a single chaste young virgin of marriageable age would be pregnant - an unmarried as-born virgin pregnant! Amazing!

Mary was both a young chaste virgin and unmarried when she conceived and bore the child Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-21, Luke 1:26-35, 2:1-7)

The Greek of Matthew 1:23 has **"the virgin** (*hay parthenos*) **in womb will have** [a child]**".**

This is a very specific expression.

The Jewish nation was told to look out for a particular chaste virgin who will be carrying a child in her womb.

This child would be called IMMANUEL - meaning - God with us !

This prediction was made more than 700 years before it happened and it was fulfilled to the letter.

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NOTES

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, **the virgin*** shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. *Hebrew "*HA ALMA*" [5959].

Matthew 1:23 Behold, **the virgin*** shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. *Greek "*hay parthenos*"[3933].

1 In the Greek Septuagint Version of the Hebrew scriptures (translated in the 3rd. century BC), this phrase [*HA ALMA*] is translated "*hay parthenos*", meaning "the virgin". The translators also rendered it "*parthenos*" in Genesis 24:43. However in the five other places they used Greek words "*neanis*", "*neanidon*", "*neanides*", meaning "young woman/young women". So it is evident that the Jewish scholars of that time had strong reason to translate "*HA ALMA*" by "*hay parthenos*" (the virgin) in Isaiah 7:14. Only since the inception of Christianity have they preferred to render it "young woman".

2 Koine Greek did not have a word to denote a chaste girl who had reached puberty and was therefore eligible for marriage. So the Septuagint translators were left with the choice of words expressing either their youthfulness or their virginity. It seems the translators used "*parthenos*" in Genesis 24:43 and Isaiah 7:14 having decided that virginity needed to be stressed, whereas in Exodus 2:8, Psalm 68:25, Proverbs 30:19, Song of Solomon 1:3 and 6:8 youthfulness was the predominant thought.

3 The reason given in note 2 could also account for why "*hay parthenos*" was used in Matthew 1:23.

4 It is sometimes protested that "*parthenos*" was used for "temple virgins" and so did not imply chastity. That abuse of the word "*parthenos*" is not relevant. It was a gross misuse of the word to give an air of respectability to the despicable practice of worshippers having sex with priestesses.

5 "*HA ALMA*" / "*hay parthenos*" / "**the** virgin" - They were to anticipate a specific virgin.

Albert Barnes' commenting on Is.7.14, says that the Sanhedrim unhesitatingly quoted Micah 5:2,3 to Herod as proof (Matt.2:6), that the expression "*she which travaileth*" or, "*she that bears shall bear*" - "*she bearing shall bear*" - refers evidently to some prediction of such a birth and that the word "*she that bears*" seems to have been used somewhat as a proper name, to designate one who was well known, of whom there had been a definite prediction. The most likely possibilities are Isaiah 7:14 and Genesis 3:15 - the woman's seed.

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Isaiah 7:14

"a virgin"
or
"a young woman"

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