Isaiah's Prophecy

For parts of this article I have drawn substantially from the structure, sources and actual words in public and private documents written by E.P. (Ted) Wixted, particularly one titled *The Doctrine of Virgin Birth*. This document was Ted's early working notes for a pamphlet published on 1st May 1966. These working notes and the pamphlet have the same title but differ somewhat in content.

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The foundation stone of the Doctrine of Virgin Birth is the claim that in the Old Testament Isaiah prophesied a virgin birth, and in the New Testament Matthew recorded its fulfilment in the birth of Jesus. Neither claim is true.

Isaiah's prophecy was first fulfilled over 700 years before Jesus' time. Matthew saw in the birth of Jesus a second fulfilment of part of Isaiah's prophecy.

This article shows that Isaiah and Matthew referred only to a "young woman" — not a "virgin". Church scholars' attempts to read a virgin birth into the accounts by Isaiah and Matthew have led them down some bizarre paths, as we shall see.

The examination of Isaiah's prophecy is divided into 6 sections. All biblical quotations in this article are from the *King James Version* unless stated otherwise.

1. Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy

Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled completely over 700 years before Jesus was born. Matthew applied part of Isaiah's prophecy to Jesus. This dual fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy presents an obvious dilemma for those who claim that Isaiah predicted a virgin birth, because if true it would mean there were two virgin births.

This section looks at both fulfilments of Isaiah's prophecy, and deals with the word in the prophecy mistranslated as virgin. It is relevant to examine whether the young woman Isaiah spoke of in his prophecy was already pregnant. The claim that Isaiah's sign refers to the virginal conception of Jesus also warrants scrutiny.

1.1 The passages in the Bible relating to Isaiah's prophecy

The passages in the Bible relating to Isaiah's prophecy and the fulfilment recorded in the New Testament, as they appear in the *King James Version*, are printed below. These passages are referred to throughout this article, and for those not familiar with them it is worth taking the time to read them carefully.

Note that Matthew only applied a portion of Isaiah's prophecy to Jesus, and particularly that he did not refer to the "sign" spoken of by Isaiah.

Isaiah 7:10-16

[10] Moreover the LORD spake again unto Ahaz, saying,

[11] Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.

[12] But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD.

[13] And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?

[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.**

[15] **Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.**

[16] **For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.**

Matthew 1:18-25

[18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

[19] Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

[20] But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

[21] And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

[22] Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

[23] **Behold, a 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.

[24] Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

[25] And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

1.2   The setting for Isaiah's prophecy and to whom it was directed

About 735 BC, during the reign of King Ahaz, the kingdom of Judah was threatened by the confederate powers of Syria and Ephraim. God directed the prophet Isaiah to go to Ahaz and deliver a message. Isaiah told Ahaz not to fear the confederate powers for they would not succeed. *(Isaiah 7:1-7)*

Ahaz did not believe what Isaiah told him. Either then or, as seems to be indicated, at a subsequent meeting, Ahaz was told to ask for a sign from God, but he declined. Angered by the response, Isaiah informed Ahaz that God would give him a sign anyway. *(Isaiah 7:10-14)*

The sign related to a child not yet born. At his birth this child was to receive the name Immanuel, a combination of Hebrew words meaning "God is with us", symbolising that "God is with" Judah in this struggle. The child was to be a visible sign to Ahaz, a living chronometer by which the king could measure the years which would see Isaiah's prophecy of victory brought to complete fulfilment. *(Isaiah 7:14-16)*

Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled within a short time when Syria and Ephraim's power was broken and their kings slain, thus ending the threat to Judah. Assyria overran Syria and parts of Ephraim and transported their populations to other regions. The Assyrians slew the Syrian king, and the Ephraimite king was assassinated by his successor. *(2Kings 15:29-30, 16:9)*

1.3   Two fulfilments of Isaiah's prophecy

On the surface there appears to be a conflict about when Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled. The events prophesied by Isaiah came to fulfilment within a short time, as he said they would. Yet Matthew, in his gospel, applied part of Isaiah's prophecy to the birth of Jesus, which occurred over 700 years after Isaiah's prophecy had already been fulfilled.

The apparent conflict between Isaiah and Matthew regarding what the prophecy applied to and when it was fulfilled dissolves when Matthew's methodology is taken into account. Matthew wrote as a Jew to convince fellow Jews that Jesus was the messiah. More than any other New Testament writer, he associates Jesus with Old Testament texts. He identified the messianic function of Jesus with the nation of Israel, and saw in the life of Jesus a recapitulation of certain events that had occurred in Israel's history.

This process where events (or prophecies), apparently singular, have two or more manifestations is known as compenetration. Another example of compenetration is where Matthew writes:

> And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of
> the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. *(Matthew 2:15)*

Matthew applied this Old Testament passage to the return of Jesus from Egypt after his family had sought refuge there from Herod. However, in the Old Testament these words refer to Moses leading Israel (God's son) out of Egypt. *(Hosea 11:1)*

In the same way, Matthew applied part of Isaiah's prophecy to Jesus in the full knowledge that the prophecy had been fulfilled long before the birth of Jesus.

These two fulfilments of the same prophecy raise some obvious questions for the doctrine of virgin birth. What words did Isaiah use? Did he predict a virgin birth? Did those who Isaiah spoke to understand him to be prophesying a virgin birth? What did Matthew see in common between the births of Immanuel and Jesus? How did Jesus fulfil Isaiah's prophecy?

The first step to resolve these questions is to examine the word in Isaiah 7:14 that has been translated as *virgin*.

1.4 The word in Isaiah 7:14 translated as *virgin*

The Hebrew word in Isaiah 7:14 that has been the centre of so many debates is *almah*. Until the finding of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* in 1947, almost invariably Bibles translated the word in Isaiah 7:14 as *virgin*. However, from early times this translation has been a matter of dispute.

Before the birth of Jesus, the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek. This translation is known as the Septuagint. In the 2nd century AD it was joined by three other Greek translations, those by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotian. These four works translated the Hebrew word *almah* in Isaiah 7:14 into Greek as follows.

Septuagint	parthenos
Aquila	neanis
Symmachus	neanis
Theodotian	neanis

Only the Septuagint translated the word as *parthenos* (which means *virgin*), while the three other recognized Greek translations of the Old Testament available in the 2nd century AD translated the word as *neanis* (which means *young woman*).

Irenaeus, the 2nd century Greek-speaking churchman, attacked the translations by Aquila and Theodotian in his work known as *Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies)*, (see below, quote B). It needs to be appreciated that the view expressed by Irenaeus, that the word in Isaiah 7:14 should be translated *virgin*, prevailed for almost two millenniums and coloured the outcome of all deliberations on the birth of Jesus.

The theologians' dilemma

The fact that the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was applied to the birth of Jesus as well as to the birth of the child Immanuel — thus having two applications — places the theologians on the horns of a dilemma.

Either the word *almah* used by Isaiah means *virgin*, and therefore there have been two virgin births in Judah, or *almah* does not mean virgin, and there was no virgin birth prophecy to be fulfilled. Either way the churches have a profound theological problem.

Aware of their dilemma, attempts by church scholars to circumvent it took on various forms. Some simply denied or ignored the first, and obvious, fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. Others gave the word in Isaiah different meanings for different occasions. And so on.

Below is a representative selection of comments from Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant sources. Apart from dealing with the etymology of *almah*, these comments touch on the history of the controversy surrounding the word. Note in some the twists and turns of church scholars as they try to escape their dilemma. This selection commences with a 1952 newspaper report that indicates how scholars had translated Isaiah 7:14 until that time.

A   The Courier-Mail, Brisbane, Australia, 25 November 1952, front page

"To burn Bible

NEW YORK, November 24 (Special) — Pastor Luther Hux, of a breakaway Baptist Church in South Carolina, sought a fire department permit to burn a Bible in his church, because he objected to the substitution of "young woman" for "virgin" in Isaiah VII, 14.

A university expert said it was **a correction of a mistake** in translation in the old King James version of the Bible."

Observation: For over 1,800 years the theologians had perpetrated the idea that the word in Isaiah 7:14 meant *virgin*, so the reaction by the Baptist pastor in 1952 to the correction of this mistranslation is understandable. Anyone who spoke on this issue from a soapbox in a Public Forum over the next two decades knew full well that most church people had the same mindset as this Baptist pastor.

B   **Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies) Book III, Chapter 21 by Irenaeus of Lyons, 2nd century**

"A vindication of the prophecy in Isaiah (7:14) against the misinterpretations of Theodotion, Aquila, the Ebionites, and the Jews. Authority of the Septuagint version. Arguments in proof that Christ was born of a Virgin.

1. God, then, was made man, and the Lord did Himself save us, giving us the token of the Virgin. But not as some allege, among those now presuming to expound the Scripture, [thus:] "Behold, a young woman shall conceive, and bring forth a son," as Theodotion the Ephesian has interpreted, and Aquila of Pontus, both Jewish proselytes."

Observation: The Roman Catholic Church claims Irenaeus, who lived in the 2nd century, as a "Church Father". Irenaeus' comment that Theodotian and Aquila had misinterpreted the word in Isaiah 7:14 as *young woman* can be summed up succinctly. He was wrong while Theodotian and Aquila were right. However, it was another 1,800 years before church scholars corrected the translation in Isaiah 7:14. See point A above.

C   **Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, 1939-1943**

"The Christian doctrine of the virgin birth arose out of a misinterpretation of the word *ha'almah* as virgin." *(Article: Immanuel)*

"The Hebrew word for virgin is invariably *bethulah*; hence to translate Isa. 7:14 as "*a virgin* will conceive" is **definitely incorrect.**" *(Article: Virgin Birth)*

Observation: Isaiah used the word *bethulah* five times (23:4, 23:12, 37:22, 47:1, 62:5). If he had intended to say *virgin* when making the prophecy to Ahaz, he would undoubtedly have used *bethulah* here as well.

D   **The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible, 1990**

"Modern lexicographers and Hebraists now believe that the source of *'almah* was the Heb. root *'-L-M*, "to be ripe" or "to be mature"**…** the primary meaning of *'almah* has to do with sexual maturity (the age of a young woman), **not with her sexual experience or lack of it**." *(Lexical Aids to OT: Word 5959 'Almah)*

Observation: *'almah* simply means young woman and has nothing to do with whether she is a virgin or not.

E   **A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture, 1953   (Roman Catholic)**

The Heb. word here translated 'virgin' is not the technical term, *betulah,* but its practical equivalent, *'almah*, which means an unmarried maiden of marriageable age, **presumed** to be a virgin by the strict moral code of the Hebrews." *(Commentary on Isaias, 426b)*

Observation: A presumption is here added to *almah* in order to equate it with virgin.

As for the strict moral code of the Hebrews, and whether Isaiah thought it was adhered to, this is how the *Catholic Encyclopedia* describes the moral conduct of the people of Isaiah's time:

> "Isaias's description of the religious condition of Juda in the latter part of the eighth century is anything but flattering. Jerusalem is compared to Sodom and Gomorrah**…** Throughout the kingdom there was corruption of higher officials, ever-increasing luxury among the wealthy, wanton haughtiness of women, ostentation among the middle-class people, shameful partiality of the judges, unscrupulous greed of the owners of large estates, and oppression of the poor and lowly**…** there was little response to the appeal of the Prophet for moral amendment and redress of social abuses." *(Article: Isaias)*

So much for the strict moral code of the Hebrews in practice in Isaiah's time!

F   **New Catholic Encyclopedia, Second Edition, 2002   (Roman Catholic)**

"The Hebrew word *'alma* used to describe the mother of Emmanuel in the divine oracle delivered to King Ahaz of Juda (735–715 B.C.) by the prophet Isaiah (Is 7.14). The Hebrew substantive is the feminine counterpart of the rare *'elem*, "young lad," and ordinarily designates a young girl of marriageable age until the birth of her first child, **prescinding entirely from her actual marital or virginal status**. (The Hebrew word for expressing "virgin" as such is *betula*.)" *(Article: Alma)*

Observation: (In point E above) *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* presumes that the 'almah of Isaiah 7:14 is "a virgin by the strict moral code of the Hebrews", and stated that 'almah is the practical equivalent of *betula*, which means virgin. But here the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* statement shows the *CCHS* presumption is entirely gratuitous, because the word 'almah "prescinds entirely from the marital or virginal status" of the young girl. In other words, whether the young girl is a virgin or not has nothing to do with the meaning of *'alma (almah)*.

G   **The Book of Isaiah – Rev. Edward J. Kissane, D.D., L.S.S., Dublin, 1941 (Roman Catholic)**

"It does not necessarily mean 'virgin', for which there was a special word *bethulah*. The prophet chose a word which is so elastic in meaning that it can refer to a virgin and yet not exclude the notion of child bearing**…** The word he chose is somewhat vague, and **further revelation** was needed to unfold its full meaning." *(Vol 1, p. 89)*

Observation: *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* added a presumption to almah to equate it with virgin. E.J. Kissane achieves the same result by adding a "further revelation" instead of a "presumption".

H   **A Guide to reading the Bible - Daniel E. Lupton, 1961   (Roman Catholic)**

"It may well be that Isaiah was referring to some contemporary event, as this would seem to be necessary if the king was to have a "sign" in his own lifetime. But the **light of faith** shows us that this contemporary event was to be merely a first step to complete and definitive fulfilment in the virgin birth of Christ." *(p. 107-8)*

Observation: Refer to *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* and E.J. Kissane, points E and G above. A third aspect is here added to almah to equate it with a second and different fulfilment — "the light of faith." To use the word "faith" in this sense is to abuse the meaning.

I   **Seventh Day Adventist Bible Commentary**

"According to the Hebrew, the *almah* of Isa. 7:14 **may already have conceived…** and if she were yet a virgin when Isaiah spoke we would then be confronted with another miraculous birth similar to that of Jesus, which would create a profound theological problem." *(Vol 4, p. 134)*

"Hebrew lexicographers are agreed that *almah* is from the root *alam*, "to be (sexually) mature," and that the word *almah* denotes a "**young woman**," implying ability to bear children. Both *almah* and *elem*, the masculine form of the word **…**" *(p. 134)*

"Without a single exception, where moral integrity and virginity are clearly referred to, *bachur* and *bethulah* are used; *elem* and *almah* are never so used." *(p. 135)*

"Isaiah uses *bethulah* altogether five times (chs. 23:4,12; 37:22; 47:1; 62:5) and had he intended the "young woman" of ch. 7:14 to be understood as a "virgin" in the strict sense of the word, he might logically be expected to use *bethulah* here as well." *(p. 135)*

Observation: To preserve the uniqueness of Jesus' birth, this commentary insists particularly that *almah* means young woman where it refers to Immanuel. The dilemma of the theologians is here plainly evident: Immanuel was born to a young woman in Ahaz's time; and Jesus supposedly to a virgin. Yet the same prophecy and same words refer to both Jesus and Immanuel.

J   **The Gospel of Matthew – Theodore H. Robinson, M.A., D.D., 1928**

"The passage illustrates two of the evangelist's characteristics, his interest in the fulfilment of prophecy and his theological position. The verse which he quotes from Isaiah vii. 14 is a familiar 'proof-text' known and constantly used in the early church, especially in arguing with the Jew. It is cited from the LXX, and is, unfortunately, somewhat misleading in the Greek form. The Hebrew has no thought of a miraculous birth, for the term rendered maiden simply means an adult woman, still young enough to become a mother, and is by no means confined to virgins." *(p. 4)*

Observation: This commentator asserts that Matthew quoted from the Greek Septuagint (LXX) and that the Septuagint translation of *almah* is "somewhat misleading". In plain English, this commentator is saying that Matthew did not quote Isaiah, who said nothing about a virgin or a miraculous birth, but instead quoted a translation of Isaiah that is "somewhat misleading".

K   **Peake's Commentary on the Bible: Old Testament Editor H.H. Rowley, D.D. B.Litt. Theol.D. F.B.A., 1962**

"Indicating a young woman, possibly among the company present, certainly known to them, he declares that **she is pregnant** and will soon bear a son who will be named Immanuel ('God is with us'). Probably the young woman was one of the wives of the king." (*Commentary on Isaiah, 428a)*

"a young woman is correct; 'virgin' derives from LXX. An *almah* is a **young woman** of marriageable age, whether virgin or not. Heb. has '**the'** young woman, which possibly indicates a specific young woman known to the court, or a class of woman…" (*428b)*

Observation: The definite article used for young woman is one of the indications that Isaiah was talking about a particular person who was known to him. The particular young woman he spoke about was already pregnant. This demolishes the proposition that Isaiah predicted a virginal conception — for his own time or in the future.

Church scholars have muddied the waters with irrelevancies concerning *almah*

As can be seen in the above references, church scholars know the meaning of *almah*, but muddy the waters by introducing irrelevant or illogical arguments.

The Hebrew word *almah* simply means *young woman*, and is the feminine equivalent of *elem*, which means *young man*. Both these words refer to a time in life, not a state of life. It is irrelevant to the meaning of these words whether the young woman, or young man, is a virgin or not.

1.5   The young woman Isaiah spoke about was already pregnant

The 1952 edition of the *Revised Standard Version* changed the translation of the word in Isaiah 7:14 from *virgin* to *young woman*. An interesting footnote indicated that the text could even be rendered to show the young woman was already pregnant.

> "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, **a young woman is with child** and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

The more recent work *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English* translated this verse in the Isaiah Scroll in much the same way, but this time in the main body of the text: *(Nonextant text shown in* [   ])

> "Therefore the LORD himself will give y[ou a sign. Loo]k, **the young woman has conceived and is bearing a son**, and his name will be Immanuel."

According to *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Isaiah 7:14 has a "close similarity" in the Hebrew to Genesis 16:11 [1], in which Bible translations agree that the woman mentioned there had already conceived. Isaiah 7:14 should be translated in the same way. Also the Hebrew has "the" young woman, one of the indicators that Isaiah was pointing to *(Behold / Look)* a particular young woman as he spoke.

It is only natural that an angry Isaiah would want to point Ahaz to something immediate and obvious — such as a pregnant woman. If this is what Isaiah did, then this by itself is sufficient to demolish any suggestion that he predicted a virginal conception. Therefore some may be astounded to learn that many Bible translations of the last 60 years show this is exactly what Isaiah did, as seen in the following examples.

- The Jerusalem Bible — the maiden **is with child**
- The New Jerusalem Bible — the young woman **is with child**
- New RSV — the young woman **is with child**
- New RSV (Catholic ed.) — the young woman **is with child**
- The New English Bible — a young woman **is with child**
- The Revised English Bible — a young woman **is with child**
- Good News Bible — a young woman who **is pregnant**
- Good News Bible (Catholic ed.) — a young woman who **is pregnant**
- The Bible in Basic English — a young woman **is now with child**
- Contemporary English Version — a virgin **is pregnant** *
- Holman Christian Standard Bible — the virgin **is pregnant** (footnote: alternative rendering) *

* According to these translations, Isaiah spoke of a virginal conception that had already taken place!

Despite these translations, the churches that published these Bibles, including the Roman Catholic Church, still argue that there was a virginal conception prophecy!

Nevertheless, the fact that the above translations have occurred in the last 60 years is an indication of how the theological edifice that has supported the concocted virgin birth story for almost two millenniums is crumbling.

1.6 Matthew did not mention Isaiah's sign

From early times there have been claims that Isaiah's "sign" refers to the virginal conception (virgin birth) of Jesus. Some things need to be pointed out about these claims.

Matthew did not mention what Isaiah said about a "sign", even though it immediately precedes the words of Isaiah he did quote. Obviously if Matthew thought Isaiah's sign applied to Jesus, he would have included those words about the sign when he quoted Isaiah. *(Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23)*

If the alleged virginal conception of Jesus was a "sign" then it was a most unusual sign, because no one could see it, not even Joseph. When Joseph learned of Mary's condition, he believed she was pregnant by another man and decided to put her away privately. He only changed his intended course of action after receiving instructions from the angel. *(Matthew 1:19-20, 24, see Joseph and The Birth of Jesus)*

The Hebrew word for sign in Isaiah 7:11 and 7:14 is *oth*. Isaiah used it 10 times and it occurs numerous times elsewhere in the Old Testament. It always refers to something visible. A sign of a virginal conception would not be miraculous conception but rather miraculous perception!

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[1] "As between the present "is pregnant" and the future "shall be pregnant," the Hebrew can mean either, but the close similarity to Gen 16:11 is in favour of the first alternative." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Article Immanuel*

Before the 1952 RSV, Moffatt's Bible had translated Isa 7:14: "There is a young woman with child**…"** *A New Translation of the Bible: James Moffatt, Revised Edition 1935*

2. Matthew's use of the name *Immanuel*

The name Immanuel, meaning "God with us", appears in Isaiah's prophecy and in Matthew's gospel where he quotes Isaiah. In the biblical context there is nothing unusual about Immanuel as a name or the way it has been used by Isaiah and Matthew. A comparison with other Hebrew names will help to dispel the misconceptions that have been deliberately cultivated about this name.

In Old Testament times no one would have considered that a child with the symbolic name Immanuel, or the statement "God with us" meant God had appeared in human form. Matthew used Isaiah's words to indicate Jesus symbolised the presence of God as understood in the Old Testament. He did not say Jesus was God.

2.1   Immanuel – *God with us*

The name *Immanuel* is a combination of Hebrew words, which are translated "with us God" or "God (is) with us". It has the same characteristics as many other Hebrew names, in so much as they are comprised of two or more words one of which is the word for God. Never does the Bible imply that a person with any of these names is God.

These and many other Hebrew names have religious connotations. Below is a sample of such names, with their meaning taken from Young's Concordance. The comments are mine.

- Michael   who is like God   Several men in OT with this name
- Abimael   my father is God   Son of Joktan and a descendant of Shem
- Daniel   God is judge   Interpreter of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams
- Deuel   God is knowing   Contemporary of Moses
- Eldaah   whom God called   Son of Midian
- Elizaphan   God is protector   Contemporary of Moses
- Samuel   heard of God   Last of the Judges
- Elijah   God himself   Prophet who incurred the wrath of Jezebel
- Elisha   God is saviour   Disciple and successor of Elijah
- Joshua   Jah saves   Jesus is the Latin / Greek form of Joshua
                                        Several men in Bible with this name
- Elihu   God himself   Several men in OT with this name
- Eliathah   God is come   Son of Heman
- Immanuel   God (is) with us   Name of child born about 735 BC
                                        Only person in the Bible with this name

The manner in which the name *Immanuel* has been used in the Old Testament is not unique. Particular names were given to certain children, for example, in order to symbolize events or things to come. Thus in the book of Isaiah the names of *Shearjashub, Immanuel, and Mahershalalhashbaz* are portents of the future. *(Isaiah 7:3, 14, 8:3)* The prophet Hosea was instructed to call his children *Jezreel. Loruhamah, and Loammi* in order to symbolize the wickedness of the people and the forthcoming consequences. *(Hosea 1:4, 6, 9)*

The biblical account gives us no personal details of *Immanuel* or the others. The sole reason their names are introduced is for symbolic purposes.

2.2   Matthew only used the name *Immanuel* symbolically

Matthew used the name *Immanuel* to convey a message. It is what Immanuel symbolised in Isaiah's time, as indicated by the meaning of the name, "God with us", that is Matthew's message for his time. Matthew was not saying Jesus was Immanuel or would be called Immanuel. The clearest indication of this is that after Matthew quotes Isaiah's prophecy he immediately informs us that the child was named Jesus as the angel instructed. *(Matthew 1:21, 23-25)*

Despite this, many bible commentators assert Jesus was called Immanuel on the basis of Matthew's quotation of Isaiah's prophecy. Jesus was only ever called Jesus; there is not one instance in the New Testament where he was called Immanuel. There the name *Immanuel (Emmanuel)* appears only this once, the name *Jesus* over 900 times.

In the Old Testament, Ezekiel referred to the messiah that would come by the name *David*. *(Ezekiel 34:23-4, 37:24-25)* In doing this Ezekiel was projecting a type, or characteristics, associated with the person named *David* on to the foretold messiah. Similarly, Matthew projected a feature, or symbolism, associated with the person named *Immanuel* on to Jesus. Matthew was not saying that Jesus was Immanuel any more than Ezekiel was predicting that the messiah would be David.

2.3   God's presence as it is perceived in the Bible

Both Isaiah and Matthew used the name Immanuel ("God with us") to symbolise the presence of God in the relevant matters about which they wrote. *(Isaiah 7:14, 8:8, 10, Matthew 1:23)* In fact God's presence is recorded on numerous occasions in the Bible. It is usually associated with events in the history of Israel or with individuals carrying out God's will, such as Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, Jesus and Paul.

That the presence of God was perceived to be spiritual and not physical by the people of the Old Testament can be ascertained from the following texts:

- And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for **I am with thee**, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake. *(Genesis 26:24)*

- when they heard **the Lord had visited the children of Israel**, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped. *(Exodus 4:31)*

- There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as **I was with Moses**, so **I will be with thee**: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. *(Joshua 1:5)*

- And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, **The Lord is with thee**, thou mighty man of valour. *(Judges 6:12)*

- And David went on, and grew great, and **the Lord God of Hosts was with him**. *(2Samuel 5:10)*

- And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and the strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon: for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the Lord his **God was with him**. *(2Chronicles 15:9)*

- Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for **God is with us**. *(Isaiah 8:10)*

The same understanding of God's presence is expressed in the New Testament:

- His name is John**…** And the hand of **the Lord was with him**. *(Luke 1:63-66)*

- And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but **God was with him**, *(Acts 7:9)*

- How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for **God was with him**. *(Acts 10:38)*

- And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of **the Lord was with them**: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. *(Acts 11:20-21)*

- Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For **I am with thee**, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. *(Acts 18:9-10)*

- And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: *(Acts 19:11)*

- Notwithstanding **the Lord stood with me**, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. *(2Timothy 4:17)*

No matter what theologians say about Jesus being the third part of the Trinity, no biblical writer, including Matthew, was of the mind that God had appeared in human form. Long after the crucifixion one of the disciples stated explicitly that no man had ever seen God.

> No man hath seen God at any time. *(John 1:18, 1John 4:12)*

The idea of God appearing in human form was completely foreign to the Hebrew mind, unlike those with a Greek and Latin cultural heritage into whose hands custody of the New Testament fell.

3. The Greek Septuagint translation of Isaiah 7:14

Church scholars know Isaiah spoke to Ahaz about a "young woman" bearing a child who would be a sign of things to occur within a short period. This creates an obvious dilemma for the scholars, for if Matthew quoted Isaiah's words then he said nothing about a "virgin".

The scholars circumvent their dilemma by claiming Matthew did not actually quote what Isaiah said, but a Greek translation of Isaiah that says something different. To prop up their position, it has been claimed, implicitly and explicitly, that this Greek rendering had divine sanction.

3.1   The Greek Septuagint

About the 2nd century BC persons unknown to history translated the Hebrew Old Testament, including the Book of Isaiah, into Greek. These translations, known collectively as the Septuagint, mistranslated the Hebrew word for "young woman" in Isaiah 7:14 as "virgin". Church scholars claim that when Matthew quoted Isaiah 7:14 he did so from the Septuagint, not from the Hebrew Old Testament.

In the 2nd century AD Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotian, made translations of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, but unlike the Septuagint each of these correctly translated the word in Isaiah 7:14 as "young woman". However it was not until 1,800 years later, following the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, that church scholars publicly admitted the translation error.

During the intervening period, in order to defend the Septuagint translation, church writers attacked the motives and characters of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotian, attaching to them labels such as "Jewish proselytes" and "Ebionite". But the fact remains that this dissenting trio were right and their adversaries of 1,800 years were wrong.

3.2   Claiming God's seal of approval for the Septuagint translation

The Septuagint mistranslation of Isaiah 7:14 was the forerunner of similar mistranslations in Bibles in other languages. Through the ages church writers have not only upheld the Septuagint version, but also claimed divine sanction for it.

One of some early quite fantastic claims appeared in *Adversus Haereses* by the 2nd century ecclesiastic, Irenaeus, where he purports to describe how the Septuagint was composed. He writes that Jerusalem sent seventy of their elders to King Ptolemy of Egypt to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, and their translations were miraculous.

> **Adversus Haereses (Book III, Chapter 21) by Irenaeus of Lyons**
> **http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103321.htm**
>
> **"A vindication of the prophecy in Isaiah (7:14) against the misinterpretations of Theodotion, Aquila, the Ebionites, and the Jews. Authority of the Septuagint version. Arguments in proof that Christ was born of a Virgin."**
>
> "2. **…**But he, wishing to test them individually, and fearing lest they might perchance, by taking counsel together, conceal the truth in the Scriptures, by their interpretation, separated them from each other, and commanded them all to write the same translation. He did this with respect to all the books. But when they came together in the same place before Ptolemy, and each of them compared his own interpretation with that of every other, God was indeed glorified, and the Scriptures were acknowledged as truly divine. **For all of them read out the common translation [which they had prepared] in the very same words and the very same names, from beginning to end, so that even the Gentiles present perceived that the Scriptures had been interpreted by the inspiration of God**."

> "4. For the one and the same Spirit of God, who proclaimed by the prophets what and of what sort the advent of the Lord should be, did by these elders give a just interpretation of what had been truly prophesied**…** and that **the angel said to Joseph in a dream**, "Now this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, Behold, a virgin shall be with child.""

Irenaeus claimed divine inspiration not only for the translation of Isaiah 7:14, but for every word, "from beginning to end", in the Septuagint! Further, he made the astonishing statement that the angel quoted prophecy to Joseph, an erroneous claim that was still being repeated 1,800 years later (see below).

Claims of divine sanction for the Septuagint version of Isaiah 7:14 have continued to the present day, in one form or another. In more recent times, rather than asserting God's verification for the Septuagint translation, church writers are more likely to claim, either explicitly or implicitly, that the Septuagint scribes were divinely inspired to "interpret" Isaiah's prophecy. Euphemisms such as "*further revelation*" and "*greater specification*" are employed to veil their underlying proposition that Isaiah's prophecy as rendered by the Septuagint is different to that in the Hebrew Old Testament.

A recent example comes from a Catholic University of America publication:

> **New Catholic Encyclopedia, Second Edition, 2002**
>
> "The Septuagint translation**…** furnishes a pre-Christian **interpretation and greater specification** of the somewhat neutral Hebrew expression by making explicit the notion of "virginity" connected with the mother of Emmanuel. In Mt 1.23 **the angel appearing to Joseph in a dream is portrayed as citing the Septuagint version of the prophecy** of Emmanuel and his virgin mother and applying it to Mary and her expected child." *(Article: Alma)*

To say, "the angel is portrayed as citing the Septuagint version of the prophecy" in Joseph's dream is really saying that the Septuagint version had the angel's, and therefore God's, approval. Of course, this claim is fundamentally flawed: it is Matthew, not the angel, who referred to the prophecy.

Through the ages there are numerous instances of church writers, using a variety of arguments, claiming divine inspiration for the Septuagint version of Isaiah's prophecy. The two examples presented above appeared 1,800 years apart, the earlier from a "Church Father" and the latter from a prestigious church institution. Both in their own way claim God's endorsement of the Septuagint version, and both erroneously claim that the angel cited prophecy in Joseph's dream!

3.3   Could the Septuagint scribes change Isaiah's prophecy?

The insistence of modern day church scholars that Matthew quoted Isaiah 7:14 from the Septuagint is a tacit admission that the meaning of the prophecy in the Septuagint is different from that in the Hebrew Old Testament.

These same scholars know that the first fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy necessarily occurred before the death of King Ahaz (circa 720 BC), and in relation to that fulfilment they deny that Isaiah prophesied a virgin birth. They only ever apply the changed (Septuagint) "prophecy" to the fulfilment in Jesus, and never to the first fulfilment in Isaiah's time, again confirming they know the meaning in the Septuagint is different from the Old Testament.

Isaiah's prophecy was spoken and written in Hebrew. What he spoke is recorded in the Hebrew Old Testament. The prophecy was fulfilled during his lifetime. The proposition that it could be changed 500 years later is absurd.

The virgin birth doctrine is based on the Septuagint mistranslation of Isaiah 7:14. It is a fiction to say the words as rendered in the Septuagint are Isaiah's prophecy. They are not.

The plain fact is the virgin birth doctrine is not based on Isaiah's prophecy.

4. The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's gospel was written specifically for a Jewish audience. This distinguishes it from the other gospels. Church scholars claim that Matthew recorded the fulfilment of a virgin birth prophecy by quoting a Greek rendering of Isaiah rather than the original Hebrew. The evidence is against this claim on two accounts. Jerome said Matthew quoted the Hebrew scripture. More importantly, Matthew said he quoted what Isaiah spoke — which means that he did not depart from what is recorded in the Hebrew scripture.

4.1 The Gospel for the Jews

Matthew wrote his gospel to convince fellow Jews that Jesus was the messiah foretold in the Old Testament. His gospel was written from a Jewish viewpoint for a Jewish audience. The internal evidence of this is so overwhelming that it is often called *The Gospel for the Jews*.

This gospel does not see the need to explain Jewish tradition. It is the only gospel that reports the story which the Jewish priests put into circulation to explain the empty tomb. It uses the distinctly Hebraic formula "Kingdom of Heaven", where the other books in the New Testament speak only of the "Kingdom of God". It alone reports Jesus as saying, *"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel"*, and instructing the disciples *"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"*. It uses the term "son of David" more times than the other gospels combined. And so on. The Jewishness of Matthew's gospel is evident from start to finish.

As part of this, Matthew's gospel has far more references and allusions to the Old Testament than any other New Testament book. It systematically identifies Jesus' life with the history of Israel and the book of Israel (Old Testament). His formula "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet" occurs again and again.

A peculiar feature of several of these "formula prophecies" is that they refer to events or prophecies that have occurred or been fulfilled in Old Testament times. Matthew sees in Jesus a second manifestation of these particular events, and in doing this deliberately links the nation Israel with the individual Jesus. The best example of this is where Matthew says the prophecy "Out of Egypt I called My Son" was fulfilled in Jesus, knowing full well that this statement in the Old Testament is about the exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt. *(Hosea 11:1, Matthew 2:15)*

The Immanuel prophecy is also one of these. Matthew sought to show that just as the birth of Immanuel was an indication of God's presence, so too was the birth of Jesus. It is Matthew's purpose to link events in Israel's history with Jesus that leads him to this second application of Isaiah's prophecy. No other New Testament writer connects this prophecy to Jesus.

Whereas Matthew's intention was to show what the two fulfilments had in common, those who hold to the virgin birth story have manufactured differences between the two fulfilments. They cannot admit similar fulfilments of the same prophecy. What they claim for one fulfilment, a virgin birth, is emphatically denied for the other fulfilment.

Matthew's gospel deals severely with the Jewish religious establishment that opposed Jesus, particularly the scribes and Pharisees. As one commentator sums it up, "there is no gospel which so sternly and consistently condemns the Scribes and Pharisees... There is no chapter of condemnation in the whole New Testament like Matthew 23 which is the condemnation of the Scribes and the Pharisees." *(Gospel of Matthew, Rev William Barclay, D.D., Vol 1, p. xxiii-xxiv)*

The religious establishment considered itself the follower of Moses and custodian of the Law. Matthew's gospel would have galled them on several accounts: it accused them of conspiring to bring about the death of Jesus *(26:3-5, 27:1-10)*; it branded them as full of hypocrisy and the children of those who killed the prophets *(23:27-31)*; it accused them of abiding by forms of the Law but neglecting the more important matters of justice, mercy and faith *(23:23-25)*; it sought to prove Jesus was the messiah on the basis of the Scriptures *(2:1-6, etc)*; and, crucially, it was aimed directly at their audience — the Jewish people. Matthew would have known that those condemned by his gospel would grasp any opportunity to disparage it among the Jewish people. Are we to believe that Matthew would assist in undermining his own credibility

among the Jews by citing a blatantly erroneous Greek translation of Isaiah 7:14 instead of the original Hebrew Scripture?

4.2 Despite what we are told, Matthew quoted what Isaiah said

The key scripture in the virgin birth doctrine is Matthew 1:23, which quotes Isaiah's prophecy. But is what appears in our Bibles a correct rendition of what Matthew wrote? To answer this, one needs to ascertain in what language Matthew wrote his gospel, what words most likely he would have used, and consult evidence that indicates what words he did use.

Despite attempts in recent times by some scholars to conclude that Matthew wrote his gospel in Greek, the testimony from early centuries is that he composed it in Hebrew, as noted in the following reference works:

> **The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire - Edward Gibbon**
>
> "It is probable enough that the first of the Gospels for the use of the Jewish converts was composed in the Hebrew or Syriac idiom: the fact is attested by a chain of fathers**...** But this **Hebrew Gospel** of St. Matthew is most unaccountably lost; and we may accuse the diligence or fidelity of the primitive churches, who have preferred the unauthorised version of some nameless Greek." *(Note 5: Chapter XLVII)*

> **Theological and Homiletical Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew - from the German of J.P. Lange, D.D. translated by Rev. A. Edersheim, PhD.**
>
> "The most ancient and trustworthy witnesses record that Matthew wrote his Gospel originally **in the Hebrew** tongue. The testimonies to this effect commence with that of Papias of Hierapolis, at the beginning of the second century, who evidently refers to the original gospel by Matthew (see Euseb. H. E. iii. 39). His statement is confirmed by almost all the older Fathers, such as Irenaeus, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, and Epiphanius**...** Besides the above testimonies, the whole tenor of this Gospel proves, that it was in the first place destined for Jewish Christians. Matthew evidently assumes that his readers are conversant with the Old Testament, with the sacred writings, and with Palestine and its manners." *(p. 54)*

The evidence is that Matthew wrote in Hebrew. The next issue is did Matthew when quoting Isaiah 7:14 use the same Hebrew word as Isaiah, that is *almah (young woman)*, or did he change the word to *bethulah (virgin)*.

The number of Hebrew Isaiah scrolls found among the *Dead Sea Scrolls* indicates that the Hebrew Isaiah was in common use in Palestine during New Testament times. No matter to what extent the Greek Septuagint may have been consulted, it can be safely assumed that in Palestine it did not override the authority of the Hebrew scriptures where the two conflicted. The error in the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 7:14 would have been considered just that, an error, if it was considered at all. Certainly the Jews never understood Isaiah to have prophesied a virgin birth, as the following authorities make clear:

- **A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture**

  "If it be objected that such a thing would be at complete variance with accepted Jewish thought, we answer first that the Incarnation and all its circumstances were also at variance with prevailing Jewish Messianism and thought." *(Commentary on Luke, 748d)*

- **Abingdon Bible Commentary**

  "**…** there is no evidence that Isa. 7:14 was ever understood in the sense given to it by Matthew till it was so applied to (sic) Christians." *(Matthew by Prof J Newton Davies, p. 957)*

If Matthew used the word "virgin", as the churches claim, then presumably he was quoting the Greek Septuagint. But is it conceivable that Matthew, writing in Hebrew for a Hebrew audience, did not quote from the Hebrew scriptures? Is it conceivable that he preferred to translate a Greek mistranslation of the Hebrew back into Hebrew, by this process changing what Isaiah said, and quote that? Had he followed this course of action, the very people to whom his gospel was directed, the Jews, would have ridiculed him for changing the prophet's words. And rightly so.

The fate of the gospel Matthew wrote in Hebrew is not recorded. However Jerome consulted a copy of this gospel, and tells how it obtained testimony from the Old Testament. Jerome's statement appears in the foreword of the following publication:

> **New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures**
>
> "In recent years some have claimed that Matthew's gospel account was at first written in Hebrew rather than in its kindred language, the Aramaic**...** There is evidence that various recensions of the Hebrew and Aramaic versions of Matthew's account persisted for centuries among the early Jewish Christian communities of Palestine and Syria**…** Jerome, of the 4th and 5th centuries A.D., had this to say:
>
>> 'Matthew, who is also Levi, and who from a publican came to be an Apostle, first of all the Evangelists, composed a Gospel of Christ in Judaea in the Hebrew language and characters, for the benefit of those of the circumcision who had believed. Who translated it into Greek is not sufficiently ascertained. Furthermore, **the Hebrew itself is preserved to this day** in the library at Caesarea which the martyr Pamphilus so diligently collected. I also was allowed by the Nazarenes who use this volume in the Syrian city of Beroea to copy it. In which it is to be remarked that, **wherever the Evangelist makes use of the testimonies of the old Scripture, he does not follow the authority of the seventy translators, but of the Hebrew**.' "

Jerome tells us:

- Matthew wrote in Hebrew,
- an unknown person translated it into Greek,
- the sect of Nazarenes had preserved the Hebrew,
- Jerome copied the Hebrew, and
- this copy showed that when Matthew cited the Old Testament, he did so from the Hebrew not from the Greek Septuagint translation.

The evidence of Jerome shows that when Matthew recorded a second fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy in the birth of Jesus, he used the same word as Isaiah, that is "young woman". It shows also, that in 400 AD the Hebrew Christian Sect of the Nazarenes had a gospel which said nothing about virgin birth.

4.3   Take note of what Matthew said

The proposition of the churches is that when Matthew quoted Isaiah's prophecy, he did so from the Septuagint and not the Hebrew scriptures. Had he done this, he would have changed what Isaiah prophesied. Neither Matthew nor anyone else had authority to do that.

However, there is no need to deliberate on whether Matthew quoted what Isaiah actually spoke or whether he preferred the Septuagint mistranslation, because **Matthew tells us**:

> Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was **spoken… by the prophet**, saying**…** *(Matthew 1:22)*

If Matthew quoted what "was spoken by the prophet", then he quoted Isaiah's words that are preserved in the Hebrew scriptures, which makes no reference to a "virgin".

5. The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Isaiah Scroll found among the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 is the only extant copy of Isaiah that predates the New Testament. Its significance to the virgin birth debate is considerable.

5.1   Dead Sea Scrolls upset status quo

The finding of the Isaiah Scroll among the Dead Sea Scrolls marks a turning point in the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14. It did not occur in a vacuum. Preceding events brought about a change in the intellectual climate, which ensured the significance of the Isaiah scroll could not be avoided.

The 20th century saw a resurgence of the Jewish people, with the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the formation of the State of Israel in 1948 as landmark events.

These events were accompanied by enormous advances in literacy, and subjects that were once the preserve of select groups of scholars were becoming much more accessible to the ordinary people. The publication of the *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* in 1939–1943 was one of the voices outside of, and a challenge to, the scholarly church circles that had corrupted the meaning of Isaiah 7:14. The iron grip with which church scholars controlled the flow of information about Jesus of Nazareth was being prised loose.

This was the setting in 1947 when a Bedouin shepherd stumbled upon ancient Hebrew scrolls in a cave near the Dead Sea, amongst which was a copy of Isaiah virtually in its entirety. Other copies of Isaiah were found, although none of them were complete manuscripts. These and assorted scrolls found between 1947 and 1956 in eleven caves in this area became known as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In March 1948 the Isaiah Scroll was confirmed as the oldest known manuscript of Isaiah. The following month a press release made the discovery of the scrolls public knowledge.

The Isaiah Scroll was about 1,000 years older than any previously known existing Hebrew copy, and several hundred years older than any extant Greek translation. It predates the New Testament. Importantly, it confirmed what the scholars have always known but tried to circumvent, that is Isaiah said nothing about a virgin birth.

Church scholars had known of and perpetuated the mistranslation of Isaiah 7:14 in the Septuagint since the 2nd century, when the three Greek translations of the Hebrew Old Testament by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotian had corrected the Septuagint mistranslation. Whether in anticipation, or with knowledge, of what the Isaiah Scroll said, the reaction in scholarly church circles after 1,800 years of misrepresentation was swift and dramatic.

5.2   Monsignor Knox's U-turn

Among the first to react was Monsignor Knox, the prominent Roman Catholic scholar and Bible translator. His case is worth telling in so much that it is representative of the monumental turnaround in many church scholarly circles. Until 1945 Knox perpetuated the translation of the word in Isaiah 7.14 as "virgin" without qualification. However after the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls, without acknowledging his previous position, Knox changed his translation of the word to "maid".

Knox 1936—1945

In the 1936—1945 period Knox published two works in which he endorsed the translation of "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14, without even a hint that this translation was questionable.

In 1936 Knox's *The Holy Bible: an abridgement and rearrangement* rendered Isaiah 7:14 as *"Behold a **virgin** shall conceive and bear a son…"* There was no comment about the word translated as "virgin", merely a footnote stating: *"This text has been quoted by all the Fathers, from St. Justin onwards, in proof of our Lord's Virgin Birth."*

In Knox's 1945 translation of the New Testament, a footnote to Matthew 1:23 upheld the translation of the word in Isaiah 7:14 as '"virgin", in categorical terms. The only qualification to the translation in his work of some nine years earlier related to the definite article in the Hebrew: "*Isaias vii. 14. 'The virgin' is a literal translation of the Hebrew; 'a virgin' would equally express the sense of the original prophecy.*"

Knox 1949

After the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Knox did a U-turn on the meaning of the word in Isaiah 7:14. No longer did he claim that "virgin" is the literal translation of the word. In his 1949 translation of the Old Testament, the word is translated as "maid".

Knox's footnote includes these words: "*In the Hebrew text, **the word translated 'virgin' should perhaps be 'maiden', since it refers rather to a time than to a state of life**; but in view of the event, we cannot doubt that this prophecy looks forward to the Virgin Birth. No very successful attempt has been made to explain its relevance to contemporary happenings.*"

Knox's U-turn between 1945 and 1949 was an enormous shift. Not accidentally, his turnaround coincided with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

5.3   Church scholars' U-turn

Others followed the path Knox had taken, conceding that "virgin" was not the correct translation. This was reflected in various new Bible translations, Roman Catholic and Protestant, which translated the word in Isaiah 7:14 correctly. Here are some examples:

- maiden   New World Translation *(after 1953)*
                    Jerusalem Bible *(1966)*
- young woman   The Bible in Basic English *(1949)*
                    Revised Standard Version *(1952)*
                    New Life Version *(1969)*
                    The New English Bible *(1970)*
                    Good News Bible *(1976)*
                    The New Jerusalem Bible *(1985)*
                    The Revised English Bible *(1989)*
                    New Revised Standard Version *(1990)*

Thus in the second half of the 20th century, following the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, there were scholars translating the word in Isaiah 7:14 exactly as Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotian had done in the 2nd century. It is unfortunate for the truth that in the intervening 1,800 years church scholars had chosen to interpret Isaiah 7:14 according to the Septuagint translation, and by doing this attributed to Isaiah something he never said.

It is only in recent times that ordinary churchgoers can read in their Bibles that Isaiah spoke only of a "young woman" who would bear a child. Church scholars have always known the facts of this matter (even though they obscured the facts and logical consequences with their theological concoctions). It took a long time to wrest the truth from them. But their continuing commitment to the virgin birth story keeps them from stating clearly and unequivocally that there is no virgin birth prophecy in the Old Testament. However their position is exposed for all to see.

6. The virgin birth doctrine in the balance

The virgin birth doctrine hinges on a single word, and holds the key to interpreting the role of the churches.

What the New Testament says about changing words of prophecy.

6.1 The fate of the churches hinges on a single word

Do the churches represent, or misrepresent, Jesus of Nazareth? If the virgin birth doctrine is a fraud, then the answer to this question is obvious.

The virgin birth doctrine will stand or fall on the answers to these two simple questions:

> *Did the Old Testament prophesy a virgin birth?*

> *Does the New Testament record the fulfilment of a virgin birth prophecy?*

As we have seen, Isaiah never referred to a "virgin". Even Roman Catholic Bible translators have dropped the pretence that he did since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

This raises the question whether Matthew quoted what Isaiah said, or something different. Church scholars opt for the something different. They claim Matthew used the word "virgin" rather than the "young woman" spoken of by Isaiah.

Wouldn't it be ironic if the mighty churches were to be judged by one of their own doctrines, and this judgment rested on something as simple as what word appears in Matthew 1:23?

The churches should pray that a young Bedouin looking for a lost goat near the Dead Sea does not stumble upon an ancient copy of Matthew in its original language, because that manuscript could well be a path to their derision.

6.2 What the New Testament says about changing words of prophecy

For 1,800 years, in order to support their virgin birth doctrine, church scholars chose a Greek mistranslation of Isaiah 7:14 to interpret, and thereby falsify, what Isaiah prophesied.

The evidence shows that scholars utilised, and continue to utilise, a version of Matthew that falsified his quotation of Isaiah's prophecy.

With the issue of tampering with prophecy in mind, it is instructive to look at the warning given in another New Testament book should any man try to alter the words of its prophecy.

> For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

> And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

> *Revelation 22:18-19*

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