The Prophecies of Jesus

Isaiah 7:14

Lesson 3

1. Hello. My name is Ken Samuel, and this is the third part of an eleven-part series on the prophecies of Jesus that was originally created by Stephen Katz. Today, we are going to analyze the prophecy of the virgin birth, Isaiah 7:14. <click>
2. So, the prophecy says, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” <click> According to the missionaries, the virgin is Mother Mary, <click> her son is Jesus Christ, and the Hebrew word “Immanuel” means “God with us,” and Jesus is God. <click>
3. So, the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14, according to the missionaries, is as follows. <click> The virgin must be Mother Mary, because she was the only virgin to ever conceive and give birth. <click> Although she had more than one son, she only conceived one as a virgin, so this verse is referring to her firstborn, Jesus. <click> And, if there’s any doubt that this prophecy refers to Jesus, it’s clarified by the name Immanuel. “Immanuel” is a Hebrew word that means “God with us,” and since Jesus is the only son of God who was born to a human, there is no doubt that this prophecy points to Jesus Christ. <click>
4. Now the anti-missionaries, people who don’t believe in Jesus, have a different interpretation of Isaiah 7:14. <click> Firstly, “virgin” is a mistranslation of the Hebrew word “עַלְמָה” (almah). “עַלְמָה” actually means “young woman.” <click> Isaiah gave this prophecy to Ahaz, the king of Judah, and it’s a promise that the kingdoms of Israel and Aram would not attack Judah. <click> The son refers to Isaiah’s son. <click> And “Immanuel” means that God was with Judah. <click>
5. So, the anti-missionaries inform us that “עַלְמָה,” which is the Hebrew word that is translated as “virgin,” doesn’t mean “virgin” at all. A true translation is “young woman.” <click> The context is that Isaiah gave this prophesy to the king of Judah, Ahaz. Earlier in the book of Isaiah, we learn that the kingdoms of Aram and Israel were planning to conquer the kingdom of Judah, and Ahaz was very worried about this. Isaiah prophesied that they would not attack Judah, and to prove that God would fulfill that prophecy, He give Ahaz a sign. <click> The sign is the birth of Isaiah’s son, which Isaiah recorded in the following chapter of his book. <click> And, by including the word “Immanuel” in the prophecy, Isaiah was emphasizing the promise that God was on the side of Judah, not Israel and Aram. <click>
6. So, the anti-missionaries say, “There is a critical mistranslation in this verse, and the disciples probably made it deliberately. <click> You see, the Hebrew word that Christians translate as ‘virgin’ is ‘עַלְמָה,’ which certainly doesn’t mean ‘virgin.’ ‘עַלְמָה’ actually means ‘young woman’ or ‘maiden’ or ‘damsel’ or ‘girl.’ The sense of ‘עַלְמָה’ is adolescence or youth. It’s related to sexual development. If you were to call a 50-year-old virgin an ‘עַלְמָה,’ she would think you didn’t know what you were saying. <click> Also, the NIV translation admits that ‘עַלְמָה’ means ‘young woman’ in four verses, and it translates ‘עַלְמָה’ as ‘girl’ in another verse. <click> And besides, a virgin birth is not a Jewish concept. It’s part of the religions of the pagans. For example, Greek and Roman gods had sex with humans. <click>
7. The Hebrew word that does mean “virgin” is “בְּתוּלָה” (betulah). Genesis 24:16 says, “The woman was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever slept with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again.” Here, the word that Christians translate as “virgin” is “בְּתוּלָה,” and obviously, that translation is correct, since it says, “no man had ever slept with her.” <click> Judges 19:24 also has the word “בְּתוּלָה” translated into “virgin” in the NIV: “‘Look, here is my virgin (בְּתוּלָה) daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But as for this man, don’t do such an outrageous thing.’” <click>
8. Let’s take a look at the context preceding Isaiah 7:14. In Isaiah 7, verses 5 and 6, God said to king Ahaz, ‘Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah’s son have plotted your ruin, saying, “Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it.”’ ‘Ephraim’ refers to the northern kingdom of Israel, and Remaliah’s son was the king of Israel. So, God was telling Ahaz that the kingdoms of Aram and Israel formed an alliance, and they were planning to attack Judah. <click>
9. However, in the following verses, Isaiah prophesied, ‘Yet this is what the Sovereign Lord says: “‘It will not take place, it will not happen, for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people.’”’ Damascus was the capital city of Aram, and Rezin was the king of Aram. And, again, Ephraim is Israel. And this prophecy was fulfilled in 721 BC, when Assyria got feisty and conquered both Aram and Israel. <click>
10. Now King Ahaz didn’t live long enough to see this, but God gave him a sign to convince him that this prophecy would be fulfilled: the birth of a boy, Immanuel. So, the anti-missionaries say, <click> “The sign couldn’t come *after* the fulfillment of the prophecy that it was promising. That would make no sense at all. The birth promised in Isaiah 7:14 had to occur before the Assyrian conquest, which occurred centuries before Jesus’s birth. In particular, the sign wouldn’t do King Ahaz any good if it didn’t happen before he died, which was in 727 BC. So then, who was this boy? <click> It was Isaiah’s son, who was born in 732 BC. Isaiah gives us clues about this by the way he reports his son’s birth in chapter 8, because it’s noteworthy how similar it is to the prophecy. <click> The first column of this table has three of the verses from the prophecy, and the second column has three verses about the fulfillment of the prophecy. So, the prophecy in Chapter 7 says, ‘“The עַלְמָה will conceive and give birth to a son...”’ and in Isaiah 8, we see, ‘The prophetess... conceived and gave birth to a son.”’ (The prophetess was Isaiah’s wife.) So, verses 7:14 and 8:3 are similar. The next row of the table shows another parallel. The prophecy in chapter 7 says, ‘“... for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right...”’ while, in Chapter 8, Isaiah says, ‘“For before the boy knows how to say ‘My father’ or ‘My mother…’” So, both verses reference a time when the boy is still young. And then, the last row of the table shows that Isaiah 7 says, ‘“... Assyria will destroy Aram and Israel,”’ and Isaiah 8 says, “‘… the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria.’” So, they both prophesy Assyria’s conquest of Aram and Israel. The similarities between the prophecy and its fulfillment are remarkable. Isaiah was telling us that his son is Immanuel.” <click>
11. So now, let’s give the missionaries an opportunity to rebut the anti-missionaries’ arguments. They say, “Yeah, ‘עַלְמָה’ can mean ‘young girl.’ But it can also mean ‘virgin.’ <click> Consider that, in the Septuagint, which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that *Jewish* translators made, they decided to translate ‘עַלְמָה’ into ‘παρθένος’ in Isaiah 7:14, and ‘παρθένος’ can only means ‘virgin.’ 72 Jews wrote the Septuagint before the birth of Christ, so, before anti-missionaries started saying that Isaiah 7:14 didn’t refer to Jesus, Jews thought that it prophesied a virgin birth. <click> And Rashi, a famous Jewish rabbi, said that ‘עַלְמָה’ can be a synonym of ‘בְּתוּלָה’ in his commentary on Song of Solomon 1:3. And remember that the anti-missionaries say that ‘בְּתוּלָה’ means ‘virgin,’ so Rashi was saying that ‘עַלְמָה’ does too. <click> And, as for the anti-missionaries’ argument that the idea of a virgin birth is pagan, not Jewish, consider Matthew 1:22-23. After reporting how the angel told Mary and Joseph about the virgin birth, Matthew wrote, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ (which means ‘God with us’).” Clearly, he was referencing the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14. Now Matthew’s audience was Jews, and Jews didn’t believe pagan myths. In fact, many of them probably didn’t even know about them. So, Matthew wasn’t mimicking a pagan myth to attract people to Christianity. <click>
12. The missionaries also say, <click> “As for the claim that the prophecy is about Isaiah’s son, consider that, before giving King Ahaz the sign, God says, ‘“Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”’ A sign should be a miracle. It should be amazing. How could a young woman having a son impress King Ahaz and convince him that Israel and Aram would not attack Judah?” It’s like God saying, ‘Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Somebody will enter Union Station sometime this week.’” <click>
13. So, in summary, <click> the anti-missionaries claim that the Christian Bibles mistranslate “עַלְמָה” as “virgin.” The missionaries point out that Jews translated “עַלְמָה” into “παρθένος,” which means “virgin.” <click> The anti-missionaries argue that only pagan religions would say that a god conceived with a human. The missionaries assert that Matthew was writing to Jews when he said that Isaiah 7:14 was a prophecy of a virgin birth. <click> The anti-missionaries’ interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 says that it refers to Isaiah’s son. The missionaries note that it’s not a miracle for a young woman to conceive and give birth to a son. <click>
14. So, I’m not going to tell you who is right. You can decide who to believe, the missionaries or the anti-missionaries.