



"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME"
ISAIAH 61:1

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

CHAPTER 7

AND HIS NAME
WILL BE CALLED
WONDERFUL COUNSELOR,
MIGHTY GOD,
EVERLASTING FATHER,
PRINCE OF
PEACE.
ISAIAH 9:6

Isaiah is called "The Book of Salvation." The name *Isaiah* means "the salvation of the Lord" or "the Lord is salvation." Isaiah is the first book containing the writings of the prophets of the Bible. And the author, Isaiah, who is called the Prince of Prophets, shines above all the other writers and prophets of Scripture. His mastery of the language, his rich and vast vocabulary, and his poetic skill have earned him the title, "Shakespeare of the Bible." He was educated, distinguished, and privileged, yet remained a deeply spiritual man. He was committed to obedience over the long haul of his 55-60 year ministry as a prophet of God. He was a true patriot who loved his country and his people. Strong tradition suggests that he died a martyr's death under the reign of King Manasseh by being placed within the hollow of a tree trunk and sawed in two.

Isaiah's calling as a prophet was primarily to the nation of Judah (the southern kingdom) and to Jerusalem, urging the people to repent from their sins and return to God. He also foretold the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of the Lord. Many of his prophesies predicted events that occurred in Isaiah's near future, yet at the same time they foretold the events of the distant future (such as the coming of the Messiah), and even some events still to come in the last days (such as the second coming of Christ).

In summary, the message of Isaiah is that salvation comes from God—not man. God alone is Savior, Ruler and King.

Commentary on the book of Isaiah is by noted theologian Rev. William G. Most (1914-1999). His contributions to theology have been recognized all over the world. He published 12 books and a host of articles on topics ranging from biblical studies to Mariology and Latin grammar.

Book of Isaiah

Summary of Chapter 7

When Ahaz was king of Judah, King Resin of Aram and Pekah, son of Remeliah, King of Israel, tried to fight against Jerusalem, but could not take it. The king of Judah was told of this alliance, and king and people were fearful, shaking like trees in the wind.

Then God told Isaiah to take his son Shear-jasub and to go out to meet King Ahaz, to tell him to have faith. God promised the invasion would not succeed. He added that within 65 years Ephraim, the northern kingdom, Israel, would be shattered. But if Ahaz did not have faith, he would not stand.

Isaiah then offered Ahaz a sign in the sky or in the depths. Ahaz refused to ask, as if it would be tempting God. Isaiah then said: "Is it not enough for you to weary men? Must you also weary God? The Lord Himself is going to give you a sign: A virgin will

Conclusion

We produced new evidence (chiefly, lack of interest in the Mishnah and beyond, in the classic prophecies) that the Targums Jonathan and Onkelos are early, probably no later than 200 A.D., the date of the Mishnah, and likely even earlier. We saw that commentators quite commonly hold that at least some parts of the targums go back to earlier times. This is specially likely for the Isaiah texts we have studied, in view of the lack of interest in them later on. And for certain, the Targum

Jonathan reflects Jewish understanding of the prophecies *without the help of hindsight*, that is, without the help of seeing them fulfilled in Christ, whom they hated.

2) We saw that the Targum Jonathan clearly makes Isaiah 9:5-6 messianic. Then, by the fact that 7:14 speaks of the same child -- since both texts are part of the Book of Immanuel -- 7:14 must also be messianic. We saw that the Jews once, e.g., Hillel, did consider 7:14 messianic, but gave it up to deter Christians from using 7:14 as messianic. So the fact that the targum does not mark 7:14 as such is readily explained by the distortion later introduced into the targums by the Jews who wanted to keep Christians from using them -- a fact admitted by several major modern Jewish scholars.

3) We saw that Vatican II teaches that 7:14, as understood in the light of later revelation really does speak of the Messiah and of Mary His Mother, in a virginal conception. The Council indicates that the original readers, and probably even Isaiah himself, did not see the full import. But it indicates that even so, the Holy Spirit, the Chief Author of Scripture, did see it and intend it, so that later He led the Church to see it also.

4) Hence for those who accept the teaching of Vatican II, both points are clear: Isaiah 7:14 is messianic, and it does speak of a virginal conception.

5) A careful study of usage of the Hebrew *almah* and Greek *parthenos* in the Septuagint reveal that although *almah* need not mean virgin, it most usually does, and is so understood by the Septuagint, which employed even more precision than the Hebrew text of the OT in general in its use of *parthenos*.

End of Chapter 7

Kaiser's Objection

Kaiser asserts: "According to the lexica, the words *parthenos* and *virgo* do not necessarily have the connotation of virginity in the strict sense." Kaiser cites H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek English Lexicon*, rev. H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie, Oxford 1940 (1961), and C. T. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, 1907.

The Latin usage is not really significant -- and it is much like the Greek anyway -- but we are dealing with the Greek and further, the Greek of the Septuagint, not the pagan usage. But let us look at the citations even so. They are few. The general normal usage of *parthenos* even in pagan literature really does stand for virgin in the strict sense. Homer, *Iliad* 2:511-4 has: "Those who dwelt in Aspledon and Orchomenos of the Minyai were under Askalaphos and Ialmenos, sons of Ares, whom Astyoche conceived by the powerful god in the house of Aktor, son of Azeus, who entered her upper chamber, an honorable maiden (*parthenos*) and lay with her secretly." We comment: the word could refer to her before that point -- she was such before Ares came, and would be commonly thought to be a virgin, for she was honorable. Who would see the god enter?

Pindar, *Pythian* 3:31-34: "Thereupon did he (Apollo) send his sister (Artemis) to Laceria ... for the unwedded girl (*parthenos*) was living by the banks of the Boebian lake." We comment: Apollo knew of her fall from virtue. She would popularly have been considered a virgin at that time.

Aristophanes, *Clouds* 530-31: "And I, for I was still a virgin (*parthenos*) and it was not right to bear, I exposed it." We observe: she was popularly considered a virgin, hence she exposed the child to hide what she had done, so as not to lose that reputation.

Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, 1219-20: Herakles says: "Do you know the maiden (*parthenos*) child of Eurytus?" Hyllus says: "It seems to me you mean Iole." A few lines below, Heracles says she had lain by his side. But again, we observe that she would popularly be thought to be a virgin. (A similar situation comes below, at line 1275.)

From these examples we conclude: 1) All examples are from poets, who are apt to be more free in their use of words, especially for the sake of meter; 2) All examples are loose at least in the sense that the girl would popularly be considered a virgin. 3) These examples are few, and do not represent the general Greek pagan usage. But even if the pagan Greek evidence were much stronger, we would still have to say: *What is significant for our purpose is not the loose usage of a few lines in pagan Greek poets, which is against general Greek usage -- the important thing is how the Septuagint used the word. We have carefully checked the usage of the LXX, above, and found it to be very strict.*

be with child and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. The son will eat curds and honey when he comes to know right from wrong. But before this, the land of the two kings of the north will be devastated.

But because Ahaz did not have faith, God said he would bring a terrible time on Judah: The king of Assyria would come at God's call. Yet after the attack there would still be milk and honey. But where there were rich vines, there would be only grazing land for cattle and sheep.

Comments on Chapter 7

At the beginning of this chapter 7, we read of the time of the Syro-Ephraimite war. Near the end of the reign of Joatham, around 734, Rezin of Syria in alliance with Pekah of Ephraim (that is, Israel) had attacked Judah (as we learn in 2 Kings 15:37) and the threat was in earnest. It seems Syria wanted to draw Judah together with Ephraim into an alliance to offer resistance to the aggressive Assyrians. But Judah was not so inclined. Hence Syria and Ephraim wanted to force Judah. Details of the events can be found in 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28. After some military actions such as the capture of Elath (2 Kings 16:6) the northern allies wanted to capture Jerusalem. It was a tense time.

The house of David, Judah, learned that Aram was in alliance with Ephraim. Ahaz and his people were shaken like leaves blown by the wind. But then the Lord told Isaiah to take his son Shear-Jashub (the name means "a remnant will return") to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool on the way to Washerman's field. The idea "a remnant will return" is of unclear import. It could mean either warning or hope, or physical return from exile or spiritual return to God. God had ordered Isaiah to name his son this way, it seems.

God told Isaiah to tell Ahaz not to be afraid of those two smoldering stumps who wanted to invade Judah, for they would not last long. Isaiah was to assure Ahaz that the Lord said: It will not happen. In saying that Damascus is the head of Aram and Rezin is the head of Damascus, God was saying in effect: These are only humans! Similarly He said that Samaria is the head of Ephraim and the head of Samaria is just the son of Remeliah, just a human again. They planned to set up the son of Tabeel as a usurper, king of Judah. The way Isaiah spells Tabeel may be deliberate corruption of spelling for contempt, so as to mean, in Aramaic: "Good for nothing", instead of "God is good". So God wanted to assure Ahaz that within 65 years Ephraim would be shattered as a people. So Ahaz is ordered to stand firm in faith. If not, he would not stand at all. The prophecy of the 65 years was fulfilled in a series of events: The fall of Samaria to Sargon II, and eventually Esarhaddon of Assyria just about 65 years after this prophecy, introduced a racial mixture in the area of the northern kingdom.

Tiglath-Pileser came to the throne of Assyria in 745. This prophecy of Isaiah probably came around 733. Damascus fell to Tiglath in 732. Then Shalmaneser V (727-722) and Sargon II (722-705) attacked Samaria, which fell in 722 or 721.

But Ahaz would not believe, and so through Isaiah God offered Ahaz a sign in the sky or in the depths. Ahaz said he did not want to put the Lord to the test.

At that point Isaiah gave the great prophecy: The virgin (or young woman) will be with child, and will have a son and call him Immanuel. Before that boy will be old enough to reject wrong and choose right, the land of the two northern kings will be laid waste.

Isaiah told Ahaz in the name of the Lord that Assyria, in whom he wanted to trust against the northern kings, would not help. Instead God would summon Assyria to swiftly punish Judah. Instead of rich vines there would be briars and thorns. It would be a place for cattle and sheep.

Ahaz had even sacrificed his own son by fire 2 Kings 16:2-4 and 2 Chron. 28:1. In his fear he sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria declaring himself a vassal (2 Kings 16:7; 2 Chron 28:16). He took gold and silver from the temple to give as tribute. Tiglath Pileser responded quickly, in 734, and took Damascus, the city of Rezin whom he killed. Ahaz had a pagan altar, like one in Assyria, set up in the temple: 2 Kings 16:10. He sent so much temple equipment to Assyria that eventually the sanctuary was closed: 2 Kings 16:17-18; 2 Chron 28:24.

Now about that prophecy: "Behold, the young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. "

The date of this prophecy can be gleaned from the fact that it was spoken to Ahaz who reigned c 735-15 BC.

The Targum does not identify this passage as messianic. However, Jacob Neusner, (<Messiah in Context> p. 173) quotes the great Hillel, one of the chief teachers at the time of Christ, as saying that Hezekiah, son of Achaz (to whom Isaiah spoke) had been the Messiah. So Hillel considered the text messianic. But then Neusner adds (p. 190): "Since Christian critics of Judaism claimed that the prophetic promises. . . had all been kept in the times of ancient Israel, so that Israel now awaited nothing at all, it was important to reject the claim that Hezekiah had been the Messiah". Thus the Talmud, cited by Neusner, p. 173, quotes Rabbi Joseph as denying that Hezekiah had been the Messiah. St. Justin Martyr in Dialogue with Trypho, 77 has Trypho the Jew say the Jews believe Hezekiah was the Messiah.

However, it is not true that the change of who would give the name is so significant. It is now generally admitted that the textual tradition of the OT was not firmly fixed at the time the LXX was made. Hence the LXX probably merely used a different textual tradition, resulting in the shift about who would give the name. The Isaiah scroll of Qumran has *wqra* which could be rendered: "one will call" = people will call, or it will be called. (The Targum Jonathan has "she will call," which matches the Hebrew.) Still further, the mother giving the name would not be critical anyway, in spite of Laurentin. At times even when there was a human father, the mother did give the name, e.g., Gen 4:1 & 25; 19:36; 29:32.

We note that above, Laurentin said the Jewish tradition did not see a virgin in Isaiah 7:14. Some later translations did not use *parthenos* but *neanis*.

Secondly, Laurentin, in the French edition, tries to claim that the LXX is loose in its use of *parthenos*, and he cites as an example the case of Dina, violated by Shechem. Dina is, says Laurentin, called a virgin in Gen 34:4, after the violation. But Laurentin made a remarkable slip here: he must have not looked at the Hebrew or Greek texts at all, but just used a French translation, which does indeed have *vierge* in Gen 34:4. But had Laurentin looked at the Hebrew, he would have found not *almah*, but *yaldah*, "young woman," and in the Greek he would have found not *parthenos*, but *paidiske*.

Somehow Laurentin found out his mistake before the English translation appeared. So in it he did not appeal to Gen 34:4 but to Gen 34:3. Now Gen 34:4 does have *parthenos* standing for Hebrew *naara*, "young woman." But again Laurentin seems to have overlooked something: Often the OT uses a concentric pattern in narratives, i.e., it will first tell part of the story, then it will back up and repeat, adding details. It is at least very plausible to suppose that that is what has happened in the passage of Gen 34:1-4. Then, even though the Hebrew has *naara* twice for Dina in verse 3, yet the LXX translators, thinking it was the concentric pattern quite familiar to them, thought it referred to Dina before the violation, when she would still be a virgin, and hence rendered *naara* both times by *parthenos*.

In view of the fact that we have seen how careful the LXX is about its use of *parthenos* we can hardly suppose without added proof that it was careless in translating Isaiah 7:14. We might add this: In the case of Genesis 24:14, 16 and 55 where the Hebrew has *naara*, the LXX each time uses *parthenos*. If we check the narrative in context, it is clear that the girl in question each time really is a virgin, for in verse 16, she is called first *naara* and then *bethulah*. So here the LXX is more precise than the Hebrew.

The Hebrew *almah* does not necessarily mean a virgin. It means a young girl of marriageable age -- who is presumed to be a virgin. The OT uses the word *almah* only seven times: Gen 24:43; Ex 2:8; Prov 30:19; Ps 68:26; Songs 1:3 and 6:8, plus, of course Isaiah 7:14. Out of these only Genesis 24:43 and Isaiah 7:14 seemed clear enough to the Septuagint translators that they rendered it by *parthenos*, which, of course, definitely means virgin. In Gen 24:43 Isaac is on his way to find a bride for himself. He then proposes to God that he will stand by the well of water, and asks that the *almah* who comes out to draw water, and who offers water for both him and his camels may be the one he should take as a bride. Exodus 2:8 tells how the daughter of Pharaoh told the sister of the infant Moses to get a Hebrew woman to nurse him. We would think likely that the sister was a virgin, since she seems to be still living with her mother. But the Septuagint was being quite careful: it used the broader word *neanis*, *young woman*. Proverbs 30:19 says the author cannot understand a few things. One of them is "the way of a man with an *almah*." It seems to mean his desire for intercourse. That of course could be true even if she were not a virgin. Yet a young man in general would want a virgin. Even so, the LXX did not render by *parthenos* -- in fact, it changed the sense, rendering *en neoteti* -- the writer of Proverbs does not understand the way of a man "in his youth." Psalm 68:26 speaks of the *alamoth* playing with timbrels in a victory procession -- we would say most likely, at least, they are virgins. But the LXX stayed with the more generic *neanis* again. Songs 1:3 is not very clear: "Therefore do the *alamoth* love you." O. Kaiser thinks that in Songs 6:8 "virginity ... is certainly ruled out." We do not agree, for the verse says: "There are 60 queens, 80 concubines, and *alamoth* without number." Now if a girl is neither a queen, nor a concubine, it seems likely she is still a virgin. But the LXX again stayed with *neanis*.

We gather that the LXX was extremely careful about translating *almah* as *parthenos*, virgin. It did it only twice. One of those two times is in Isaiah 7:14. Hence it seems that the LXX was quite convinced that it really did mean a virgin in Isaiah 7:14.

Laurentin's Objections

Rene Laurentin, in the original French edition of *Les Evangiles de l'Enfance du Christ* raises some objections to taking Isaiah 7:14 as foretelling a virgin birth.

First, he recognizes that the LXX does translate by *parthenos*, but he says this point is weakened in two ways. "*Jewish tradition never interpreted this as a virginal conception*. The Septuagint (two centuries before Christ) had in the meantime translated it by *parthenos*; this does not imply a development in the direction of the virginal conception. If this were the case, the Greek text would have retained the most significant factor of the Hebrew text, where it is *the young girl who receives the mission of giving the name to the child*. In the LXX this mission is given to Ahaz." In the LXX the prophet says, speaking to Ahaz "You will call."

But even though the Targum does not mark this passage as messianic, yet it does mark 9:5-6 as messianic. Now both Is 7. 14 and 9. 5-6 are part of the section on Immanuel, which runs from 6. 1 to 12. 6. Hence it is generally accepted that the child in 7. 14 is the same as the child in 9. 5-6. This means, of course, that since 9. 5-6 is messianic, so is 7. 14. As Jacob Neusner, cited above, said, it was the actions of the Jews against Christians that caused them to stop saying 7. 14 was messianic.

Who, then, is the child of 7. 14? Some of the characteristics of 9. 5-6 are too grand for Hezekiah, as we shall see. Further the use of the definite article before <almah> in 7. 14 seems to point to someone special, not just to the wife of Achaz. Also, there is no clear example in the Old Testament of <almah> to mean a married woman. On the other hand, a sign to come seven centuries later would hardly be a sign for Achaz. We conclude: this is a case of multiple fulfillment of prophecy: it refers to both Hezekiah and Christ.

Still further, the Septuagint uses <parthenos> to render Hebrew <almah> (which means a young woman, of the right age for marriage, who at least should be a virgin. <Betulah> is the more precise word for virgin). R. Laurentin (<The Truth of Christmas Beyond the Myths>, Petersham, 1986, p. 412, claims the Septuagint sometimes uses <parthenos> loosely. But this is not true. Actually, there are only two places in the OT where the Septuagint translates <almah> by <parthenos>. One is in Genesis 24. 43, where the context shows the girl is a virgin. The other is Is 7. 14. There are several other places where <almah> is at least likely to be a virgin. But the Septuagint is so careful that it uses instead of <parthenos>, a more general word, <neanis> in those cases. Laurentin in the English version appeals also to Genesis 34. 3 (in the French he had appealed to 34. 4, which does not have the word <parthenos> at all)! But the case is at least unclear, since 34. 3 is likely to be an instance of concentric ring narration, common in Hebrew. In it the text begins to narrate an event, goes part way, then goes back to the start and retells, using different details. This may happen twice or three times. And as we have just said, in all clear instances the Septuagint is very precise in its use of <parthenos>, at times more precise than the Hebrew (as shown by the context).

<Our conclusion>: there are good reasons for taking 7:14 as meaning Jesus, but also good reasons for taking it to mean Hezekiah. So this is probably a case of multiple fulfillment of prophecies - on this pattern in general cf. again Wm. Most, <Free From All Error> (Libertyville, Il. 1990), chapter 5.

What invasion is meant here? The trouble did begin to come from Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria in 733-32, went further with the fall of Samaria, capital of the northern kingdom in 722. Then there was a racial mixture introduced into the north by Esarhaddon (681-69), which was about 65 years after the prophecy of Isaiah.

The Lord will bring a terrible time on them. He will whistle for flies from Egypt and bees from Assyria. They will settle in the ravines and crevices. The Lord will employ a razor from beyond the River, the King of Assyria. He will shave their heads and beards.

What about the comment in verse 15 that the child will eat curds and honey - and the same expression comes in verse 22. Now curds and honey could be taken in two ways: the words could suggest plenty: cf. Exodus 3:8. 17 and Dt 6:3. Or do the words suggest a normal diet for a recently weaned (a baby stops nursing) child? What then of the use of the words in verse 22: does it mean just a subsistence diet after an invasion, a small but adequate diet, from being able to keep a cow? To say the vine will be replaced by cattle grazing seems to mean a change from agricultural economy to pastoral. But where there had been a thousand rich vines, there will be only briars and thorns, and cattle will graze in that place.

Fr. William Most- The Problem of Isaiah 7:14

Valuable help on our problem comes from a number of major modern Jewish scholars who are commendably honest in bringing forth facts that really favor the Christian interpretation of Isaiah 7:14, as we shall be seeing presently.

In our study we are going to make much use of the targums, ancient Jewish Aramaic free translations, plus fill-ins, of the Old Testament. We are especially concerned with the Targum Jonathan, the official targum to the prophets -- for most of the greatest messianic prophecies are found in that targum, to the prophets Isaiah and Micah. We must also add Targum Onkelos, because of the great prophecies of Genesis 3:15 and 49:10, which Onkelos recognizes as messianic.

The Date of Targums

As a result, we need to consider the question of the date of composition of the targums, especially Targum Jonathan. There is much diversity of opinion among scholars. For example, Samson Levey wrote that the official targums (which include those of Onkelos and Jonathan) are likely to come from the second century B.C., since they are cautious about using the full title "King Messiah" -- they omit the word King -- because in Maccabean times, hope for restoring the Davidic kingship might sound like treason to the Hasmoneans. But two pages later, Levey says the older view that the latest possible date, the *terminus ad quem*, of Targum Jonathan was earlier than the Arab conquest of Babylon in the 7th century A.D., which is wrong. It should be placed after that.

Rabbi Menahem Kasher, in his large 25 volume work, *Torah Sheleimah* (=complete Torah) traces Onkelos, Pseudo-Jonathan, and even Neofiti to the time of Ezra, that is, the fifth century B.C. He notes that the scribe Ezra, according to Nehemiah 8:7-8, read

We mentioned above in passing that it is possible to see a multiple fulfillment pattern in 7:14, namely, the prophecy would refer to both Hezekiah and to Christ. St. Augustine already in his *De civitate Dei* 17:3 recognized that some OT prophecies refer only to OT persons or events, some to Christ and His Church, and some to both. He would notice this to be the case by finding the prophecy would fit partly the one, partly the other. Inasmuch as some things in Isaiah 7 seem to fit Hezekiah better, some to fit Christ better, this may well be the case here. Vatican II, in *Lumen gentium* #55, used a similar principle: "These primeval documents, as they are read in the Church, and are understood under the light of later and full revelation, gradually more clearly bring to light the figure of the woman, the Mother of the Redeemer. She, under this light, is already prophetically foreshadowed in the promise, given to our first parents after their sin, of victory over the serpent (cf. Gen 3:15). Similarly she is the Virgin who will conceive and bear a Son whose name will be called Emmanuel (cf. Is 7:14; Mich 5:2-3; Mt 1:22-23)." Behind this principle of course is the fact that the Chief Author of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit, of course could intend more than the human author might see at the time of writing. So we gather two things from this text of Vatican II: (1) The complete sense of Isaiah 7:14 was not clear at the start, probably not even to the human author; (2) it has become clear now, with the passage of time, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Chief Author of Holy Scripture. So we see that as a matter of fact, the Holy Spirit did intend the messianic sense.

So at least in this sense, Vatican II does teach that Mary is the virgin of Isaiah 7:14.

Virgin Birth: The Usage of *almah* and *parthenos*

This of course brings us to our second question: Does Isaiah 7:14 speak of a virgin birth? Vatican II does teach this, in showing that this point is really contained in Isaiah 7:14, as intended by the Chief Author, the Holy Spirit. But we would still like to see the exegetical evidence for this matter.

Of course, we must examine both the Hebrew *almah* and the Septuagint translation, (LXX) *parthenos*.

could not be Hezekiah, since Zechariah 9:9, after the time of Hezekiah, still foretold a Messiah as to come in the future.

However, as we said earlier, several major Jewish scholars help us. Perhaps the most eminent, Jacob Neusner, in his *Messiah in Context* made the remarkable admission that since Christians began to say that the Messiah had already come, and so the Jews had no Messiah to look forward to, Jews began to say that Hezekiah had not been the Messiah: "It was important to reject the claim that Hezekiah had been the Messiah." The implication is of great importance: The Jews at one time, as we saw from the words of the great Hillel, had considered Hezekiah as the Messiah -- *which meant that they did see Isaiah 7:14 as messianic -- but later, to keep Christians from claiming that prophecy, they began to deny it was messianic, saying it did not mean Hezekiah*. Christians of course would agree Hezekiah was not the Messiah, but would still insist that Isaiah 7:14 was messianic.

Thus we can make a coherent picture with another piece of data, namely: The Targum Jonathan does say that Isaiah 9:5-6 is messianic -- but -- scholars commonly agree today that the child in 9:5-6 is the same as the child in 7:14. Therefore, the deduction is clear: *Isaiah 7:14 must be messianic too, and the early Jewish view that it was messianic, as we saw in Hillel, must be correct.*

Neusner's indirect admission that there was distortion in the targum to keep Christians from using the OT is reinforced by statements from other important modern Jewish scholars.

Samson Levey, whom we cited above, quotes with basic approval the words of J. Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*: "Christians tended to base their arguments against Judaism on verses of scripture, and the targum-interpretation of those verses was often deliberately designed to exclude the Christian argument." Levey adds right after the quote: "The author, on the basis of his own study, agrees with Bowker, in the main, but thinks he is too dogmatically certain and too general in the assertion." Still another prominent Jewish writer, H. J. Schoeps, in *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* says that reports of atonement for sin in the martyrdoms of rabbis were carefully worded, to avoid helping Christians and adds: "Again with the same motive, and in order to eliminate the reference of Isaiah 53 to Christ, atoning power was imputed to the death of Moses."

the law, while Levites, "gave the sense, so that the people understood what was read." Jacob Neusner, perhaps the greatest of modern Jewish scholars, thinks that "the targums contain ideas from a time prior to their own closure and redaction." Similarly Bruce Chilton, in the notes to his translation of the Isaiah Targum comments on 25:2 which says that the gentiles will never build a temple in Jerusalem: "Such a vigorous assurance has a rather clear *terminus ad quem*, since in 136 ... The Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus was dedicated there." So that statement must have been made before 136 A.D. Chilton also, in great detail, in his *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible*, argues that much of the matter of the targums was already in use in oral form in the time of Jesus, and finds echoes of it in the teachings of Jesus. The debate still goes on today over the dates of the targums. However, one thing is certain: They do reflect ancient Jewish understanding of the messianic prophecies, made without what some have called "hindsight," i.e., without help by seeing them fulfilled in Christ. If any parts are more ancient than the final form, it will be the prophecies, as we gather from the remarks by Neusner, Chilton, and Levey just cited. However, as Neusner, Levey and Schoeps, whom we shall presently cite on the point, admit, there was deliberate distortion introduced into some targums on prophecies to counter Christian use of them.

New Evidence for Targum Dates

This view is strengthened by still newer evidence. Jacob Neusner, in his *Messiah in Context*, makes an exhaustive survey of the teachings of the rabbis after the fall of Jerusalem on the Messiah. In speaking of the Mishnah, the earliest of the major documents of that period, dating from around 200 A.D., Neusner says that it hardly mentioned a messianic figure of any kind. He suspects that the reason is great disappointment about the debacle of Bar Kokhba. Similarly, the Tosefta is not much concerned with the Messiah. The Talmud of Jerusalem shows no tendency, he says, to bring up questions of messianic importance even into discussions of passages of the Mishnah that would naturally suggest it. He adds that there is no more importance given to what he calls the "messiah myth" in the hermeneutical works such as Genesis and Leviticus, Rabbah, Sifra, Sifre on Numbers, Sifre on Deuteronomy.

But when we finally come to the much later Talmud of Babylonia (reached closure 500-600 A.D.) a fair bit of interest develops in the Messiah. However, the items that are discussed are remarkable for what they omit -- *they do not take up the great classic prophecies of the Messiah, such as Isaiah 7:14 and 9:5-6 or 53*. The chief points they do discuss, according to Neusner are these: There will be a time of tribulation before the Messiah comes. It is not a good idea to try to calculate when he may come -- for the figures may be wrong, and disappointment could ensue. The history of the whole world is in three parts, of which the third is the time of the Messiah,

who will come to a generation that is worthy of him, for it is the condition of Israel that will determine the time of his coming. The only item mentioned by Neusner that ties closely to the classic prophecies is that the Messiah will be from the house of David.

What do we gather from this survey by Neusner? We notice the remarkable lack of interest in the Messiah until rather late. Even then, there is no reference to the great prophecies of Isaiah about the Messiah. Therefore we think it at least likely: *The chief substance of the targums -- we of course admit possible later revisions of course, especially those designed to counter Christian use, of which we will soon speak -- must be earlier than even the Mishnah, that is, 200 A.D.* We could add a small but significant item. Jastrow, in his great *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Jerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* does not list any occurrences of the word *Memra*, so common in the targums to stand for God or for a characteristic of His after the targums. In other words, the word *Memra* does not seem to occur in the later Jewish literature which Neusner surveyed.

A similar small but interesting item is the fact that the Isaiah Targum on 5:16 mentioned God, "the Holy One," but did not add the phrase which rabbis so consistently added "Blessed be He." This could point to an early origin for this line at least. So, since, as we said, the targums most certainly do reflect ancient Jewish interpretations of the prophecies, made without any "hindsight" we may confidently make use of them in our study.

But to start, we notice that there are two problems: 1) Is, Isaiah 7:14 messianic? and 2) Does it speak of a virgin birth?

Is Isaiah 7:14 Messianic?

We begin with the question of the messianic character of Isaiah 7:14. Catholic scholars at one time used to defend the messianic nature of that text. Then they shifted to divided positions: some said the child spoken of was the King Hezekiah, the son of King Ahaz, to whom Isaiah spoke. Others would say it is Christ. A third position is quite possible if we hold that there can be multiple fulfillment of prophecies. The text could refer to both Hezekiah and Christ.

We will first summarize the more usual arguments in favor of a messianic sense, and then will add some new evidence, given us indirectly by the Jewish scholars mentioned.

The birth of the son is to be considered as a sign. Would the birth of an ordinary child be really a sign? Some insist it could be. Otto Kaiser insists that even ordinary events could be called a sign in the OT. J. H. Hayes, and S. A. Irvine even say that the words "need not be taken as the presentation of a sign at all." They are simply the announcement that a royal child is soon to be born, and that he will survive! Some explain that the birth of the child is a sign that the line of David would survive, as God

had promised.

But these claims are very weak. Isaiah, had in a great gesture, offered any sign, from the top of the sky to the depth under the earth. It would be a case of what Horace called "parturient montes": the mountains in labor to bring forth a silly little mouse, if it meant only the birth of an ordinary child to continue the royal line. That had happened so many times. And most importantly, why tell Ahaz he will have a son to continue his line, when he had already sacrificed a previous son by fire, as 2 Kings 16:3 says? (From the context, it seems the son was born before Hezekiah, since only after verse 3, namely in verse 5ff, do we learn of the danger from Rezin and Pekah, of which Isaiah 7 speaks.) Really, the line of David, as Isaiah 11:1 foretells, was to die down to a mere stump, from which later would sprout the Messiah. Further, it is generally agreed even by scholars who do not favor seeing Christ as the child, that the child foretold in Isaiah 9:5-6 is the same as the child of 7:14. But the description of that child of 9:5-6 is too grandiose for an ordinary king: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Some at this point try to say these are merely throne names of the ordinary Hebrew kings. But there is no record elsewhere in the OT of calling a king "Mighty God." Indeed, *el gibbor* occurs only 5 times in the entire OT -- and every time it is found, it means strictly "Mighty God." Jewish translators of Isaiah 9:5-6 render *el gibbor* that way -- even though they use a different expedient to avoid giving the title of Mighty God to the child. A remarkably strained view is found in Hayes and Irvine, who say that the child is not even Hezekiah, but Ahaz himself! It would seem strange too that the Hebrew text uses the direct article as meaning "the" to refer to the ordinary wife of the king.

New Evidence of Messianic Nature of Isaiah 7:14

But there is newer evidence which has not been sufficiently noticed. According to the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 99a), Hillel, the great teacher of the time of Christ, said "There will be no Messiah for Israel, because they already had him in the days of Hezekiah." Also, Johanan B. Zakkai, according to Talmus, Berakoth 28b, said: "Prepare a throne for Hezekiah, king of Judah, who is coming." A fine Jewish scholar, Samson Levey comments "Johanan's statement is especially significant, for it was he who salvaged what little he could in 70 C.E." That was after the destruction of the Temple, a traumatic event for all Jews. Levey also observes, in his comment on the Targum Jonathan to Isaiah 9:5, that the use of tenses in the targum as compared with the Hebrew makes us suspect that the writer of the targum had Hezekiah in mind as the Messiah -- which incidentally is an indication of a rather early date for the targum, since the view that Hezekiah had been the Messiah was dropped later on. Since later the Jews dropped the idea that Hezekiah was the Messiah: the Talmud, Sanhedrin 99a cites Rabbi Joseph as pointing out it