

EXPOSING A MISSIONARY DECEPTION¹

I. INTRODUCTION

The resources available on the World-Wide-Web are almost boundless, which can be both a good thing as well as bad thing. It can be good because of the potential educational value that may be derived from these resources. It can be bad because of the potential adverse impact that false as well as insidious information taken from the Internet may have on its users and/or those at whom it is being directed.

Pertinent to ongoing work in counter-missionary education is the presence of a plethora of Christian websites filled with Christian apologetics. The Jews for Jesus website² is a popular resource of this kind, which is used by other missionary websites to proliferate the misinformation that is so anathematic to the teachings of the Hebrew Bible.

In this essay, the missionary tract Does *almah* mean young woman or virgin?³, which appears on the Jews for Jesus website, is analyzed and exposed as being nothing more than a collection of deceptive misinformation.

II. EXPOSING THE MISSIONARY DECEPTION

Each part of this missionary tract is now examined for its accuracy.

A. The introductory material

In the introductory paragraph, the author points out that one of the commonly used arguments against the Christian doctrine of the “Virgin Birth” and the use of Isaiah 7:14 as a supporting “proof text”, is that the Hebrew word עַלְמָה (almah) does not

¹ Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in ***bold italicized*** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in **SMALL CAPS** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letter that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
 - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
 - A vocalized letter י is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
 - The letter ה is transliterated as “h”
 - The letter ח is transliterated as “ch”
 - The letter כ is transliterated as “k”
 - The letter ק is transliterated as “q”
 - A vocalized שְׁוָא (וְ) אֶיִשׁ – **SHVA NA** is transliterated as a superscripted “e” following the consonant
 - There is no “doubling” of letters in the transliterations to reflect the **dagesh** (emphasis)

² The Internet address of this website is - <http://www.jewsforjesus.org>

³ The Internet address for this tract is - <http://www.jfjonline.org/apol/qa/almah.htm>

mean “a virgin”, and that Jews do not believe in a “Virgin Birth”. The author then makes the following statement:

Archaeological findings show that the Hebrew word "almah" refers to a virgin. The possibility of a virgin birth is upheld by open-minded Jewish sages and scholars, even those who are not believers in Jesus.

This statement, although followed by what the author claims to be "evidence" to support it, is untrue, as the following analysis demonstrates.

In the following analysis, each of the “exhibits” brought forth by the author of the missionary tract is addressed in a separate sub-section. The heading for each of the sub-sections identifies an Exhibit # and the respective element from the author's "evidentiary supporting material".

B. Exhibit #1 – A published note by Professor Cyrus H. Gordon

- † **Christian Claim:** The "archaeological findings" cited in the tract are drawn from a technical note⁴ published by the late Cyrus H. Gordon, who is described by the author as "a leading Jewish scholar". The author quotes the following two portions from Professor Gordon's note⁵:

The commonly held view that "virgin" is Christian, whereas "young woman" is Jewish is not quite true. The fact is that the Septuagint, which is the Jewish translation made in pre-Christian Alexandria, takes 'almah to mean "virgin" here. Accordingly the New Testament follows Jewish interpretation in Isaiah 7:14.

From Ugarit of around 1400 B.C. comes a text celebrating the marriage of the male and female lunar deities. It is there predicted that the goddess will bear a son....The terminology is remarkably close to that in Isaiah 7:14. However, the Ugaritic statement that the bride will bear a son is fortunately given in parallelistic form; in 77:7 she is called by the exact etymological counterpart of Hebrew 'almah "young woman"; in 77:5 she is called by the exact etymological counterpart of Hebrew betulah "virgin." Therefore, the New Testament rendering of 'almah as "virgin" for Isaiah 7:14 rests on the older Jewish interpretation, which in turn is now borne out for precisely this annunciation formula by a text that is not only pre-Isaianic but is pre-Mosaic in the form that we now have it on a clay tablet.

- ☆ **Jewish Response:** Is this claim true? One striking item right at the beginning of the missionary tract is the characterization of Cyrus H. Gordon as "a leading **Jewish** scholar" (**boldface** added for emphasis). Professor Gordon was an archaeologist, historian, and linguist of world renown, who also happened to be of **Jewish heritage**, albeit, he was a secular Jew. Using the author's terminology, one can say that both Albert Einstein and Carl Sagan were "leading **Jewish** scholars", though certainly not "leading **Judaic** scholars". Both were physicists who happened to be of Jewish heritage. This may just be a matter of *semantics*, although it could also indicate that the author refers to Professor Gordon as "a leading **Jewish** scholar" in order to give readers the (false)

⁴ 'Almah in Isaiah 7:14, *Journal of Bible and Religion*, p. 106, Vol. XXI, No. 2 (April 1953).

⁵ In the note, 'a denotes the transliteration of the Hebrew letter א (*ayin*; the 1st letter in the word עֲלִמָּה).

impression that he is a "Judaic scholar". If the latter is the case, then it is plausible that, under this guise, the author lifts certain "suitable" segments out of Professor Gordon's technical note in order to support his claims. This technical note indicates that, in fact, the opposite conclusion may be drawn, with the information contained in it actually having no validity regarding the theological aspects of this subject.

A superficial reading of the material being selectively quoted from the technical note in the missionary tract could mislead the reader to believe that Professor Gordon supported the common Christian missionary claim that the Hebrew word עַלְמָה means "a virgin". However, a careful examination of the "evidence" demonstrates this claim to be weak at best, if not downright false.

Professor Gordon's note is reproduced in Figure II.B-1 below, in which the portions quoted in the missionary tract are shown in highlighted form.

Figure II.B-1 – The full text of the note by Professor Gordon

'Almah in Isaiah 7:14	
CYRUS H. GORDON*	
<p>Ever since the publication of the Revised Standard Version there has been a storm of debate over the translation of 'almah in Isaiah 7:14 as "young woman" instead of the King James "virgin." The commonly held view that "virgin" is Christian, whereas "young woman" is Jewish, is not quite true. The fact is that the Septuagint, which is the Jewish translation made in pre-Christian Alexandria, takes 'almah to mean "virgin" here. Accordingly, the New Testament follows Jewish interpretation in Isaiah 7:14.</p>	<p>The aim of this note is rather to call attention to a source that has not yet been brought into the discussion. From Ugarit of around 1400 B.C. comes a text celebrating the marriage of the male and female lunar deities. It is there predicted that the goddess will bear a son. (For the translation, see my "Ugaritic Literature", Rome, 1949, pp. 63-64.) The terminology is remarkably close to that in Isaiah 7:14. However, the Ugaritic statement that the bride will bear a son is fortunately given in parallelistic form; in 77:7 she is called by the exact etymological counterpart of Hebrew 'almah "young woman"; in 77:5 she is called by the exact etymological counterpart of Hebrew betulah "virgin." Therefore, the New Testament rendering of 'almah as "virgin" for Isaiah 7:14 rests on the older Jewish interpretation, which in turn is now borne out for precisely this annunciation formula by a text that is not only pre-Isaianic but is pre-Mosaic in the form that we now have it on a clay tablet.</p>
<p>Little purpose would be served in repeating the learned explanation that Hebraists have already contributed in their attempt to clarify the point at issue. It all boils down to this: the distinctive Hebrew word for "virgin" is betulah, whereas 'almah means a "young woman" who may be a virgin, but is not necessarily so.</p>	
<p>* Professor of Assyriology and Egyptology, Dropsie College</p>	

The first thing to note is that the portions quoted by the author of the tract were selected, by design, to promote the standard missionary agenda. Not quoted are the remarks in the second paragraph concerning the "learned explanations", by Hebraists, of the Hebrew terms בְּתוּלָה (*b^etulah*) and עַלְמָה.

Secondly, certain technical elements in Professor Gordon's note require further elaboration and explanation. One item concerns Professor Gordon's rather surprising reference to the **Septuagint**, considering his credentials as linguist and archaeologist. A common misperception prevails about the *Septuagint*: Today's *Septuagint* (**LXX**, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible used by Christians) is a Church-translated document that is not the **Original Septuagint**.

One of several pieces of evidence in support of this statement is the fact that the LXX contains errors that learned Jewish scholars would not make, particularly when one considers the size of the team that produced the translation. The *Original Septuagint* was a translation of only the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) into (**Koiné**) Greek by 72 learned bi-lingual Jewish scholars (Rabbis). The work took place in Alexandria, Egypt, in the mid-third century B.C.E. The well-known *Letter of Aristeas* describes this entire project as having been commissioned by King Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Alexandria.⁶ In Section 3 of his *Preface to the Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus states that the translation was "of our law" (i.e., the Mosaic Law),⁷ and the details on the entire event appear later⁸, in Book XII, Chapter 2, Sections 1-4. St. Jerome, an early Christian Church father, in the Preface to his *Book of Hebrew Questions*, affirms Josephus' statement that the *Original Septuagint* was a translation of only the Five Books of Moses.⁹ The Babylonian Talmud, in Tractate Megilah, Folio 9a-b, records 15 phrases which the Jewish scholars translated in a unique fashion, and which deviate from the (later) Masoretic Text, yet only two of these uniquely translated phrases appear in the Christian LXX.¹⁰ Lastly, an analysis of the Greek language used in the LXX translation, which includes Prophets and Writings, indicates that it is not the **Koiné** Greek that was prevalent in the mid-third century B.C.E.; rather, it is a more modern dialect of the Greek language. Thus, the *Septuagint* to which Professor Gordon refers cannot be the original Jewish translation. It is most likely the Christian translation, which contains known mistranslated verses as well as errors, and in which the order of books follows the Christian, not the Jewish, canon. Unfortunately, it is only possible to speculate about Professor Gordon's choice of this particular terminology. As a secular Jew, not a Judaic scholar, the theological aspects regarding the *Septuagint* were not the focus of his work, and he may have been unaware of the available evidence that proves the LXX is not the *Original Septuagint*.

⁶ *The Letter Of Aristeas*, R.H. Charles-Editor, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913; available on the Internet at - <http://www.piney.com/ApocAristeas.html>

⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews – Preface*; available on the Internet at - <http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/works/ant-pref.htm>

⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews – Chapter XII*; available on the Internet at - <http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/works/ant-12.htm>

⁹ St. Jerome, *Preface to the Book of Hebrew Questions*; available on the Internet at - <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.vii.ii.v.html>

¹⁰ The 15 phrases which appeared in the Original Septuagint are in the following verses: Genesis 1:1, 1:26, 2:2, 5:2, 11:7, 18:12, 49:6; Exodus 4:20, 12:40, 24:5, 24:11; Leviticus 11:6; Numbers 16:15; and Deuteronomy 4:19, 17:3. The only two of these found in the LXX are: Genesis 2:2 and Exodus 12:40.

Another technical issue concerning Professor Gordon's note is the statement that the inscribed Ugaritic clay tablet, said to be from around 1400 B.C.E., is pre-Mosaic. It is, as he states, "pre-Isaianic". The consensus among scholars (Jewish and Gentile) is that the Mosaic era dates to around 1400-1300 B.C.E. Given that the available standard tools for absolute dating at the time of the discovery of these tablets (late 1940's and early 1950's) were not even accurate to ± 100 years, perhaps the dating of the tablet "From Ugaritic of around 1400 B.C.E." should have been stated more properly as "From Ugaritic of around 1500-1300 B.C.E.".

Consider next the Ugaritic poem inscribed on the clay tablet, to which Professor Gordon refers in his technical note.¹¹ Professor Gordon's comments and his translation of the relevant ten lines (highlighted; the full poem contains 50 lines) are shown in Figure II.B-2 below. The blank spaces within brackets, ([]), indicate missing, blank, or illegible parts on the original tablet, some of which was redacted by Professor Gordon.

Figure II.B-2 – Professor Gordon's introduction and the relevant lines from the poem

Chapter IV	
THE WEDDING OF NIKKAL AND THE MOON	
<p>The bard opens with the declaration that he sings of the <i>dramatis personae</i>: the bride Nikkal⁽¹⁾, the groom Yarih = the Moon, and Hrhb the King of Summer who acts as intermediary to arrange the match. The time is a fitting one: when the Sun goes down and the Moon rises. The wedding is indicated because the bride-to-be is destined to bear a son. The Ktrt are informed of the situation for they are to celebrate joyous occasions like marriages in song. The intermediary is instructed to procure the bride for whom Yarih is ready to pay a price of a thousand shekels of silver, even a myriad of gold, plus gems of lapis – lazuli. The prospective groom also promises to be a good husband, and cultivate his beloved, even as a farmer transforms a field into a fertile vineyard. The intermediary suggests a couple of other goddesses who could be obtained as brides without difficulties, but Yarih is steadfast in his desire to wed Nikkal. The wedding is performed by the weighing of the marriage price by the bride's family. The bard sings to the bride, who is to be illuminated by the light of her groom.</p> <p>After a scribal line across the tablet, the text concludes with the poet's singing of the Ktrt descending among the flowers to Ltpn, the head of the pantheon. Then the bard mentions the counting of the dowry and trousseaux.</p>	
77:1	<p>I sing of Nikkal-and-Ib [] Hrhb, King of Summer Hrhb, <i>Estival</i> King When the Sun sets The Moon <i>rises</i> - - []</p>
77:5	<p>A virg[in] will give birth [] [To the K]trt Daughters of <i>shouting</i> [Swallows]. Lo a maid will bear a s[on]⁽²⁾ []</p>

¹¹ *Ugaritic Literature – A Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts*, Cyrus H. Gordon, pp. 63-64, (Rome, 1949).

answers/sees /o for his love she is []
 []for her flesh, my blood []
 77:10 And wine like/and one wed []

⁽¹⁾ From Nin-gal, a Sumerian lunar goddess. Very few Sumerian deities penetrated into Canaan and Egypt.

Nikkal is an exception attested in Ugarit and Egypt (UH § 18.1310). She is also called Ib or Nikkal-and-Ib in this poem.

⁽²⁾ Such annunciations are common in Ugaritic and biblical literature. The earliest one in Scripture is that by an angel to Hagar, predicting the birth of Ishmael (Gen. 16:11).

This poem speaks of the marriage of two pagan gods. Though lines 77:5 and 77:7 say what Professor Gordon described in his note, several grammatical, contextual, and theological issues arise when attempting to compare this text with the common renderings of Isaiah 7:14 in Christian Bibles:

- ⊙ **Tenses:** In Isaiah 7:14, הַעַלְמָה (*ha'alma*), **the young woman**, is already with child, i.e., it is rendered in the present tense. The Hebrew term הַרְהָ (*hara*) refers to a woman who is already pregnant, and it is used in this manner consistently in the Hebrew Bible. In the poem, the future tense is used.
- ⊙ **Identification:** In Isaiah 7:14, the term הַעַלְמָה is used, i.e., עַלְמָה with the definite article הַ (*ha-*), **the**, which identifies a specific female who was known to both Isaiah and King Ahaz. In the poem, the definite article is absent in both instances, and the general article, **a**, is used instead of the definite article, **the**, thereby removing the specific identification, something that bears similarity to the Christian renditions of Isaiah 7:14 and, of course, to the "quote" of the prophet in Matthew 1:23.
- ⊙ **Interchangeability of terms:** The statement by Prof. Gordon, "... in 77:7 she [the bride] is called by the exact etymological counterpart of Hebrew 'almah "young woman"; in 77:5 she is called by the exact etymological counterpart of Hebrew betulah "virgin."", does not necessarily imply that the two terms are interchangeable. Similar situations occur in Genesis. Rebecca is referred to as הַנַּעֲרָה (*ha'na'ara*), **the young girl and בְּתוּלָה, a virgin**, in Genesis 24:16; and later on in the same chapter, she is referred to as הַעַלְמָה, **the young woman**, in Genesis 24:43, and הַאִשָּׁה (*ha'isha*), the woman, in Genesis 24:39,44. Does this mean that the respective pairs or all these terms are interchangeable? Of course it does not!
- ⊙ **Language used by Isaiah:** This is a dual problem -
 - ⇒ Why would Isaiah use the ambiguous Ugaritic style only at Isaiah 7:14? He had other, more accurate, vocabulary at his disposal had he desired to specifically refer to a virgin; after all, he used the word בְּתוּלָה, five times throughout his Book (see Is 23:4; 23:12; 37:22; 47:1; 62:5).
 - ⇒ Why would Isaiah, the Prophet who railed against idolatry (see, e.g., Is 19:7-8; 41:18-26; 44:9-20; 46:1-7; 57:3-14; 65:1-7), use ambiguous language from an old pagan source (if it was even known to him) in a prophecy that had to be very precise? Like the other prophets of his era, Isaiah condemned idolatry and idolaters. According to our tradition, as soon as Manasseh, the notorious idolater, succeeded to the throne, he had Isaiah murdered.

The above information indicates that the author of the missionary tract misused the material in Professor Gordon's technical note by selectively quoting from it

only some portions that served his purpose. This puts into question the relevance of the technical note to the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14.

Although Professor Gordon was widely recognized and well respected as a secular linguist and archaeologist, his credentials and skills as a Judaic theological scholar are non-existent as indicated by the absence of any relevant published record. This is also confirmed in the short biographical sketch in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, where he is described as a “U. S. Semitic scholar”¹², and from the fact that this particular technical note is not cited in any other known publication (Jewish or Christian) on Isaiah 7:14, except in this missionary tract. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the claim concerning Professor Gordon's note on Isaiah 7:14 lacks both integrity and validity.

Conclusion on Exhibit #1: The Christian missionary claim that archaeological findings support עלֵמָה to mean "a virgin" in Isaiah 7:14 is false.

C. Exhibit #2 – Rabbi Abraham Farissol on the possibility of a “Virgin Birth”

- ‡ **Christian Claim:** The author of the missionary tract makes the statement that, "Jewish sages have sometimes had something to say about the possibility of a virgin birth". The first citation offered is a quote attributed to Rabbi Abraham Farissol, a noted medieval Jewish Sage:

We cannot deny the possibility that God, may He be blessed, could create in a virgin, even one whom no man has known, for He created everything out of nothing.

--quoted by Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York: KTAV/ADL, 1977), p. 153.

- ☆ **Jewish Response:** Rabbi Abraham Farissol (1452-1528) was a Jewish Sage, polemicist, and geographer, who hailed from Ferrara, Italy. The question is: *Is the quote in the missionary tract an accurate representation of the context of Rabbi Abraham Farissol's words?*

The answer to this question is, once again, obtained by examining the source being quoted in Exhibit #2. The material from which the quote was extracted appears at the beginning of the seventh chapter in Professor Lasker's book, the first few paragraphs of which are reproduced in Figure II.C-1, where the passage quoted by the author of the missionary tract is highlighted.¹³

Figure II.C-1 – Relevant portion from Daniel J. Lasker's book [footnote references omitted]

CHAPTER SEVEN *Virgin Birth*

The Christian dogma of virgin birth teaches that Mary, the mother of Jesus, remained a virgin, i.e., a *virgo intacta*, her entire life, before, during, and after the birth of her son. "The

¹² *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 7, p. 794, Keter Publishing House Ltd. (1971)

¹³ Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages*, p. 153, Ktav Publishing House, Inc. (1977).

Christian belief is that Mary's virginity was never broken, neither at the time of the birth [*in partu*] nor before [*ante partum*], nor after [*post partum*].¹⁴ The Jewish polemicists challenged this assertion on all three points.

The doctrine of the virgin conception was not attacked per se. The possibility that a woman might conceive with her virginity intact, though by means of normal fertilization, is an occurrence which is conceded in the Talmud. Nevertheless, the Jewish polemicists rejected the notion that God could become incarnate by impregnating a virgin and fathering an offspring who was, according to Christian doctrine, God Himself. Hence, the Jewish thinkers rarely offered arguments against the doctrine of Mary's virginity ante partum without reference to incarnation. Abraham Farissol expressed it this way:

We cannot deny the possibility that God, may He be blessed,, could create a creation in a virgin, even one whom no man has known, For He created everything out of nothing. Rather, we deny that there was a need for incarnation.

The denial of incarnation was sufficient justification for rejection of the doctrine of Mary's virgin conception of Jesus.

[For future reference: Take note of the first two sentences in the second paragraph of Chapter Seven above (shown in **bold font**); these will be discussed in Sec. II.E below.]

According to the context of the entire passage, Rabbi Abraham Farissol said something much more significant than the author of the missionary tract wants to convey to the reader, which is evident from the portions he left out of the quote, namely, the phrase "a creation" and the entire last sentence. The context in which this quote is presented by Professor Lasker is stated immediately following the quote from Rabbi Abraham Farissol.

Professor Lasker concludes the seventh chapter¹⁴ with the following statement (the last sentence is shown in **bold font** for emphasis):

Figure II.C-2 – Concluding paragraph in Daniel J. Lasker's book

There were not many Jewish philosophical arguments against the Christian doctrine of virgin birth. After they cited the obvious philosophical contradictions between virgin birth and the impossibility of the interpenetrability of bodies, and rebutted the images of virgin birth adduced from nature, the polemicists employed no further rational arguments. As Isaac Lupis stated: "What more can I add in order to refute this strange belief since it has absolutely no support, neither from reason nor from the intellect."⁽⁷¹⁾ **The dogma of virgin birth, then, was one more Christian belief which the Jewish polemicists regarded as irrational; they attempted to demonstrate that irrationality through the use of philosophical arguments.**

This evidence demonstrates that the reference in the missionary tract to Professor Lasker's quote from Rabbi Abraham Farissol's works cannot be used to support the claims that a "Virgin Birth" was foretold by Isaiah and that the application of *עַלְמָה* in Isaiah 7:14 means "a virgin".

The author of the missionary tract deceives his readers by lifting out of its true context a portion from an original work by a Jewish Sage in order to promote his/her own agenda.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 158-9.

Conclusion on Exhibit #2: The Christian missionary claim that Rabbi Abraham Farissol supported the notion of a “Virgin Birth” is deceptive and false.

D. Exhibit #3 – The author of a medieval Jewish polemic work writes on the possibility of a “Virgin Birth”

- ‡ **Christian Claim:** The author of the missionary tract offers more evidence that Jewish Sages supported the possibility of a “Virgin Birth” with the following quote from a well-known medieval Jewish work of polemics:

Granted that the prophet said that a virgin would give birth to a son. So what? There is, after all, no doubt that the Lord's hand is not incapable of fulfilling his will and desire, and that he is a ruler who can do whatever he wishes...."

--David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1996, © 1979), p. 103.

- ☆ **Jewish Response:** The *Nizzahon Vetus*, or **Old Book of Polemic**, is an exceptionally comprehensive example of medieval Jewish polemic against Christianity. The anonymous Northern European Jew who wrote the book in the late 13th or early 14th century, C.E. refutes the Christological interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and subjects the New Testament and Christian dogma to a rigorous critique. So, once again, the question is: *Is the quote in the missionary tract an accurate representation of the context of the original material from the Nizzahon Vetus?*

Figure II.D-1 shows approximately half of the relevant section from David Berger's book¹⁵, with the portion quoted by the author of the missionary tract highlighted for emphasis.

Figure II.D-1 – Relevant portion from the *Nizzahon Vetus*

[86] The *'almah*, Immanuel, and the prophetess (Isa. 7, 8)

The heretics also say that “Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son” [Isa. 7:14] was said about Mary, who was a virgin and bore a son, for otherwise this would not constitute a novelty or a sign. “And shall call his name Immanuel” [ibid.], for when he is born God[sic] will be with us; i.e., he will be God. “And I came unto the prophetess” [Isa. 8:3] – that is Mary. “Come together, O people, and you shall be broken in pieces....Take counsel together, and it shall come to naught...” [Isa. 8:9-10] – there are the Jews who took counsel together to kill him.

Now listen men of understanding, and see how confused their words are and how they contradict the words of the living God. The book of Isaiah is, after all, in our possession, and it testifies that these verses are not written together but are found in two or three different places; moreover, it testifies further that Isaiah prophesied concerning two sons, one named Immanuel and another named Maher Shalal Hash Baz.

Now, if you would prefer to answer briefly, then tell him: Granted that the prophet said that a virgin would give birth to a son. So what? There is, after all, no doubt that the Lord's hand is not incapable of fulfilling his will and desire, and that he is a ruler who can do whatever he

¹⁵ David Berger, *THE JEWISH CHRISTIAN DEBATE IN THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES - A critical edition of the NIZZAHON VETUS*, (pp. 102-104), Jason Aronson, Inc. (1996)

wishes, but still how do you know that this virgin is Mary? Where do you find her name or that of her son so that you may know? I could say, rather, that this refers to another virgin or that it will happen in the future. And if your view is based on the name Immanuel, i.e., God is with us, this is no proof, for you could make the same claim of divinity regarding Ishmael the son of Hagar if you use this sort of reasoning. There too the angel told her, "Behold you are with child and shall bear a son, and you shall call his name Ishmael" [Gen. 16:11], and you can interpret that name as follows: Everyone will listen to him because he is God. Similarly, it says of Hannah, "And she called his name Samuel" [1 Sam. 1:20], a name that can be explained as "His name is God." If he will then say that Hagar and Hannah were not virgins while Mary was, this would contradict Solomon, who said, "There is no new thing under the sun... that which has been is that which shall be" [Eccles. 1:9]. Moreover, where do we find that the prophets warned us concerning his Torah and the belief in his divinity as we were warned at Sinai by Moses, as it is written, "I am the Lord your God... you shall have no other gods beside me" [Exod 20:2-3]? Thus, one can understand that your words have no substance and that these prophecies do not deal with divinity.

Moreover, you can defeat him and respond with true and proper words by telling him: According to you that Isaiah said, "Behold, a young woman conceives" and the entire passage concerning Mary and her son, come and examine the language of the verse and let your ears hear what comes out of your mouth. With regard to the verse, "Behold, a young woman conceives (*harah*)," you cannot explain *harah* except as a reference to the past, i.e., that she has already conceived, while Mary had not yet conceived and would not do so for another thousand years. According to you, then, why does it say *harah*? It should have said *tahar* which would have been a reference to the future. Moreover, see what it says soon after: "For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you abhor shall be forsaken of both her kings" [Isa. 7:16]. Now, if he was God, what is the meaning of "before the child shall know etc."? Why, he should have known and understood the difference between good and evil from the day of his birth if God was within him. Indeed, with regard to your statement that he eventually performed wonders so that people would believe that he was God, what could have been a greater sign than distinguishing between good and evil as soon as he came out of his mother's womb and remaining without food and drink? Then, people would have believed in him. As it is, however the fact that we saw nothing in him during his youth to distinguish him from other infants leads us to disbelieve those wonders performed in his adulthood and to conclude that he performed them through magic in the manner of charmers, diviners, and observers of times. Moreover, where do these verses indicate that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to her son? After all, *'almah* in Hebrew does not necessarily denote a virgin; *virgo* means young woman.

The title of item [86], "*The 'almah, Immanuel, and the prophetess (Isa. 7, 8)*", and its content, indicate this is a refutation of the claim by Christians concerning the use of *עַלְמָה* to mean "a virgin". The passage quoted by the author of the missionary tract is the opening statement in a counter argument that refutes the "Virgin Birth". Take note of what was not quoted! Although the quoted segment itself, without the surrounding text, appears to support the missionary claim, the entire passage demonstrates that the *Nizzahon Vetus* is not "friendly" to Christian doctrine, especially when such doctrine is claimed to be based on passages from the Hebrew Bible.

It is evident that, once again, the author of the missionary tract deceives his readers by lifting out of its true context a portion from an original work by a Jewish scholar in order to promote his/her own agenda.

Conclusion on Exhibit #3: The Christian missionary claim that the Jewish author of the *Nizzahon Vetus* supports the notion of a “Virgin Birth” is deceptive and false.

E. Exhibit #4 – Dr. Adam Kamesar on the possibility of a “Virgin Birth”

‡ **Christian Claim:** The next citation offered as evidence that Jewish Sages supported the possibility of a virgin birth is the following quote from Dr. Adam Kamesar, contemporary scholar:

The doctrine of the virgin conception was not attacked per se. The possibility that a woman might conceive with her virginity intact, though by means of normal fertilization, is an occurrence which is conceded in the Talmud.

--Adam Kamesar, "The Virgin of Isaiah 7:14: The Philological Argument from the Second to the Fifth Century," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., vol. 41 part 1 (April 1990), p. 51.

☆ **Jewish Response:** Dr. Adam Kamesar, is the Director of the School of Graduate Studies at the Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, OH (the Rabbinical seminary of Reform Judaism). Did Dr. Kamesar really write this?

Following Figure II.C-1, a special note was made concerning the following two sentences in the second paragraph of the shown portion from the seventh chapter in Professor Lasker's book:

The doctrine of the virgin conception was not attacked per se. The possibility that a woman might conceive with her virginity intact, though by means of normal fertilization, is an occurrence which is conceded in the Talmud.

This passage from Professor Lasker's book is identical to the passage being attributed to Dr. Kamesar by the author of the missionary tract. *What is going on here?*

Dr. Kamesar is, indeed, a contemporary Jewish/Judaic scholar noted for his research on St. Jerome. The cited paper¹⁶ presents an in-depth analysis of early Christian apologetics (i.e., defenses) concerning the Christian translation and interpretation of the Hebrew noun *עַלְמָה* in Isaiah 7:14. Dr. Kamesar's article is based on his doctoral dissertation, which was submitted at Oxford University in 1987. However, nowhere to be found in this article is the quote attributed to Dr. Kamesar by the author of the missionary tract. The quoted passage was actually lifted from Professor Lasker's book, not from Dr. Kamesar's article, and the author of the missionary tract deceives the reader yet again.

Conclusion on Exhibit #4: The missionary claim that Dr. Adam Kamesar supports the notion of a “Virgin Birth” is a bold lie!

¹⁶ *The Virgin of Isaiah 7:14: The Philological Argument from the Second to the Fifth Century*, *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, pp. 51-75, Vol. 41, Pt. I (April 1990)

F. Exhibit #5 – Professor Suzanne Daniel on the Septuagint as a Jewish document

- † **Christian Claim:** Attempting to convince readers that Professor Gordon's reference to the *Septuagint* lends credence to the claim that it is a Jewish document, the author of the missionary tract writes:

The Septuagint is the translation into Greek of the Hebrew Scriptures, made for the benefit of Greek-speaking Jews in Egypt. This is the version that translated "almah" as "parthenos," which nearly always means "virgin." Some have discounted its value, claiming that except for the Torah, the Septuagint is a Gentile Christian translation. However, that is not the view of most scholars.

To support the claim that "... **that is not the view of most scholars.**", the author quotes the following portions from a scholarly article about the *Greek Septuagint* as evidence:

Suzanne Daniel, Associate Professor of Judeo-Hellenistic Literature, Hebrew University, Jerusalem:

On the Torah portion of the Septuagint:

It is assumed that the project was initiated by the Greek-speaking Jewish community itself, which needed a version of the Pentateuch for worship and instruction.

On the Prophets and the Writings portions of the Septuagint:

It is...generally held that the versions of the Former and Latter Prophets must be placed before the end of the third century B.C.E., and that at least some of the Hagiographa were already translated at the beginning of the second century B.C.E., since the prologue to the Greek Ben-Sira (132 B.C.E.) refers to an already existing version of "the Law, the Prophets, and the other writings." It is therefore accepted that a complete version of the Hebrew Bible existed at least at the beginning of the first century C.E.

--"Bible," section "Greek: The Septuagint", Encyclopedia Judaica.

- ☆ **Jewish Response:** Is this claim accurate? Before the quoted segments are analyzed, the following claim needs to be addressed:

"Some have discounted its value, claiming that except for the Torah, the Septuagint is a Gentile Christian translation."

This is not an accurate statement concerning the Jewish objections. The Jewish issues with the *Septuagint* being an authorized Jewish translation into Greek of the entire Hebrew Bible are based on the following evidentiary support:

- ⊙ Historical evidence that shows the *Original Septuagint* was an authorized Greek translation of only the Torah.
- ⊙ Evidence found in today's *LXX (Septuagint)*, such as factual errors, missing information, and a dialect that is inconsistent with the *Koiné* Greek spoken in the third century B.C.E.

Today's *LXX* is a Church-rendered document in its entirety. However, even though the evidence is ample and convincing, it is not presented in this essay since the focus here is the material contained in the missionary tract on *עלמה*.

The relevant portion from the article on the *Septuagint* by Professor Daniel is shown in Figure II.F-1, with the passages that are quoted in the missionary tract highlighted for emphasis.¹⁷

Figure II.F-1 – The relevant portion from Professor Daniel’s article on the *Septuagint*

ORIGIN AND HISTORY. It is widely accepted that what the *Letter of Aristeas* relates about an official translation of the Pentateuch, made in Alexandria at the beginning of the third century B.C.E., may be taken as valid. However, it is assumed that the project was initiated by the Greek-speaking Jewish community itself, which needed a version of the Pentateuch for worship and instruction. This version, which was undoubtedly a collective undertaking, perhaps based on previous written or oral attempts, was hailed with enthusiasm by the community. It was followed by translations of the other books of the Hebrew Bible. According to Thackeray, the liturgical needs of the Alexandrian Jews led to a gradual translation of the Latter Prophets, followed by that of the Former Prophets, during the second century, while the books of the Hagiographa were translated separately in the first century B.C.E. or later. However, it is more generally held that the versions of the Former and Latter Prophets must be placed before the end of the third century B.C.E., and that at least some of the Hagiographa were already translated at the beginning of the second century B.C.E., since the prologue to the Greek Ben-Sira (132 B.C.E.) refers to an already existing version of the "the Law, the Prophets, and the other writings." It is therefore accepted that a complete version of the Hebrew Bible existed at least at the beginning of the first century C.E. All or nearly all of it was of Egyptian origin, but as each component emerged, it was disseminated throughout the Hellenistic Diaspora and Palestine. There must have been considerable confusion in its transmission, due to the normal scribal corruptions and a growing incomprehension of the intentions of the translators, who had used a rather flexible technique and had not worked on a standard original. The resulting deviations were all the more disconcerting when the Hebrew canon was definitely fixed. This may explain the dissatisfaction of the Jews for the Septuagint, an attitude which was doubtless aggravated by the enthusiastic use of it by the Christians. As a result, new versions were made in the course of the second century by Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus (see below).

A short time later Origen became alarmed at the state of the Greek text of the Bible: the latter not only differed considerably from the Hebrew text of the Jews, which he believed to be the original one, but it appeared in a wide range of forms in the manuscripts current among the Christians. His purpose in producing his enormous work known as the Hexapla ("the sixfold," completed in 245 C.E.) was to reconstitute and standardize the "genuine" text of the Septuagint, essential both to sound exegesis and effective apologetics. The Hexapla consisted of six parallel columns, the first – the standard Hebrew text, the second – the same transcribed in Greek characters, the third, fourth, and sixth – the versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion respectively; the critical text of the Septuagint compiled by Origen made up the fifth column. It was often recopied separately and enjoyed wide circulation in Palestine. However, it did not become preeminent throughout the Christian world, since, at the end of the fourth century, Jerome referred to the existence of two other recensions, one Egyptian by Hesychius, and the other made in Asia Minor by Lucian. The existence of these three versions might in itself afford a sufficient explanation of the many discrepancies displayed by the Septuagint manuscripts.

¹⁷ Suzanne Daniel, "*The Septuagint*", in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 4B, pp.851-856, Keter Publishing House, Ltd. (1971). [The complete article cannot be reproduced due to copyright restrictions.]

The context of the material surrounding the quoted passages does not support the claim made in the missionary tract. Upon reading the entire article, the repeated use of the term “Alexandrian version”, a reference to the *Original Septuagint*, is noteworthy, and this should be contrasted against the claim made in the missionary tract, that the entire Hebrew Bible was part of the original translation. Unlike the message that the author of the missionary tract wants to convey to the reader, Professor Daniel's article makes it abundantly clear that she does not support the notion that the *Original Septuagint* (“Alexandrian version”) was a Greek translation of the entire Hebrew Bible. Rather, that it consisted of a Greek translation of only the Torah (Pentateuch), as also noted by both Josephus, St. Jerome, and in the *Letter of Aristeas*, as was pointed out by Professor Daniel.

Conclusion on Exhibit #5: The missionary claim that the *Septuagint* to which Professor Gordon referred is a Jewish document is deceptive and false.

III. SUMMARY

The analysis of the missionary tract "*Does almah mean young woman or virgin?*" presented in this essay demonstrates that all the so-called “evidence” used by its author to convince the reader that the Hebrew word **עַלְמָה**, as used in the Hebrew Bible, means “a virgin”, is false. This result leads to the following observations:

- ⊙ **Deception is a primary tool of the Christian missionary to the Jews**
- ⊙ **The deceivers are counting on their readers' trust and, thus, not to verify that -**
 - **Sources are quoted accurately and within proper context**
 - **Cited sources are real and not bogus**
- ⊙ **The deceivers often give the false impression that they know the Hebrew language**
- ⊙ **The deceivers violate the Biblical commandments against bearing false witness (Exod 20:13, Deut 5:17)**

Those who blindly trust tracts such as the kind analyzed in this essay and use it to bolster their religious beliefs put themselves at a great risk of being deceived.

It should be noted here that not all engaged in missionary work are necessarily deliberate deceivers. Some, perhaps even most, are doing their work by rote, i.e., they quote or recite material that they have been given without fully understanding it or the sources from which it was generated. The deceivers are those who create such materials and those who propagate it with the knowledge that it is not true. Nevertheless, each claim made by Christian missionaries needs to be researched and validated and must not be "taken of faith" just because it may sound plausible.

That which needs to be defended with deception is not worth defending at all!