

THIRD EDITION

THE
MYSTERY
OF THE
MEM

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Introduction

The virgin birth of Yeshua of Nazareth is one of the most profound and debated events in human history. According to the New Testament, Yeshua was conceived and born to a young Jewish woman “who had never known a man,” a virgin.

To maintain precision, we will use the term “virginal conception.” This description clarifies confusion arising from inaccurate terms like “parthenogenesis,” which refers to asexual reproduction and the development of an embryo without fertilization. “Immaculate conception” is another misnomer, as it refers to a late Catholic dogma about Mary’s supposed freedom from “original sin.”

Additionally, the virginal conception should not be conflated with the later doctrine that Miriam of Nazareth remained a perpetual virgin, an idea unsupported by the text. The idea is contradicted by the Gospels, which specifically mention Yeshua’s brothers and sisters, as Yosef and Miriam had more children after Yeshua’s birth¹.

The concept of a virginal conception does raise many questions, however. Did it originate with later authors, possibly influenced by pagan beliefs or a flawed understanding of science? Or does the theme of miraculous birth consistently run through the history of Israel, culminating in the birth of the Messiah?

¹ Mark 6:3, Matthew 13:55-36: James (Yaakov), Joses (Yose), Simon (Shimon), Yehudah (Jude) and at least two sisters. Despite claims to the contrary, the Greek word ἀδελφοί does not mean ‘cousin’ but means ‘of the same womb’.

What is the reasoning and purpose behind such a miracle? Moreover, if Yeshua was born of a virgin, how could he be patrilineally descended from King David, a requirement for being recognized as the Messiah?

We will explore answers to these questions but must preface this discussion with a caveat: **We cannot “prove” the virginal conception.** The nature of a miracle defies its being repeated in a laboratory setting and isolating variables according to the scientific method.

While we do not know the precise method of this miracle, we will aim to show that the virginal conception, as described in the Gospels, is completely within the patterns of Biblical history and the parameters of Jewish interpretation. Moreover, we will provide potential solutions for the questions and difficulties raised by this concept.

Ultimately, the virgin birth of Yeshua, while uniquely significant in its theological implications, finds resonance in the miraculous births found in the Tanakh (“Old Testament”). These events serve as poignant reminders of God’s sovereignty and His power to fulfill His divine purposes through extraordinary means. Whether it was the birth of Isaac, Samson, Samuel, or Yeshua, each narrative illustrates the profound truth that God can work miracles, bringing hope, redemption, and salvation to His people. These miraculous births continue to inspire faith and wonder, bringing unity to the Tanakh and New Testament in the tapestry of Divine Providence.

Chapter One:

The Mystery of the Mem

Fire and Water

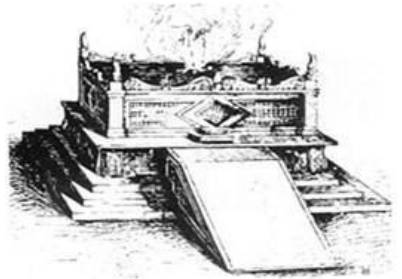
In the book of Leviticus, we read of the עולה (*Olah*) sacrifice. The word “olah” is commonly translated as “burnt offering”, but this obscures its meaning, which is “that which ascends”. It is related to the word עליה (*aliyah*), meaning ‘to ascend, to go up.’ It may be better rendered as an “ascension offering.”

צו אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר זֹאת תֹּרַת הָעֹלָה

“Command Aharon and his sons, saying, “This is the law of the *Olah* (ascension offering). It is an offering that ascends upon the pyre (*moqdash*) of the Altar...”

Leviticus 6:2(9)²

The word for “pyre” in Hebrew is מוקדה (*moqdash*), and it is written with an unusually small letter mem (מ) in the Torah scroll. The Rebbe of Kotzk, R’ Menachem Mendel Morgenzstern (1787 – 1859 CE), comments on this unique letter,



“Why is the word *moqdash* (“pyre”) written in the Torah with a miniature mem? To teach us that the fire in one’s soul should be understated; it should burn within, but show nothing on the outside.”

***Parsha In Depth: Tzav, Chabad.org*³**

² Jewish and Christian Bibles number this verse differently.

³ The Rebbe of Kotzk, cited in *Parshah In Depth: Tzav, Chabad.org*

R' Aaron Raskin explains, “In other words, be humble; don’t make a demonstration of your learning.”⁴ Ironically, the letter mem represents **מַיִם** (*mayim*), water within this word for *pyre*, concealed within its flame⁵ ⁶. This miniature mem opens a gateway for us to explore its deeper meaning and connection to Mashiach.



Closed Mem

At the end of
a word



Open Mem

At the beginning
or middle of a word

The letter mem itself has two forms, the *mem p’tucha* (open mem **מ**) and the *mem stumab* (closed mem **ם**), also called a *mem sofit* (final mem). When the letter is used at the beginning or middle of a word, it is written in its open form. If it is at the end of the word, the closed mem is used. The open mem refers to that which is openly revealed and known, and the closed mem refers to the concealed, that which is secret, as the Talmud says,

⁴ R’ Aaron Raskin, *By Divine Design*, Sichos in English, pg. 182

⁵ The Talmud says, “*Ein mayim ela Torah* - there is no water but Torah’ likening the Torah to *mayim*, water, based on Isaiah 55:1, “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come for water” in Bava Kamma 82a, Taanit 7a, Chagigah 3a, among other sources. This connection forms the theological background to Yeshua’s words to the Samaritan woman in John 4:4 - 44 regarding the *mayim chayim*, the living water.

⁶ The words **אש** *Esh* (Fire) and **מַיִם** *Mayim* (Water) together create **אשמים** *Shamayim* (Heaven), see Chagigah 12a and Rashi on Genesis 1:8.

מ"ם פְּתוּחָה , מ"ם סְּתוּמָה -
מֵאֵמֶר פְּתוּחַ , מֵאֵמֶר סְּתוּם .

“The open mem and closed mem indicate that the Torah contains an open statement, understood by all, and an esoteric statement.”

Shabbat 104a⁷

Let us dive beneath the surface of the Mem to discover its secrets.



⁷ Shabbat 104a, The William Davidson Talmud, Sefaria.org

A Belly from Above

The mem is the 13th letter of the Hebrew Alefbet⁸. It opens the words *Moshe*, *Mashiach*, *Miqveh* (immersion pool), and *Malchut* (Kingdom).

Both forms of the mem bracket the words *Mayim* (Water), *Maqom* (Place) and *Miriam*. As mentioned above, the letter mem represents water, which defies shape. Paradoxically, the letter has the *gematria* (the numerical value) of 40, a recurrent number in the Torah representing “where raw matter takes on a form” during the process of development⁹. Examples of the number 40 include:

- **40 Seahs** – The halachic amount of water required for a kosher miqveh (immersion pool)
- **40 Days and Nights** it rained during Noah’s flood
- **40 Days** Moshe was on Mount Sinai to receive the Torah (Exodus 24:18)
- **40 Days** Moshe was on Mount Sinai after the Golden Calf (Deuteronomy 9:18)
- **40 Days** of the Spies (Numbers 13:26, 14:34)
- **40 Days** of Teshuvah (Repentance) – from Elul 1 to Tishrei 10, which is Yom Kippur
- **40 Years** of wandering in the wilderness prior to entry into Eretz Yisrael

⁸ R’ Yitzchak Ginsburgh connects this 13th letter to the words *עבד* *echad* and *אהבה* *ahavah*, both of which have the gematria of 13, linking them to the *ג’* *gidot* the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, from Exodus 34:6-7. (*The Hebrew Letters*, R’ Yitzchak Ginsburgh, Gal Einai Publications, pg. 194)

⁹ *Jewish Wisdom in the Numbers*, Osher Chaim Levine with Rabbi Yehoshua Hartman, Mesorah Publications, ltd, pg. 274

- **40 Years** King David reigned over Israel (2 Samuel 5:4, 1 Kings 2:11)
- **40 Days** Elijah was in Horev (1 Kings 19:8)
- **40 Days** Yonah preached to Nineveh (Jonah 3:4)
- **40 Days** Ezekiel lay on his right side, symbolizing 40 years of Judah's sin (Ezekiel 4:6)
- **40 Years** before the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the miracles stopped (30 CE)
- **40 Years** of age is when man attains *binah*, understanding (Pirkei Avot 5:21)
- **40 Days** of fasting of Yeshua in the Wilderness¹⁰ (Matthew 4:2)
- **40 Days** after the resurrection, Yeshua ascended (Acts 1:2)
- **40 Days** of embryonic formation
- **40 Weeks** of gestation within a womb
- **40 Days** of uncleanness for a woman who gives birth to a male (Leviticus 12:2, 4)

The letter Mem is likened to a womb by *The Bahir*, a mystical text attributed to the first-century sage R' Nehunya ben HaKaneh, who says,

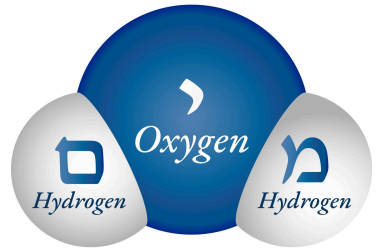
“What is the closed Mem? It is made like a belly from above. . . What is a Mem? Do not read Mem, but Mayim (water)...Just like the male cannot give birth, so the closed Mem cannot give birth. And just like the female has an opening with which to

¹⁰ For more information on the significance of Yeshua's trial in the Wilderness, see our book *The Temptation of the Messiah*.

give birth, so can the open Mem give birth. The Mem is therefore open and closed.”

The Bahir, Part One, 84-85, translated by R’ Aryeh Kaplan, Samuel Weiser, Inc., pg. 31

Interestingly, the open mem appears to reflect the anatomy of the side profile of a female. The word for womb in Hebrew is **רְחֵם** (*rechem*)¹¹, which ends with a closed mem. R’ Aaron Raskin writes, “The closed mem represents the nine months when the womb is closed. The open



mem represents the period of childbirth, when the womb is open.”¹² Before a woman gives birth, her “water breaks,” or the amniotic sac within the womb ruptures, a clear sign that the birth process has begun. Knowing that the word for water is *mayim*, which is spelled **מַיִם** (*mem-yud-mem*), it is interesting to note that this appears to mirror the atomic structure of water, *hydrogen-oxygen-hydrogen* (H₂O).

R’ Aryeh Kaplan (1934 - 1983 CE) comments,

“The numerical value of Mem is forty, alluding to the forty days in which the embryo is formed in the womb...water represents the concept of change, and this is also the primary concept of birth. The teaching here includes the entire mystery

¹¹ R’ Yitzchak Ginsburgh also notes that the word em (mother) can also mean “womb.” (The Hebrew Letters, Gal Einai Publications, pg. 196)

¹² R’ Aaron Raskin, *Letters of Light*, Sichos in English, pg. 130

of Mikvah, the ritual pool used for purification. The Mikvah contains 40 seahs of water (about 150 US gallons), forty being the numerical value of mem. The Mikvah thus represents the womb, and when he emerges, it is like he is reborn.”

R' Aryeh Kaplan's Commentary to The Bahir, Part Two, 86, Samuel Weiser, Inc., pg. 150

The words of R' Kaplan echo the words of Yeshua to Nicodemus in the Gospel of John,

“Amein, I tell you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of G-d. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born anew...Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?”

John 3:1-10



Based on Yeshua's response, one may derive that this is a well-known teaching within Judaism¹³. In fact, the Talmud says,

¹³ See Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, *Meshivat Nefesh, Restore My Soul*, translated by R' Avraham Greenbaum, Breslov Research Institute, pgs. 88-89, *Likutey Etzot, Tzaddik* 25, Breslov Research Institute, pg. 230, *Tales of the Hasidim, Early Masters*, Martin Buber, Schocken Books, pg. 314

וְגַר שֶׁנִּתְגַּיֵּיר כְּקָטָן שֶׁנּוֹלַד דְּמִי

“...one who has become a proselyte is like a child newly born.”

Yevamot 22a, Soncino Press Edition

R' Aaron Raskin comments,

“When one immerses in a mikveh, it is similar to entering the womb of Creation, a state of the world yet unborn. At the moment when a person emerges, he or she is reborn.”

R' Aaron Raskin, Letters of Light, Sichos in English, pg. 134

R' Michael L. Munk (1905 - 1985 CE),

“The word מַי, water, with its initial and ending *mem*, one open and one closed, depicts the accessible and inaccessible – an allusion to the waters of Creation. At Creation, HaShem divided the water, placing some above the firmament and others beneath the firmament (Genesis 1:7.) The nature of the upper waters is beyond our comprehension – they are “closed” like the final mem in מַי. The lower waters on earth – oceans, lakes and rivers – are revealed to us like the open מ.”

The Wisdom in the Hebrew Alphabet, R' Michael L. Munk, Artscroll Mesorah Series, pg. 146

Consider this stunning fact: According to the United States National Ocean Service, **we have explored less than 5% of the**

ocean.¹⁴ If this is so regarding the revealed, how much more does it apply to the concealed? R' Munk continues,

“...the open מ describes the open aspect of the Torah, and the closed □ denotes the concealed...According to the Zohar, for example, the מ stands allegorically both for משה Moses and for משיח, the Messiah, who represent these two aspects of the Torah. Mem stands for Moses because he started to reveal the infinite Torah on a level that man could perceive. Not everything was transmitted by Moses, however. The concealed will be revealed by the Messiah...This is the allusion of the מם, which stands openly for משה and concealed for משיח (Osios R' Yitzchok).”

The Wisdom in the Hebrew Alphabet, R' Michael L. Munk, Artscroll Mesorah Series, pgs. 146-147

Prince of Peace

There are other places in the Tanakh where other unusual forms of the mem occur. One place is in an important messianic prophecy in the book of Isaiah,

“For unto us, a child is born. To us, a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders. His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty G-d, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **Of the increase** (לסרבה) of his government and of peace there shall be no end, on the throne of David, and on his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with

¹⁴ How much of the ocean have we explored? National Ocean Service, NOAA.gov

righteousness from that time on, even forever. The zeal of HaShem of Hosts will perform this.”

Isaiah 9:5-7

The words “of the increase” translate the word לַמְרֵבָה, *l'marbeh*. Violating normal practice, it contains a closed mem (ם) within the middle of the word. Why is it written like this? Shmais.com answers,

“For the increase of the realm and for peace without end....”

Our Sages have taught that the closed letter mem which normally appears only at the end of a word, but here appears in the middle of the word *l'marbeh*, is an allusion to Mashiach...”

Shmais.com, Living with Moshiach #1131¹⁵

The passage describing the birth of a promised child is connected to a closed *mem*, a closed womb. Surrounding this prophecy are thousands of years of debates between Jews and Christians, skeptics and scholars. Let us examine some of the controversies surrounding this passage. Some attempt to portray this verse as speaking *exclusively* of Hezekiah, claiming this defuses its explosive Messianic implications. Artscroll summarizes this position,

“Isaiah cannot be referring to a child or son that will be born at a later time because the prophecy clearly states יָלַד, **has** been born, and נָתַן, **has** been given. Both are in the past tense, clearly indicating that whomever the prophet was referring to had already been born.”

The Prophets: Isaiah, Milstein Edition, Mesorah Publications, ltd., pg. 78

¹⁵ Living with Moshiach #1131, Shmais.com

It is important to note that the Artscroll commentary here refers to the *peshat*, or plain sense of the text. This prophecy is much deeper than the literal reading. The “past tense argument” is easily ruled out because Hebrew is made up of perfect (complete) and imperfect (incomplete) tenses. The prophets sometimes speak in what is sometimes called the “prophetic perfect tense,” as they see the events that are yet to happen, as though they have already happened.

For example, the *Radak*, R’ David Kimchi (1160 – 1235 CE), explains in his commentary on Psalm 3:5,

“And He answered me: a past (tense) in place of a future, equivalent to “and He will answer me” and there are many similar cases...and in the greater part of prophecy this is found, that the speaker uses a past tense in place of a future, for it is as though the thing had already happened when it has been spoken in the Holy Spirit.”
Radak on Psalm 3:5, Sefaria.org¹⁶

Moreover, it is well known that Hezekiah is a prototype of the *Mashiach*, being the Messiah, or the Messianic prototype, of his generation. This point is highlighted in the Talmud,

¹⁶ Radak on Psalm 3:5, translated by R.G. Finch, London, 1919, Sefaria.org, here is the Hebrew of this commentary:

ויעני עבר במקום עתיד, כמו ויעני, וכמוהו רבים. או הוא כמשמעו, כי בטוח היה בזה. או רוח הקדש הופיעה על לשונו; והוא הנכון, כי כבר פרשנו, כי ברוח הקדש נאמרו כל המזמורים; וברוב הנבואה נמצא זה שמדבר עבר במקום עתיד, שהוא כאלו נעשה הדבר כיון שנאמרה ברוח הקדש.

“R. Hillel said: ‘There shall be no Messiah for Israel, because they have already enjoyed him in the days of Hezekiah.’ R. Joseph said: ‘May G-d forgive him [for saying so]. Now, when did Hezekiah flourish? During the first Temple. Yet Zechariah, prophesying in the days of the second, proclaimed, ‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem, behold, your king comes to you! He is just, and having salvation, lowly, and riding upon a donkey, and upon a colt the foal of a donkey.’”

Sanhedrin 99a, Soncino Press Edition

The preceding section of the Talmud explains,

“The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to appoint Hezekiah as the Messiah, and Sennacherib as Gog and Magog; whereupon the Attribute of Justice said before the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘Sovereign of the Universe! ‘If You did not make David the Messiah, who uttered so many hymns and psalms before You, will You appoint Hezekiah as such, who did not sing hymns to You in spite of all these miracles which You wrought for him?’ Therefore [the mem] was closed. Straightway the earth exclaimed ‘Sovereign of the Universe! Let me utter song before You instead of this righteous man [Hezekiah], and make him the Messiah.’ So it broke into song before Him, as it is written, ‘From the uttermost part of the earth we heard songs, even glory to the righteous.’ Then the Prince of the Universe said to Him: ‘Sovereign of the Universe! It [the earth] has fulfilled Your desire [for songs of praise] on behalf of this righteous man.’ But a heavenly Voice cried out, ‘It is my secret. It is my

secret.”

Sanhedrin 94a, Soncino Press Edition

The potential for Hezekiah becoming the Messiah was closed, as indicated by the *mem sofit*. The Ramban, R' Moshe ben Nachman (1194 - 1270 CE), comments on this Talmud passage,

“This is a strange text. Yet, as I have delved into it, I have seen that it confirms many things. Thus, you will find that the Sages of blessed memory always explain that the Scriptural texts that are said with reference to Chizkiyah apply to the future. With regard to these [Scriptural texts, the Sages] always employ the expression, “The Holy One, blessed be He, shall at a future time, [etc.]” They also said, “Rabbi Yosi HaGalili says that the name of the Messiah will also be Peace, for it is said, ‘avi-ad sar-shalom’, everlasting father, ruler of peace.” . . . the condition [required] for [achieving the redemption in the days of] Chizkiyah was voided, and all those rewards and consolations remained for King Messiah, who will arise from [Chizkiyah’s] descendants.”

Ramban, The Book of Redemption, the Second Gate, Writings of the Ramban, Shilo Publishing House, pg. 660

This should remove any doubt as to whether or not this prophecy refers to the Messiah. The Ramban cited the third-generation Tanna¹⁷, R' Yosi the Galilean, who said,

¹⁷ The *Tannaim*, or “Repeaters”, were sages whose views are recorded in the Mishnah, circa 1 - 220 CE.

רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר אף שמו של משיח נקרא שלום:
שנאמר (ישעיהו ט':ה') אבי עד שר שלום... רבי יוסי
הגלילי אומר גדול הוא השלום שבשעה שמלך המשיח
נגלה לישראל אין פותח אלא בשלום. שנאמר (ישעיהו
נ"ב:ז') מה נאוו על ההרים רגלי מבשר משמיע שלום

“R. Jose the Galilean said: Even the name of the Messiah is called ‘peace,’ [as it is stated,] “And his name is called...Abi-ad-sar-shalom”...Great is peace, seeing that when king Messiah will reveal himself to Israel, his first message will be peace, as it is stated, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger of good tidings, that announces peace.”

**Tractate Derekh Eretz Zuta, Section on Peace, 11, 13,
The William Davidson Talmud, Sefaria.org**

There is a well-known principle that history repeats itself. In other words, Jewish history is Jewish prophecy. As *Kobelet*, Ecclesiastes says,

“That which has been is that which shall be, and that which has been done is that which shall be done, and there is no new thing under the sun.”

Ecclesiastes 1:9

Therefore, what applies to Hezekiah applies to the Messiah. This principle also applies to Moshe Rabbeinu, David HaMelech, Shlomo HaMelech, and other Messianic figures. The Aggadic midrash *Pesikta Rabbati* (c. 845 CE) comments,

“... it is also written of a scion of Judah (trans. note: Hezekiah, who was of the Tribe of Judah, and the Messiah, who will spring from the same Tribe) And his name is called “Wonderful in counsel is G-d the Mighty (El Gibbor) (Isa. 9:5)”

Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 46.3, translated by William Braude, Vol. II, Yale University Press, pg. 793

R' William G. Braude (1907 - 1988 CE) highlighted the connection between Messiah and Hezekiah in the footnotes to this translation. The Midrash Rabbah explicitly identifies Isaiah 9 as speaking of Mashiach,

עַד עֶכְשָׁו יֵשׁ לִי לְהַעֲמִיד מֶלֶךְ הַמְּשִׁיחַ, שְׁפָתוֹב בּוֹ
(ישעיה ט, ה): כִּי יֵלֵד יֵלֵד לָנוּ.

“I have yet to raise up the Messiah, of whom it is written, ‘For a child is born to us’ (Isaiah 9:5).”

Deuteronomy Rabbah 1:20, Soncino Press Edition

At this point, there can be no doubt that Isaiah 9 refers to the Messiah. The Targum translates Isaiah 9 as follows,

אָמַר נְבִיא לְבֵית דָּוִד אֲרִי רַבִּי אֵיתִילִיד לָנָא בַר אֲתִיָּהּ
לָנָא וְקָבַל אֲוִרִיתָא עֲלוּהִי לְמִטְרָה וְאֲתִקְרִי שְׁמִיָּהּ מִן
קָדָם מִפְּלִיא עֲצָה אֱלֹהָא גְבַרָא קַיִם לְעֲלֵמִיא מְשִׁיחָא
דְּשְׁלָמָא יִסְגִי עֲלָנָא בְּיוֹמוֹהִי:

“The prophet said to the house of David, ‘For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and he has taken the law upon himself to keep it. His name is called from eternity wonderful,

the mighty G-d who lives to eternity, the Messiah whose peace shall be great upon us in his days.”

Targum Yonatan to Isaiah 9, Sefaria.org

While it explicitly identifies the subject of this passage as the Messiah, this gives rise to another controversy: To whom do the names *Pele Yoetz, El Gibbor, Avi Ad, Sar Shalom* belong? Rashi, R' Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040 - 1105 CE) follows the Targum's angle of projecting the names onto HaShem rather than the newborn child.

Like the other debates, this is also unnecessary, as they belong *both* to HaShem and to Messiah, as the Messiah is the *Shaliach* (Sent One) of HaShem. In the event someone wishes to make an issue of this, the Talmud portrays the names as belonging to the child,

שיש לו שמונה שמות חזקיה דכתיב (ישעיהו ט, ה) כי
ילד יולד לנו בן ניתן לנו ותהי המשרה על שכמו ויקרא
שמו פלא יועץ אל גבור אבי עד שר שלום

“The eight names of Hezekiah are as it is written: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government is upon his shoulder; and his name is called Pele, Joez, El Gibbor, Abi Ad, Sar Shalom” (Isaiah 9:5).”

**Sanhedrin 94a, The William Davidson Talmud,
Sefaria.org**



The *Rambam*, R' Moshe ben Maimon (1135 - 1204 CE), follows the Talmud, as he wrote in his *Iggeret Teiman*, Letter to Yemen,

“Six appellations were divinely conferred upon him as the following passage indicates: “For a child is born unto us, and a son is given unto us, and the government is upon his shoulder, and he is called Pele, Yoetz, El, Gibbor, Abiad, Sar-Shalom.” (Isaiah 9:5).”

Maimonides, Letter to Yemen, page 16, translated by Boaz Cohen¹⁸

Based on the comments of the great rabbis, there is no doubt that Isaiah 9 referred to Hezekiah and, ultimately, to the Messiah. Thus, the claim by the anti-missionaries that this is not a Messianic prophecy is baffling, considering it is well established within Jewish

¹⁸ Cited at Wikisource.org,
https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Epistle_to_Yemen/XVI

tradition. Are they ignorant of these sources, or do they presume their audiences are unaware of them? It is beyond the scope of this book to explore every deep connection and facet within this passage.^{19 20 21 22}

Therefore, let us examine the claims of pagan parallels and explore the miraculous births in the Tanakh.

¹⁹ “It is written: Wonderful – supernal Wisdom, which is wondrous and concealed from all, as is written: If a matter is too wondrous for you (Deuteronomy 17:8). Counselor – supernal river flowing forth and never ceasing, counseling all and watering all. *El*, G-d – Abraham, as has been established, האל הגדול (HaEl HaGadol) (Deuteronomy 10:17). הגבור, Gibbor, Mighty – Isaac, as is written: the mighty. Eternal Father, Jacob, who grasps this side and that side, attaining perfection. Prince of Peace – Righteous One, who is peace of the world, peace of the house, peace of Matronita.”

Zohar 3:31a, Tsav, translated by Daniel C. Matt, Pritzker Edition, Volume 7, pgs. 179-180

²⁰ “...from the depth of all, as it is written: For You have done (*pele*), wonders, as is written: He has been named *pele*, Wonder (Isaiah 9:5).”

Zohar 3:31a, Tsav, translated by Daniel C. Matt, Pritzker Edition, Volume 7, pgs. 179-180

²¹ “The word (*pele*), wonders, alludes to the deepest source, Keter. . . The verse in Isaiah 9 provides the throne name of the Davidic king: He has been named: (*pele yo’ets*), Wonderful Counselor, Mighty G-d, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”

Pritzker Edition Zohar commentary, Volume 7, pg. 207

²² Isaiah 9 is further explored in our article, *Prince of Peace* at ladderofjacob.com.

Chapter Two:

The Closed Womb

Many individuals have wrongly asserted that the Roman Catholic Church manufactured the virgin birth accounts to copy pagan birth stories in order to make the account more appealing to Gentiles. This idea has been refuted by scholars numerous times.

Contrary to popular belief, there are no virgin births in paganism. In the pagan stories, the births of the heroes and “gods” were the result of sexual intercourse, after which one is no longer a virgin. The critical scholar Raymond Brown explains,

“AFTER SEXUAL
INTERCOURSE,
YOU ARE
NO LONGER
A VIRGIN.”

“Are any of these divinely engendered births really parallel to the non-sexual union virginal conception of Jesus described in the NT, where Mary is not impregnated by a male deity or element, but the child is begotten through the creative power of the Holy Spirit? These “parallels” consistently involve a type of *hieros gamos* where a divine male, in human or other form, impregnates a woman, either through normal sexual intercourse or through some substitute form of penetration. In short, there is no clear example of *virginal* conception in world or pagan religions that plausibly could have given first-century Jewish Christians the idea of the virginal conception of Jesus.”

**Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*,
Doubleday, pg. 523**

One apologist beautifully articulates the issue,

“Some have attempted to account for the virgin birth by tracing it to Greek or Babylonian mythology. They argue that the Gospel writers borrowed this story from the mythology of their day. This view does not fit the facts, for there is not any hero in pagan mythology for which a virgin birth is claimed, and moreover it would be unthinkable to the Jewish mind to construct such a story from mythology. Many deities among Greeks, Babylonians and Egyptians were reported born in an unusual manner, but for the most part, these beings never actually existed. The accounts are filled with obvious mythological elements which are totally absent from the Gospel narratives. They are reports of a god or goddess being born into the world by sexual relations between some heavenly being or by some adulterous affair among the gods and goddesses.”²³

Let us briefly examine the claims of the most popular parallels that are uncritically cited by skeptics as material evidence against the virginal conception. To do so, we must be aware of the tendency of modern scholars to use Christian terminology to describe ancient pagan practices and myths. They do this in order to form a conceptual link for the Western reader, but oftentimes end up misleading the audience into believing that parallels exist when they do not. Therefore, we must go straight to the source texts describing the birth myths of so-called ‘gods’ and heroes of old. To summarize the claim, we will cite R’ Tovia Singer:

²³Josh McDowell, *A Ready Defense*, pgs. 189-190

“The claim that some great person was born to a woman who didn’t sleep with a man was ubiquitous throughout the Greco-Roman world. . . at the lowest level of ‘gods’, where you have someone who is both man and god, invariably, they are born to virgins. Or in the case of Hercules, his mother just slept with Zeus. . . Alexander the Great, he was believed to be born of a virgin, Romulus, the mythical founder of Rome, born to a virgin, Pythagoras, the great thinker, mathematician, the genius...Octavius, Caesar Augustus born to a virgin.”

R’ Tovia Singer, The Church Claim that Jesus was born to a virgin is revolting to Judaism, May 24, 2020, Youtube.com

Unfortunately, many of these myths are graphic, so we will recount them as appropriately as possible.

Alexander the Great

Conflicting stories are told about the conception of Alexander the Great in *Parallel Lives* by Plutarch (45 - 119 CE). He writes that the night before Philip was to consummate his marriage with Olympias, the mother of Alexander, she dreamed that a thunderbolt struck her womb and that a fire broke out and then was extinguished. Later, he found her sleeping beside a snake (perhaps a form of Zeus), and he thought, “she was the partner of a superior being.” He reports that others say that “she repudiated the idea, and said, “Alexander must cease slandering me to Hera (the wife of Zeus).”

Conclusion: The contradictory account does not refer to a virgin

birth but a romantic relationship between the mother of Alexander and Zeus, which according to some accounts, she denied.

Attis

According to *Description of Greece 7.17.11*, by the Pausanias (c. 110 - 180 CE), Attis was the Phrygian 'god' of vegetation. His origin story began when the Olympian 'gods' castrated Agdistis, an androgynous demon. The male member was cast away and grew to be an almond tree. When Nana, the daughter of a river god, put some almonds into her bosom, they disappeared, and she became pregnant. She abandoned the child, who was then raised by a goat.

Conclusion: The story involves the male member of a demon in the conception of the child. Thus, there is no virginal conception.

Buddha/Siddhartha Gautama

The time that Siddhartha Gautama lived is uncertain, ranging from 900 to 400 BCE. Most scholars place the date circa 563 to 483 BCE. No written records about Gautama were found from his lifetime. The first mention is in the middle of the 3rd century BCE to his biographies in the 1st to 6th centuries CE. According to later biographies such as the *Mahavāstu* (2nd - 4th century CE) and the *Lalitavistara*, his mother Maya, the wife of Suddhodana, had a dream that a white elephant with six white tusks entered her right side. Ten months later, Siddhartha was born.

Conclusion: The late text of the *Mahavāstu* describes the descent of the Buddha into the womb of Maya, the chief queen of Suddhodana, in the shape of a white elephant. However, there is no

hint of a virginal conception, as he says “This king Suddhodana is worthy to be my father.” Moreover, the texts are too late to be of influence to the New Testament account.

Dionysus/Bacchus/Liber

The so-called ‘god’ of wine and vegetation has different accounts and traditions regarding his birth. The birth narrative given by Gaius Julius Hyginus (c. 64 BCE - 17 CE) in *Fabulae* 167 says that Dionysus was the son of Jove (Zeus) and Proserpine (Persephone). After Liber was torn apart, Jove put the fragments of his heart in a drink and gave it to Semele, one of Zeus’ many paramours, who became pregnant. In another version, Zeus swallows the heart himself and then begets Liber a second time with Semele. The Greek poet Nonnus gives a birth narrative in the epic *Dionysiaca* (4th-5th century CE), describing how Zeus took the shape of a serpent and violated Persophoneia.

Conclusion: The closest any of these variants come to a ‘virgin birth’ is where Semele drinks pieces of the heart of Liber, after which she is impregnated, but the myths are contradictory. However, according to mythology, Semele was a consort of Zeus.

Heracles/Hercules

Often cited as being “born of a virgin,” Hercules was born of a romantic relationship between Zeus and Alcmena, who was the wife of Ampitryon, according to Homer’s *Iliad*.

Conclusion: The child is a result of an adulterous affair and not born of a virgin.

Horus/Apollo

According to Plutarch's *On Isis and Osiris*, the Egyptian 'god' Horus, called Apollo by the Greeks, was born to the "goddess" Isis after she reassembled her murdered husband Osiris, except the male member. She used her magic to make another one, and conceived Horus.

Conclusion: This grotesque mythical account does not refer to a virgin birth.

Krishna

In the *Krishna Charitas*, he is born to Devaki and her husband Vasudeva of the Yadava clan in Mathura. According to the Hindu text *Vishnu Purana*, Devaki had seven sons prior to Krishna, making him the eighth son.

Conclusion: Vasudeva and Devaki are married and had children prior to Krishna. There is no hint of a virginal conception.

Pythagoras

Herodotus and Isocrates agree that the mystical mathematician Pythagoras was the son of Mnesarchus. Iamblicus also stated in the *Life of Pythagoras*, also states that his father was Mnesarchus, but a legend began due to a certain Samian poet who wrote that Apollo bore Pythagoras, noting that Mnesarchus had gone to Delphi on a business trip, "leaving his wife without any signs of pregnancy." An oracle informed him of the child, who would be of the greatest benefit to humanity. His father took care that his son should enjoy

the best possible education, and he became so venerable that many thought he was a child of divinity.

Conclusion: The account in Iamblichus does not appear to be literal, but a poetic device describing Pythagoras' remarkable character. Even if some of the ancients took it literally at the time, there is still no hint of a virginal conception.

Mithras

The Roman mystery religion centered on Mithras, which was popular around the 1st to the 4th century CE. No written narratives or theology from the religion survive, only passing references in inscriptions and references in Greek and Latin literature. He is depicted as being born from a rock while wearing a Phrygian cap.

Conclusion: All we know from ancient sculptures is that Mithras was born or emerged from a rock. Any other supposed parallels also break down upon examination.

Perseus

Perseus was the son of Zeus and Danaë. The myth states that Zeus desired her, came to her in the form of golden rain, and entered into her womb.

Conclusion: According to the context of the mythology, Zeus would transform into snakes, lightning bolts, bulls, and even swans in order to consummate his desires. Here he takes the form of golden rain.

Romulus and Remus

Romulus is the legendary founder of Rome and is etymologically connected to the Hebrew word *Armilus*, who is the “Antichrist” in the Jewish Midrash²⁴. According to Livy’s *History of Rome, Book 1.3-4*, their mother, Rhea Silvia, was the daughter of King Numitor, who was displaced by his brother Amulius. Amulius forced Rhea to become a Vestal virgin, sworn to celibacy at the punishment of death, to ensure that Numitor would have no heirs to the throne. She was violated by the “god” Mars and gave birth to the twins, Romulus and Remus.

Conclusion: Contrary to the claims of R’ Tovia Singer, the accounts do not support that Romulus was born of a virgin.

Zoroaster/Zarathustra

There is no scholarly consensus on when he lived, most placing him in the 7th - 6th century BCE. There are different versions of Zoroaster’s birth. One legend states that his father, Pourushaspa, took a piece of the Haoma plant, mixed it with milk, and gave it to his wife Dugdhova. They then conceived Zoroaster.

Conclusion: The conception of Zoroaster involved marital relations.

When reading these myths, one is not struck by similarities to the Gospel but by their radical differences. As Dr. Thomas Thorburn notes,

²⁴ In fact, Armilus is called the “Antichrist” in the Jewish apocalyptic text named *Otot HaMashiach* in the section named *The Seventh Sign*.

“All these various stories of supernatural conceptions and births, which we meet with in folklore and the history of mythology, have this one point in common – they serve to point not so much to the similarity as to the complete contrast and dissimilarity which exists between the Christian birth-story and the tales which are current in various pagan circles.”²⁵

The agnostic New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman writes,

“...the claim that Jesus was simply made up falters on every ground. The alleged parallels between Jesus and the “pagan” savior-gods in most instances reside in the modern imagination: We do not have accounts of others who were born to virgin mothers and who died as an atonement for sin and then were raised from the dead (despite what the sensationalists claim ad nauseum in their propagandized versions).”

Bart Ehrman, Did Jesus Exist, Huffington Post²⁶

Unfortunately, many people accept the pagan parallel argument at face value, without checking the actual sources. J.P Holding writes,

“In spite of having been pronounced dead even by intelligent skeptics, the thesis that Judaism and Christianity consist

²⁵ Thomas James Thorburn, *A Critical Examination of the Evidences for the Doctrine of the Virgin Birth*, London, 1908, p. 158, cited at *Are There Legitimate Objections to the Virgin Birth?* Josh.org

²⁶ Did Jesus Exist? Bart Ehrman, Huffington Post
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/did-jesus-exist_b_1349544

merely of stolen pagan myths and ideas continues to be promulgated by the uncritical and accepted by the gullible.”²⁷

So if the virginal conception narrative in the Gospels does not originate in paganism, where does it come from? To understand this, we must look to the Torah and Jewish tradition.

Torah Parallels

From the conception of Isaac to the birth of the modern state of Israel, miraculous beginnings seem to be a unifying thread of Jewish history. In truth, the Gospel birth narratives are based upon the Torah’s own miraculous birth stories, not only in content but even in structure. When we read through the expanded lens of the *Aggadab*, the connections become even more apparent. The miracle births of Jewish history form the threads that Matthew and Luke weave into a beautiful tapestry describing the birth of the Messiah. The births in the Tanakh follow a very specific pattern, one that is echoed by the Gospels:

***Barrenness > Annunciation of the
Promised Son > Conception > Birth >
Deliverance***

²⁷ Tektonics.org

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to cover every parallel and nuance, but let's briefly survey the traditions surrounding these individuals.

Adam

It is obvious that Adam HaRishon's²⁸ entry into the world was unlike any other. This is not a proof of the virgin birth, but does point to the numerous connections and parallels between Adam and Mashiach.

Noah

The Torah implies that something remarkable happened at the birth of Noah,

“Lamech lived one hundred eighty-two years, and became the father of a son, and he named him Noah, saying, “This one will comfort us (*yenachameinu*) in our work and in the toil of our hands, because of the ground which HaShem has cursed.”

Genesis 5:28-29

What inspired Lamech to make this statement about his newborn son? The book of Enoch provides the background,

“Methuselah took a wife for his son Lamech, and she bore him a male child. The body of the baby was white as snow and red as a blooming rose, and the hair of his head and his long locks were white as wool, and his eyes like the rays of the sun. When

²⁸ Literally, “Adam the First (Man)”

he opened his eyes, he lit up the whole house like the sun, and the whole house was very full of light. And when he was taken from the hand of the midwife, he opened his mouth and praised the L-rd of righteousness. His father Lamech was afraid of him...[saying]: “I have begotten a strange son; he is not like a human being, but resembles the children of the angels of heaven, and his nature is different, and he is not like us, and his eyes are as the rays of the sun, and his countenance is glorious. And it seems to me that he is not sprung from me, but from the angels...”

The Legends of the Jews, Book 1, Chapter 4, Louis Ginzberg

While the birth of Noach is not accompanied by barrenness, his birth is associated with the miraculous, echoing the nativity of Moshe. An important parallel to note is that Lamech even doubted the paternity of his son, similar to Joseph in the Gospels (and Jesse in the Midrash). He implores his father to go to Enoch, who dwells among the angels, to learn the truth of Noach’s paternity. Enoch replies to Methuselah the following,

“And now make known to your son Lamech that he who was born is in truth his son, and call his name Noach, for he will be left to you, and he and his children will be saved from the destruction which will come upon the earth.” . . . By the name Noah he was called only by his grandfather Methuselah; his father and all others called him Menachem. His generation was addicted to sorcery, and Methuselah thought that his grandson might be bewitched if his true name were known, therefore he kept it a secret. Menachem, Comforter, suited him as well as

Noah; it indicated that he would be a comforter, if only the evil-doers of his time would repent of their misdeeds.”

Legends of the Jews, Chapter 4, Louis Ginzberg

According to the Talmud, one of the names of the Messiah is Menachem, which is equivalent to the word *Tzemach*, Branch. The concealment of Noach’s name parallels that of Yosef, Moshe and Yeshua. The book of Enoch continues to echo the Messianic implications of Noach’s birth,



$$138 = 40 + 8 + 50 + 40$$



$$138 = 8 + 40 + 90$$

“When G-d created Adam, He gave him dominion over all things: the cow obeyed the plowman, and the furrow was willing to be drawn. But after the fall of Adam all things rebelled against him: the cow refused obedience to the plowman, and also the furrow was refractory. Noah was born, and all returned to its state preceding the fall of man.”

The Book of Enoch, Chapter 4

Accordingly, Noach was a prototype of Mashiach, as he was the *Tzaddik HaDor*, the righteous one of his generation. R’ Hayyim Vital (1542 - 1620 CE), the disciple of the Ari, R’ Yitzhak Luria (1534 - 1572 CE), writes,

“...This Noach is the Messiah. . . the two musical accents on the word “zeh [this one]” (Gen 5:29) are a clue to the first and last redemption; “from our work” – from the generation of the

Flood, “and from the toil of our hands” – from this long exile. Furthermore, why is his name doubled, Noach Noach? This is hinted at in the haftorah “Shout for joy” (Zech 2:14-4:7), which concludes “*chen, chen.*” This is the secret of Noah. Had his name been *chen*, we would not be sitting in exile.”²⁹

Sefer Chizyonot, R’ Hayyim Vital, Jewish Mystical Autobiographies, pg. 256

Melchizedek

In the Torah, Melchizedek is a mysterious personality. In the world of the Midrash, he is Shem, the son of Noah. In the Dead Sea Scrolls (11Q13), Melchizedek is seen as an eschatological Messianic figure. According to the work 2nd Enoch, in a section called *The Exaltation of Melchizedek* (Chapters 69-73), Melchizedek is born of a barren woman named Sopanim. According to the text, she conceived him miraculously without having sexual relations with her husband, Nir. This text is of limited value due to scholarly controversy questioning its originality.

Isaac

Perhaps the most famous example of a miraculous birth from the Torah is that of Isaac. Genesis says regarding his mother Sarah,

“Sarai was barren. She had no child.”

Genesis 11:30

²⁹ This text is highly mystical, see our book *The Stone with Seven Eyes* for more on this passage.

Isaac's conception was so miraculous that not even his mother believed it until it happened! Like Noach, a series of miracles took place at his birth, as the *Jewish Encyclopedia* summarizes,

“At that hour, the sick were restored to health, the blind recovered their sight, and the deaf their hearing; the brightness of the sun and of the moon was intensified (Tan., Gen. 37); a spirit of justice began to prevail in the world”

JewishEncyclopedia.com, Isaac, cf. Rashi on Genesis 25:19

The *Shelah*³⁰, R' Isaiah Horowitz (1555 - 1630 CE), comments on the *akeidah*, binding of Isaac, linking him to Adam HaRishon,

“Isaac was the spiritual equivalent of Adam before his sin since he was the first person who was both conceived and born by parents who had sanctified themselves. The removal of Abraham's foreskin repaired the damage Adam had done by sinning and acquiring a קליפה, husk...This may well account for the fact that he was not allowed to leave the holy soil of *Eretz Yisrael* (Genesis 27:2)...When Abraham was about to slaughter Isaac, the latter's soul flew away to be replaced later by a holy spirit from the Celestial Regions. It follows then that Isaac's life after the *akeidah*, **was the life of a human being who had not originated from a drop of semen.** We must view Isaac as someone re-born in consequence of that experience: a totally new creature. G'd had applied the strictest yardstick to him by letting him die, and subsequently infusing

³⁰ Named after his Torah Commentary, *Shney Luchot HaBrit*, the Two Tablets of the Covenant.

him with a new soul. He had also sanctified his body; from that time on, Isaac's body resembled that of Adam HaRishon, also not the product of a drop of semen. Now we understand why the ram which Abraham sacrificed in lieu of Isaac was not the product of natural procreation, i.e. through semen, but was created during the period of dusk on the sixth day of Creation as reported in Avot 5:6.”

Shney Luchot HaBrit, Vayera, Volume 1, translated by Eliyahu Munk, Lambda Publishers, Inc., pg. 111

The Shelah's commentary here is unusual. Why does he mention that this 'new Isaac' did not originate from a drop of semen? He is speaking of spiritual nature, but the question is what is the significance of this 'drop?' We will explain below in chapter 6. The text *Kol HaTor*, Voice of the Turtledove, written by R' Hillel Shklover, a disciple of the Vilna Gaon (1720 - 1797 CE), comments,

“Our forefather Isaac was in the line of the Mashiach ben Yosef from the time he was bound as a sacrifice.”

Kol HaTor 1.23, translated by R' Yechiel Bar Lev and K. Skaist, pg. 22

The parallels between Isaac and Yeshua of Nazareth are numerous. Regarding the wife of Isaac, Rebekah, R' Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev (1740 - 1809 CE) comments,

“Betuel was not the originator of Rivkah, but merely a vessel used by G'd as an intermediary... There is no question that Abraham's major attribute was *chesed*... [and he] personified on earth what the Creator personifies in the entire universe, i.e. the

dispensing largesse. The expression *yuldah* is not appropriate for males, as they only *holid*, beget, plant seed, but do not bring it to gestation. **The proper meaning of the word *yuldah* as it appears here suggests an immaculate birth, a birth that had not been preceded by insemination.** Seeing that this is a difficult process for us to grasp, the idea that Abraham's good deeds spilled over even to people such as Betuel, is meant to set our mind at rest over the fact that Rebekah, with a father such as Betuel, and a brother such as Laban, could have been such a righteous matriarch as she clearly was."

Kedushat Levi on Genesis 24:14, translated by R' Eliyahu Munk, Lambda Publishers, Inc., Volume 1, pg. 126

Jacob

Following the pattern, Rebekah was also barren, like Sarah before her,

"Isaac entreated HaShem for his wife, because she was barren. HaShem was entreated by him, and Rebekah his wife conceived."

Genesis 25:21

The Midrash Rabbah comments,

"R' Judan said in the name of Resh Lakish: She lacked an ovary, whereupon the L-rd fashioned an ovary for her."

Genesis Rabbah 63:5

Jacob's parallels to the Messiah are numerous, and beyond the scope of this book.

Joseph

“HaShem saw that Leah was hated, and he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren...And God remembered Rachel, God listened to her and opened her womb, and she conceived and bore a son...”

Genesis 29:31, 30:22-23

Rachel gave birth to Yosef, through whom all Israel and the world were saved. It is well known that Yosef HaTzaddik is the blueprint for the Mashiach ben Yosef. As Yosef was born of a miracle, so too will Mashiach ben Yosef be born supernaturally. The *Shelah* comments,

“Joseph, in his capacity as the sacred seed of his father, who in turn represented the spiritual beauty of Adam prior to his sin, was truly created בצלם אלוקים, in the image of G'd, because he was not the result of a smelly drop of semen.”

Shney Luchot HaBrit, Vayeshev-Mikketz-Vayigash, Torah Ohr 140, R' Yeshayahu Horowitz, Sefaria.com

As mentioned above, we will cover the spiritual significance of the term “smelly drop” below in Chapter 6, but it is important to note this point for now.

Moses

Like Sarah, whose womb became young again, the Targum speaks of

Yocheved's womb being renewed, as she gave birth to Moshe at the age of 130 years! Targum Yonatan says,

“And Amram, a man of the tribe of Levi, went and returned to live in marriage with Yocheved, his wife, whom he had put away on account of the decree of Pharaoh. And she was the daughter of a hundred and thirty years when he returned to her, but a miracle was wrought in her, and she returned unto youth as she was, when in her minority she was called the daughter of Levi.”

Targum Yonatan to Exodus 2, Sefaria.org

The parallels of Amram's divorcing Yocheved are directly analogous to that of Yosef and Miriam. R' Ari Kahn while commenting on the birth of Moshe, points out the similarities of the traditions of *Chazal*³¹ and the New Testament,

“When one reads the New Testament, a couple of things are obvious. One, is that Christians don't understand it. That's completely obvious. The second point is the reason they don't understand it, the points of reference in the New Testament are Chazal's...when the New Testament was written, they are going to copy all kinds of things that Chazal have to say about what's going on. And especially over here, when you have the birth of the Savior, which Moshe is, when they are going to speak of the birth of the Savior, they are going to try to imitate it, they are going to try to copy it, and every now and then, they are going to try to make it a little bit better...”

³¹ An acronym for *chachameinu zichonram livraka*, our Sages of blessed memory.

R' Ari Kahn, Why was Moshe Chosen, Parsha Shiurim, Podcast, Nov 30, 2012

While it is obvious that R' Kahn is not pro-New Testament, he understands that the New Testament's points of reference are that of the Sages. It is interesting to note that those who have not studied the New Testament deeply believe that the Gospels copied pagan myths, whereas the erudite Torah scholar, R' Ari Kahn (himself a student of R' Yosef B. Soloveitchik), believes the Gospels copied the traditions of the Sages.

Samson

“The angel of HaShem appeared to the woman, and said to her, “See now, you are barren, and don't bear; but you shall conceive, and bear a son.”

Judges 13:3

Interestingly, Rashi cites the birth of Samson in his explanation of Isaiah 7:14, which we will explore below. It may also be of interest that the angel who proclaimed the birth of Samson was named “Wonderful” (פֶּלִי, *paliy*) and the name of the son of Isaiah 9 was named “Wonderful” (פֶּלֵי, *pele*) which is an anagram of אֶלֶף (aleph). Samson was the Mashiach of his generation, as we will explore in a future article, *b'ezrat HaShem* (with HaShem's help).

Obed

The book of Ruth has an unusual phrasing of Ruth's pregnancy by Boaz, the ancestor of David and Messiah,

“So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife; and he went in to her, and HaShem gave her conception, and she bore a son.”

Ruth 4:13

It is important to note that Ruth was married to a son of Naomi, yet remained childless. The unusual phrasing, “HaShem gave her conception” seems to imply that HaShem opened the womb of Ruth. The Midrash says,

“R. Simeon b. Lakish said: She lacked the main portion of the womb, but the Holy One, blessed be He, shaped a womb for her.”

Ruth Rabbah 7:14, Soncino Press Edition

Samuel

“...Hannah was childless...for HaShem had closed her womb...Elkanah knew his wife Hannah and Hashem remembered her...It happened, when the time had come, that Hannah conceived, and bore a son and she named him Samuel, saying, “Because I have asked him of HaShem.”

1 Samuel 1:20

The circumstances surrounding the birth of *Shmuel HaNavi*, Samuel the Prophet, are also echoed in the New Testament. Numerous scholars have compared Hannah and Miriam of Nazareth:

Hannah
(1 Samuel)

My heart rejoices in HaShem, my
horn is exalted in HaShem. *(2:1)*

O Hashem of Hosts, if you will
indeed look upon the affliction
of your maidservant. *(1:11)*

There is none holy as the Lord
for there is none beside You.
(2:2)

Do not boast proudly...the bows
of the mighty men are broken,
and those who stumbled are
girded with strength. *(2:4)*

Those who were full have hired
out themselves for bread and
those who were hungry ceased.
(2:5)

and he shall give strength unto
his king, and exalt the horn of
His Mashiach. *(2:10)*

Miriam
(Luke)

My soul magnifies HaShem,
and my spirit rejoices in God my
Savior. *(1:46)*

For He looked upon the low
estate of his maidservant. *(1:48)*

For the Mighty One has done
great things for me. And holy is
His Name. *(1:49)*

He scattered the proud in the
imagination of their heart. He
put down princes from *their*
thrones, and exalted those of low
degree. *(1:51-52)*

He filled the hungry with good
things, and the rich He sent away
empty-handed. *(1:53)*

He has given help to Israel his
Servant, that He might
remember mercy, as he spoke to
our fathers, toward Abraham
and his seed for ever. *(1:54-55)*

David

While David's mother was not barren, it is said that he was destined to die at birth. When HaShem showed Adam all of the generations, the latter gifted David 70 of these years. Like Miriam of Nazareth and Sarah, Nitzevet, the mother of David, was maligned as an adulteress, and David was thought to be illegitimate. The circumstances surrounding the birth of King David are explored in our article *Mashiach ben David*.

Son of the Shunamite

“Most certainly she has no son, and her husband is old...At this season next year, you will embrace a son...The woman conceived and bore a son...”

2 Kings 4:14

This recurring pattern of miraculous births seems to be integral to the plan of Redemption. Let us explore the *raison d'être*, the reason for the existence of these miraculous birth patterns in the Tanakh.

Ben Sira, Rav Papa & R' Yehuda HaChassid

The Alephbet of Ben Sira brings a case where three individuals were conceived without sexual relations:

“It is written, (Job 9:10) *“Who performs great deeds which cannot be fathomed, And wondrous things without number.”* Come and see how great are the Holy Blessed One's deeds! Since it says, *“Who performs great deeds which cannot be fathomed,”* why does it also say *“And wondrous things without number”*? And since it says *“And wondrous things without number,”* why does it also say *“Who performs great*

deeds which cannot be fathomed? How have the Sages interpreted it? "*Who performs great deeds which cannot be fathomed,*" refers to all the created beings in the world, "*And wondrous things without number,*" refers to the three beings who were born without their parents having mortal sex (שְׁלֹשָׁה שְׁנוּלְדוּ בְּלֹא שְׂכִיבַת הוֹרֵתָן עִם אִמָּם). And these are they: Ben Sira, Rav Papa, and Rabbi Zeira. (The "Yuchasin" brings the matter regarding Rabbi Judah the Pious's father, see further Tzemach David Part 1 1:448) They are all completely righteous ones, and wise, and great Torah scholars. . . And how did their mothers give birth without husbands? They said: Once they went to the bathhouse, and some seed from an Israelite entered their bellies, and they conceived and gave birth from this, without knowing who their fathers were. But Ben Sira's father was known to him! How did his mother give birth without a husband's intercourse? They said about her that she was the daughter of Yirmiyahu."

Otzar HaMidrashim, The Aleph bet of ben Sirah, Sefaria.org

Yochanan HaMatbil (John the Baptist)

There is not only one miraculous birth in the Gospels. It is fascinating that Elisheva (Elizabeth) said to Miriam of Nazareth,

"Now at this time, Miriam set out and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elisheva. When Elisheva heard Miriam's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elisheva was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb!"

Luke 1:39-42, NASB (modified)

This sentiment is repeated later in the Gospel of Luke with a surprising reply from Yeshua,

“While Yeshua was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, “Blessed is the womb that carried You, and the breasts at which You nursed!” But He said, “On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and follow it.”

Luke 11:27-28, NASB (Modified)

Pesikta Rabbati contains strong echoes of this statement,

“As a bridegroom puts on a priestly diadem (Isa. 61:10). This text teaches that the Holy One, blessed be he, will put upon Ephraim, our true Messiah, a garment whose splendor will stream forth from world’s end to world’s end; and Israel will make use of his light and say: Blessed is the hour in which He was created! Blessed is the womb whence he came! Blessed is the generation whose eyes behold him! ...Blessed are the forebears of the man who merited the goodness of the world, the Messiah, hidden for eternity [-to come].”

Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 37, translated by William Braude, Yale University Press, pg. 689

In a fascinating section of the Zohar called *The Yanuka*³², Rabbi Yitzhak and Rabbi Yehudah meet an extraordinary wonder child in the village of Sikhnin³³. The boy displays superhuman messianic

³² Zohar 3:186a-192a, found in the Pritzker Edition, Volume IX, pgs. 245-296.

³³ This city is known in Rabbinic literature to be connected with believers in Yeshua, cf. Tosefta Hullin 2:24, Avodah Zarah 17a, 27b, Kohelet Rabbah 1:8.

abilities and incredible Torah knowledge. When the rabbis are astounded by his insight, they call him, “Son, Angel of YHVH...Beloved son of the blessed Holy One...” To his mother, they exclaim,

“Happy is your share, worthy woman, selected from among all women! For the blessed Holy One has selected your share and raised your banner above all the women of the world.”
Zohar, Yanuqa, translated by Daniel C. Matt, Pritzker Edition, Volume 9, pg. 254

While it is beyond the scope of this book to explore this section in detail, it is interesting that Daniel Matt says in the footnote,

“Cf. Luke 1:42, recording the exclamation of Elizabeth (pregnant with John the Baptist) to Mary (pregnant with Jesus)...”

As Elisheva speaks these words to Miriam, she herself has experienced a miraculous conception. Like Abraham and Sarah, Zechariah and Elisheva were past the age of childbearing. Her womb being closed follows the pattern woven throughout the Tanakh. When told by the angel that he would have a son, Zechariah said,

“How will I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in her years.”... Now after these days his wife Elisheva became pregnant...”
Luke 1:18, 24, NASB (Modified)

What is the significance of being beyond the age of childbearing in this miraculous birth? A Chassidic commentary on the supernatural conception of the Baal Shem Tov reveals the secret.

Baal Shem Tov, R' Yisrael ben Eliezer

It is said of R' Yisrael ben Eliezer (1698 - 1760 CE) known as the *Baal Shem Tov*,

"A soul like that of the Baal Shem Tov comes into this world but once in a thousand years.¹ The soul of the Baal Shem Tov was so lofty that it would have been impossible for it to enter this world if his father had experienced any physical desire.² Therefore, his father was one hundred years old when the Baal Shem Tov was born. His desires had already abated, and the Baal Shem Tov was only conceived with G-d's help.³"

Tzvi Meir Cohn. Divine Light: Baal Shem Tov. BST Publishing. Kindle Edition.

The footnotes say,

“[1] In name of Rabbi Yisrael of Koshnitz (1740 - 1814 CE)

[2] There is a classic teaching, stretching as far back as the Midrash, that the thoughts of the parents during marital relations affect the nature of the children who are born. The soul of the Baal Shem Tov so transcended physicality that he could only be born to elderly parents, individuals who no longer had physical desires. Rashis Chochmah, Shaar HaKedusha Ch. 17

[3] Imrei Noam.”

Tzvi Meir Cohn. Divine Light: Baal Shem Tov. BST Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Chapter Three:

Out of Darkness

The paternity of Yeshua of Nazareth has been questioned for millennia. Insults and accusations have been hurled at him based on

the circumstances of his birth. Incredibly, the same pattern occurred after the miraculous birth of Isaac,

“Since Scripture wrote: “Isaac the son of Abraham,” it had to say: “Abraham begat Isaac,” because the scorners of the generation were saying that Sarah had conceived from Abimelech, for she had lived with Abraham for many years and had not conceived from him. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He shaped the features of Isaac’s face to resemble Abraham’s, and everyone attested that Abraham had begotten Isaac.”

Rashi on Genesis 25:19, Chabad.org

The accusations of being a *mamzer*, an illegitimate son, were also spoken against King David. Why did this happen?

“It is clear in the Sifrei Kabbalah, often when HaShem wants to bring something unbelievable to the world, a great mattanah, a great gift ... He garbs it in ugly and unseemly garb, so to speak, so that the prosecuting forces, which HaKodesh barchu Himself created, can’t stand up and try to prevent it from coming to the world ... so HaKodesh barchu tries to get it under the rug ... so that the prosecuting forces do not realize it. . . that’s Melech HaMashiach. When HaKodesh barchu wants to bring Melech HaMoshiach to the world, He can’t do it in a way where everyone realizes.”

R’ Shalom Rosner, The Murky Roots of Melech HaMoshiach, OU.org

Thus, bringing such an agent of Redemption into the world may be likened to smuggling Bibles into China, or a secret agent rappelling

into a terrorist base in the dark of night. The spiritual authorities of the *Olam Hazeb* (this world system and order) oppose these efforts. Thus, the birth of the Mashiach into the world, like Isaac, like David, would have the appearance of questionable circumstances.

Contrary to the idea that the virginal conception would have made Yeshua more popular, it actually raises more questions. As some theologians have argued, "...a crucified Messiah was hard enough for unbelievers to swallow; should [this] have included the preaching of a virginal conception as well? No...for it [would have] opened Jesus' origins to ridicule and calumny."³⁴ Accordingly, it may be argued that the concept of the virginal conception passes the *criterion of embarrassment*. As such, the idea may have been concentrated among the inner circles of Yeshua's closest followers and only later became more widely known after the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were written.

This also may answer the skeptics who claim that the other writers of the New Testament did not believe in or did not know about the virginal conception of Yeshua since they do not mention it.

This is called an *argumentum ex silentio*, an argument from silence. One must be incredibly cautious when deriving conclusions from silence, as the absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence. One could easily draw the opposite conclusion, that if the other writers disagreed with Matthew and Luke's accounts, they would have written against the virginal conception. Ultimately, this

³⁴ *The Virginal Conception and the Bodily Resurrection*, pg. 61, cited in Matthew: A Commentary, Frederick Dale Bruner, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Volume 1, pg. 38

rationale has been repeatedly disproven and is extremely limited in its proper application. For example, Paul never mentions the immersion of Yeshua and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him. He never mentions Yeshua's cleansing of the Temple nor quotes any of his parables. The First Epistle of John does not mention the resurrection of Yeshua. Are we to infer from this that they knew nothing about these ideas? Of course not.³⁵

It has also been noted that the “epistles are occasional writings, not systematic treatises or Gospels. Why would Jesus’ birth have to be there?”³⁶ Moreover, the American Biblical scholar Frederick Bruner observes,

“...the great differences between Matthew and Luke’s ... stories make their narrow agreement on Jesus’ virginal conception the more striking. The mysterious tradition of the virginal conception, which both Gospel writers adopted as their own...certainly goes back earlier than the two Gospels that now contain [the virginal conception

³⁵ Some have pointed out a few potential veiled references in the New Testament, such as Mark 6:3, which calls Yeshua the “son of Miriam” which does seem a bit unusual in an ancient patriarchal society. However, this is a statement of the crowd and may reflect Joseph’s absence due to his death and a personal familiarity with Miriam of Nazareth. Another example, Paul curiously speaks of Yeshua being “born of a woman” in Galatians 4:4, this is not a reference to the virgin birth, but rather a Hebraism that simply means “a human” in contrast to an angel (Cf. Niddah 13a). Moshe is said to be “born of a woman” (ילוד אשה) in Shabbat 88b (Cf. Job 14:1, Yoma 75b).

³⁶ Matthew: A Commentary, Frederick Dale Bruner, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Volume 1, pg. 38

tradition]. It is thus not a ‘late legend’ created at the end of the first century (Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:221; cf. 214).³⁷

What about the early Jewish believers? Did they believe in a virginal conception? There is a saying, “Where there are two Jews, there are three opinions.”

One group of Jewish believers called the Nazarenes apparently did believe in the miraculous birth of Yeshua³⁸, and maintained their observance of the Torah. Regarding the נַצְרִיִּים Nazarenes, Jerome wrote as follows,

“In our own day, there exists a sect among the Jews throughout all the synagogues of the East, which is called the sect of the Minei, and is even now condemned by the Pharisees. The adherents to this sect are known commonly as Nazarenes; they believe in Christ the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, and they say that He who suffered under Pontius Pilate and rose again, is the same as the one in whom we believe. But while they desire to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither the one nor the other.”

Jerome, Letter 75 to Augustine, circa 404 CE³⁹

³⁷ Matthew: A Commentary, Frederick Dale Bruner, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Volume 1, pg. 39

³⁸ The Nazarenes are mentioned in Epiphanius’s *Panarion* 1.2.29, Jerome’s letter to Augustine, and his commentary on Isaiah 1:3, 12 and Matthew 12:13

³⁹ Letters of Augustine of Hippo, New Advent, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102075.htm>

Another group, named the אביונים *evyonim*, or Ebionites (meaning “poor ones”)⁴⁰, largely rejected the idea, along with Paul, whom they deemed a false apostle. However, some Ebionites *did* believe in the virginal conception, as Origen states,

“...the twofold sect of Ebionites, who either acknowledge with us that Jesus was born of a virgin, or deny this, and maintain that He was begotten like other human beings.”

Origen, Contra Celsus V:61⁴¹

Is there a way that both of these opinions could be true?

⁴⁰ The Ebionites are mentioned in *Against Heresies* (1.26.2, 3.21.1, Origen’s *De Principiis* 6.22, and *Contra Celsus* 2.1, 5.61, Eusebius’s *Church History* 3.27, Epiphanius’s *Panarion* 1.2.30, Hippolytus’s *Refutation of All Heresies* 7.34 and Jerome’s *Letter to Augustine* and his commentary on Isaiah 1:3, 12 and Matthew 12:13.

⁴¹ Origen, *Contra Celsus*, V:61, *New Advent*

Chapter Four:

Isaiah 7 &
The Virgin Birth

Historical Context

There are many points regarding Isaiah 7 that should be examined in this discussion. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address each angle, so we will briefly survey the prophecy,

“HaShem spoke again to Ahaz, saying, “Ask a sign of HaShem your G-d; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt HaShem. He said, Listen now, house of David. Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my G-d also? Therefore HaShem himself will give you a sign.

Behold, **the almah** will conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat butter and honey when he knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land whose two kings you fear shall be forsaken...”

Isaiah 7:10-16

The historical context of this prophecy occurs approximately 700 years before the birth of Yeshua, during the reign of the wicked king Ahaz of Judah. King Rezin of Aram and king Pekah of the northern kingdom of the Ten Tribes conspired to attack Judah, casting fear into the heart of Ahaz. Therefore, a child to be born several centuries later could hardly be a comfort to him. This fact has caused many to object to this as a valid messianic prophecy to the point of claiming that Matthew “painted Jesus into the Tanakh.” The Artscroll commentary to Isaiah says,

“Their intent was to eradicate the royal line of David (R’ M. Eisemann, Artscroll, II Chronicles, Section II to Ch. 27) and appoint the son of Tabeel, who was either an Ephraimite or

Aramean official as the new king of Judah (Ibn Ezra)”
**The Prophets: Isaiah, Milstein Edition, Mesorah
Publications, Ltd., pg. 59**

It is important to note that this was an attack not only against Ahaz, not only against Judah, but a direct assault on the House of David, to “eradicate the royal line of David.” Many commentators note that the prophecy of Isaiah 7 is addressed to the “House of David” and not to Ahaz specifically. Rashi explains that Ahaz had no merit to be mentioned by name in the prophecy, even though it was addressed to him. While this is true, the former point is also relevant, it is addressed to Ahaz *and* the entire House of David. R’ Chaim Dov Rabinowitz writes,

“Other members of the royal family were present at the time, and Isaiah addressed all of them, since none of them had protested Ahaz’s blasphemy. Also, not addressing Ahaz directly was a way of scorning him.”

**Daat Sofrim, R’ Chaim Dov Rabinowitz, translated by
R’ Y. Starret, H. Vagshal Publishing, Ltd., pg. 71**

The prophecy goes on to mention something incredibly unsettling – something that should strike fear into the heart of Judah. While the two kings, Rezin and Pekah, were no threat to Jerusalem nor the House of David, there was an impending danger coming,

“HaShem will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s family days such as have not come since the day Ephraim turned away from Judah: the king of Assyria’s invasion.”

**Isaiah 7:17, The Prophets: Isaiah, Milstein Edition,
Mesorah Publications, ltd., pg. 63**

Who was this Assyrian King? The Artscroll commentary to Isaiah answers,

“Most commentators hold that this powerful Assyrian king is Sennacherib, who rose up against Jerusalem during the days of Ahaz’s righteous son, Hezekiah (Rashi).”

**The Prophets: Isaiah, Milstein Edition, Mesorah
Publications, ltd., pg. 63**

As mentioned in the Talmud above, HaShem wanted to make Sennacherib into Gog and Magog (see Ezekiel 38, Revelation 20:8), and Hezekiah into the Messiah. Here we have the prophecy of the coming invasion of Judah by Sennacherib, who was the *Gog u’Magog* of his generation.

We saw above where Isaiah 9 was disputed to be a future Messianic prophecy because of its historical connections to Hezekiah, and how that interpretation failed to convey the entire picture. The historical objection to Isaiah 9 being messianic is directly analogous to the historical objection of Isaiah 7 being messianic. Isaiah 7 has important implications for future generations. For example, the very next chapter says,

“He will be a sanctuary, but for both houses of Israel, he will be a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Many will stumble over it, fall, be broken, be snared, and be captured.”

Isaiah 8:14-15

Using the historical angle, we know this chapter is rooted in history. However, **the Talmud itself applies this to the Messiah, using the exact methodology and interpretive principles that Matthew used to apply Isaiah 7 to the Messiah,**

“The son of David cannot appear ere the two ruling houses in Israel shall have come to an end, viz., the Exilarchate, in Babylon and the Patriarchate in Palestine, for it is written, ‘And he shall be for a Sanctuary, for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both houses of Israel. (Isaiah 8:14-15).”

Sanhedrin 38a, Soncino Press Edition

The language of chapters 7 through 12 in Isaiah seem to form a cohesive unit that begins with an attack on the Davidic dynasty (Chapter 7-8), fruits into the birth of the Messiah (Isaiah 9), his anointing by the Spirit (Isaiah 11) and culminates in the Messianic Era (Isaiah 12). Isaiah 11 says,

“A shoot will come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of HaShem will rest on him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of HaShem. His delight will be in the fear of HaShem. He will not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor decide by the hearing of his ears.”

Isaiah 11:1-3

Matthew didn't cite Isaiah 7 as a forward-looking proof-text for the virginal conception. He learned of the virginal conception and

searched the Scriptures for the source of this idea. He looked at the prophecy of the birth of the Messiah in Isaiah 9 and looked for connections adjacent to the passage, leading him to the mysterious birth of Immanuel. It is no leap to consider the birth prophesied in chapter 7 to have reached its fulfillment in chapter 9. He is Immanuel of Chapter 7, the Stumbling Stone of Chapter 8, the Prince of Peace of Chapter 9, the one upon whom the Spirit rests in Chapter 11, and the one who will destroy evil in the final war of *Gog u'Magog* as Isaiah says,

“He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips, he will kill the wicked.”

Isaiah 11:4

The Targum interprets this passage as follows,

“...with the speech of His lips, he shall slay Armilus the wicked.”

**Targum Yonatan on Isaiah 11, Sefaria.org,
cf. Revelation 19:15**

Armilus is the name for what Christians call the “Antichrist.” After this, Isaiah 12 says,

“Behold, G-d is my salvation. I will trust, and will not be afraid; for Yah, HaShem, is my strength and song; and he has become my salvation (*yeshu'ah*). Therefore with joy you will draw water out of the wells of salvation (*yeshu'ah*).”

Isaiah 12:2-3

Everywhere that Matthew looked in Isaiah, he saw Yeshua. He saw the Messiah. Moreover, Isaiah specifically says about the children,

“I shall await HaShem, Who has concealed His face from the House of Jacob, and I will hope to Him. **Behold, I and the children whom HaShem has given me are signs and symbols for Israel**, from HaShem, Master of Legions, Who dwells in Mount Zion.”

Isaiah 7:18, The Prophets: Isaiah, Milstein Edition, Mesorah Publications, ltd., pg. 73

These children are SIGNS and SYMBOLS. Not only for then, but for the future. All prophecy has a historical foundation and immediate context whose implications extend to the Messianic Era. Therefore, one may ask the following question: If Isaiah 8, 9 and 11 are interpreted in a Messianic fashion, and each are tied to historical events, what would prevent Isaiah 7 from being interpreted in the same manner? The answer is absolutely nothing.

Almah or Betulah?

Much of the debate focuses on the word *almah*, which is translated in Christian bibles as “virgin” and in Jewish bibles as “young woman.” To some, the word *almah* means simply “young female” with no indication of her virginal or non-virginal status. If one wished to convey the word “virgin” in Hebrew, they would use the word *betulah*. For many, that is the end of the discussion.

First, let us examine this word *betulah*. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* states,

“The biblical *betulah* usually rendered “virgin,” is in fact an ambiguous term which in nonlegal contexts may denote an age of life rather than a physical state. . . the only way that the term “virgin” can be unambiguously expressed is in the negative: . . . “one who has not known a man.” ... In legal contexts, however, *betulah* denotes a virgin in the strict sense.”

The Encyclopedia Judaica, “Virgin, Virginity”, Volume 16, Ur-Z, Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., pg. 159, 1996 Edition

This somewhat muddies the waters in terms of defining *betulah*. The encyclopedia brings several examples from Jewish and other literature from the ancient Near East. In general terms of halacha⁴², *betulah* does connote “virgin”, but there are special considerations involving cases where a female was violated, but still legally considered a virgin. There are also cases where someone could be completely intact but classified as a non-virgin⁴³. Regardless of these nuances, Encyclopedia Judaica’s note that “the only way that the term “virgin” can be unambiguously expressed is in the negative,” is buttressed by the reference to Rivka in Genesis,

וְהַיְנָעַר טֹבַת מְרֵאָה מְאֹד בְּתוּלָה וְאִישׁ לֹא יִדְעָה
הַעֲלָמָה הַיְצִיאת לְשֵׂאב...

“The maiden (*na’ara*) was very beautiful, a virgin (*betulah*),

⁴² Jewish law

⁴³ See the Encyclopedia Judaica’s summary, along with Kiddushin 9b, Yad Chazakah, Issurei Biah 3:6

and no man had known her...the young woman (*ha'almah*) who comes out to draw..."

Genesis 24:16

Interestingly, in this chapter, Rebecca is described as a:

- 1) Na'ara - A Maiden**
- 2) Betulah - A Virgin**
- 3) v'ish lo yada - whom no man had known**
- 3) Ha'Almah - The Young Woman**

As pointed out by the Messianic Jewish scholar Dan Gruber⁴⁴, if the meaning of the word *betulah* were definitive, there would be no need to further elucidate that "no man had known her." Interestingly, Genesis 24 later calls Rivkah the "almah", which the Encyclopedia notes is "somewhat synonymous." With that said, it is not foreign to Judaism to interpret the word *almah* as describing someone who is a virgin. Song of Songs uses the word *עַלְמוֹת* (*alamot*, plural of *almah*) in the following verse,

This commentary of Rashi doesn't mean that the word *almah* means virgin, but that the word can be applied to someone who is a virgin. The laser-beam focus on the word *almah* in the debate between Jews and Christians has caused both sides to miss the beautiful tapestry that Matthew is weaving. This has been a common factor in many religious debates for 2000 years, creating the position of missionaries and anti-missionaries that

⁴⁴ In his book *God, the Rabbis and the Virgin Birth*

Yeshua and Judaism are incompatible, leading the former to create an alternative construct of a religion into which their interpretation of him fits, and the latter to correctly respond to that construct as incompatible with the faith of Israel, but to incorrectly project this onto Yeshua and the New Testament.

Dr. Zhava Glaser points out that the word *almah* is relatively rare, appearing “only seven times in the Hebrew Scriptures, three of these in the plural and four in the singular.”⁴⁵ However, a careful reading of Isaiah reveals that he did not simply use the word “*almah*,” but **העלמה** “*Ha’Almah*” with the definite article (ה). In other words, it doesn’t say “a young woman,” it says “THE young woman.” Who was this young woman? There is debate about her identity,

“The Hebrew definite article ה, the, indicates that Isaiah is referring to a specific woman who was known to them, perhaps even someone who was standing nearby and could be pointed to. According to Rashi, the young woman was Isaiah’s wife; according to Radak, she may have been the wife of Ahaz.”

Isaiah 7:17, The Prophets: Isaiah, Milstein Edition, Mesorah Publications, Ltd., pg. 63⁴⁶

There is a principle: Everything in the Prophets, everything in the Writings, is all concealed within the Torah. If we were to look for a connection to this mysterious young woman, we must look to the Torah for the specific word: “*Ha’Almah*.” Interestingly, **there are**

⁴⁵ Zhava Glaser, *Almah: Virgin or Young Maiden*, September 01 2006, Jews for Jesus

⁴⁶ Abarbanel also says that it is either Ahaz’s wife or his daughter.

only TWO occurrences of the word “Ha’Almah” in the Torah,
the first in Genesis 24:

“I came this day to the spring, and said, ‘HaShem, the G-d of my master Abraham, if now you prosper my way which I go – behold, I am standing by this spring of water. Let it happen, that the maiden (הַעֲלֵמָה, *ba’almah*) who comes out to draw, to whom I will say, “Please give me a little water from your pitcher to drink, and she will tell me, ‘Drink, and I will also draw for your camels’ – let her be the woman whom HaShem has appointed for my master’s son.”

Genesis 24:42-44

The preceding verses describe this *almah* (who is Rebekah, the wife of Isaac), as follows,

“The young lady (*na’arah*) was very beautiful to look at, a virgin (*betulah*), neither had any man known her...”

Genesis 24:16

Therefore the *almah* here is identified as a *betulah*, a virgin, whom no man had known, and she is specifically connected to water (the letter mem) and is appointed for “the Master’s Son.” The second occurrence appears in Exodus 2, in connection to the infancy of the first Redeemer, Moshe Rabbeinu,

“The maiden הַעֲלֵמָה (*ba’almah*) went and called the child’s mother.”

Exodus 2:8-9

It is important to note that *the almah* of Exodus 2:8-9 is named “Miriam.” Rashi then says something curious about the *almah*. He mentions Manoah’s wife, who was barren yet became the mother of Samson (who was born miraculously and was the Mashiach of his generation.) He then says some interpret this sign as if she were incapable of giving birth! Here is the commentary,

“is with child: This is actually the future, as we find concerning Manoah’s wife, that the angel said to her (Judges 13:3): “And you shall conceive and bear a son,” and it is written, “Behold, you are with child and shall bear a son...

Immanuel: [lit. G-d is with us. That is] to say that our Rock shall be with us, and this is the sign, for she is a young girl, and she never prophesied, yet in this instance, Divine inspiration (רוח הקודש) shall rest upon her. This is what is stated below (8:3): “And I was intimate with the prophetess, etc.,” and we do not find a prophet’s wife called a prophetess unless she prophesied. Some interpret this as being said about Hezekiah, but it is impossible, because, when you count his years, you find that Hezekiah was born nine years before his father’s reign. And some interpret that this is the sign, **that she was a young girl and incapable of giving birth.”**

Rashi on Isaiah 7 cited at Chabad.org^{47 48}

⁴⁷ https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/15938/showrashi/true

⁴⁸ It is also interesting to note that Rashi says that “Divine Inspiration” shall rest upon her, in Rabbinic literature, this is called *ruach hakodesh*, and is the lowest form of prophecy. While a different theological concept, the linguistic parallels to Luke are worth noting.

It seems that the young girl of Isaiah 7 experienced miraculous conception within her womb, like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Manoah's wife, and Hannah. Note that the sign that was given to Ahaz was supposed to be something remarkable,

“Ask a sign of HaShem your G-d. Ask it either in the depth or in the height above.”

Isaiah 7:11

When instructed to ask for a sign of HaShem, he declines. In English, it appears that Ahaz is being pious. In fact, the opposite is true. He doesn't ask HaShem because he doesn't believe in Him. The Artscroll commentary says,

“Ask G-d for the most far-fetched sign. Ask for a sign from the depths below, i.e. to bring a dead person back to life, or go up to the heights high above and request that a sign appear in the heavens.”

Isaiah 7:17, The Prophets: Isaiah, Milstein Edition, Mesorah Publications, ltd., pg. 61

This was supposed to be a sign that even the faithless Ahaz would be astounded by. The *Midrash Tehillim* says,

“R' Yochanan taught: To three men – Solomon, Ahaz and the lord Messiah – the Holy One, blessed be He, said, “Ask of me.” To Solomon...” Ask what I shall give you” (1 Kings 3:5). To Ahaz, as is written, “Ask for yourself a sign of the HaShem your G-d: ask it in the depth, or in the height above” (Is. 7:11). Because he shut up and, by not asking, did not let goodness come to the world . . . to the lord Messiah, as is written, “Ask of

Me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession.”

Midrash Tehillim on Psalm 2, translated by William G. Braude, Yale University Press, Book 1, pg. 42

The similarity of the language connects these three passages together. Solomon, Ahaz, and the Messiah. Looking through the lens of these connections on a deeper level, we may summarize Matthew's midrash as follows:

The *almah*, the young woman, whose name is Miriam, is a *betulah*, whom no man had known. She was incapable of giving birth, is connected to the *mem*, and is appointed for the Master's Son, Immanuel, the Prince of Peace.

Chapter Five: Seed of David

The Messiah must descend from David through Solomon, as 2nd Samuel says,

“When your days are fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who shall proceed out of your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men.”

2 Samuel 7:12-14

While Matthew traces Yeshua’s genealogy through Solomon, it may be objected that Luke 3:38 traces Yeshua’s genealogy through Nathan. While it is beyond the scope of this edition to resolve

genealogical difficulties in the Gospels, we will mention a solution from the Zohar in passing,

“You that bring good tidings to Zion” is Hephzibah, the wife of Nathan, son of David, who is the mother of Messiah, Menachem, son of Amiel. She shall go out and bring the tidings and she is part of the general meaning of: “You that bring good tidings to Zion.”

Zohar III:173b, Parashat Shlach Lekha 45:298,

Zohar.com

In Jewish *Aggadah*, the mother of the Messiah is named “Hephzibah,” which means, “My Delight is in Her.” (cf. Isaiah 62:4, cf. 2 Kings 2:11, Sefer Zerubavel). It is remarkable that the Zohar, from the many sons of David, focuses on Nathan, just as the Gospel of Luke does. The source for this Zohar passage was likely Zechariah 12:10-14, which speaks about the death of the Messiah son of Joseph (Sukkah 52a), and specifically mentions the “House of Nathan.” Chabad.org notes the brilliant commentary of R’ Reuven Margolies on this difficult passage in the Zohar:

“The famed 20th-century Jewish scholar and kabbalist Rabbi Reuven Margolies explains that the Zohar is careful to describe the Moshiach as being a descendant of Nathan’s wife, rather than of Nathan himself. Nathan had passed away childless, and Solomon his brother married his widow, according to the laws of *yibum*, levirate marriage. In a levirate marriage, the firstborn son of the widow and the brother of the deceased is considered to be a continuation of the dead husband’s line. Therefore, Moshiach is referred to here as the “offspring” of Nathan, even

though he is a descendant of King Solomon.”

R' Yehuda Shurpin, Is the Messiah a Descendant of King Solomon, Chabad.org

So Luke's genealogy actually does record descent through Solomon via a Levirate marriage. The genealogy of Zerubbabel, the ancestor of the Messiah, has the same contradiction, as the Tanakh lists him as both the son of Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2) and Pedaiah (1 Chron 3:19), who were brothers. Ancient believers offered similar solutions to the two genealogies in the Gospels.

Another genealogical objection is found in the person Jeconiah, an ancestor of Joseph, who was cursed in Jeremiah 22:30,

“Thus says HaShem: ‘Write this man down as childless, A man who shall not prosper in his days; For none of his descendants shall prosper, Sitting on the throne of David, And ruling anymore in Judah.’”

Jeremiah 22:24-29

The ‘problem’ arises in Matthew 1:10, which says,

“...Hezekiah fathered Manasseh, Manasseh fathered Amon, Amon fathered Josiah, and Josiah fathered Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. Then after the exile to Babylon, Jeconiah fathered Shealtiel, Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel...”

Matthew 1:10

Skeptics and anti-missionaries have claimed this disproves the Messiahship of Yeshua. Jewish tradition disagrees. The rabbis tell us in numerous places that Jeconiah was forgiven. Pesikta Rabbati says,

“R. Joshua ben Levi, however, argued as follows: ‘Repentance sets aside the entire decree, and prayer half the decree. You find that it was so with Jeconiah, king of Judah. For the Holy One, blessed be He, swore in His anger, ‘As I live, saith the L-rd, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakhim king of Judah were the signet on a hand, yet by My right’ – note, as R. Meir said, ‘that it was by His right hand that God swore – ‘I would pluck you hence (Jer. 22:24).’ And what was decreed against Jeconiah? That he die childless. As is said, ‘Write this man childless (Jer. 22:40). But as soon as he avowed penitence, the Holy One, blessed be He, set aside the decree, as is shown by Scripture’s reference to ‘The sons of Jeconiah – the same is Assir – Shealtiel his son, etc.’ (1 Chron 3:17). And Scripture says further: ‘In that day...I will take you, O Zerubbabel...the son of Shealtiel...and will make thee as a signet (Haggai 2:23).’ Behold, then, how penitence can set aside the entire decree!

Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 47, translated by William G. Braude, Yale University Press, pgs. 797-798

The Gemara, in Sanhedrin 37b, also notes that “exile atones for everything” and cites the case of Jeconiah as proof, as he was forgiven, and had children while in exile. Numbers Rabbah 20:20 also says that the curse was annulled. Moreover, the Jewish Encyclopedia notes that,

“Jehoiachin’s sad experiences changed his nature entirely, and as he repented of the sins which he had committed as king he was pardoned by G-d, who revoked the decree to the effect that none of his descendants should ever become king (Jer. xxii. 30; Pesi., ed. Buber, xxv. 163a, b); he even became the ancestor of the Messiah (Tan., Toledot, 20 [ed. Buber, i. 140]).”

Jewish Encyclopedia, Entry on Jehoiachin

The *Midrash Tanchuma*, commenting on Zechariah 4:7, says that the Messiah will descend from Zerubavel, the grandson of Jeconiah,

“What does it mean, Who are you, O great mountain? This is King Messiah. And why does he call him “great mountain”? Because he is greater than the Fathers...loftier than Abraham...more elevated than Moses...and higher than the ministering angels...and from whom will he issue? From Zerubbabel...”

Midrash Tanchuma, Toledot 14, ed. Buber 1:139, cited in the Messiah Texts by Raphael Patai, pg. 41

Again, we have seen Jewish tradition prove the Gospels correct, and the skeptics wrong. Yet many persist in continuing this debunked argument. We must ask again, do they not know Jewish tradition, or do they know and not say? Returning to Davidic descent, the Rambam writes,

“...there is no king in Israel except from the House of David and the seed of Shlomo, and anyone who challenges this family denies G-d and the words of His prophets.”

Rambam’s Commentary on Perek Chelek, cited in Otzrot

Acharit HaYamim, When Moshiach Comes, R' Yehudah Chayoun, Targum/Feldheim, pg. 67

It may then be asked, if Yeshua is born of a virgin, how is he the seed of David? This argument presupposes that if Yeshua is born of a virginal conception, then he has no earthly father. If he has no earthly father, according to Numbers 1, he is without a tribe, and without the paternal lineage necessary to receive the Throne of David. Therefore cannot be the Messiah. The Gospels contradict this claim. Yeshua is referred to as the “son of David” in the following passages,

- *In Zechariah’s Song – Luke 1:69*
- *By the blind man at Jericho – Matthew 9:27; Mark 10:47*
- *By the ‘Canaanite’ Woman – Matthew 15:22*
- *By the questioning crowd - Matthew 12:23*
- *By the massive crowd at the Triumphal Entry – Matthew 21:15*
- *By the Apostle Peter – Acts 2:25*
- *By the Apostle Paul – Acts 13:22; Romans 1:3; 2nd Timothy 2:8*
- *By the Apostle John – Revelation 5:5; 22:16*

The Apostle Paul writes,

“...concerning his Son, who was born of the seed (σπέρμα, *sperma*) of David according to the flesh.”

Romans 1:3

The Greek word for “seed” in this passage corresponds to the Hebrew זרע (*zerah*). The Rambam writes,

“...a man will arise who was unknown prior to his revealing himself, and the signs and wonders that will appear by his hand are proof of his true genealogy.”

Iggeret Teiman, cited in Otzrot Acharit HaYamim, When Moshiach Comes, R’ Yehudah Chayoun, Targum/Feldheim, pg. 69

There is an interesting question brought up in the Talmud,

“...a High Priest, son of a High Priest, requires anointing, but one does not anoint a king, son of a king. And if you say: ‘For what reason did they anoint King Solomon (see I Kings, chapter 1), who was the son of a king? It was due to the challenge of Adonijah.’”

Horayot 11b, William Davidson Talmud, Sefaria.org

The *Yismach Moshe*, Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum (1759 – 1841 CE), points out a difficulty here. If a king who is the son of a king, does not require anointing, why will the King Messiah need to be anointed? He answers,

“This midrash (on Psalm 2:7) implies that they will not recognize him or know him, or else they would honor him, but because they will not recognize him, how will they know he is the Son of David? Therefore he needs to be anointed. This resolves the difficulty that we do not anoint a king that is the

son of a king...He will become a new creation that has never before been seen within the human species, which makes it appear that he is not from the seed of Adam or from the seed of David, therefore he needs to be anointed.”

**Yismach Moshe cited in Torah Club: Shadows of Messiah,
Volume 2, Parashat Ki Tisa, First Fruits of Zion, pg. 480**

The appearance of the Mashiach will make it seem as if he is not human, or at least not from the seed of David. Before we offer a solution, let us study the concept of the “Counsel of the Serpent.”

Chapter Six:

Counsel of the Serpent

Ritual Purity

In the Torah, especially in the book of Leviticus, we learn of the laws of *tohorot*, ritual purity. Out of the six orders of the Mishnah, an entire section is dedicated to these laws. In general, most of these laws are only in effect when the Temple is standing, as one cannot enter God's sanctified space while in a state of *tumah* (ritual impurity). Without the Holy Temple, these laws are often misunderstood in today's society.

One common misconception is that it is sinful to be unclean, or in a state of ritual impurity. In fact, every person alive today is ritually impure because of contact with a dead body, or contact with someone who has touched a dead body. While a variety of events can cause impurity, the ultimate source of ritual impurity⁴⁹ is death itself. And death is caused by sin. Thus, in Torah math, ritual impurity is caused by death, which is caused by sin⁵⁰.

The Torah's antidote to ritual impurity is the Red Heifer, as R' Zalman Baruch Melamed explains,

“A more profound understanding of the Red Cow calls for seeing it not only as a vehicle for rectifying the state of impurity, but as a means for effecting the very source of the impurity – death itself. The purpose of the Red Cow is to rid the world of death, and in order to accomplish this the very source of death must be disposed of.”

Rabbi Zalman Baruch Melamed, *A Red Cow and a Golden Calf*⁵¹

Like cold is the absence of heat, so too death is the absence of life. What would you think is more “spiritually unclean”? A dead dog, or a dead human? R' Shraga Simmons says,

⁴⁹ Called *Avi Avot Ha Tumah*, אבי אבות הטומאה.

⁵⁰ The wages of sin is death - Romans 6:23. Cf. Shabbat 55a: “There is no death without sin.”

⁵¹ Rabbi Zalman Baruch Melamed, *A Red Cow and a Golden Calf*, Parashat Chukat, Yeshiva.co

“Most people would think a dog is more “spiritually unclean” because it is a lower form of existence than a human being. Actually, the dead body of a human being contains a much greater degree of “Tuma.” Because the human being, when it is alive and filled with a soul - the open manifestation of God’s presence - has a much greater condition of Tahara. The manifestation of Godliness within a human being is far greater than that within an animal. Therefore, when the soul departs, it leaves behind a much greater vacuum of Tahara, a much stronger Tuma, than that of an animal.”

R’ Shraga Simmons, Spiritually Pure, Aish.com

This answer provides a key to unlock a difficult passage in Parashat Tazria, in Leviticus 12, that says that a woman who gives birth to a boy will be unclean for seven days, plus an additional thirty-three days, for a total of forty days. However, if she gives birth to a girl, the time is doubled: fourteen days, plus an additional sixty-six days, for a total of eighty. Why does a baby girl cause twice the ritual impurity of a baby boy? At first glance, this may even seem misogynistic. It is actually the opposite, as R’ Simmons says,

“The reason (the mother becomes) *tameh* is that a degree of spiritual vacuum is created by the departure of the extra life within her - the child. It is interesting that when a woman gives birth to a girl, her state of “Tuma” is twice that of when she gives birth to a boy (Leviticus 12:5). That is because the presence of a female child within her gives her a greater state of “tahara.” The female bears within her the power to give life, a condition that is an open manifestation of Godliness,

and a higher level of “tahara.” The departure of a female child, therefore, creates a greater spiritual vacuum. Hence, the woman is tameh for a longer period of time.”

R’ Shraga Simmons, Spiritually Pure, Aish.com

It is fascinating to consider that the female baby within the womb of her mother *already* has her eggs inside of her ovaries. In a certain sense, this means that a mother of a daughter is actually carrying her grandchildren. When a daughter is born and reaches puberty, she will begin menstruation, which is the shedding of the eggs within her ovaries, a consequence of Eve’s disobedience in the Garden⁵². The Sages say that if Adam and Eve had not sinned, childbirth would be markedly different than how we experience it today. Conception and delivery would occur almost instantaneously, and completely without pain. However, the menstruation process renders the woman⁵³ unclean according to Leviticus,

“If a woman has a discharge, and her discharge in her flesh is blood, she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening.”

Leviticus 15:19

The reason for this *tumah* is the loss of potential of life, as each egg had the potential to become a human being. This is paralleled in the male who experiences an emission,

⁵² Genesis 3:16

⁵³ A woman experiencing her menstrual cycle is called a נדה ‘niddah’.

“If any man has an emission of semen, then he shall bathe all his flesh in water, and be unclean until the evening.”

Leviticus 15:16

Parallel to the woman shedding her eggs, the emission of seminal fluid makes a person ceremonially unclean, because there is a loss in the potential for life, as each spermatozoon had the potential to become a human being. On a certain level, this loss of the potential of life is comparable to death. In fact, the Sages liken ‘spilling of the seed’ to murder⁵⁴. Yet the Torah also says that intercourse causes ritual impurity,

“If a man lies with a woman and there is an emission of semen, they shall both bathe themselves in water, and be unclean until the evening.”

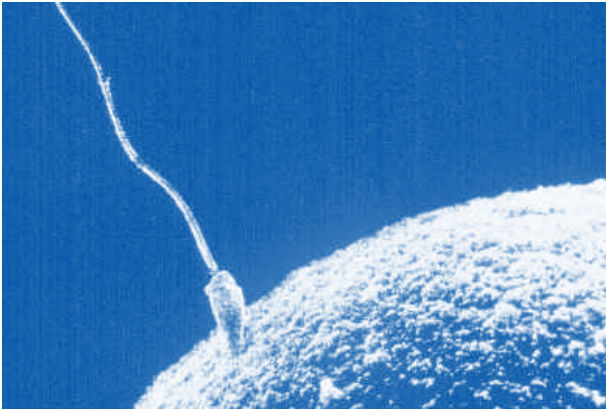
Leviticus 15:18

This presents a difficulty. If intercourse results in conception of a new life, why are both male and female still unclean? From a scientific perspective, sperm and seminal fluid are two separate things. Seminal fluid is merely the vehicle for the sperm to reach the egg. On average, during intercourse, 100 million spermatozoa enter the womb. **Yet only one fuses with the egg.** Thus millions of sperm die in the process, bringing us back to the problem: Death.

This brings us to the concept of שֵׁל נָחָשׁ (et'yo shel nachash), the *Counsel of the Serpent*.

⁵⁴ Niddah 13a-b. See also *Mishneh Torah*, Issurei Biah 21:18

Science of the Seed



Pirkei Avot says,

עֲסִבְיָא בְּן מַהֲלָלֵאל אוֹמֵר...
דַּע מֵאַיִן בָּאתָ... מֵאַיִן בָּאתָ, מִטְּפָה סְרוּחָה

Akavia ben Mahalalel said, “Know from where you come...
from where do you come? A putrid drop.”

Pirkei Avot 3:1

This “putrid drop” is semen, but why has the seed within man become “putrid”? It is important to know that this is a spiritual, not a physical concept. The *Shelah* says,

“Man unfortunately did not even manage to spend a single night in Gan Eden before he sinned... ever since, new generations of man are the product of the smelly drop of semen, i.e. semen which is polluted by the residual pollutant of

the original serpent.”

**R' Yeshayahu Horowitz, Shnei Luchot HaBrit, Ki Teytze,
Volume 3, pg. 1181**

The word for “smell” in Hebrew is רִיחַ *reiach*, which is linked etymologically to the word רוּחַ *ruach*, spirit. The seed of man has become contaminated with the spiritual pollutant of the serpent called *the “Counsel of the Serpent”* (עֵטִיו שֶׁל נָחָשׁ) (etyo shel nachash).⁵⁵

R' Avraham Saba (1440 - 1508 CE), writes in *Tzror HaMor*,

“By [Adam] calling her Chava, he alluded to the future, because having herself seduced by the serpent⁵⁶, she would forever be remembered as the mother of all future sin. In Psalms 51:7, David describes himself as having been conceived in sin...He does not refer to his biological mother, but to the mother of all mankind, Chavah, reminding G'd that all human beings ever since have been conceived in sin...[Moses] also refers to the phenomenon this very human being carries within it, this pollutant implanted in Chavah, and that in the final analysis, this is what makes him prone to the “one who will seduce you.”

**Tzror HaMor, R' Avraham Saba, Parashat Re'ay,
translated by R' Eliyahu Munk, Lambda Publishers, Inc.,
Volume 5, pgs. 1881-1882**

⁵⁵ The Messiah is specifically linked to a holy sense of smell in Isaiah 11:3 and throughout Rabbinic literature.

⁵⁶ This should be understood spiritually, not literally or physically.

It is important to note that the Counsel of the Serpent causes a physical, not spiritual, death penalty (contrary to Catholic doctrine)⁵⁷. Only one's own sins without repentance would merit a spiritual death penalty. But if every child born into the world has this physical death penalty as a result of Adam's sin, then how will the Messiah accomplish his function of destroying death?⁵⁸

To destroy death, the Messiah must be free from its power. This would mean that not only would the Messiah need to be sinless, but he would need to be free from the Serpent's Counsel, the spiritual pollutant transmitted through the putrid drop, which has come into contact with death.

If Yeshua had a death penalty that he had to pay for himself, he would be unable to become the "exchange" for all mankind. All sin is likened to debt, and if the Messiah were in debt, he could not pay the debts of others. However, being the Mashiach, on the level of Adam before the fall, he had no death penalty, no debt to pay for himself.

With that said, not only would a sinless life of complete obedience to the Torah be necessary to repair the world, but it would also require a miraculous birth that would circumvent the transmission of the serpent's counsel.

It is possible that a virginal conception, via a miraculous "in vitro fertilization" of one special spermatozoon, could avert the transmission of ritual impurity and prevent the transference of the serpent's spiritual pollutant.

⁵⁷ The concept of the Messiah as the "Holy Snake" who neutralizes the venom and counsel of the evil serpent is explored in our book *The Secret of the Holy Snake*.

⁵⁸ Isaiah 25:8

Some have argued that Jewish law does not permit in vitro fertilization, but this objection fails on multiple points. First, we are speaking about a miracle, not the modern medical process. Secondly, the modern process **is permitted** by a majority of *poskim* (halachic authorities).⁵⁹ The only real halachic issue with the modern process is that of ‘wasting seed’, which poses no problem in this scenario. In a fascinating statement regarding in vitro fertilization, one source summarized the halacha as follows,

“It would, therefore, appear to be unanimously accepted that there is no fundamental requirement in Jewish law that reproduction take place in a purely natural manner.”

Daniel B. Sinclair, Assisted Reproduction in Jewish Law, 30 Fordham Urban Law Journal 71 (2002)

A miraculous conception is not against halacha. Judaism is replete with miraculous births, as we have shown above. However, we do not know the exact process that HaShem used to bring Mashiach to the world. We cannot test this idea in a laboratory, using the scientific method, therefore this remains theoretical. We do know that HaShem is not physical. He has no boundaries, no limits, and no physical body. If this is the case, from what source did HaShem procure this single sperm?

⁵⁹ Avraham Steinberg, Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics, pgs. 151-154

It may be conjectured that he took it from Yosef of Nazareth. This would explain the Gospels attributing Yosef's genealogies⁶⁰ to Yeshua. If Yeshua had no physical connection to Yosef, then it would seem that the genealogies serve no purpose. The argument that Yeshua could have inherited the Davidic lineage via adoption by Yosef has several objections. If a *kohen*, a priest, adopted a son, the son could not become a kohen. It seems highly unlikely that a Davidic king could become a legitimate king by mere adoption. The arguments for the requirement of a patrilineal Davidic descent are extremely strong. This solution satisfactorily solves the problem.

However, one may object that the Gospels imply otherwise, as Matthew says,

“Jacob became the father of Joseph, the husband of Miriam, from whom was born Yeshua, who is called Messiah.”

Matthew 1:1

This statement does not exclude our potential solution. The fact that it does not say “Yosef begat Yeshua” like the preceding verses presents no problem, as he was not the one to deliver the seed, as we have just explained. In fact, perhaps this is a certain level of fulfillment of the words of Psalm 2,

“I will tell of the decree: HaShem said to me: ‘You are My son, this day have I begotten you.’”

Psalms 2:7

⁶⁰ The ancient belief is that both the genealogies of Matthew and Luke belong to Yosef. This is possible through *yibbum*, Levirate marriage. We explore the genealogies at www.ladderofjacob.com.

Luke's Gospel also contains a problematic statement,

“Yeshua himself, when he began to teach, was about thirty years old, being the son (ὡς ἐνομίζετο, as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Eli...”

Luke 3:23

The problematic wording is “as was supposed.” It may be a stretch, but the traditional way this passage has been read can be understood in the exact reverse. He was, just as was supposed, the son of Yosef. The Greek word *nomizo*, comes from the word *nomos*, law. **It does not say that he was not the son of Yosef, as was supposed.** This seems to solve the problem of how Yeshua could be born of a virgin while fulfilling the requirements of patrilineal Davidic descent, being of the literal seed of David. This would also solve the issue of the *Counsel of the Serpent*, and allow Yeshua (along with his perfectly sinless life) to overcome death.

One may then ask, if so, then why was he killed? And doesn't Yeshua's death disprove claims that he is the Messiah, as the Rambam writes in his *Hilchot Melachim* (Laws of Kings), Chapter 11,

“If [the potential messiah] did not succeed to this degree or was killed, he surely is not the redeemer promised by the Torah.”

**Rambam, Melachim uMilchamot – Chapter 11,
translated by Eliyahu Touger, Chabad.org**

The answer is twofold. One, Rambam refers to Mashiach ben David, who will not be killed. Mashiach ben Yosef, however, does die in the process of Redemption. Yeshua was not in the role of Mashiach ben David when he died, but in the role of Mashiach ben Yosef. When Yeshua returns, he will be in the role of Mashiach ben David. However, the second point to the Rambam's statement is this, even in the role of Mashiach ben Yosef, Yeshua was not killed. He laid down his life willingly,

“Therefore the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. **No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down by myself.** I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father.”

John 10:17-18

Yeshua said, “No one takes it from me,” not even the Angel of Death, as it has no power over him. Even Moses had to die because of the counsel of the serpent (Deuteronomy Rabbah 9:9). If he had a normal birth via the putrid drop, the counsel of the serpent would have prevented him being completely free from any blemish. He would only be on the level of the individuals who never sinned in their lives, but still died because of the counsel of the serpent,

“For, indeed, *“there is not a righteous man upon earth that does good and sins not”* (Eccl. 7:20). And even the sinless ones who only died because of the “counsel of the Serpent” will arise and be counselors to the Messiah.”

Zohar II:54a, Soncino Press Edition

If these individuals are counselors to the Messiah, then the Messiah is greater than they are. Because he was born in this unique way, combined with the life of ultimate obedience that he lived, he merited to be the ultimate Tzaddik. His death initiated the process of the death of death, and the rebirth of the world: the *Olam Haba*. Isaiah says,

“He will swallow up death in victory! HaShem Elohim will wipe away tears from all faces, and shall take away the rebuke of his people from all the earth, for HaShem has spoken it.”

Isaiah 25:8

The Midrash Rabbah interprets this verse as a messianic prophecy,

“...when G-d created His world, there was no Angel of Death in the world...Messiah would arise, and in his days G-d would cause death to be swallowed up, as it says, “He will swallow up death forever.”

Exodus Rabbah 30:3, Soncino Press Edition

When sin is removed, death is destroyed. When death is destroyed, the door to the *Olam Haba*, the World to Come, opens. The Ben Ish Chai says,

“The word דלת, “door,” is also the spelled-out letter dalet. The two Temple gates, or doors, that stuck together allude to the two dalets that stuck together to form the end mem, which appears unexpectedly in the middle of לַמַּרְבֵּה, *lemarbeh*, describing the sovereignty of the Messiah (Isaiah 9:6). At last King Solomon said, “Remember the good deeds of David your

servant.” Then the Temple doors opened, alluding to the opening of the end mem of לַמַּרְבֵּה to form the two dalets of דָּוִד “David.” ... When the mem opens, the Davidic Messiah will reign...”

Ben Ish Chai, Ben Yehoyada, Days of Peace, Yeshivat Ahavat Shalom Publications, pg. 133

He continues,

“The two dalets of that come from diagonally cutting the closed mem of לַמַּרְבֵּה, *lemarbeh*, come to rectify the sin of Adam and Eve...”

Ben Ish Chai, Od Yosef Chai, Days of Peace, Yeshivat Ahavat Shalom Publications, pg. 134

Chapter Seven:
The Ascension

Returning to the Source

As we have traveled full circle through the *Closed Mem*, we now return to the Beginning. We must reexamine the miniature mem in the word *moqdash* concealed in Parashat **Tzav**,

“It is an offering that ascends upon the pyre (*moqdash*) of the Altar. . .”

Leviticus 6:2

מוֹקְדָּשׁ

"Pyre"

Remember that translating the word עולה (*olah*) as “burnt offering” obscures the meaning of the Hebrew, which literally means ‘that which ascends,’ and is related to the word עליה (*aliyah*), meaning ‘ascent, to go up.’ Thus the letter Mem is connected to the concept of ascension. Remarkably, the book of Acts says that Yeshua ascended from the Mount of Olives after forty days of physically appearing to the disciples,

“After his suffering, he showed himself alive by many infallible proofs, being seen by them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father... And when he had spoken these things, while they watched, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.”

Acts 1:3

Knowing that Yeshua died on Passover, this would place his ascension around *Mem b'Omer*, the Fortieth Day of the Omer, during the time called *Sefirat HaOmer*, the Counting of the Omer. As we learned, the letter מ (mem) has a numerical value of 40. It is also possible that he ascended sometime after that, possibly as late as the 42nd of the Omer⁶¹, still within the week of the 40s.

It is fascinating that Yeshua ascended during the time of Sefirat HaOmer because this season is all about breaking off layers of physicality and elevating through 7 weeks to the level of the 8 (Infinity), that of Mount Sinai. The 49 days to Shavuot are a smaller-scale fractal of the 49 years to the Jubilee (which itself is a smaller-scale fractal of a larger pattern). The gematria of Sinai and Sulam (Ladder) are the same, thus “Sinai” equals the “Ladder of Jacob.”

As Yeshua ascended, he was concealed by a cloud (Luke 24, Acts 1), hidden from the view of the disciples. Ever wonder what happened on the other side of the cloud? Interestingly, the book of Daniel picks up the view on the other side,

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all

⁶¹ 42 would also have significant meaning and parallels in Torah literature.

peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Daniel 7:13-14

R' Chaim Vital, the disciple of the Arizal, wrote in a text called *Arba Meiot Sheqel Kesef*,

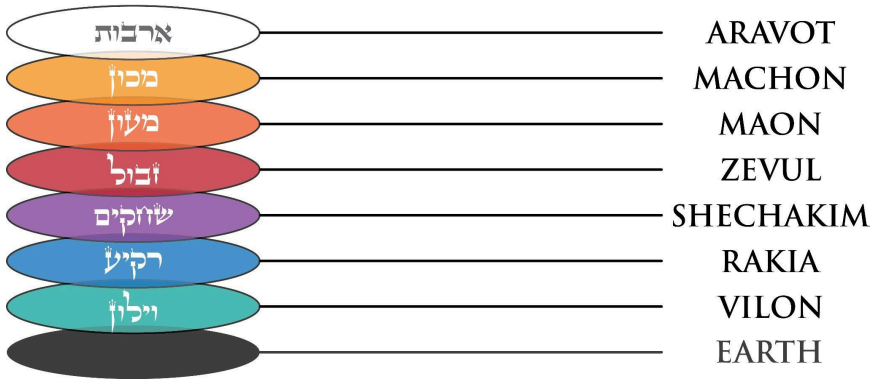
"Just as we find that Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to heaven, body and soul, and remained there for forty days, similarly Moshiach will, through the help of the Almighty, merit to attain that lofty soul. He will then realize he is in fact Moshiach, although no one else will be aware of this. This is the secret to which the Zohar alludes, 'Moshiach will be revealed, yet no one will perceive him.' Shortly afterward, Moshiach will be hidden away, body and soul...Moshiach will thereupon rise up to heaven just as Moshe ascended to the firmament, and will subsequently [return and] be revealed completely for all to see. The entire Jewish people will then perceive him and flock towards him."

R' Chaim Vital, *Arba Meiot Sheqel Kesef*, pg. 68, cited in *And He Will Redeem Us, Moshiach in Our Time*, compiled and edited by Chayalei Beis Dovid, Mendelsohn Press, Inc., pgs. 134-135

It seems that as Yeshua ascended through the seven heavens, known in Jewish literature as Vilon, Raqia, Shekhaqim, Zevul, Maon, Machon, Aravot, he underwent a further transformation and

glorification, even beyond that of his higher-dimensional body after the resurrection.

SEVEN HEAVENS CHAGIGAH 12B



This refined body is called *Guf Dak*, or as the Zohar⁶² calls it the "Chaluka D'Rabbanan"⁶³. The Jewish text named *Sefer HaHeikhalot*⁶⁴ may contain a glimpse of what happened to Yeshua,

"As soon as the Holy One, blessed be He, took me in (His) service to attend the Throne of Glory and the Wheels (Galgalim) of the Merkaba and the needs of Shekina, forthwith my flesh was changed into flames, my sinews into flaming fire, my bones into coals of burning juniper, the

⁶² Zohar 1:66a

⁶³ Lit. "Garment of the Sages"

⁶⁴ Also dubbed "3rd Enoch."

light of my eye-lids into splendor of lightnings, my eye-balls into fire-brands, the hair of my head into dot flames, all my limbs into wings of burning fire and the whole of my body into glowing fire...After all this, the Holy One, blessed be He, made for me a throne like the throne of glory, and he spread over it a coverlet of splendor, brilliance, brightness, beauty...The Holy One blessed to me from that time onward all the mysteries of wisdom, all the depths of the perfect Torah, and all the thoughts of men's hearts. All the mysteries of the world and all the orders of nature stand revealed before me as they stand revealed before the Creator. . . I looked and beheld deep secrets and wonderful mysteries. Before a man thinks in secret, I see his thought. Before he acts, I see his act. There is nothing in heaven above or deep within the earth concealed from me...Out of the love which he had for me, more than for all the denizens of the heights, the Holy One, blessed be he, fashioned for me a majestic robe in which all kinds of luminaries were set, and he clothed me in it. He fashioned for me a kingly crown in which 49 refulgent stones were placed, each like the sun's orb, and its brilliance shone into the four quarters of the heaven of 'Arabot, into the seven heavens, and into the four quarters of the world. He set it upon my head and called me, "The lesser YHWH" in the presence of his whole household in the height, as it is written, "My name is in him."

The Book of Enoch by R' Ishmael the High Priest, Chapters 15: 1, 10:1, 11:13, 12:1-5, translated by Hugo Odeberg, Cambridge, 2928, cited in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, edited by James H. Charlesworth, Hendrickson Publishers, pgs. 263-257

This passage has numerous parallels in Rabbinic literature and the New Testament. Thus we see in Revelation 1,

"I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned, I saw seven golden *menorot*, and among the *menorot* was someone like a Son of Man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever!"

Revelation 1:12-17

Chapter Eight:
The Closing
of the Mem

We have not addressed every nuance and detail of this controversial discussion. However, we have seen:

1. **There are no virgin births in paganism that influenced the Gospels.**
2. **The birth narratives of the Gospels are patterned on the miraculous births of Jewish tradition.**
3. **Isaiah 7 can be interpreted as referring to the Messiah, and some interpret that *the almah* cannot give birth, and this would be miraculous like the birth of Samson.**
4. **The prophecy in Isaiah 7 links to Genesis 24 and Exodus 2.**
5. **The almah's name is Miriam (Exodus 2:8) who is a virgin, whom no man has known (Genesis 24:16)**
6. **The letter mem is womb, which, if closed, is incapable of birth.**
7. **The closed mem is in Isaiah 9:5-6, which is the birth prophecy of the Messiah.**
8. **An “in vitro fertilization” may bypass the “counsel of the Serpent” which transmits via the “putrid drop.”**

9. Jewish mysticism refers to the birth of the Messiah from the Shekhinah in similar terms.

In the Book of Nehemiah, another unusual *mem* appears,

“I went out by night by the valley gate, even toward the jackal’s well, and to the dung gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, *which were broken down* (הַמְּפֹרָצִים), and its gates were consumed with fire.”

Nehemiah 2:13

The word הַמְּפֹרָצִים (haimprutzim) should be written הֵם פְּרוּצִים (heim prutzim). The mem should be closed, but it is broken open, meaning that the walls of Jerusalem have been breached open by her enemies. Shmais comments,

“...if that which is closed is opened...so that the mem of *l’marbeh* becomes open, then the open letter mem appearing at the end of the word ham in the phrase *chomos Yerushalayim asher beim portzim* – ‘the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down,’ will be closed on all sides.”

Living with Moshiach #1131, Shmais.com⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Living with Moshiach #1131, Shmais.com

This refers to the rebuilding of Jerusalem as the everlasting capital of Israel and the world by the hand of the King Messiah.⁶⁶ Thus, the one who opens the Closed Mem will close the Open Mem. On this the Tzemach Tzedek comments:

“Our Sages teach that when an unborn infant is in his mother’s womb, ‘his mouth is closed and his navel is open, ...and as soon as he encounters the air of the world, that which is closed opens and that which is open closes.’ Now, exile is likened to pregnancy and the Redemption is likened to birth, as it is written, ‘For Zion has been in labor, and has given birth to her children.’ At the time of birth, then, which is the Redemption, ‘that which is closed opens’ – an allusion to the [currently] closed letter mem of *l’marbeh* [in the verse which foretells the imminent rule of Mashiach], and ‘that which is open closes’ – an allusion to the [currently] open letter mem of ham [in the verse which speaks of the still-breached walls of Jerusalem].”

Or HaTorah – Nach, pg. 184 cited in Living with Moshiach #1131, Shmais.com⁶⁷

The Messiah was born into the world via a virgin - the crowning miracle of the supernatural births of Jewish history - in order to completely restore and rebuild Jerusalem below, and unite her with the Jerusalem above. To accomplish this, he must not only rebuild the walls of Jerusalem but rebuild the broken walls of the human

⁶⁶ See Radak on Isaiah 9:6:

למרבה המשרה. המ"ם סתומה בכתוב, וקרי במ"ם פתוחה ובהפך זה בעזרא המ"ם פרוצים, מ"ם פתוחה בסוף התיבה, בכתוב, ויש בו דרש כאשר יסתמו חומות ירושלים שהם פרוצים כל זמן הגלות ולעת הישועה יסתמו הפרוצים ואז תפתח המשרה שהיא סתומה עד מלך המשיח

⁶⁷ Living with Moshiach #1131, Shmais.com

soul, poisoned by the serpent's venomous counsel. He accomplishes this by removing sin, thus destroying death. He comes to restore Israel and repair the universe. HaShem invites us to partner with the Mashiach in this task, as Isaiah says,

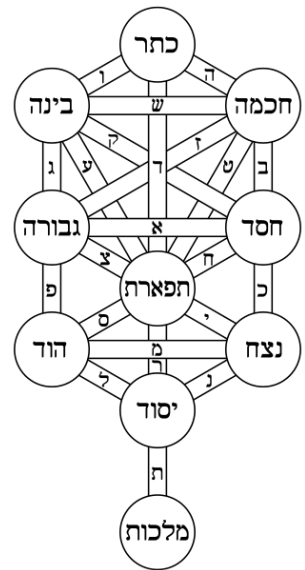
“Those who shall be of you shall build the old waste places. You shall raise up the foundations of many generations, and you shall be called The Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Paths to dwell in.”

Isaiah 58:11

Bonus Chapter:
Mystical Mirrors

[Note: This chapter requires some background in Jewish mysticism. It is beyond the scope of this chapter (and beyond the author) to elucidate the mystical concepts of the Sefirot and Partzufim.]

It is possible to read the birth accounts in the Gospels as a Sod-level mystical treatise, reflecting the upper worlds of the Partzufim and Sefirot. In a mystical sense, the Female who gives birth to the Messiah is the *Shekhinah*, the *Knesset Yisrael*, the *Sefirah Malchut*. One may see in the Gospel accounts a reflection of the Sefirot, with Miriam continuing the role of *Rachel Immeinu*, representing the “Virgin Daughter of Israel.” This is not literal, but symbolic language, similar to the Zohar’s beautiful allegory. For example, the Zohar comments on the birth of the *Trein Meshichin*⁶⁸, the Twin Messiahs,



⁶⁸ *Trein Meshichin* is Aramaic for the Two Messiahs.

“The Faithful Shepherd said, “At that time (there will come) pangs and pains upon the woman in childbirth, that is, the Shekhinah ... And through these pains, which will make her cry out, seventy supernal Sanhedrins will be aroused, until her voice reaches the L-rd ... And from those voices which she gives forth ... her womb opens — and her womb consists of two houses – to give birth to two Messiahs ... and she bends her head between her knees; her head is the Middle Column and her two thighs are Eternity and Majesty ... and from there are born two Messiahs. In that time the forests will be denuded, and the Serpent will pass from the world.”

Zohar, Ra'aya Mehemna, 3:67b-68a, cited in the Messiah Texts, Raphael Patai, pgs. 129-130

An unusual Kabbalistic text, highlighted by the eminent Jewish scholar Isaiah Tishby, says,

“Now the remembrance [in its ordinary sense] is a hidden reference to the beginnings of conception and the months of pregnancy with the Messiah, when Yesod remembers Rachel and visits and impregnates her, and when that holy seed is absorbed, which reveals light in the world in body and soul here below while the spirit of the Messiah, with regard to whose body here below it was said: “The spirit of wisdom will rest upon him’ etc., is still hidden in the womb of Ima, in the hidden meaning of the closed *mem* in *lemarbeh hamisrah* [‘of the increase of government...’], until there takes place there the nine months’ gestation alluded to in the *tikkunim* (Zohar Chadash 5d)...and then she ‘like a woman with child, when she is near her time, will cry out, writhing in pains’ (Isaiah 26:17).”

**MS Jerusalem 1466, fo 215, cited in Messianic Mystics,
Isaiah Tishby, The Littman Library of Jewish
Civilization, pgs. 267-268**

Another text called *Sefer HaMeshiv* (a text that is hostile to Christianity), nonetheless speaks of the Sefirot in language reminiscent of the Gospels. Tishby writes,

“In my opinion, the author of *Sefer HaMeshiv* gave a Kabbalistic interpretation to the immaculate conception by the virgin and the Holy Spirit when he equated the idea of a virgin with the Shechinah, mother of the two messiahs, an idea, already expressed in the Zohar. This affords a better understanding of another statement in *Sefer HaMeshiv*:

“The open letter mem is an allusion to Binah and the closed letter mem has another meaning. It is an allusion to Malchut.”

This also represents a departure from the symbolism of the Zohar, where the open mem is an allusion to Malchut in particular, while the closed mem is an allusion to the Sefirah Binah. The author of *Sefer HaMeshiv* reverses this symbolism, a convention in kabbalah since the fourteenth century. Possibly, this change reflects the Christological exegesis of Isaiah 9:6 where the closed letter mem is taken as an allusion to Jesus’ virgin birth. In *Sefer HaMeshiv*, the discussion of the closed letter mem is associated with the subject of the coming of the Messiah.”

The text continues, as cited by Tishby,

“This is the mystery of the Kingdom (The Sefirah Malchut). That is the mystery of the closed letter mem, when He will send him — that is the meaning of the words Lekh Lekha (Gen. 12:1), (the Hebrew letters Lamed-Kaf — Lamed Kof form the words, Get you out). The word (Lamed Kof) is doubled to indicate this great mystery, the nature of the descent of the Messiah.”

Messianic Mysticism, Isaiah Tishby, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, pgs. 267-268

Similarly, the Jewish scholar Moshe Idel cites the following,

“... And the Holy Blessed One was reconciled with Israel and these are days of acquittal and forgiveness, and this is the mystery of a virgin, neither had any man known her (Gen. 24:14). He misled the nations through this secret power, for the Supernal Power is joined with this constellation. This is the mystery of Virgo. There is an actual virgin, made of fire, and she is sexually receptive (lit., has a receptive vessel), and this likeness was created for Israel, as a wife and as a virgin, so that the mystery of the point has connection with her. That is the mystery of a virgin, neither had any man known her (Gen. 24:14). At the time of the redemption the mystery of the Messiah will come forth for Israel. Until that time, she will remain a virgin and then the supernal spirit will enter her mouth and a spirit of consuming flame will come forth at her opening and will emerge from that sanctuary, for there it will reside, shut away. At the time when the spirit emerges, it will take the form of fire. This is the mystery of the constellation

Virgo. Therefore, it is the constellation of Israel and this is the esoteric meaning of the verse, rise, the virgin of Israel. .. that is the secret interpretation of the verse, a virgin, neither had any man known her (Gen. 24:24) until the L-rd's anointed one will come."

Sefer HaMeshiv, cited in Messianic Mystics, Moshe Idel, Yale University Press, pg. 143, cf. Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism, Moshe Idel, Continuum, pg. 438

In the Gospel of Luke, we see an interesting parallel with the Zohar,

"The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the Power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore also the holy one who is born from you will be called the Son of G-d."

Luke 1:35

Note that the text doesn't say only "The Holy Spirit" but also says, "the Power of the Most High." This matches a description in the Zohar when the Son (Zeir Anpin) emerges from the pairing of Chokmah (Father) and Binah (Mother/Holy Spirit), thus "birthing" the Son (Tiferet/Zeir Anpin),

"The word OMeR (speech) indicates the letters and paths which proceed from the Father (Hokmah), the Mother (Binah), and the head which issues from them, who is the firstborn Son (Tiferet). Aleph symbolizes the Father, and when it ascends and descends, the Mem unites itself with it, producing *em*, which signifies Mother; the *resh* is the Head (rosh =head), signifying Son. When these three unite the result

is that they form ‘Word’, ‘Speech.’ Thus the Father, the Mother, and the firstborn Son radiate one within the other in one union, which has its reign and duration upon the Sabbath.”

Zohar, Shemot, Section 2, Page 136b, Soncino Press Edition

On a lower dimensional level, Miriam functions as a symbol of the *Sefirah Malchut*, the Daughter, who gives birth to the Messiah into the world, just as Binah “gives birth” to Zeir Anpin, the Partzuf of the Son above. This may explain why Catholicism literalized and projected onto Miriam of Nazareth symbolic concepts that are associated with Rachel, herself a symbol of the lowest Sefirah. It is critical to note that these concepts are not literal, and if viewed literally, lead to idolatry. One should not undertake study of these deep concepts without proper study and foundation.

In my limited understanding (and these concepts are beyond the author), it seems as if the light of the Messiah is the connector throughout the four worlds of ABYA (Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Assiyah.) The lower worlds reflect the higher worlds, as the Light of the Messiah is filtered down into our world of *Assiyah* (Action). From Adam Kadmon > Zeir Anpin > Metat > Mashiach, the light of the Messiah is refracted and reflected. These concepts are complex and beyond the scope of this book. Suffice to say that Earth reflects Heaven, and the Gospels are in harmony with these concepts.

Ultimately, HaShem through Yeshua will unify Above and Below, Heaven and Earth, Infinite Light and finite matter, recreating the entire world, as it is written,

“And He who sits upon the Throne said,
Behold, I make all things new.”

Revelation 21:5

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