

## Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

### Abraham's Legacy Refutes the "Virgin Birth"



Growing old has its pros and cons. As we age, we mature and gain wisdom. However, on the flip side, we are confronted with our mortality and the legacy we will leave behind.

In this week's Torah portion, *Chayei Sarah* (Genesis 23:1–25:18), Sarah passes away, and an aged Abraham is near the end of his life. Faced with this reality, Abraham takes steps to ensure his legacy. He instructs Eliezer, the most faithful member of his household, to find an upstanding bride for his son Isaac.

To ensure that Isaac follows in his father's footsteps, Eliezer knows that Isaac must marry someone who shares Abraham's values. This is what King Solomon meant when he said, "*He who finds a wife finds what is good*" (Proverbs 18:22).

When Eliezer encounters Rebecca, he knows she is the right woman for Isaac because she demonstrates the same qualities of kindness and righteousness that exemplify Avraham's life.

Additionally, Rebecca is described with two words that are used for the very first time in the Torah. When Eliezer first sees Rivkah at a well, we are informed that she is "*a virgin* [בתולה–*betulah*] *whom no man has known*" (Genesis 24:16).

Later, when recounting the incident at the well to Rebecca's father and brother, Eliezer refers to Rebecca as a "*young woman* [עלמה–*almah*]" (Genesis 24:43).

The Torah is very precise with its choice of words. So why does the Torah use these different words to describe Rebecca? Upon careful examination, we see that in the first instance it is not Eliezer who is speaking. The Torah's narrative is from God's perspective, and only God knew Rebecca was a virgin.

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Later, when Eliezer describes Rebecca to her family, he says she is a "*young woman* [עלמה–*almah*]" because this is what he was able to observe.

This analysis demonstrates that the words "almah" and "betulah" have separate and distinct meanings. The word "almah" tells us only that the woman is young; it does not indicate her sexual status. Similarly, there is a masculine form of this word [עלם–*elem*], which means "young man" as in "*whose son is this young man*" (I Samuel 17:56).

However, there is no masculine counterpart for the word "virgin" [בתולה–*betulah*], because this status is relevant only to women. Furthermore, the Torah underscores the meaning of "betulah" when it states she is "*a virgin* [בתולה–*betulah*] *whom no man has known*" (Genesis 24:16).

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Missionaries incorrectly claim that the interchangeable use of [עלמה–*almah*] and [בתולה–*betulah*] in the story of Rebecca proves that the word *almah* also means “a virgin.” They do this in a desperate attempt to validate their blatant mistranslation of “almah” in Isaiah 7:14, which they claim is a prophecy that predicts that the messiah will be born of a virgin.

Not only does the word *almah* not mean virgin, but Christian bibles are inconsistent and contradict themselves. In every place “almah” is used, they translate it as “young woman”— except in Isaiah 7:14.

In one enlightening passage, King Solomon compares “*The way of an eagle in the sky, The way of a serpent on a rock, The way of a ship in the middle of the sea, and the way of a man with a young woman [עלמה–almah]*” to “*an adulterous woman who wipes her mouth and says, ‘I’ve done nothing wrong’*” (Proverbs 30:19-20). In each of these cases, there is no sign after the event, which is not the case with a virgin, who after her first intimacy leaves “*signs [blood] of her virginity*” (Deuteronomy 22:17). Solomon’s words provide irrefutable proof that the word *almah* does not mean “a virgin.”

No wonder several modern Christian translations, including the New Revised Standard Version, also agree that in Isaiah 7:14, *almah* should be translated as a “young woman.” Furthermore, many scholars point out that since virgin birth stories were common in ancient pagan religions, the church originally adopted the “virgin birth myth” and subsequent mistranslation to make their new religion familiar and appealing to non-Jews.

However, when read in context, Isaiah Chapter 7 is speaking about the birth of a child to a young woman who is already pregnant. Isaiah tells Jerusalem’s King Ahaz that God will give him a sign that in the same way the child’s birth is imminent, the downfall of two enemies who threaten to attack him will happen very quickly.

## **It is imperative to study the Torah carefully.**

*“The Lord himself will give you [King Ahaz] a sign: The young woman is pregnant and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel [God is with you: against your enemies]... before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste” (Isaiah 7:14-16).*

Anyone who reads the Bible in context will see the fulfillment of this prophecy in the next chapter of Isaiah, with the birth of Isaiah’s son. Furthermore, his birth, as well as the downfall of Ahaz’s enemies, occurred more than 500 years before Jesus, who could not have fulfilled this prophecy.

To understand the Torah correctly, it is imperative to study the Torah carefully, in context and in the original Hebrew, and not to jump to conclusions. This approach to Torah study is our Jewish legacy, as our sages teach, “*Turn it over, turn it over [i.e., to study it] because everything is in it*” (Ethics of Our Fathers 5:21).

Shabbat Shalom,

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