

ISSUES

A · M E S S I A N I C · J E W I S H · P E R S P E C T I V E



VIRGIN BIRTH?

“**H**ow can God appear as a man? It is foreign to our Jewish tradition. We Jews don’t worship a human being!” This line of thought has been stated again and again as one of the rationales for not considering the claims of Y’shua (Jesus). That is why the subject of “incarnation” is fitting for the pages of *ISSUES*. We offer two articles for your consideration on the biblical background of this concept as outlined by Isaiah, each focusing on a different declaration the prophet made concerning the Messiah. The third article, by design, is lighter fare for this holiday season. *(continued inside)*

kingdom will never end.” “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:30-35)

After the birth of Jesus, he was presented at the Temple in Jerusalem according to the Law of Moses (Exodus 13:2,12 and Leviticus 12:8). According to that same narrative account, a devout man named Simeon who was present spoke of this baby:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Luke 2:29-35)

Matthew, another New Testament writer, recognized Jesus as the *Immanuel* of Isaiah’s prophecy (Matthew 1:23). He states that Jesus was called from the beginning to be God’s presence among us. He was to be a man among men and yet he was to be the son of God.

THE MESSIAH AS MODEL AND EXAMPLE

The incarnation provides humanity with an amazing example of God with us. We see him in relation to others including his earthly family, the religious leaders

of his day, ordinary people, children and those he taught and mentored. The presence of Jesus was intended to inspire.

The example Jesus provided through his life is profound. Warren Wiersbe eloquently expresses the marvel of the incarnation:

In sending his son to earth, God caused eternity to invade time. This was not a temporary visit; when Jesus came, he wedded dust and deity—time and eternity into one. The eternal Word was made human flesh, and that union will last forever. As the perfect man here on earth, Jesus Christ showed us what it is like to live by the eternal.²

Throughout Jesus’ life, he demonstrated a constant awareness and closeness to humankind. He experienced the struggles and strife of a world in turmoil. His words were those of comfort and compassion and his actions struck at the heart of the issues, demonstrated his understanding of people and empathy for their burdens. Jesus lived the human experience to the fullest. And in all this, he remained holy.

THE AUDACITY OF THE INCARNATION

Isaiah prophesied about the messiah of Israel. His words were not disputed because he spoke of those things that were distant and remote. But when Jesus spoke about himself he pushed the limits of what some might call “politically correct” behavior. When Jesus had a conversation with a woman, she said, “I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Jesus responded, “I who speak to you am he” (John 4:25-26). He also said, “I and the father are one” (John 10:30) and “Trust in God; trust also in me” (John 14:1). It’s easy to see how off-putting such claims could be. But if what Jesus said about himself is

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IMMANUEL—GOD WITH US

by Efraim Goldstein

The notion that God would want to appear alongside his creation to care for and instruct us is not just a comforting thought. That a Creator would **not** want to be close to what he created is contrary to instinct and understanding.

The theological term that designates *Y'shua* (Jesus) as the presence of God in our midst is *incarnation*. The English word “incarnation” was coined in the fourteenth century. It means: (1) the embodiment of a deity or spirit in some earthly form; (2) *capitalized*: the union of divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ.¹

According to the Hebrew Scriptures, the Creator has always desired to be physically close to his creation. Genesis 3:8 says, “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.” The passage describes God walking in the garden, meeting with Adam and Eve. In this pristine state the Creator could commune with those he loved. But because of their disobedience, Adam and Eve were cast out from the garden. The Scriptures then begin to unveil God’s plan to come and dwell among his people once again.

He would come down to the level of humanity by sending a special child. These intentions are revealed through the prophet Isaiah: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The *almah* (young woman or virgin) will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

Isaiah addressed the entire house of David at a critical time in the history of the nation. Israel was facing the awful threat and devastating power of the Assyrian empire in the eighth century B.C. The context of Isaiah’s prophecy was to remind King Ahaz that the

fate of the nation didn’t rest in the designs of opposing armies or in the temporary alliances of monarchs. Isaiah believed the destiny of the Jewish people rested securely in the hands of the God of Israel.

THE BETHLEHEM BABY

If we fast forward about eight hundred years, Israel is faced once more with a grave threat to her destiny. She has endured the Greek conquest and is spiritually and morally ravaged by the effects of Hellenism. The Romans have engulfed the Land and the people are being snuffed out by the influence of this mighty empire.

The interest and controversy surrounding Jesus mounted in Jerusalem both before he was born and at his birth. Family members, bystanders and foreign travelers made comments on his birth. These accounts match up with the ancient declarations spoken long ago by the prophets of Israel about a child who would come and be the presence of God, *Immanuel* (Isaiah 7:14).

Throughout the Land a quiet rumor was being whispered that a child would soon be born. This promised child would be the hope of Israel. The first recorded statement about Jesus is found in the New Testament as a dialogue between Miriam (Mary) and an angel.

But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his

3. *Eternal Father*

This can be compared with Isaiah 63:16b, “. . . thou, O Jehovah, art our Father; our Redeemer from everlasting is thy name.” The same words used in Isaiah 9:6 as a proper name are seen within this sentence where they are clearly used of God.

4. *Prince of Peace*

Isaiah 26:3 says, “The steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace . . .” The object and subject of the sentence is God himself. Again in Isaiah 26:12, the work of peace is attributed to God: “Lord, Thou wilt establish peace for us . . .” As stated above, the fourth name, “the Prince of Peace,” is sometimes used of men in the Hebrew text. If we limit our attention to the book of Isaiah, however, then the work of peace is the work of God only.

THE RULE OF THE KING—9:7

Isaiah 9:6 presents us with a Being who is both God and man. Isaiah 9:7 shows us that this person is the Messiah of Israel: He is to sit upon the throne of David. Verse 7 is a reaffirmation of the Davidic Covenant, which is found in 1 Chronicles 17:10-14. In the Davidic Covenant, God promised David four things: an eternal house or dynasty, an eternal kingdom, an eternal throne and an eternal son.

Isaiah 9:7 further confirms that David’s house, kingdom and throne will be maintained eternally by the everlasting Son.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

(1 Chronicles 17:10-14)

“Moreover, I tell you that the LORD will build a house for you. When your days are fulfilled that you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up one of your descendants after you, who shall be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build for Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he shall be My son, and I will not take My lovingkindness away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. But I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.”

The Davidic Covenant is found in two segments of Scripture, 2 Samuel 7:11-16 and 1 Chronicles 17:10-14. There are significant differences. In 2 Samuel the son is immediate; in 1 Chronicles he is distant. In 2 Samuel the son is a sinner; in 1 Chronicles there is no mention of sin. In 2 Samuel the reference is to Solomon; in 1 Chronicles the reference is to an eternal son. The three promises of 2 Samuel are repeated, but a fourth is also added: “I will settle him in My house forever.” David’s line will eventually culminate in the birth of an eternal Person—the Messiah—whose eternity will guarantee David’s dynasty, kingdom and throne forever.

We are told from which family within the tribe of Judah the Messiah will come—the family of David. This automatically requires that Messiah come prior to 70 A.D. since, in that year, all of Israel’s genealogical records were destroyed along with the Temple by the Romans. Within a few decades of 70 A.D., it was impossible to prove who was a son of David and who was not.

There is one further limitation placed upon the descent of Messiah. We are told that He will come from one of David’s sons, but in Jeremiah 22:24–30 we are told of one family, cursed by the prophet, which was excluded. This is the family of Coniah, also known as Jeconiah or Jehoiachin. Because of the kind of man that he was, God pronounced a curse on him. The curse, given in Jeremiah 22:30, is that no descendant of Jeconiah will ever have the right to sit on the Throne of David. Messiah therefore had to be born a son of David but apart from Jeconiah.

We are told in Matthew’s Gospel that Joseph, husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a son of David via Solomon and Jeconiah. He and his children were therefore under God’s curse and would never fall heir to the Throne of David. Does that exclude Jesus from being the Messiah? No, because the New Testament Scriptures record that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born to a virgin, his mother Mary. Furthermore, Luke’s Gospel clearly gives Jesus’ lineage as being via Mary back to Nathan and David and, therefore, proves the legitimacy of Jesus’ claim to be Messiah. ■

**excerpted from Messianic Christology, by Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, Founder/Director of Ariel Ministries*

UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN

by Arnold Fruchtenbaum*

ISAIAH 9:6-7

⁶ For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Note that the Hebrew verse numbering differs from the English numbering for this passage.

The two verses discussed here deal specifically with Messiah's origin, both human and divine.

HUMAN ORIGIN—9:6a

Isaiah 9:6a emphasizes the humanity of Messiah (his Messiahship is shown in verse 7). Isaiah sees a son, given by God and being born into the human world; specifically, the Jewish world. The phrase “unto us a son is given” in the Hebrew Scriptures emphasizes a unique gift of God. This is the same son as in Psalm 2.

DIVINE ORIGIN—9:6b

In 9:6b, this son is given four names, each one having two parts. Each of these names is applicable to God; three of them exclusively so:

1. *Wonderful Counselor (Pele Yoetz)*

In some translations a comma is placed between these two words making them two separate names. The word “wonderful” is in the construct state and should be taken together with “counselor.” There are some words in Hebrew that are used only of God and never of men. One example is *barah* meaning “to create.” Another word like this is *pele*, rendered here in English as “wonderful.” In

English, “wonderful” may be freely used of many things, but in Hebrew it is reserved exclusively for that which is divine.

2. *Mighty God (El Gibbor)*

Obviously never used of a mere man.

3. *Eternal Father (Avi Ad)*

Literally: Father of Eternity. The son who is to be born will be the Father of Eternity, meaning that he is the source of eternal life. Clearly this is to be no mere man.

4. *Prince of Peace (Sar Shalom)*

This is the only one of the four names that can be used of man and God.

These four names are all used **elsewhere in the book of Isaiah** and in each case they are used of God, never of man.

1. *Wonderful Counselor*

This can be found in Isaiah 25:1: “. . . I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things, [even] counsels of old . . .” and in Isaiah 28:29, “This also cometh forth from Jehovah of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel . . .”

2. *Mighty God*

This is found in the very next chapter in Isaiah 10:21, “. . . to the mighty God.” There are many liberal theologians who object to the concept of Messiah as a God-Man. When they translate verses such as Isaiah 9:6 they are forced to interfere with the text in order to justify their own presuppositions. In the New English Bible, for example, an entire phrase—completely absent in the Hebrew text—is inserted to make Isaiah 9:6 read, “in battle he will be God-like.” This is an impossible translation. In the Hebrew there are only two words, *El Gibbor*, which mean “God Almighty.” Furthermore, when exactly the same words appear in Isaiah 10:21, the NEB then translates them correctly as “. . . the mighty God.” Clearly there is no integrity in such inconsistent translation.



practice they must participate.

They carefully followed the line that had formed behind my singing father, which had by now become a parade of noise. We sounded like an untrained junior high band, melding the sounds of South Africa and Jamaica, with a hint of Emeril Lagasse's kitchen. My father's voice, however loud, could barely be heard over our musical accompaniment.

As if this weren't enough of a bustle, tradition also claims that the best position is directly behind my father, which both acknowledged my father as the head of the house and confused our guests. As he led us in a winding path around every room on the first floor, reminiscent of the hardest level of Snake, my family fought for this position. It was every man for himself.

My friends watched in mild horror as we shut the door in the face of our followers, pulled out chairs to block their path, or turned off lights to blind their way. We continued our drumming, tambourine waving, and maracas shaking as we fought our way to the front, my guests humbly tapping their pot covers together.

I think it was about the time my mother dragged a chair in front of Danielle, or when I jabbed Renee in the back with my maracas, that they began to clang their pots and pans together with a little more passion. Maybe Josh began to see the similarities between this tradition and some of the many concerts he attends. This mosh pit simply included tambourines, kitchen utensils and Jews.

By our fourth or fifth circuit around the entirety of the first floor, it was hard to tell the difference between the hosts and the guests. I think a few chairs even moved without the

help of Friedlander hands. The parade now moved in uniform disorder, with every member displaying their combination of both musical and World Wrestling Entertainment [WWE] skills. I couldn't have been more proud.

When my father led us back to the dining room, where the mosh-pit parade had first begun, he circled around our large dinner table. This was the telltale sign that the dance was nearing its end. As my father's notes became slightly more prolonged, Mark used his foot to whip a chair out from the table, securing the conga drum between his knees as he sat down. My family halted and stationed themselves around the table, giant smiles plastered over our weary faces.

All instruments paused for a moment and my father hit the last note. Then, all at once, we waved our tambourines and shook our maracas as hard as we could, Mark beginning the longest, fastest drum roll I've ever heard. My father faded out long before our instruments, gasping for air as we woke up the neighbors with our finale.

Maybe my brother Mark would develop arthritis from those drum rolls, and maybe I couldn't hear anything for a while afterward. But as we all waved, shook, and clanged by the brightly lit Hanukkiah and sent the flames into a frenzy, I couldn't help but think that this blending together created the perfect mix. Perhaps they hadn't expected a conversation about my seemingly confusing beliefs to be answered in a night of dancing, but scanning across their faces at the end of the night, I saw a new expression upon their faces. It wasn't one of scrunched-up confusion, but of a happiness and contentment that can only come from the Hanukkah parade. 🍷



TRADITION, TRADITION by Rachel Freidlander

It's always interesting to watch the range of expressions that flash across a person's face when they hear that I am a "Messianic Jew." Sometimes, I try to clarify: "I'm Jewish, and a Christian." This doesn't seem to help. They wonder if I'm a mutt, some strange crossbreed of two animals that shouldn't reproduce. That is usually how the conversation begins.

A couple of years ago, some days after school had been let out for Christmas break, four of my college friends tried to appease their curiosity. Stephanie, my roommate at the time, had grown up in a Christian home, but didn't practice her beliefs. Danielle also had some experience with religious ceremonies, as she was raised Catholic. The other two, Renee and Josh, were atheists. They all wanted to understand my seemingly oxymoronic, mixed-breed lifestyle. So they chose to come to my family's celebration of Hanukkah.

Letting friends into the eccentric world of my family is always a gamble, like having someone taste-test your signature dish for the first time. My mother guided them into the dining room and began the introductions. Somewhere after I introduced my father David, my brother Arin, his wife Erin (we have to distinguish by calling them Boy Arin and Girl Erin) and their son, Isaac, my friends began to look skeptical. It was around the time I came to my two other brothers, Mark and Ezra, that I thought they were going to ask which of my relatives was named Jesus.

After they climbed the many branches of our family tree, the celebration began. Things started tamely enough, with my father singing some prayers in Hebrew from the *Siddur* as we gathered around the *hanukkiyah* (many incorrectly refer to it as a *menorah*). It being the last

evening of the eight-night celebration, every one of the branches held a spindly candle. As my father continued the prayer, we each lit a wick.

I saw my friends' eyes, wide in the candlelight, the four of them standing close together behind my brothers. Josh is short but well-built, with wide shoulders. He wore a band T-shirt, skinny jeans, and a silver lip ring that glinted in the candlelight. Beside him was my father. He towered above Josh, wearing a full beard and a plaid dress shirt, tucked into jeans. His body was bowed over the prayer book, leaning towards the dancing flames. Rocking back and forth on the balls of his feet, he read from the *Siddur*, "*Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam . . .*"

We listened to my father's voice, falling and rising in the sweet, guttural melody, my family joining in after all the candles were lit. When he lowered the book, everyone, both friends and family, stood in a moment of stupor, staring at the tiny flames of remembrance in awe. Normally, this is where a Hanukkah celebration would end. But my family is different.

Somehow, generations ago, we developed a tradition. My father again lifted his *Siddur*, sweeping into the first note of this prayer with unrivaled gusto. His voice boomed through the house as he began to march. Mark ran to grab the conga drum, Ezra the maracas, my family grabbing musical instruments from shelves and cupboards and running to follow my father. My mother opened the kitchen cabinets and began shoving pots and pans and large utensils into the hands of our guests. This is the priceless moment: they look at their hands, holding these strange objects, and wonder in what brutal, sacrificial