

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

We Demanded Truth in Advertising



I received numerous calls concerning a High Holiday service promoted with large banners across a busy interchange. The host appeared to be a legitimate Jewish synagogue.

However, upon closer examination, the fine print revealed that the sponsor was a messianic Christian group masquerading as authentic Judaism.

One thing all denominations of Judaism agree upon is that it is an oxymoron to claim you can be Jewish and Christian simultaneously. So, after a few phone calls, I enlisted representatives of all denominations of Judaism to issue a statement warning the Jewish community and demanding truth in advertising

The approaching High Holidays are not only a reminder that we should not tolerate deception. This is a time to focus our attention on spiritual rejuvenation which strengthens our connection with the Almighty.

A high point in this process is when congregations sing the “Avenu Malkanu” prayer proclaiming that “God is our Father and our King” and we are God’s children and servants. This beautiful and stirring prayer recalls the verse, “*To Me the children of Israel are servants*” (Leviticus 25:55).

In addition to the above-mentioned relationships with God, the Torah describes our relationship in other ways. This includes the well-known metaphor of husband and wife. God is the husband; the Jews are the wife, and the Torah is our marriage contract. This intimate relationship is described in the verse, “*your Maker is your husband*” (Isaiah 54:5).

Jeremiah the prophet expounds on the spiritual husband and wife relationship. He tells us that even when the Jews break the spiritual marriage contract [the Torah] with acts of infidelity [idolatry], God remains a faithful Husband to us: “*Although they broke my covenant, I was a husband to them*” (Jeremiah 31:32).

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God’s unwavering faithfulness is highlighted in the Torah when God says that despite Israel’s shortcoming, “*I will not reject or despise them ... or break my covenant with them*” (Leviticus 26:44).

God’s loyalty to the Jews is so significant, that the New Testament attempts to subvert this message by intentionally changing the word “husband” to “disregarded.” Thus, by misquoting Jeremiah 31:32, it reads, “*My covenant which they broke, and I disregarded [despised] them*” (Hebrews 8:9).

Contrary to this disparaging viewpoint, God remains faithful to the Jews and desires that we demonstrate our spiritual loyalty with an unflinching allegiance to God and not to foreign gods. If we falter, God asks that we repair the relationship with repentance, prayer, and charity.

Jeremiah continues, that in the messianic age the bond between God and the Jews will be so tangible that the Jews will have a transformed heart and will no longer be inclined to break the covenant.

Jeremiah describes this as a “new heart” and a “new [renewed] covenant.” The new covenant does not do away with the original; rather, it renews and strengthens it. Ezekiel referred to this change of heart with these famous words, “*I will give you a new heart ... and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them*” (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

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Regarding marriage and infidelity, this week's Torah portion, *Ki Teitzei* (Deuteronomy 21:10–25:19), discusses a husband who suspects his wife of infidelity. The husband says, “*I married this woman, but when I approached her, I found she was not a virgin.*” (Deuteronomy 22:14).

The Hebrew word for virgin is [בתולה–*betulah*] and refers to a woman of any age “*who was never intimate with a man*” (Genesis 19:8). Consequently, the Torah describes hymenal bleeding as “*evidence of her virginity*” (Deuteronomy 22:20).

When missionaries attempt to prove the virgin birth of Jesus, they incorrectly quote Isaiah 7:14, claiming that it says, “*Behold a virgin is pregnant and shall give birth to a son.*” However, the Hebrew word they translate as virgin is [עלמה–*almah*], and not “*betulah.*”

Isaiah was intentionally mistranslated to mislead people.

The word “*almah*” means a “*young woman,*” regardless of her sexual status. It is significant that in the seven places that the word “*almah*” is used in the Jewish scriptures; Christian bibles always translate it as a “*young woman,*” — except in Isaiah 7:14. This glaring inconsistency demonstrates that the Isaiah text was intentionally mistranslated to mislead people to believe that the virgin birth concept is biblical. It isn't!

On the contrary, virgin birth stories were common in ancient mythology but had no place in Judaism.

The true meaning of Isaiah is evident to anyone who reads the context and original Hebrew. The story tells us that God sent Isaiah to King Ahaz, of the southern kingdom of Judah, to warn him and advise him of an imminent invasion from the northern kingdom of Samaria, which had forged an alliance with Syria.

Isaiah tells Ahaz to not fear this impending invasion because very soon, the nations who are threatening him will be vanquished by the armies of Assyria. As a sign to King Ahaz that this will occur quickly, Isaiah points to a specific young woman, indicated by the prefix [ה–*the*], and says, “*God will give you a sign; behold the young woman [העלמה–*almah*], is pregnant and shall give birth to a son ... before the boy knows enough to reject evil and choose good, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste*” (Isaiah 7:14-15).

The context confirms that the sign was something King Ahaz would be able to see and the fulfillment of the prophecy would happen soon and definitely within his lifetime. Whether the girl was a virgin is not something he could know, and therefore it could not be the sign. Furthermore, since Ahaz lived more than 500 years before Jesus these events could not be referring to the so-called “*virgin birth*” of Jesus.

No wonder, missionaries usually ignore the next chapter of Isaiah which describes the fulfillment of Isaiah 7 with the natural birth of Isaiah's son. In striking similarity to Isaiah's words to Ahaz, Isaiah now says, “*I approached the prophetess, and she became pregnant and conceived a boy ... and before the boy knows how to say, 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria*” (Isaiah 8:3-4).

This examination of the texts demonstrates the importance of investigating claims, reading the context, and not jumping to conclusions.

May this Shabbos provide opportunities to learn God's Torah carefully and foster a faith-filled spiritual relationship with our Eternal Father.

Shabbat Shalom,

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