

Jewish New Testament & Commentary

Matthew 1 & 2

Bible:

1 ¹ This is the genealogy of Yeshua the Messiah, son of David, son of Avraham:

2 Avraham was the father of Yitzchak,

Yitzchak was the father of Ya'akov,

Ya'akov was the father of Y'hudah and his brothers,

3 Y'hudah was the father of Peretz and Zerach (their mother was Tamar),

Peretz was the father of Chetzron, Chetzron was the father of Ram,

4 Ram was the father of *Amminadav*,

Amminadav was the father of Nachshon,

Nachshon was the father of Salmon,

5 Salmon was the father of Bo'az (his mother was Rachav),

Bo'az was the father of Oved (his mother was Rut),

Oved was the father of Yishai,

6 Yishai was the father of David the king.

David was the father of Shlomo (his mother was the wife of Uriyah),

7 Shlomo was the father of Rechav'am, Rechav'am was the father of Aviyah, Aviyah was the father of Asa,

8 Asa was the father of Y'hoshafat,

Y'hoshafat was the father of Yoram,

Yoram was the father of Uziyahu,

9 Uziyahu was the father of Yotam,

Yotam was the father of Achaz,

Achaz was the father of Chizkiyahu,

10 Chizkiyahu was the father of M'nasheh,

M'nasheh was the father of Amon,

Amon was the father of Yoshiyahu,

11 Yoshiyahu was the father of Y'khanyahu and his brothers at the time of the Exile to Babylon.

12 After the Babylonian Exile, Y'khanyahu was the father of Sh'altiel,

Sh'altiel was the father of Z'rubavel,

13 Z'rubavel was the father of Av'ichud,

Av'ichud was the father of Elyakim,

Elyakim was the father of Azur,

14 Azur was the father of Tzadok,

Tzadok was the father of Yakhin,

Yakhin was the father of El'ichud,

15 El'ichud was the father of El'azar,

El'azar was the father of Mattan,

Mattan was the father of Ya‘akov,

¹⁶ Ya‘akov was the father of Yosef, the husband of Miryam, From whom was born the Yeshua that was called the Messiah.

¹⁷ Thus there were fourteen generations from Avraham to David,

fourteen generations from David to the Babylonian Exile,
and fourteen generations from the Babylonian Exile to the Messiah.

¹⁸ Here is how the birth of Yeshua the Messiah took place. When his mother Miryam was engaged to Yosef, before they were married, she was found to be pregnant from the *Ruach HaKodesh*. ¹⁹ Her husband-to-be, Yosef, was a man who did what was right; so he made plans to break the engagement quietly, rather than put her to public shame. ²⁰ But while he was thinking about this, an angel of *Adonai* appeared to him in a dream and said, “Yosef, son of David, do not be afraid to take Miryam home with you as your wife; for what has been conceived in her is from the *Ruach HaKodesh*. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Yeshua, [which means ‘*Adonai* saves’,] because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this happened in order to fulfill what *Adonai* had said through the prophet,

²³ **“The virgin will conceive and bear a son,
and they will call him Immanu’el.”**

(The name means, “God is with us.”)

²⁴ When Yosef awoke he did what the angel of *Adonai* had told him to do—he took Miryam home to be his wife, ²⁵ but he did not have sexual relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Yeshua.

2 ¹ After Yeshua was born in Beit-Lechem in the land of Y’hudah during the time when Herod was king, Magi from the east came to Yerushalayim ² and asked, “Where is the newborn King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard of this he became very agitated, and so did everyone else in Yerushalayim. ⁴ He called together all the head *cohanim* and *Torah*-teachers of the people and asked them, “Where will the Messiah be born?” ⁵ “In Beit-Lechem of Y’hudah,” they replied, “because the prophet wrote,

⁶ **‘And you, Beit-Lechem in the land of Y’hudah,
are by no means the least among the rulers of Y’hudah;
for from you will come a Ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’ ”**

⁷ Herod summoned the Magi to meet with him privately and asked them exactly when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Beit-Lechem with these instructions: “Search carefully for the child; and when you find him, let me know, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹ After they had listened to the king, they went away; and the star which they had seen in the east went in front of them until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ Upon entering the house, they saw the child with his mother Miryam; and they prostrated themselves and worshipped him. Then they opened their bags and presented him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² But they had been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, so they took another route back to their own country.

¹³ After they had gone, an angel of *Adonai* appeared to Yosef in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you to leave. For Herod is going to look for the child in order to kill him.” ¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother, and left during the night for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until Herod died. This happened in order to fulfill what *Adonai* had said through the prophet,

“Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁶ Meanwhile, when Herod realized that the Magi had tricked him, he was furious and gave orders to kill all the boys in and around Beit-Lechem who were two years old or less, calculating from the time the Magi had told him. ¹⁷ In this way were fulfilled the words spoken through the prophet Yirmeyahu,

¹⁸ **“A voice was heard in Ramah,
sobbing and lamenting loudly.
It was Rachel sobbing for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no longer alive.”**

¹⁹ After Herod’s death, an angel of *Adonai* appeared in a dream to Yosef in Egypt ²⁰ and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to *Eretz-Israel*, for those who wanted to kill the child are dead.” ²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother, and went back to *Eretz-Israel*. ²² However, when he heard that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as king of Y’hudah, he was afraid to go there. Warned in a dream, he withdrew to the Galil ²³ and settled in a town called Natzeret, so that what had been spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he will be called a *Natzrati*.

Commentary:

CHAPTER 1

1–16 The New Testament begins with **the genealogy** of Yeshua in order to show that he meets the requirements set by the *Tanakh* for who the Messiah must be—a descendant of **Avraham** (Genesis 22:18), **Ya’akov** (Numbers 24:17), **Y’hudah** (Genesis 49:10), **Yishai** (Isaiah 11:1), **David** (2 Samuel 7:13; see below on “Son of David”) and **Z’rubavel** (Haggai 2:22–23). All these names appear in vv. 1–16. This genealogy recalls the pattern of those in the *Tanakh* (Genesis 5, 10; 1 Chronicles 1–9, etc.).

The genealogy of the Messiah as reported by Luke is different from the one here; see Lk 3:23–38&N.

1 **“Yeshua the Messiah”** is rendered “Jesus Christ” in other English versions, as if the man’s first name were “Jesus” and his last name “Christ.” Neither is the case. *“Yeshua”* is Jesus’ name in Hebrew and Aramaic, the languages he spoke; in his thirty-some years on earth people called him Yeshua. The word “Jesus” represents the efforts of English-speakers to pronounce the name of the Messiah as it appears in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, *“Ie sours”*—yee-**soos** in modern Greek, perhaps yay-**soos** in ancient *Koine* Greek, which began to displace Aramaic as the *lingua franca* of the Near East after Alexander’s conquests (331–323 B.C.E.). In turn the word *“Ie sours”* represents the ancient Greek-speakers’ attempts at pronouncing *“Yeshua”*. By using Hebrew “Yeshua” throughout, the *JNT* calls

attention to the Jewishness of the Messiah. On the name “Yeshua” itself see v. 21&N.

The Messiah. The Greek word here is “*christos*,” which means the same thing as Hebrew “*mashiach*,” namely, “anointed” or “poured on.” The significance of being known as “The Anointed One” is that both kings and *cohanim* (priests) were invested with their authority in a ceremony of anointing with olive oil. Thus, inherent in the concept of “Messiah” is the idea of being given God’s priestly and kingly authority.

The Greek word “*Christos*” is usually brought over into English as “Christ.” In two verses of the New Testament (Yn 1:41, 4:25) the Greek text has “*Messias*,” obviously, like English “Messiah,” a transliteration of the Hebrew word; there the *JNT* uses “*Mashiach*” (see Yn 1:41N).

The *JNT* also renders “*Christos*” as “*Mashiach*” in two narratives where its specifically Jewish significance stands out in bold relief: at 16:15 and at 26:63 (and equivalently at Mk 8:29, 14:61; Lk 9:20, 22:67). Others might have used this criterion to introduce “*Mashiach*” in other passages, for example, at Ac 2:31, 36, 38. A translator’s decision to use “Christ,” “Messiah” or “*Mashiach*” depends on the purpose of his translation; in the end it may come down to his intuition or personal preference.

But usually in the text of the *JNT* Greek *Christos* is rendered by “Messiah”; “Christ” does not appear even once. This is because “Messiah” has meaning in Jewish religion, tradition and culture; whereas the word “Christ” has an alien ring and a negative connotation because of the persecutions Jews have suffered from those claiming to be his followers. Further, the use of the word “Messiah” more than 380 times in the text of the *JNT* is a continual reminder that the New Testament claims Yeshua to be none other than the promised *Mashiach* for whom the Jewish people have yearned. The English word “Christ” does not point to Yeshua’s fulfillment of Jewish hopes and biblical prophecy.

Son of. The Hebrew word “*ben*” (“son,” “son of”) is commonly used in three distinctive ways in the Bible and in Judaism:

- (1) In both the Bible and in Judaism a man is normally identified as the son of his father. For example, if Sam Levine’s son Joe is called up to read from the *Torah* scroll in the synagogue, he will be announced not as Joseph Levine but as *Yosef ben-Shmu’el* (“Joseph, son of Samuel”).
- (2) “*Ben*” can also mean not the actual son but a more distant descendant, as is the case in this verse: **David** and **Avraham** were distant ancestors of Yeshua (also v. 8: Yoram was not the father but the great-great-grandfather of Uziyahu).
- (3) Thirdly, “*ben*” can be used more broadly to mean “having the characteristics of,” and this too applies here: Yeshua had qualities found both in Avraham and in King David.

Son of David. Avraham and David are singled out because they have unique importance in the Messiah’s lineage. The term “**Son of David**” is actually one of the titles of the Messiah, based on the *Tanakh*’s prophecies that the Messiah will be a descendent of David and will sit on David’s throne forever (for the *Tanakh* references see Ac 13:23&N). While “Son of David” does not appear as a Messianic title in the *Tanakh* and is first seen as such in the pseudepigraphic Psalms of Solomon 17:23, 36, written in the first century B.C.E., the New Testament records the use of this term some 15–20 times?, and it has been used continuously in Judaism till the present.

Son of Avraham. This term is significant in at least four ways:

- (1) Both King David and King Yeshua trace their ancestry back to the individual chosen by God as the father of the Jewish people (Genesis 12:1–3).
- (2) Yeshua is the promised “seed of Avraham” (Genesis 13:15, explained by Ga 3:16).
- (3) The Messiah’s mystical identity with the Jewish people (see 2:15N) is hinted at, since every Jew is a son of Avraham (3:9).
- (4) Yeshua also has a *mystical* identity with everyone who believes in him, whether Jewish or Gentile (Ro 4: 1, 11, 17–20; Ga 3:29).

3, 5, 6, 16 Tamar ... Rachav ... Rut ... the wife of Uriyah (Bat-sheva) ... Miryam. Women, especially those born Gentiles, were rarely included in biblical genealogies. The first four were Gentile women whom God honored by including them among the recorded ancestors of Yeshua the Jewish Messiah—through whom Gentiles, women and slaves are saved equally with Jews, men and free (Ga 3:28&N). On whether these women became Jews or continued to be Gentiles see Ac 16:1&N.

16 Yosef, the husband of Miryam, from whom was born ... Yeshua. The change in language from the litany, “X was the father of Y,” signals that Yeshua was not conceived in the usual way; other passages state that the Holy Spirit of God overshadowed Miryam, causing her to become pregnant without sexual union (vv. 18, 20; Lk 1:27, 31, 34–38; also see vv. 18–25&NN, Lk 3:23–38&N).

The Yeshua who was called the Messiah. This somewhat awkward phrase calls attention to the fact that the genealogy leads up to this particular person named Yeshua, the particular Yeshua who was known as the Messiah. There is no implication that he was not the Messiah; **he was called the Messiah** because he was and is.

On the conception and birth of Yeshua compare Lk 1: 26–38, 2:1–7; Yn 1:1–2, 14.

18–25

18 Engaged. The Hebrew/Aramaic word for betrothal is “*kiddushin*,” which signifies “sanctification, separation,” i.e., the setting aside and separating of a particular woman for a particular man. According to the Mishna, adultery during the betrothal period is a more serious sin than adultery after marriage.

The Mishna specifies four kinds of death penalty in descending order of gravity: stoning, burning, beheading and strangling (Sanhedrin 7:1). A man who has intercourse with a betrothed girl is subject to the same penalty as one who has intercourse with his mother, namely, stoning (Sanhedrin 7: 4). Someone who has intercourse with another man’s wife is liable to death by strangling (Sanhedrin 11:1).

Today, partly in order to eliminate the possibility of committing this grave sin, formal Jewish betrothal (*kiddushin* or *’erusin*) and marriage (*nisu’in*) are generally combined in a single ceremony.

Ruach HaKodesh, Hebrew for “Holy Spirit.” The term appears in the *Tanakh* (Isaiah 51:13(11), 63:10–11) and is equivalent to the “Spirit of God” (*Ruach-Elohim*), first seen in Genesis 1:2 as having “moved on the face of the waters” before God said, “Let there be light.” From this verse, Isaiah 48:16 and other places in the Bible it can be learned that the Holy Spirit is divine, not less or other than God. Under the terms of the New Covenant, Yeshua sends the Holy Spirit to dwell in any person who trusts God through

the Messiah. The Holy Spirit gives such a person power for service, guidance into God's truth, gifts to facilitate holy living, and fruits of righteous behavior. (The King James Version of the English Bible uses the term "holy ghost," which has nothing to do with spooks but is seventeenth-century English for "Holy Spirit.")

Miryam. In English this Hebrew name is usually rendered by the spelling "Miriam" in the *Tanakh* and "Mary" in the New Testament. This unfounded and artificial distinction produced by translators subtly drives a wedge between Yeshua's mother and her own Jewishness. The original Miryam was the sister of *Moshe Rabbenu* ("Moses, our teacher"; Exodus 2: 4–8) and a prophet (Exodus 15:20); in some respects she is seen as a role-model for the Jewish woman leader of today. But the name "Mary" evokes in the reader's thinking an otherworldly image of "Madonna and Child," complete with haloes, beatific smiles and angels in array, instead of the New Testament's portrayal of a down-to-earth Jewish lady in an Israel village managing her wifely, maternal and other social responsibilities with care, love and faith.

Yeshua's mother was **discovered to be pregnant by the *Ruach HaKodesh***. Sooner or later everyone discovered she was pregnant. But not everyone discovered that her pregnancy had resulted not from sexual relations but from the Holy Spirit's super-natural activity. The "virgin birth" was a supernatural event (see Section (1) of v. 23N). The God who made heaven and earth is quite capable of causing a woman to become pregnant in a way not possible in nature.

Mattityahu informs his readers of Yeshua's supernatural conception in order to counter the obvious and natural inference that Miryam had misbehaved. The early rabbis developed a tradition that Yeshua was the illegitimate son of Miryam and a Roman soldier named Pantera (in the second-century Tosefta, a collection similar to the Mishna, see Chullin 2:23; in the fifth-century Babylonian Talmud see Sanhedrin 43a, 67a). This calumny, invented, of course, to counter the claims of the Gospel, was worked up further in the sixth-century anti-gospel, *Toledot-Yeshu* (see v. 21N).

20 *Adonai*, literally, "my lords"; but grammarians consider it the "plural of majesty"; so a slightly less literal translation would be "my Lord." Long before Yeshua's day, however, the word "*Adonai*" had, out of respect, been substituted in speaking and in reading aloud for God's personal name, the four Hebrew letters *yud-heh-vav-heh*, variously written in English as "*YHVH*," "Yahweh" and "Jehovah." The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) made it a requirement not to pronounce the Tetragrammaton (the word means the "four-letter name" of God), and this remains the rule in most modern Jewish settings. In deference to this tradition (which, in my view, is unnecessary but harmless) the *JNT* uses "*Adonai*" where "*YHVH*" is meant. (Incidentally, the name "Jehovah" is a modern invention, an English hybrid based on the four Hebrew letters as transliterated into German, J-H-V-H, with the individually transliterated Hebrew vowel-points of "*Adonai*," e-o-a.)

The Greek word here is "*kurios*," which can mean (1) "sir," (2) "lord" in the human sense, as in "lord of the manor," (3) "Lord" in the divine sense, or (4) God's personal name *YHVH*. The *JNT* uses "*Adonai*" only when one can be certain that "*YHVH*" is meant; it is not used if there is doubt. So far, editions of the *JNT* are conservative on this score; there are probably additional places in the text where "*Adonai*" could safely be substituted for "Lord." For more on "*kurios*" see 7:21&N.

This verse is an example of a "semitism" (an allusion to Hebrew or Aramaic) brought

over literally into the Greek text. It provides strong evidence in favor of the theory that there was a Hebrew or Aramaic oral or written tradition behind the extant Greek manuscripts, for only in Hebrew or Aramaic does the explanation here of Yeshua's name make any sense; in Greek (or English) it explains nothing.

The Hebrew word for “**he will save**” is “*yohiaʿ*,” which has the same Hebrew root (*yud-shin-ʿayin*) as the name **Yeshua** (*yud-shin-vav-ʿayin*). Thus the Messiah's name is explained on the basis of what he will do. Etymologically the name *Yeshuaʿ* is a contraction of the Hebrew name *Yʿhoshuaʿ* (English “Joshua”), which means “*YHVH* saves.” It is also the masculine form of the Hebrew word “*yeshuʿah*,” which means “salvation.”

The KJV renders this verse, “... and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.” But in English, saving people from sins is no more reason for calling someone Jesus than for calling him Bill or Frank. The Greek is no better; only in Hebrew or Aramaic does the explanation explain.

In modern Hebrew Yeshua is usually called *Yeshu* (*yud-shin-vav*, without an *ʿayin*) by nonbelievers. This verse also shows why the name “*Yeshu*” cannot possibly be correct—it does not include all three letters of the Hebrew root of *yoshiaʿ*. However, the matter bears further scrutiny.

According to Professors David Flusser and Shmuel Safrai, Orthodox Jews, “*Yeshu*” was how the name “*Yeshuaʿ*” was pronounced by Galilean Jews in the first century. We know from 26:73 below that Jews of the Galil had a different dialect than those of Judea. According to Flusser (*Jewish Sources in Early Christianity*, p. 15) Galileans did not pronounce the Hebrew letter *ʿayin* at the end of a word, much as Cockneys drop “h” at the beginning. That is, instead of saying “*Ye-shoo-ah*” they said “**Yeh**-shoo.” Undoubtedly some people began spelling the name according to this pronunciation.

However, that is not the end of the story. In Jewish anti-Christian polemic it became customary not to use Yeshua's correct name but intentionally and consciously to use the distortion “*Yeshu*,” because at some point someone realized that “*Yeshu*” is also an acronym consisting of the first letters of the Hebrew insult, “*Yimach shʿmo vʿzikhro*” (“May his name and memory be blotted out”; the words adapt and expand the last phrase of Psalm 109:13). Thus “*Yeshu*” was a kind of coded incantation against Christian evangelism. Moreover, since Yeshua came to be regarded in non-Messianic Judaism as a false prophet, blasphemer and idolater wrongly being worshipped as God, and since the *Torah* says, “You shall not even pronounce the names of their gods” (Exodus 3:13), the Messiah's name was purposely *mispronounced*. Today most Israelis saying “*Yeshu*” suppose this is the man's correct name and intend no disparagement. The *JNT* avoids “*Yeshu*” because of its history and also because in Hebrew it, like “Jesus” in English, carries the valence of “the god the Gentiles worship.”

But Yosef Vaktor (see 10:37N) reinterprets the acronym to praise Yeshua, “*Yitgadal shʿmo umalkhuto!*” (“May his name and kingdom be magnified!”)

22 To fulfill what Adonai had said through the prophet. The New Covenant consistently

presents itself as fulfilling prophecies and promises made by God in the *Tanakh*. Such conformity to statements and predictions made hundreds of years earlier, in defiance of all reasonable probabilities, proves beyond reasonable doubt that God “knows the end from the beginning.” Moreover, in this case, it proves beyond reasonable doubt that Yeshua is the Messiah. Prophecy fulfillment is the chief rational reason, based on empirical observation of

historical events—that is, based on facts—for Jews and others to accept Yeshua as the Messiah.

There have been more than fifty messianic pretenders in the last two thousand years of Jewish history, starting with Todah (Theudas) and Judah HaG'lili (Ac 5:36–37&NN), continuing with Shim'on Bar-Kosiba (died 135 C.E.), whom Rabbi Akiva recognized as the Messiah by changing his name to “Bar-Kochva” (“son of a star”; see 2 Ke 1:19N on “the Morning Star”), and culminating in Shabtai Tzvi (1626–1676), who became a Moslem, and Jacob Frank (1726–1791), who became a Roman Catholic. But none of them met the criteria laid down in the *Tanakh* concerning the identity of the Messiah; whereas Yeshua met all of them that are applicable to his first coming (these fulfilled prophecies are listed in 26:24N and in Section VII of the Introduction to the *JNT*). Of the four gospel writers Mattityahu especially concerns himself with pointing out these fulfillments (see 2:5, 15, 17; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 11:10; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 22:43; 26:31, 27:9). His object is to demonstrate that Yeshua should be recognized as the Messiah because he fulfilled what *Adonai* said about the Messiah through the prophets of the *Tanakh*.

What *Adonai* had said through the prophet. On this phrase see 2:15N, third-from-last paragraph.

23 The virgin will conceive and bear a son. This verse introduces a major controversy concerning the use of the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament. Following are three objections which non-Messianic Jews and other skeptics often make to Mattityahu’s quoting Isaiah 7:14b in this verse, along with Messianic Jewish replies.

(1) *Objection:* A virgin birth is impossible.

Reply: In liberal scholarship miracles are characteristically explained away as natural phenomena in disguise. One might pursue this line here by pointing to observed instances of parthenogenesis in the animal kingdom or modern cloning experiments. But there is no instance of human parthenogenesis. Therefore one must regard a virgin birth as supernatural.

Usually objection to a virgin birth as impossible follows as a logical consequence of objecting to any and all supernaturalism. But the God of the Bible is literally “supernatural,” above nature, since he created nature and its laws. Therefore, if it suits his purpose he can suspend those laws. The Bible in both the *Tanakh* and the New Testament teaches repeatedly that God does intervene in human history and does sometimes overrule the natural course of events for his own reasons.

Frequently his reason, as in this instance, is to give humanity a sign of his sovereignty, presence and concern. In fact, Isaiah 7:14a, immediately preceding the portion quoted, reads, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.” The Hebrew word for sign (“*’ot*”) means an extraordinary event that demonstrates and calls attention to God’s direct involvement in human affairs. The “God” of Deism, pictured as starting the universe like a man winding a watch and leaving it to run by itself, is not the God of the Bible.

(2) *Objection:* Isaiah, in using the Hebrew word “*’almah*,” was referring to a “young woman”; had he meant “virgin” he would have written “*b’tulah*.”

Reply: “*’Almah*” is used seven times in the Hebrew Bible, and in each instance it either

explicitly means a virgin or implies it, because in the Bible “*‘almah*” always refers to an unmarried woman of good reputation. In Genesis 24:43 it applies to Rebecca, Isaac’s future bride, already spoken of in Genesis 24:16 as a *b’tulah*. In Exodus 2:8 it describes the infant Moshe’s older sister Miryam, a nine-year-old girl and surely a virgin. (Thus the name of Yeshua’s mother recalls this earlier virgin.) The other references are to young maidens playing on timbrels (Psalm 68:25), maidens being courted (Proverbs 30:19) and virgins of the royal court (Song of Songs 1:3, 6:8). In each case the context requires a young unmarried woman of good reputation, i.e., a virgin.

Moreover, Mattityahu here is quoting from the Septuagint, the first translation of the *Tanakh* into Greek. More than two centuries before Yeshua was born, the Jewish translators of the Septuagint chose the Greek word “*parthenos*” to render “*‘almah*.” “*Parthenos*” unequivocally means “virgin.” This was long before the New Testament made the matter controversial.

The most famous medieval Jewish Bible commentator, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (“Rashi,” 1040–1105), who determinedly opposed Christological interpretation of the *Tanakh*, nevertheless wrote on Isaiah 7:14:

“Behold, the *‘almah* shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name *Immanu’el*. This means that our creator will be with us. And this is the sign: the one who will conceive is a girl (*na’arah*) who never in her life has had intercourse with any man. Upon this one shall the Holy Spirit have power.” (*Mikra’ot G’dolot, ad loc.*)

Also in his comment on Song of Songs 1:3 Rashi explains that “*‘alamot*” (the plural of “*‘almah*”) means “*b’tulot*” (“virgins”).

Michael Rydelnik, a Hebrew Christian, writes,

“Cyrus Gordon, a greatly respected Jewish scholar who does not believe in the virgin birth, holds that the cognate languages demonstrate that in Isaiah 7:14 *almah* should be translated ‘virgin’ (see *Journal of Bible and Religion*, XXI, 2 [April 1953], p. 106).” (*The Chosen People*, June 1987, p. 18)

The Bible itself shows us how we can know when an *‘almah* is a virgin. Rivkah is called an *‘almah* at Genesis 24:43, but it can be deduced from Genesis 24:16 (“Neither had any man known her”) that she was a virgin. In the same way, we know that the *‘almah* Miryam was a virgin from Lk 1:34, where she asks the angel how she can be pregnant, “since I am a virgin?”

A possible reason for Isaiah’s using the word “*b’tulah*” instead of *b’tulah* is that in Biblical (as opposed to later) Hebrew, “*b’tulah*” does not always unambiguously mean “virgin,” as we learn from Joel 1:8: “Lament like a *b’tulah* girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth.” Deuteronomy 22:19 speaks of a woman after her wedding night as a *b’tulah*.

(3) *Objection:* In Isaiah the context (vv. 10–17) shows that Isaiah was predicting as a sign to King Achaz that before the *‘almah*’s as yet unconceived and unborn child would be old enough to choose good and refuse evil, Syria and the Northern Kingdom would lose their kings, and Assyria would attack Judah. This prophecy was fulfilled in the eighth century B.C.E. Therefore the prophet was not predicting an event some 700 years in the future.

Reply (for which I am grateful to the Jewish believer Arnold Fruchtenbaum): On the contrary, the context, which includes all of Isaiah 7, not just eight verses, shows that the “sign” of v. 14 was not for King Achaz, who is referred to as “you” (singular) in vv. 11 and 16–17, but for the entire “House of David,” mentioned in v. 13, and referred to as “you” (plural) in vv. 13–14.

The sign for Achaz was that before the *na‘ar* (“child,” at least a toddler, never a newborn baby) should know how to choose good and refuse evil, the events of vv. 16b–17 would occur. That child was Isaiah’s son Sh’ar-Yashuv (v. 3), who was with him as he prophesied and at whom he was probably pointing, not the son (Hebrew *ben*) of v. 14. This leaves v. 14 to provide a sign to the whole House of David, including all the descendants of David from that time onward until the prophecy should be fulfilled—which it was by Yeshua’s virgin birth.

Occasionally persons unacquainted with Christian tradition, specifically Roman Catholic tradition, confuse the term “virgin birth” with “immaculate conception.” The virgin birth of Yeshua—his being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit of God in Miryam before she had ever had sexual contact—is accepted by all Bible-believing Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians. The immaculate conception, the Roman Catholic doctrine (first taught by the Church Fathers) that Miryam herself was sinlessly conceived, is not accepted by Protestants because the New Testament makes no mention of it.

Immanu’el is the name given to the Messiah at Isaiah 7:14, 8:8. As Mattityahu himself explains, it means “**God is with us**”—which is how Hebrew *immanu El* is translated at Isaiah 8:10. However, Yeshua was not known by that name during his life on earth; rather, the name gives a hint (*remez*; see 2:15N) at who he is by describing him: he is God-with-us. God’s people experience the final fulfillment at Rv 21:3, where in the new heavens and new earth “God-with-them” dwells among them.

In the *Tanakh* names frequently describe an aspect of the person named. In fact the *Tanakh* uses several names to refer to the Messiah, including “Shiloh” (Genesis 49:10), “Branch” (Isaiah 11:1), “Sprout” (Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15), and the longest, “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:5–6(6–7)). All describe the Messiah, yet he was known by just one name, Yeshua.

24–25 Yosef’s behavior shows that he accepted Yeshua as his son. According to the Mishna, “If one say, ‘This is my son,’ he is to be believed” (Bava Batra 8:6). The Gemara explains that he is believed “as regards the right of inheritance” (Bava Batra 134a). Thus Yeshua, as a legally acknowledged son, is entitled to inherit the throne of King David from Yosef, a descendant of David (v. 8). (This point is made in Phillip Goble, *How to Point to Yeshua in Your Rabbi’s Bible*, New York: Artists for Israel, 1986.)

25 **Until she had given birth.** Protestants generally affirm that Miryam was a virgin when Yeshua was born, but that “his sisters” (plural: at least two) and four brothers (13:55–56, Mk 6:3) were Miryam and Yosef’s natural children. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Miryam remained a virgin all her life, and that the terms “brothers” and “sisters” are used loosely to refer to more distant relatives (compare Genesis 14:12–16, 31:32, Leviticus 10:4). The Greek phrase “*eo s ou*” (“until”) is inconclusive because it does not necessarily imply a change; that is, the Greek could mean either that they did not have relations during the period before she gave birth but did afterwards, or that they remained celibate afterwards as well. But celibacy in

particular and asceticism in general, though regarded by pagans as spiritually meritorious, were and are the exception in Judaism and in New Covenant faith, as both Yeshua and Sha'ul teach (see 19:10–12&N, 1C 7:1–40&NN, Co 2:18–23&NN, 1 Ti 4:3a&N).

CHAPTER 2

1 **Yeshua was born** between 8 and 4 B.C.E. The reason he was born “B.C.” (“Before Christ”) is that Dionysius Exiguus, the sixth-century monk who set up the modern calendar, made a mistake in determining the date which was not corrected till later. Instead of the terms “A.D.” (“*Anno Domini*,” “in the year of [the] Lord” Yeshua) and “B.C.” the Jewish community customarily denotes these periods by “C.E.” (“Common Era”) and “B.C.E.” (“Before the Common Era”), to avoid relating dates explicitly to the Messiah.

In Beit-Lechem. See v. 6&N.

Herod the Great (c. 73–4 B.C.E.) founded the Herodian dynasty (see Lk 3:1N), which ruled the Land of Israel and its surroundings from 37 B.C.E. until the war with Rome in 66–70 C.E. Herod himself was a man of great physical energy and ambition. His career comes to the notice of historians in 47 B.C.E. in Syria and the Galil; a combination of military successes, political machinations and bribery of Roman superiors enabled him to replace the last of the Hasmonean rulers, Antigonus, when the latter died in 37 B.C.E. (possibly in consequence of one of Herod’s bribes).

Though technically Jewish by birth, since his family was from the Idumeans (Edomites), who had been forcibly converted to Judaism under the Hasmonean Maccabees in the second century B.C.E. (see 23:15N), neither his religious behavior nor his ethics reflected anything of Judaism. He did, however, reconstruct and enlarge the Second Temple, which had been built under Z’rubavel (see the book of Haggai) in 520–516 B.C.E. The Talmudic rabbis said, “One who has not seen Herod’s temple has never seen a beautiful building” (Bava Batra 4a), but also, “It was built by a sinful king, and the building was intended by him as an atonement for having slain Israel’s sages” (Numbers Rabbah 4:14).

Herod was consistently paranoid about his power. He had all his rivals exterminated, including those of his wife’s family (he had married Mariamne, a Hasmonean, and feared the restoration of the Hasmonean dynasty) and even some of his own children (he had fifteen). He built remote fortresses, Herodion and Matzada, as refuges should he be deposed. The events described in 2:1–17 are entirely in keeping with the man’s independently attested character.

Magi were not merely sorcerers or magicians, although the term “magician” comes from this word; nor were they simply astrologers, although they did observe the stars. They were sages, wise men, often in positions of responsibility but sometimes commanding respect because of their wisdom even when not holding office. These Magi came from the Medo-Persian Empire or Babylon.

2 **King of the Jews.** At Yn 1:19N I argue that the Greek word *Ioudaioi* should usually be translated “Judeans” and not “Jews” when the context is the Land of Israel. But the set phrase, “king of the *Ioudaioi*” is used in the New Testament only by non-Jews—here by the Magi, and later by Pontius Pilate and the Roman soldiers (27:37; Mk 15:26; Lk 23:3, 38; Yn 19:19). This argues for making an exception: all of these people were interested not in distinguishing Judeans

from Galileans but Jews from Gentiles.

However, one can make a strong case for rendering *Ioudaioi* “Judeans” even here. Not only is the context the Land of Israel, but three times in vv. 1–6 we read of Beit-Lechem in Y’udah (Judea). The Jewish scholar Solomon Zeitlin so understands the phrase:

“The gospels according to both Matthew [1:1–16] and Luke [3:24–31] trace the genealogy of Jesus to David, while Mark, who does not give the genealogy, states that Jesus is the son of David [12:35]. John, who stresses the view that Jesus was the son of God, nevertheless wrote, ‘But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, that Christ cometh out of the seed of David and out of the town of Bethlehem where David was?’ [7:41–42]. According to the gospels Jesus was greeted with the words, ‘Blessed be the kingdom of our father David’ [Mark 11:10], ‘Hosanna to the Son of David’ [Matthew 21:9]. On the cross on which Jesus was crucified the words ‘Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Judaeans’ were inscribed in Hebrew, Greek and Latin [*Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum*]. *Mashiah*, messiah, Christ were synonymous in their minds with ‘son of David’ and ‘king of the Judaeans.’ ” (“The Origin of the Idea of the Messiah,” in Daniel Jeremy Silver, ed., *In the Time of Harvest*, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1963, p. 458)

His star. This seems to allude to Numbers 24:17, where Balaam prophesies, “There shall come forth a star out of Jacob.” Judaism understands this “star” to be the Messiah. See 2 Ke 1:19N on “the Morning Star.”

4 *Cohanim* (plural; singular *cohen*), “priests,” a word which today evokes the image of clerics in formal Christian denominations or functionaries in eastern or primitive religions. This is because the Jewish priesthood has been dormant since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. But in Yeshua’s day, when the Temple still stood, Judaism without a priesthood was unimaginable.

The task of a priest, like that of a prophet, is to serve as spokesman and mediator between God and man. The prophet speaks to man on behalf of God, the priest to God on behalf of man. The *cohanim* serving in the Temple were descendents of Moshe’s brother Aharon, great-grandson of L’vi, Ya’akov’s third son. In terms of practical job-description their primary duty was to offer sacrificial animals on the altar. The ever-bloody altar in the Temple of God was a continual witness to Israel that God’s penalty for sin is death (see MJ 10:3). The concepts of priesthood and sacrifice are minimized in today’s non-Messianic Judaism (see MJ 9:22N), but the Judaism of the Bible is inoperative without them. Messianic Judaism holds that Yeshua the Messiah is our everlasting *cohen* (MJ 7:23–25) and our everlasting sacrifice (MJ 7:27, Yn 1:29).

Torah-teachers. The Greek word “*grammateus*” translates literally Hebrew *sofer*, which has the literal meaning “scribe” and is usually so rendered in English. But the function of the *sofrim* in Yeshua’s day went well beyond copying scrolls or performing secretarial duties; they were the primary students and teachers of the content of Judaism, that is, of *Torah*.

The leading *cohanim*, who were mostly Sadducees, **and *Torah-teachers*,** who were allied with the Pharisees (but see next paragraph), represented the two main concentrations of power within the Jewish religious establishment (see 3:7N). The opinions of the two groups frequently differed, but Herod’s question received a single

response; from this we learn that all Israel agreed that the Messiah would be born in Beit-Lechem (see v. 6N).

Joseph Shulam, a Messianic Jewish leader in Jerusalem, points out that modern scholars believe the scribes were neither rabbis nor Pharisees but “sages of the ‘*am-ha’aretz*” (see Yn 7:49N, Ac 4:13N), *Torah*-teachers without *s’mikhah* (ordination; see 21:23N)—but see Mk 2:16&N. For this reason they could not bring *chiddushim* (introduce new interpretations) or *posek halakhah* (make legal judgments). According to Shulam, this is why the people were in shock that Yeshua taught like a rabbi and not like a scribe (7:28–29, Mk 1:22&N).

In Judaism the citation of a Scripture text implies the whole context, not merely the

6

quoted words. Thus Micah 5:1(2) reads, in full, from the Hebrew:

“But you, Beit-Lechem Efratah, though small among the thousands of Y’hudah, nevertheless out of you shall one come forth to me who will be ruler in Israel; and his goings-forth are from of old, from ancient days.”

Some have taken this verse to mean only that the Messiah is to be descended from King David, who came out of Beit-Lechem (1 Samuel 17:12), also called Efratah (Genesis 48:7). But it is bad exegesis to give this very clear prediction of the geographic origin of the Messiah such a figurative meaning. Instead it is an effort to fudge the obvious reference to Yeshua, the eternal Son of God “whose goings-forth are of old, from ancient days,” as noted in Yochanan 1:1–2&N, 14; 8:56–58&N.

It is amazing that in many periods of history significant numbers of Jewish people have fallen for the claims of Messianic pretenders (see 1:22N), not one of whom fulfilled this prophecy by being born in Bethlehem.

There are even rabbinic sources which directly identify Beit-Lechem as the birthplace of the Messiah, for example, the Midrash Rabbah to Lamentations, Section 51 (on Lamentations 1:16):

“A man was plowing when one of his oxen lowed. An Arab passed by and asked, ‘What are you?’ He replied, ‘I am a Jew.’ The Arab said to him, ‘Unharness your ox and untie your plow [as a sign of mourning].’ ‘Why?’ ‘Because the Temple of the Jews is destroyed.’ The Jew asked, ‘How do you know this?’ ‘From the lowing of your ox.’ While they were talking the ox lowed again. The Arab said, ‘Harness your ox and tie up your plow, because the deliverer of the Jews is born.’ ‘What is his name?’ ‘His name is Menachem [Comforter].’ ‘What is his father’s name?’ ‘Chizkiyahu [King Hezekiah is identified in Jewish literature with the Messiah].’ ‘Where do they live?’ He answered, ‘In Birat-’Arba, in Beit-Lechem of Judea.’ ”

The same *aggadah* (story) appears in the Jerusalem Talmud at B’rakhot 5a; there the last line is, “In the royal capital of Beit-Lechem.” Moreover, although it does not identify the Messiah as Yeshua, it implies that the Messiah has come already, around the time of the Temple’s destruction.

An angel of Adonai. See Yn 1:14N.

13

15

Out of Egypt I called my son. Hosea 11:1 clearly refers not to the Messiah but to the people of Israel, who were called God’s son even before leaving Egypt (Exodus 4:22). The previous two *Tanakh* quotations (1:23, 2:6) involved literal fulfillment, but this does not. In what

sense, then, does Yeshua's flight to Egypt **fulfill what Adonai had said through the prophet?**

To answer, we must understand the four basic modes of Scripture interpretation used by the rabbis. These are:

- (1) *P'shat* ("simple")—the plain, literal sense of the text, more or less what modern scholars mean by "grammatical-historical exegesis," which looks to the grammar of the language and the historical setting as background for deciding what a passage means. Modern scholars often consider grammatical-historical exegesis the only valid way to deal with a text; pastors who use other approaches in their sermons usually feel defensive about it before academics. But the rabbis had three other modes of interpreting Scripture, and their validity should not be excluded in advance but related to the validity of their implied presuppositions.
- (2) *Remez* ("hint")—wherein a word, phrase or other element in the text hints at a truth not conveyed by the *p'shat*. The implied presupposition is that God can hint at things of which the Bible writers themselves were unaware.
- (3) *Drash* or *midrash* ("search")—an allegorical or homiletical application of a text. This is a species of eisegesis—reading one's own thoughts into the text—as opposed to exegesis, which is extracting from the text what it actually says. The implied presupposition is that the words of Scripture can legitimately become grist for the mill of human intellect, which God can guide to truths not directly related to the text at all.
- (4) *Sod* ("secret")—a mystical or hidden meaning arrived at by operating on the numerical values of the Hebrew letters, noting unusual spellings, transposing letters, and the like. For example, two words, the numerical equivalents of whose letters add up to the same amount, are good candidates for revealing a secret through what Arthur Koestler in his book on the inventive mind called "bisociation of ideas." The implied presupposition is that God invests meaning in the minutest details of Scripture, even the individual letters.

The presuppositions underlying *remez*, *drash* and *sod* obviously express God's omnipotence, but they also express his love for humanity, in the sense that he chooses out of love to use extraordinary means for reaching people's hearts and minds. At the same time, it is easy to see how *remez*, *drash* and *sod* can be abused, since they all allow, indeed require, subjective interpretation; and this explains why scholars, who deal with the objective world, hesitate to use them.

These four methods of working a text are remembered by the Hebrew word "*PaRDeS*," an acronym formed from the initials; it means "orchard" or "garden."

What, then, is Mattityahu doing here? Some allege he is misusing Scripture, twisting the meaning of what Hosea wrote from its context in order to apply it to Yeshua. Such an accusation stands only if Mattityahu is dealing with the *p'shat*. For there is no question that the *p'shat* of Hosea 11:1 applies to the nation of Israel and not to Yeshua.

Some think Mattityahu is using the *drash* approach, making a *midrash* in which he reads the Messiah into a verse dealing with Israel. Many rabbis used the same procedure; Mattityahu's readers would not have found it objectionable.

Nevertheless, I believe Mattityahu is not doing eisegesis but giving us a *remez*, a hint

of a very deep truth. Israel is called God's son as far back as Exodus 4:22. The Messiah is presented as God's son a few verses earlier in Mattityahu (1:18–25), reflecting *Tanakh* passages such as Isaiah 9:5–6(6–7), Psalm 2:7 and Proverbs 30:4. Thus the Son equals the son: the Messiah is equated with, is one with, the nation of Israel. This is the deep truth Mattityahu is hinting at by calling Yeshua's flight to Egypt a "fulfillment" of Hosea 11:1.

This fact, that the Messiah Yeshua stands for and is intimately identified with his people Israel, is an extremely important corporate aspect of the Gospel generally neglected in the individualistically oriented Western world. The individual who trusts Yeshua becomes united with him and is "immersed" (baptized; see 3:1&N) into all that Yeshua is (see Ac 2:38&N), including his death and resurrection—so that his sin nature is regarded as dead, and his new nature, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is regarded as alive (Ro 6:3–6&N). Likewise, just as this intimate identification with the Messiah holds for the individual, so the Messiah similarly identifies with and embodies national, corporate Israel. Indeed it is only because Yeshua identifies himself with the Jewish people, national Israel, the "olive tree" into which Gentile Christians have been "grafted" (Ro 11:17–24), that he can plausibly identify with the Messianic Community, the Church, as "head of the Body" (1C 11:3; Ep 1:10, 22; 4:15, 5:23; Co 1:18, 2:19) and "cornerstone" of the building (below at 21:42, Mk 12:10, Ac 4:11, Ep 2:20, 1 Ke 2:6–7).

Modern readers of the Bible, by using "grammatical-historical exegesis," ignore all modes of interpretation except the *p'shat*, discounting them as eisegesis. This is in reaction to the tendency of the Church Fathers in the second through eighth centuries to over-allegorize, an error which probably resulted from their misunderstanding the limitations of, and therefore misusing, the other three rabbinic approaches to texts. But the New Testament is a Jewish book, written by Jews in a Jewish context; and the first-century Jewish context included all four ways of handling texts. Mattityahu knew perfectly well that Hosea was not referring to Yeshua, to a Messiah, or even to any individual. Yet he also sensed that because Yeshua in a profound yet recondite way embodies Israel, his coming from Egypt re-enacted in a spiritually significant way the Exodus of the Jewish people. Since *remez* and *p'shat* have different presuppositions one should expect fulfillment of a prophecy by *remez* to be different from literal fulfillment. At 1:23 and 2:6 the plain, literal sense of the text, the *p'shat*, suffices to show how the prophecies are fulfilled, but here it does not.

The phrase, "**what Adonai had said through the prophet,**" takes our attention off the prophet himself and puts it on God who spoke through him. It lets the reader understand that *Adonai* might have been saying more than what the prophet himself understood when he wrote. It prepares him for the possibility that behind Hosea's *p'shat* was God's *remez* to be revealed in its time and lends credibility to the "*PaRDeS*" mode of interpretation.

Recognition that there are four modes of Jewish exegesis also resolves much of the controversy concerning how certain passages in the *Tanakh* ought to be interpreted. For example, most Christians say that Isaiah 53 refers to the Messiah, and some (though not all) traditional Jews say it refers to Israel. But if there is a mystical identification between the Messiah and the people whose king he is (an idea expounded at length by the best-known Christian theologian of the twentieth century, Karl Barth, in his *Church Dogmatics*), then the interpretational conflict vanishes; both claimants hold part

of the total truth.

Moreover, the idea that the Messiah personifies or is identified intimately with Israel is a Jewish one. First of all, we see it in the *Tanakh* itself. Compare Isaiah 49:3 (“You are my servant Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”) with Isaiah 49:6 (“Is it too slight a thing that you should be my servant ... to restore the preserved of Israel?”). The servant is at once Israel and he who restores Israel, that is, the Messiah. In chapter 12 of Raphael Patai’s *The Messiah Texts* he quotes Pesikta Rabbati 161–162, where the Messiah is called Efrayim (a name symbolizing Israel) and is at the same time presented as bearing Israel’s sufferings. Likewise the thirteenth-century work which is at the core of the Jewish mystical approach called *kabbalah*, the *Zohar* (2:212a), links the Messiah’s suffering with that of Israel. Patai also retells the eighteenth-century Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav’s story of the viceroy and the king’s daughter, adding that most interpreters understand the viceroy to represent both Israel and the suffering Messiah.

18 The *p’shat* of this verse from Jeremiah does not refer to the Messiah but to the slaughter of the northern tribes of Israel by the Assyrians. But there is a *remez* here of which Mattityahu makes use: the traditional burial-place of Ya‘akov’s wife Rachel is in Ramah, just outside Beit-Lechem—one can visit what is called “Rachel’s Tomb” there today. Just as Rachel in her grave mourns for her posterity descended from her son Yosef, so the many women of nearby Beit-Lechem mourn for their slain infants.

20–21 What does the New Testament call the Holy Land? Not Palestine but *Eretz-Israel*, “the Land of Israel.” Similarly, the regions north and south of Jerusalem are called not the West Bank but “Y’hudah” and “Shomron” (Judea and Samaria; see Ac 1:8). The New Testament, like the Israelis of today, uses the names the Hebrew Bible uses, not those employed by the Romans or other conquerors. See 5:5&N.

23 This is a problematical verse. In every instance where Mattityahu is showing the fulfillment of a Scriptural prophecy (see list in 1:23N), a specific writer—Isaiah, Jeremiah, David—is named, or “the prophet,” or “the *Tanakh*,” followed by a verse or passage. Here **the prophets** (uniquely plural) are mentioned, and no text is quoted. This is clear from the fact that Mattityahu leaves out “*legontos*” (“saying”), the Greek keyword he uses to cite Scripture. Rather, he seems to be alluding to a general concept found in several prophets, capable of being fulfilled by the Messiah’s being what the Greek text here calls a *Nazo raios*? (in some other places the word is “*Nazare nos*”). The questions: Which prophets? What did they actually say? And what is a *Nazo raios/Nazare nos*?

Some have suggested that the verse has to do with Yeshua’s taking the vows of a Nazirite (Numbers 6:1–23). But this is improbable, since there is no record that Yeshua, who was not an ascetic (11:16–19), ever did such a thing.

A second possibility is that since **Natzeret** (Nazareth, see Lk 1:26N) was a place people made fun of—as in Natan’el’s remark, “Natzeret? Can anything good come from there?” (Yn 1:46)—Mattityahu is referring to the many *Tanakh* prophecies that say the Messiah would be despised (e.g., Psalm 22, Isaiah 52:13–53:12) and is informing us that these prophecies would be fulfilled, in part, by his having the onus of being a *Natzrati*, a resident of Natzeret.

The third possibility is that Mattityahu is speaking of the prediction that the Messiah will be a *netzer* (“branch”) from the stock of Yishai, King David’s father (Isaiah 11:1);

but compare Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15; Zechariah 3:8, 6:12, where the word is “*tzemach*,” (“sprout”). Thus several **prophets** use the idea, though not the word “*netzer*.” (For more on “the prophets” see 5:17N.)

What I consider most probable is that Mattityahu is combining the second and third alternatives by means of wordplay, a technique very common in Jewish writing, including the Bible. Yeshua is both *netzer* and *Natzrati*.

Finally, although one of the earliest names for the Jewish believers was “*Notzrim*” (“Nazareth-ites,” that is, “followers of the man from Nazareth,” Acts 24:5&N), it would be odd for Mattityahu to use the same term for the one they followed. The Talmud refers to him as *Yeshu HaNotzri* (B’rakhhot 17b, Sotah 47a). In modern Hebrew “*Notzri*” remains the everyday word for “Christian”; but it is wrong and confusing to speak of “Yeshua the Christian,” i.e., the follower of Christ—he could not follow himself! The Talmud’s expression should be understood as meaning “Yeshua the *Natzrati*, Yeshua from Natzeret.” I use the term “*Natzrati*” instead of “*Notzri*” (both are acceptable modern Hebrew) in order to get away from the modern connotations of “*Notzri*” in Hebrew.

⁶⁰ Isaiah 7:14

⁶¹ Micah 5:1(2)

⁶² Hosea 11:1

⁶³ Jeremiah 31:14(15)

ⁱ*The Jewish New Testament*, (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications) 1996.

ⁱⁱ*The Jewish New Testament Commentary*, (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications) 1996.