

## Hope of Israel Ministries (Ecclesia of YEHOVAH):

# Origins of the Virgin Birth *Myth*

The Greeks of the first few centuries of the Common Era had to pick and choose among the dozens of mystery cults and gods that had sprung up -- each promising riches and eternal bliss in a heavenly afterlife. The Messiah had little to offer these Greeks. He was a mortal Judahite messiah, speaking mainly to the sons of Abraham, so the Messiah's later-added attribute of a virgin birth was necessary if the Messiah was to be made acceptable to the pagans of the Hellenized world. The interpolators of Matthew and Luke proceeded to elevate the Messiah to the status of the Greek savior-gods by inserting, at the front of these gospels, the birth narrative of the Messiah.

**by James Still**

Biblical scholars have long ago dismissed the literal interpretation of the miraculous virgin-birth of the Messiah. Also, many liberal Christian denominations have either quietly purged this curious piece of teaching from their body of philosophy, or conveniently ignore the issue altogether. Despite this, the allure of such an intriguing concept is still very powerful and the Messiah's virgin birth continues to enjoy the unquestioning belief of millions of people. The purpose of this article is to explore the mythological connections between prodigal children in history with an emphasis on the meaning and symbology of virgin birth as it particularly relates to the Messiah. In this way the Messiah's virgin birth and the mysteries surrounding it will be fully explored in the mythological context from which it derives.

We know very little about the desert nomads and goddess worshippers who settled the fertile Tigris-Euphrates river valley. Mesopotamia, situated as it was between the ancient lands of Ur and Sumer, was almost constantly at war in the three millennia preceding the Common Era. What we do know comes down to us through the Ashurbanipal library. King Ashurbanipal (fl. 668 BCE) of Nineveh ruled the Assyrian empire just prior to its decline. His brutal accomplishments on the battlefield were tempered only by a driving passion for letters and learning so that, over time his spoils included the religious texts and history books of all of his conquered neighbors including the Mesopotamians. After his death, his empire collapsed and in a few short years Nineveh itself was utterly destroyed by Persian invaders. The invaders were only interested in destroying Nineveh's military might; they ruined the city's walls, but completely ignored the

Ashurbanipal's library, perhaps considering it a mere whimsical endeavor. The library was soon swallowed up by the shifting sands of the desert. Finally in 1845 British archaeologists rediscovered Nineveh and the wealth of books which lay buried there.

The pre-civilized world of ancient Mesopotamia, consisted of small farming settlements whose people worshipped Ishtar, a fertile, mother goddess. Ishtar caused the rains to fall and the crops to grow in a continuous cycle of birth, life, and death. Over time, Ishtar-worship began to wane as the warlike male gods of neighboring tribes emerged in positions of prominence. The warrior-kings of neighboring desert tribes continually invaded the fertile lands of Mesopotamia, eventually seizing the land and incorporating it into their own rising and falling empires. One of the first warrior-kings to rise up among these early peoples was Sargon of Akkad, who established his kingdom in 1632 BCE. Ishtar was by now fully absorbed into the stronger cults of the patriarchal deities and she became a lesser deity who was subservient to the new male gods of the warrior-kings.

Sargon is perhaps the first Babylonian king who was said to have a larger-than-life birth and childhood. He was born in secret to a mother of lowly birth and a father who was a mountain god. In a motif which would later be borrowed and attributed to Horus and Moses, Sargon's mother placed the child in a basket of rushes and sent him down a river to protect him from the god's enemies. The babe was rescued downstream by simple folk and the goddess Ishtar loved and guided Sargon through his early childhood and to his final destiny: the ascension of the throne. Sargon's biography started a "tall tale" tradition that subsequent kings felt the need to match. The attribute of divine birth and predestination became an important vehicle whereby a mortal king was said to be god-favored; gaining recognition and power during his life which often continued into posterity long after death.

By 1000 BCE, we find this tradition improved upon so that the biography of kings and important men insist that they were not only divinely born, but said to have transcended death to become gods themselves. Zoroaster, the Persian prophet and patriarch who lived and preached in ancient Babylon, was said to have been God-begotten and virgin born. Virgin-birth was the responsibility of the Ishtar priestesses, who conducted fertility rites, prophesied and performed elaborate rituals in the temples throughout Babylon. The priestesses who administered the temples also managed a lucrative prostitution business that provided a steady stream of financial support for temple activities. Upon their return to Palestine, Hebrews of the Babylonian captivity brought back to the Mediterranean peoples wondrous tales of the priestesses and their blasphemous sexual ministries to the men who visited them. The role of the Ishtar priestess was to act as both mother to the prospective man's child and minister to the child's divine needs:

"Holy Virgin" was the title of harlot-priestesses of Ishtar (and) Asherah. The title didn't mean physical virginity; it meant simply "unmarried." The function of such "holy virgins" was to dispense the Mother's grace through sexual worship; to heal; to prophesy; to perform sacred dances; to wail for the dead; and to become Brides of God." [1]

The Hebrews called the children of these priestesses *bathur*, which meant literally

"virgin-born" as in those children who were born of the holy harlot-priestesses of the temple. The Hellenic world had no equivalent to the bizarre rituals of Ishtar, and mistranslated and misunderstood the literal Hebrew's *bathur* as *parthenioi*, also "virgin-born" but in the sense of physical, not spiritual, virginity.

The Zoroastrian cosmology told of the world lasting for twelve thousand years in four, three-thousand year blocks of time. The last block of time began with the divine birth of the prophet and would end by ushering in the apocalyptic end of the world and the restoration of good over evil:

[Zoroaster's] birth and teaching in the world marked the opening of the final three thousand of the world span of twelve thousand years -- at the end of which term his spiritual sons Saoshyant, "the Coming Savior," the World Messiah, would appear, to culminate the victory of Truth over the Lie and establish forever the restoration of the pristine creation of God. As the legend tells, the birthplace of Zoroaster...was beside the river Daiti, in the central land of the seven lands of the earth, Eran Vej....Angra Mainyu [Demon of the Lie] rushed from the regions of the north, crying to his horde, "Annihilate him!" But the holy babe chanted aloud...and the demons were dispersed.[2]

In the Hellenic empire carved out by Alexander the Great during the third century BCE, these eastern beliefs and myths mingled with those of the Greeks, Egyptians, and Semitic peoples. Alexander was anxious to connect the Mediterranean world with the strange ways and customs of the Orient and sought to connect his two empires culturally as well as politically. The Greeks had already devised well-developed concepts of divine impregnation. The savior-god Dionysus was said to have been born after Zeus visited Persephone in the form of a serpent. The Persian contribution to these Hellenic myths was to bring the fascinating idea of the virgin (*parthenioi*) birth to the old Dionysus and Herakles stories. Eventually the pagan mysteries had fully incorporated the virgin-birth ceremonies of the Ishtar priestesses into their own beliefs and religions as each savior-god took on the divine attribute themselves.

The Greeks related that Persephone was hidden in a cave by her mother, the goddess Demeter. While there, Persephone began weaving a great tapestry of the universe out of a web of wool. Zeus learned of her presence and approached Persephone in the guise of a serpent. She conceived a son for Zeus and named him Dionysus, whom she cared for and nurtured in the cave to protect the young child from other jealous wives of Zeus. Eventually Herakles, whom the Romans would rename to Hercules, was said to have been born of a god as well. In due time Perseus, Minos, Asclepius, Miletus, and many others, were all reputedly born of a specially selected mortal woman and a god in the manner of the Ishtar virgin priestesses. Often the god would impregnate the woman as a spirit in special ceremonies. Zeus was said to have impregnated Danae by visiting her as a ray of sunlight and the dove, sacred to Ishtar, manifests itself as a holy spirit to impregnate Mary and announce Yeshua the Messiah as the son of YEHOUAH God. [3]

One result of the Persian-Hellenic blend of myths was Mithras. Mithras was a Persian deity, but other than his name used "to give itself an exotic oriental flavor," [4] Hellenic

Mithraism was distinctly pagan. Mithraism began and flourished at the same time as did Christianity. The cult gained enormous popularity and by the third century hundreds of mithraeum -- underground temples where Mithras was worshipped -- were spread out across Asia Minor, Africa, Italy, Greece, and the German and Scottish frontiers where Roman soldiers were stationed. Mithras is the most recognizable of the Mediterranean gods that was said to have been physically virgin-born; a flattering imitation of the Ishtar priestesses of Babylon. Mithras was depicted as a "bull-slayer" and stone-carved reliefs display a tauroctony where Mithras plunges a knife into the neck of a great bull, while the blood spills down to the ground. The bull-slaying scene always takes place inside of a cave, symbolically represented by the mithraeum's locations in caves and underground grottos. To understand this symbolic bull-slaying, we must first look briefly at the Greco-Roman world's understanding of the universe.

The ancients believed that the sun, the moon, "wandering" stars (planets), comets, and other celestial bodies were heavenly gods who were in motion about a stationary earth. Since the sun (*Sol invictus*) seemed to be the most influential of the celestial gods, it was especially worshipped and regarded as annually "reborn" at its lowest point in the sky during the winter solstice of December 25th. [5] Since the plane of the ecliptic -- the path that the sun travels in the sky -- traces out the band of the twelve star-patterns that make up the zodiac, the sun was considered a god that gave "birth" to, or was a father of, the twelve zodiacal gods. The Greek astronomer Hipparchus made the astounding discovery in 128 BCE that the zodiac of constellations slowly drifted backward over time so that they appeared, with respect to the sun's position at winter solstice, in a new location in the heavens. Every 25 thousand years these constellations slowly moved; a phenomenon we know today to be the precession of the equinoxes which is caused by the "wobble" of the earth on its axis. To the ancients, it was a frightening and astounding event:

Hipparchus, who assumed that the earth was immovable and at the center of the cosmos, could only understand the precession as a movement of the entire cosmic sphere. In other words, Hipparchus's discovery amounted to the revelation that the entire universe was moving in a way that no one had ever been aware of before....[The precession] had profound religious implications. A new force had been detected capable of shifting the cosmic sphere: Was it not likely that this new force was a sign of the activity of a new god, a god so powerful that he was capable of moving the entire universe? [6]

At the time Hipparchus made his discovery, the spring equinox, which signaled the resurrection of the sun-god, appeared in the constellation of Aries the Ram. Before Aries, it was seen that the equinox fell on Taurus the Bull. This celestial movement taking place among the heavenly gods and the "death" of Taurus the Bull made a tremendous impact. Mithras became that celestial force who was strong enough to slay the bull and was able to command the very heavens to do his bidding.

In Mithraism, just as in Christianity and Zoroastrianism before them, the world was a constant battleground of good and evil; a bitter dualistic struggle between the hosts of

demons and the elect who serve God. Spirituality warred against the physical, and darkness imperiled the good fortune of light. Mithras represented the divine son of the sun-god and the savior of good against darkness in the universe who battled against the minions of evil to save mankind.

Because Mithras could move the celestial sphere at will, he was seen as outside of the universe. Carvings of Mithras reflect his birth as a naked child bursting from an egg-shaped *petra genatrix*, or "Generative Rock." The rock caves where the mithraeum were located symbolize the "womb" from which Mithras emerged. His escape from the confines of the rock, attest to his extra-universal power to escape the celestial sphere and command the heavens:

[Mithras'] birth is said to have been brought about *solo aestu libidinis*, "by the sole heat of libido...." The earth has given birth -- a virgin birth -- to the archetypal Man. [7]

Mithras was born on December 25th, the eve of the winter solstice when the sun is at its lowest point in the sky. With the dawn of light on Mithras' birth "the priest emerged from the temple to announce triumphantly: The God is born!" [8]

When Christianity gained power in the fifth century, Mithraism was declared heretical and ruthlessly scourged. Before that time, Christianity and Mithraism coexisted and were undoubtedly influential upon each other. This mingling and influence are apparent in the manner with which Christianity overtook Mithraism. **The former had no trouble incorporating Mithraism's followers into its own ranks and many former mithraeums were converted to churches.** Many Roman churches today, the Church of San Clemente in Rome most notably, still contain well-preserved mithraeums in their vaulted burial crypts. *The lines that divided Mithraism from Christianity were understandably blurred* due to this slow and steady absorption of Mithraism by Christianity during the centuries that the two existed side-by-side. This process led to the similarities that we now see shared between the two religions:

[Mithras] was said to have been sent by a father-god to vanquish darkness and evil in the world. Born of a virgin (a birth witnessed only by shepherds), Mithras was described variously as the Way, the Truth, the Light, the Word, the Son of God, and the Good Shepherd and was often depicted carrying a lamb upon his shoulders. Followers of Mithras celebrated December 25th (the winter solstice) by ringing bells, singing hymns, lighting candles, giving gifts, and administering a sacrament of bread and water. Between December 25th and the spring equinox (Easter, from the Latin for earth goddess) came the 40 days' search for Osiris, a god of justice and love. The cult also observed Black Friday, commemorating Mithras' sacrificial bull-slaying which fructified the earth. Worn out by the battle, Mithras is symbolically represented as a corpse and is placed in a sacred rock tomb from which he is removed after three days in a festival of rejoicing. [9]

**The Messiah's virgin-birth was probably attributed to him during this time.**

Matthew and Luke write that the Messiah was born of a virgin in 1:18-25, and 1:26-35, respectively. Mark, the earliest of the synoptics, makes no such claim and the Gospel of John would never think of making the Messiah more than flesh and blood. The Gospel of Mark aligns itself closely with the earlier Q -- the forty or so oral tradition sayings that are believed to be derived from the Messiah's teachings directly -- and does not think to concern itself with the biography of the Messiah prior to his baptism by John. To early Christians, the childhood or place and manner of the birth of the Messiah was irrelevant. The Kingdom of YEHOVAH God was at hand and the Messiah the messenger had warned them of that fact and that they should prepare for the new heaven and earth that was to come in their lifetimes. Given the Messiah's apocalyptic message and instructions to repent and prepare for the LORD, a posterity-driven biography would seem absurd. If the Kingdom of YEHOVAH God was at hand, as the Messiah taught, then there would be no future generations to read anything that was codified in the present. Thus, the oral tradition preserved the Messiah's teachings in short, concise pericopes (short sayings) and Yeshua's followers gave little thought to writing them down at first because of the very nature of the apocalyptic movement that had sprung up around them.

As time went by it could be seen that the Kingdom of YEHOVAH God was delayed. Among the Hellenized Jews and the Greek pagans who were considering conversion to Christianity, this delay posed more questions than answers. Additionally, Greek pagans, from which Christianity was to draw its converts and eventually thrive, were naturally skeptical of any new savior and the heavenly rewards they might promise. *These Greeks had to pick and choose among the dozens of mystery cults and gods that had sprung up, each promising riches and eternal bliss in a heavenly afterlife. The Messiah had little to offer these Greeks. He was, by all accounts, a mortal Jewish messiah, speaking only to the sons of Abraham and telling them to prepare the way of the LORD who would build a new Jerusalem especially for his chosen people.* The Marcan Messiah that was known to his followers during the middle-to-late first-century (before the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John) shared none of the attributes of the time-honored moral-savior deities of Dionysus or Herakles. **The Messiah's later-added attribute of a virgin-birth was necessary if the Messiah was to be made acceptable to the pagans of the Hellenized world.**

Hebrew teachings do not specify that the Messiah would be born of a virgin; the very idea is *ALIEN* to Jewish expectations of who the Messiah would be. Quite contrary to the Hellenized Jesus "there is nothing in the Jewish sacred books to suggest that the Messiah or anyone else was, or was to be, born of a virgin." [10] The Messiah had been thoroughly rejected by the Judahites who had decided that he was not the Messiah that would usher in the new Kingdom. Early Christians had no choice but to turn away from Palestine and introduce the Messiah to the House of Israel and the Gentile world.

The Gospel of Mark begins with the Baptist in the River Jordan and the baptism of the Messiah there. ***Early versions of Matthew and Luke, which were circulated among Greek Christians, began with the Baptist as well.*** At some point, these Christians felt the need to tailor their savior after the Greek savior-gods that they were familiar with and

felt that it would be necessary to write a biography of the Messiah to fill that need and make him as powerful and honorable as the pagan gods. The Gospel of Mark (70 CE or earlier) was already too well known and circulated, but the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were perfect for *inserting the childhood biography of Jesus*:

The first two chapters of Matthew and the first three chapters of Luke were added in the second century by Hellenizers who would accept only a divinely born savior-god like those of the pagan mystery-cults...." [11]

By the close of the first century it became necessary to codify the origins of the Messiah so as to defend him from the pagan critics who hesitated at following a new god when their current ones, like Herakles and Perseus, were well known to have been born by the union of a god and a virgin mother. Writing independently of each other, **the authors or interpolators of Matthew and Luke proceeded to elevate the Messiah to the status of the Greek savior-gods by inserting at the front of their gospels, the birth narrative of the Messiah.** The end result however created another problem:

Although Matthew and Luke, who deal with the Virgin Birth story, are considered "inspired" writers...they yet disagree on minor details. It was to Joseph that the angel appeared to according to Matthew; it was to Mary according to Luke. And the Annunciation (the angel Gabriel's announcement of the Incarnation) took place before Mary's conception, if Luke is the authority; and after, if Matthew is the authority. [12]

At the time of Matthew and Luke's interpolation, "Christianity" had deeply rooted itself in the Graeco-Roman world and had completely separated itself from its mother religion Judaism. Former pagans were converting en masse and *brought their religious beliefs with them to the new religion.*

Even the Hebrew's Tanakh was forgotten, having been replaced by the Greek Septuagint which translated the Old Testament books into Greek terms and concepts that often were misleading, inaccurate, or mistranslated from the Hebrew texts. The Greek-speaking author of Matthew, relying on the faulty translation of the Septuagint, rendered the Hebrew word *almah* (young woman) into Greek *parthenos* (virgin) when he wrote:

Behold, a *parthenos* shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. [13]

The Septuagint had retained the Ishtar-worshipping virgin-temple practices in part by insisting on the physical virgin-birth of Isaiah's prophetic Emmanuel in verses 7:14. The later writers of Matthew and Luke relied on the Septuagint for their references. After reading this passage in Isaiah, Matthew sought to find a way to fit the Messiah into the virgin-birth role that Isaiah spoke of, thus achieving a prophecy in Yeshua's own birth. The impetus for the idea and the motivation which would eventually permanently seal it into the canon, came from the huge numbers of pagan converts. *These converts didn't want to leave behind Mithras and Perseus, who were both virgin-born, in exchange for a*

## *Jewish Messiah who was not.*

The text in Isaiah 7:14, properly translated from the Hebrew Nevi'im reads:

Assuredly, my LORD will give you a sign of His own accord! Look, the young woman is with child and about to give birth to a son. Let her name him Immanuel.

This "young woman" may perhaps be unmarried or a physical virgin, but she should not be confused with the role of the Holy Virgins of the pagan temples of Ishtar whose job it was to bear savior-gods. This passage could not refer to anything other than a direct sign of YEHOVAH concerning the events of Isaiah's time. Isaiah specifically refers to the time and place in which the prophet is speaking to King Ahaz and reassuring him that Syria and Ephraim will not go to war with Judah. [14] Isaiah "is simply saying to Ahaz that a lady who is now a virgin will shortly fall pregnant and bear a son, and that by the time this has happened the political dangers will have been averted." [15] Matthew, straining to provide some kind of scriptural basis for the virgin-birth of the Messiah, takes Isaiah *out of context* in order to support a prophecy fulfillment through the Messiah's virgin birth. We see the context-dropping in 8:3-4 where Isaiah's prophecy is said to have come true in that "the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria" shall be plundered by Assyria while the child is yet an infant. These invasions and the resultant booty did occur in the seventh century BCE. How did such a doctrine ever become promulgated?

What actually happened is obvious enough: at an early date, Judaizers interpolated passages designed to make Yeshua the Messiah who would establish a Jewish empire at His Parousia; but then, about 115-125 (CE), since it had become impossible to remove these interpolations, certain Hellenizers simply superimposed Matt. 1:18-25 and Luke 1 upon them, which provided the Messiah with a Virgin Birth and made of him a savior generically similar to Dionysus and therefore acceptable in the pagan world. [16]

By the time pagan philosophers like Celsus (fl. 180 CE) were denouncing the virgin-birth mythology, it was too late. The doctrine was already imbedded in the collective minds and manuscripts of the early Christians. Celsus anticipated the motive behind the virgin birth narrative and accused Christians of attributing the virgin birth to the Messiah in order to imitate the pagan savior-gods:

Many of the nations of the world hold doctrines similar to those espoused by the Christians....The Galactophagi of Homer, the Druids of Gaul, and even the Getae (for example) believe doctrines very close to (the historicity of Christianity and Judaism)...Linus, Musaeus, Orpheus, Pherecydes, Zoroaster the Persian, and Pythagoras understood these doctrines....What absurdity! Clearly the Christians have used the myths of the Danae and the Melanippe, or of the Auge and the Antiope in fabricating the story of Jesus' virgin birth. [17]

Celsus' bitter criticism necessitated a Christian apology that never quite overcame the



defensive posture that it was forced to take. Early Church fathers like Eusebius and Augustine compare and contrast the Messiah heavily against his pagan contemporaries, claiming that if the Messiah is false, then so is Mithras and Herakles. During this period, the early Christians were still tied to their pagan roots and had not yet stated a clear case for why their god should not be considered an equal of Mithras, Dionysus, and other Greek and Roman gods. Roman critics and neoplatonic philosophers who argued against Christianity from a conservative status quo position, couldn't understand why Christians would want to so closely fashion their god after those of the standard repertoire of state-endorsed gods.

The pagan idea of a savior-god being virgin-born was very persistent:

a...factor making for the survival of such tales (virgin birth) in religious cults is stressed by Gilbert Murray. He notes that it is the saviour gods of paganism who are often reputed virgin-born. The father-god supplies the human race with a saviour, his son, by impregnating a goddess or a mortal. He must, however, not be regarded as actuated by lust. His purpose is the birth of a great saviour of mankind, and so the impregnation has to be effected without carnal intercourse. Hence Io was made pregnant by the laying on of the divine hand, Danae by the golden sunlight. [18]

Nowhere is virgin birth so stressed as in the Graeco-Roman world where the synoptic interpolators were deeply rooted:

[T]he doctrine of the Virgin Birth, without which no prophet or savior-god could be a divine incarnation, was so common among ancient cults that it was impossible for any religious founder to achieve acceptance without it. [19]

The virgin-birth story which is attributed to Yeshua the Messiah, *is a later pagan addition interpolated for the sole purpose of adding support for the Christian savior*. Not having been based upon a solid textual foundation like the Jews, early Christians needed to attribute the characteristics and events of existing gods to their savior in order to legitimize him as a god worthy of worship. The Messiah represents a crossover from Messianic Judaism and Graeco-Roman paganism; an embodiment of the best of both worlds.

Clues from the apocryphal -- texts not included in the canon -- that account for the persistence of the Messiah's virgin-birth may be from the Gospel of Thomas, which dates to perhaps 50 CE. The Messiah is preaching in the desert using parables and saying that "he who has ears, let him hear." A woman calls out saying "[b]lessed are the womb which bore you and the breasts which nourished you" to which the Messiah replies:

Blessed are those who have heard the word of the father and have truly kept it. For there will be days when you will say, 'Blessed are the womb which has not conceived and the breasts which have not given milk.' [20]

The Messiah is referring to the hard times that may befall those who choose to serve YEHOUAH God for the path to the Kingdom of YEHOUAH God is narrow indeed. Often the Messiah is depicted in the gospels as being taken literally (e.g., Nicodemus' "born from above" narrative) when he meant to use figurative speech, so this may be just such a case. Also, in the same gospel the Messiah tells his disciples that when they "go into any land" and "see one who was not born of woman, prostrate yourselves on your faces and worship him." [21] Thomas' Messiah constantly plays on words and tells his disciples that only by searching for the beginning will they find the end of their journey. Aside from the Buddhist overtones of this statement, it is possible that later Christians decided that the "beginning" (Yeshua) must have been one not born of woman since no mention is made of such beings after the disciples traveled and preached.

The Gospel of Mark, the earliest of the gospels, relates that Yeshua is a Jewish Messiah, and so born quite naturally in the manner expected of the Davidic Messiah. The Jewish ascetic sects who were expecting a son of David to arrive who would invoke the Parousia and regain the throne, said that he would be born in Bethlehem. The earliest references, upon which Mark's gospel is based, insist that the Messiah was instead born in Galilee at Nazareth. The last two synoptics, Matthew and Luke, attempt to correct Mark's error by again placing the Messiah's birth back in Bethlehem. The Gospel of John, which is totally unconcerned with any notion of Jewish expectations of the Messiah, places the Messiah back at Nazareth merely for the sake of argument ascribing the conflict as a "division among the people over him" (Jn. 7:43). The conflict would be a minor one if it were not for the fact that there was no such town in Galilee named Nazareth during the Messiah's birth. In a humorous self-fulfilling prophecy, the Galilean town was established in the third century after news of the Messiah's birthplace had become famous. This curious insistence on associating the Messiah with Nazareth may predate the Christian oral traditions and was told among apocalyptic groups like the Essenes, who practiced a form of sun worship. Early Christians may have considered the Messiah a sun-god. Nazareth is very closely worded to Nazareth which in Hebrew is "the twelve signs (of the zodiac)." The root verb *nazar* means to "surround" as in the twelve constellations of the zodiac which pass overhead each night, thus surrounding the earth. [22] Job is reminded of his human limitations and the celestial astrological power of YEHOUAH God, when the latter speaks to him from a raging desert whirlwind:

Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Nazareth in his season? [23]

This theory is supported by the evidence that the inhabitants of Qumran by the Dead Sea, who Pliny referred to as Essenes, used a solar-based calendar, rather than the traditional lunar-based Judaic calendar. Pliny the Younger reported in a letter to the emperor Trajan in 112 CE that "Christians appear to be harmless people who meet at daybreak and sing hymns to the honor of the *Christo quasi deo* (the Christ as if he were a god)."

Matthew and Luke sought to fill in the missing genealogy for the Messiah. Jewish Messiah's were considered important only in the capacity that they fulfilled the role of a

"Son of man" and told their people the message of YEHOVAH God who had appointed them. The Messiah himself was unimportant compared to the mission which he was elected to perform. But when Matthew and Luke wrote, the Messiah had taken on a greater meaning to the Christians than just a fulfiller of Messianic duties. Understandably, many early Christians wanted to know more about the Messiah than the earlier texts and the sayings sources had shown. Writing independently of each other, Matthew and Luke wrote conflicting genealogies based on OT scripture and numerology.

Matthew's genealogy is an attempt to invoke credibility through powerful numerological magic. He bases the Messiah's lineage on watershed events in history in three sets of fourteen:

"So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations."  
[24]

Since "seven" is the Hebrew magical number we find a strong desire to tailor the Messiah's genealogy in groups that are divisible by seven, and in groupings that denote historical events of which the Messiah's birth is as important as the "carrying away into Babylon" and King David himself:

Here are the six sets of seven names each that Matthew derives:

Abraham Aminadab	Solomon Joatham	Jechonias Achim
Isaac Naasson	Roboam Achaz	Salathiel Eliud
Jacob Salmon	Abia Ezekias	Zorobabel Eleazar
Judas Booz	Asa Manasses	Abiud Matthan
Phares Obed	Josaphat Amon	Eliakim Jacob
Esrom Jesse	Joram Josias	Azor Joseph
Aram David	Ozias Jechonias	Sadoc Jesus
<b>Formation of Israel</b>	<b>Babylonian Captivity</b>	<b>Jesus as Messiah</b>

Matthew omits Joash, Amaziah, and Azariah from the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 3 and mistakenly counts Jechonias twice in order to achieve the perfect three sets of fourteen which when halved invoke the magical properties of the number seven. Yeshua can be said according to Matthew's genealogy as being the "seventh son thrice and one" of King David himself. An impressive lineage indeed and one which testifies to the powerful influences astrology and numerology had on the ancient world and the early Christians in particular. Pagan critics accused Christians of practicing chicanery and magic learned from the Masters in Egypt. Matthew and Luke's birth narratives also show astrological magic in practice by having the Messiah born when the stars are correct in the heavens. These myth-making elements liven up the gospels, but should not be taken literally. Again, we can safely assume that these accretions which attach magical

properties and visiting magicians to the Messiah's birth are stories designed to Hellenize the Messiah for the pagan converts sake.

### End Notes:

1. Walker, p. 1048.
2. Campbell, *Occ. M.*, p. 210.
3. Luke 3:22. "And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him..."
4. Ulansey, David, Solving the Mithraic Mysteries, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Sep/Oct 1994, p. 41.
5. December 25th was the winter solstice on the pre-Gregorian Julian calendar.
6. Ulansey, David, *Ibid.*, p. 50.
7. Campbell, *Occ. M.*, p. 260-261.
8. Larson, *Story*, p. 184.
9. Temple, Kerry, Who Do Men Say That I Am?, *The Humanist*, May/June 1991, p. 4.
10. Wells, p. 30.
11. Larson, *Essene*, p. 175.
12. Cutner, p. 13.
13. Matthew 1:23.
14. Wells, p. 29.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 29-31.
16. Larson, *Story*, p. 470.
17. Celsus, p. 55-56.
18. Wells, p. 30.
19. Larson, *Story*, p. 154.
20. Nag Hammadi, *Gospel of Thomas*, II, 2, (79).
21. *Ibid.*, (15).
22. Cutner, p. 15.

23. Job 38:1-32. The Authorized Version renders Mazzaroth, which is an acceptable translation since Hebrew uses the letter m and n interchangeably.

24. Matthew 1:17

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Hope of Israel Ministries  
P.O. Box 853  
Azusa, CA 91702, U.S.A.  
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