

heirdom for the reason that in dynastic monarchy the child would normally be of the king's body begotten and there can be no question about this fact; so in this matter the three classes of women in the harem—[1] *malkah*, [2] *pilegesh* and [3] *almah*=*betulah*, Song of Songs 6:8—are crucial technical terms having to do with not only sexual matters vis-a-vis the king but political matters vis-a-vis the succession government of the dynastic monarchy. This matter of royal bearing of the *almah* as *betulah* or virgin is decisive in translating Isaiah 7:14 "*ha-Almah*" as "the virgin" particularly here since the context of "Bais Dovid" (verse 13) shows that a royal *almah*, not just any *almah*, is in view; see Shir Hashirim 6:8 "there are threescore *melakhot* (queens), and fourscore *pilagshim* (concubines), and—without number—*alamot* (virgins, singular=*almah*; *alam*=young man 1Sm 20:22; 17:56)." [Note: *alamot* is plural of *almah*, "virgin," *alamot*, "virgins."] See Shir Hashirim 1:3; Yeshayah 7:14; Bereshis 24:43; Shemot 2:8; Mishle 30:19 where the word means explicitly or implicitly "virgin" and where "young unmarried woman" is not an adequate rendering, in this case, since the king was hardly interested in only "young unmarried women" in his harem, but demanded "*virgin* unmarried maidens"; the older Jewish translations like Harkavy's in fact translated the word as "virgin" in Song of Songs 6:8 until it became "politically incorrect" to do so in later, more liberal Jewish translations into English.

See Joel 1:8 where *betulah* is used of a married woman; *almah* is always a young unmarried *betulah* in Scripture. We have no word in English to differentiate an unmarried from a married virgin. One might say, we have no word in English to differentiate a young horse from a younger horse—so what? Not so, in English we have a very precise nomenclature for horses. We have "filly" (a young female horse), or "mare" (a fully mature female horse) or "foal" (a horse not yet one year old), or "yearling" (a horse one year old dating from January 1 of the year after the year of foaling). So "young horse" is crudely inadequate in the world of the stables, just as "young woman" is crudely inadequate in the world of the Bible. And just as modern racetrack enthusiasts require more precision in their "horse" vocabulary, so too the Hebrews did with their "woman" vocabulary. An *almah* is an unmarried, virginal, sexually ripening young woman (all these notions in the definition are crucial); a *betulah* is a virginal married or unmarried woman, and she may be old, she does not have to be young; a *na'arah* is a girl or young woman; a *zonah* is a non-virginal harlot or prostitute; a *noefet* is an adulteress; an *agunah* is a woman whose husband's whereabouts are unknown [see Ro 7:2 **OJBC**]; a *pilegesh* is a concubine; an *isha* is a woman/wife; a *gerushah* is a divorcee; a *gevirah* is a noble woman or queen mother; a *malkah* is a queen, etc. Notice all these terms for women are defined vis-a-vis the man, since, according to the opening chapters of Genesis, woman was made for man. "Young woman" is as crudely out of place in Hebrew nomenclature as "young horse" is in racetrack nomenclature; "young woman" is oddly and jarringly imprecise. There is a perfectly good Hebrew word for "young woman" which Boaz says twice in reference to Ruth—"na'arah" ("young woman"), which Boaz uses in Ruth 2:5 and again in Ruth 4:12. Here virginity is not implicit and in fact Ruth is a young widow who had been married before and for some time. Notice the precision of language: Song of Songs 6:8 does not say "ne'arot" without number (*ne'arot*=young women plural, *na'arah* = young woman singular); Song of Songs 6:8 says "alamot" without number (*alamot*=virginal young women, plural of *almah*).

Proverbs speaks of the *derech gever* (way of a man) with an *almah* (Prov. 30:19), but when this is referenced in Scripture in Genesis 24:65, the *derech* (way) of the *almah* Rivkah (Rebekah) and the *gever* Yitzchak (Isaac) shows the young woman still a virgin (Gn 24:65). The virgin whose seed (Moshiach) crushes Satan's head (Genesis 3:15) is the *almah* whose supernatural conception of Moshiach is a sign to the House of David.

One more point, in Genesis chapter 24, *almah* and *betulah* (in 24:43 and 24:16) are used nearly synonymously. Now, to illustrate, if we say the "lad" sat by the well and then if we say the "boy" walked around the well, and if we are talking about the same person, then obviously we