

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

הִנֵּה אֹת לָכֶם יְהוָה אֲדַנִּי הוּא לְכֹן  
הָעַלְמָה הָרָה וְיִלְדֵת בֵּן וְקָרְאת שְׁמוֹ  
עִמָּנוּ אֵל:

Therefore, my Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the maiden will become pregnant and bear a son, and you will name him Immanuel. (*Stone Edition Tanach; Jewish*)<sup>1</sup>

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (*New American Standard Bible; Christian*)<sup>2</sup>

"In preparing this paper, my purpose has been to ascertain as nearly as I may what the prophet had in mind, and what he wished King Ahaz to understand, when he uttered this remarkable prediction, this *crux interpretum*." --Prof. C. R. Brown (1890)<sup>3</sup>

### Isaiah 7:14: The *Crux Interpretum*

The only aspect of Isaiah 7:14 not debated is its difficulty. It has been debated within Christian circles; it has been debated within Jewish circles--even Rashi and Radak did not agree on who the child was.<sup>4</sup> This verse has also been a matter of dispute between Christians and non-messianic Jews since at least the time of Justin Martyr and his *Dialogue with Trypho* (ca. A.D. 160).<sup>5</sup> In our own day, Michael Rydelnik, a Christian, has stated that "in my experience, Isa. 7:14 is the most controversial of messianic prophecies."<sup>6</sup> Almost every detail of this verse and its context has been debated over these two millennia, within both the circles of Judaism and Christianity: the meaning of the words, grammatical analyses, and the ultimate interpretation and fulfillment. Many scholars have taken note of these facts.

Probably no single passage of the Old Testament has been so variously interpreted or has given rise to so much controversy as the prophecy contained in these verses [Isa. 7:14-16]. The difficulties arise

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1 Rabbi Nosson Schermon, ed., *The Stone Edition Tanach* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Heritage Foundation, 2012).

2 *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1975).

3 C. R. Brown, "Exegesis of Isaiah VII. 10-17," *JBL* 9 (1890):118.

4 Rashi is an acronym for Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105) and Radak for Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235).

5 Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," trans. A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. I, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenæus in The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols., ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1885; reprinted 1979).

6 Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), p. 147.

mainly from the fact that while the terms of the prediction are so indefinite as to admit a wide range of possibilities, we have no record of its actual fulfillment in any contemporary event.<sup>7</sup>

In his paper on Isaiah 7:14, Charles Feinberg cites Johannes Lindblom's characterization of this verse as an "endlessly discussed passage."<sup>8</sup> Both Rawlinson and Barnes make similar observations:

Few prophecies have been the subject of so much controversy, or called forth such a variety of exegesis, as this prophecy of Immanuel.<sup>9</sup>

Who this virgin was, and what is the precise meaning of this prediction, has given, perhaps, more perplexity to commentators than almost any other portion of the Bible....Perhaps there is no prophecy in the Old Testament on which more has been written...And after all, it still remains, in many respects, very obscure.<sup>10</sup>

If Isaiah 7:14 is the *crux interpretum* of biblical prophecy, many scholars have considered the meaning of עֲלְמָה (*almah*) to be the *crux interpretum* of Isaiah 7:14.<sup>11</sup> On this issue alone, Feinberg states that "reams have been written upon it and, doubtless, reams will be written on it in the future."<sup>12</sup>

In view of these facts, it is difficult to disagree with the conclusion drawn by Gordon Wenham:

This one verse has received more discussion than any other passage in the OT, yet without any consensus emerging among commentators.<sup>13</sup>

Even in the space of an entire book it remains impossible to review, much less critique, every exegetical proposal and every interpretive conclusion that has been offered since the time of Justin Martyr. Regarding even the "recent years," E. J. Young in 1953 concluded that it would "be impossible to mention every interpretation which has appeared in recent years, nor would such mention, even if it were possible, necessarily be fruitful for our purpose."<sup>14</sup>

E. Henderson put it somewhat more humorously. After a brief review of the interpretations of no fewer than 26 scholars from the 18th and 19th centuries, he writes:

To attempt a refutation of each of these theories would require more space than can here be spared. And, indeed, it is rendered in a great measure superfluous, by the self-contradictory and mutually subversive bearings by which they are distinguished; while some of them are so manifestly formed to serve the hypotheses, as to be totally unworthy of notice.<sup>15</sup>

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- 7 J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*. Cambridge: The University Press, 1896; brackets added.
- 8 Charles Lee Feinberg, "The Virgin Birth in the Old Testament and Isaiah 7:14," *BSac* 119 (July-September 1962):251, citing Johannes Lindblom, *A Study on the Immanuel Section in Isaiah*.
- 9 Feinberg, *ibid.*, citing George Rawlinson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah in The Pulpit Commentary*.
- 10 Feinberg, *ibid.*, citing R. Barnes, *Notes on Isaiah*.
- 11 Richard Niessen, "The Virginity of the עֲלְמָה in Isaiah 7:14," *BSac* 137 (April-June 1980):133: "This article focuses on the *crux interpretum* of the passage--the meaning of the Hebrew word עֲלְמָה in Isaiah 7:14--for the conclusions of that study bear directly on the range of possible interpretations." Doubtless, Niessen's point is well taken. However, Edward J. Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16," *WTJ* 15 (May 1953):98, rightly points out that "the proper interpretation of this word is by no means the only *crux interpretum* in the passage."
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 254.
- 13 Gordon J. Wenham, "Virgin," *ISBE*, IV:990.
- 14 Edward J. Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16, Second Article," *WTJ* 16 (November 1953):37.
- 15 E. Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 2nd ed. (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1857), p. 61.

If some scholars have noted the impossibility of the task to review the entire corpus of literature on Isaiah 7:14 since the 2nd century A.D., others have expressed doubts as to the possibility of deriving a satisfactory interpretation, even in one's own mind. For example, Richard Niessen cites E. Hammershaimb as follows:

The many solutions put forward since ancient times are sad evidence of how difficult a task is here set for interpreters. It must be freely admitted that the passage assumes a knowledge of its hearers which we do not possess, and that we are therefore reduced to conjecture on certain critical points.<sup>16</sup>

Brevard Childs, cited by Walter Kaiser, makes a similar point:

It seems unlikely that a satisfactory historical solution will be forthcoming without fresh extra-biblical evidence.<sup>17</sup>

In view, then, of all this negativism, what is the purpose and plan for this book? First, a number of writers have provided very helpful classifications and distillations of the major interpretations of Isaiah 7:14. As Young argued, certain views that have become predominant are worthy of mention and, if warranted, critique.<sup>18</sup>

Second, after all the semantic, syntactical, and historical issues are thoroughly analyzed, I believe that an interpretation can be offered that comes reasonably close to the original intent of Isaiah.

Third, I suggest that this end result can be reached by placing sufficient emphasis on the "old paths." The editor of J. A. Alexander's two-volume work, *The Prophecies of Isaiah* (1870), made these observations with reference to that commentary:

Interesting views of the nature of prophecy in itself, and in its relations as well to the Jewish Commonwealth as to the Church of the Redeemer, abound in the following pages. The reveries of Teutonic criticism are unsparingly held up to scorn, and the "old paths" are proved to be still the safest and best.<sup>19</sup>

There are several 19th-century scholars whose views I have not seen discussed in the more recent literature I have examined. They have played a role for constructing my view of Isaiah 7:14.

## The Slow Death of Messianism

The issue raised by messianic predictions in Old Testament prophecy, however, goes far beyond the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 and the other passages Christian theologians believe were fulfilled by Jesus. A storm has been brewing since the late eighteenth century that threatens both traditional Christianity and Judaism. As this and the next two sections demonstrate, this threat denies not only the passages Christians claim are messianic and fulfilled by Jesus, but it continues in the denial of messianic prophecy as a whole, including passages, such as Isaiah 11, on which Jews and Christians agree are messianic and have yet to be fulfilled. It then moves to the denial of predictive prophecy as a whole, such as the Cyrus poem in Isaiah 44. The final culmination is the complete denial of the supernatural in the Bible. The track of the storm can be traced as follows.

Throughout the centuries, the Christian church had traditionally and consistently interpreted such passages as

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16 Niessen, "The Virginity of the עִלְמָה in Isaiah 7:14," p. 133, citing E. Hammershaimb, "The Immanuel Sign," *Studia Theologia* 3 (1951):124.

17 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Promise of Isaiah 7:14 and the Single-Meaning Hermeneutic." *EJ* 6 (1988):55, citing Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (London: SCM, 1987), p. 120.

18 Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16, Second Article" p. 37.

19 John Edie, editor, in the Preface to Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1870), I:vii.

Genesis 3:15, Numbers 24:15-19, Deuteronomy 18:15-18, Psalm 2:7, 110:1, Micah 5:2 (Heb., 5:1), Isaiah 7:14, 9:2-7 (Heb., 9:1-6), 52:13-53:12, Zechariah 9:9, among many others, as direct predictions of the Messiah.<sup>20</sup> That is no longer the case.

It was also true during those centuries that these texts had not only been used as "proof-texts" in controversies with Jewish scholars for the messiahship of Jesus, but also in debates with skeptics to demonstrate the divine origin of Scripture through fulfilled prophecy. However, according to Ronald Clements,

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, at the time when the controversies over Deism were still at their height, there entered into the study of Old Testament prophecy a fresh questioning of its predictions of the coming of the Messiah. The scholar around whom these discussions are most conveniently centered was Anthony Collins (1676-1729), who published in 1724 a volume entitled *Discourses of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, and a sequel to this in 1727 entitled *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy Considered*. The two works are both concerned with the use of certain messianic proof-texts from the Old Testament, and Collins' essential argument is that the literal meaning of the text cannot support the messianic interpretation placed upon it in the New Testament.<sup>21</sup>

Milton Terry provides a similar comment:

Collins...in his *Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (London 1724) maintained that the Jewish expectation of the Messiah arose only a short time before the birth of Jesus, and that the New Testament citations of Old Testament messianic prophecy are merely fanciful accommodations of the Hebrew books, and at best mystical and allegorical portraiture of Christian truth. The logic of this work was to show that Christian evidences drawn from prophecy are invalid.<sup>22</sup>

Complicating this issue, however, is the fact that the argument made by Collins is not entirely wrong. According to Clements, the central claim made by Collins was "the assertion that only the original--literal--sense could be held to be the valid and true meaning of the text."<sup>23</sup> With this Walter Kaiser agrees and emphasizes that the debate started by Collins still continues today:

Collins argued...that the use of the natural or literal meaning of certain OT messianic texts, previously used as proof-texts for messianism in the OT, could not support the messianic interpretation placed on them by the NT. In his view, the only valid and true meaning of these texts was the original (i.e., the literal) sense, which for scholarly purposes was declared not to be the same sense attributed to them by the NT writers....Thus began the long debate which has continued to this very hour.<sup>24</sup>

As I argue throughout this book, the problem with Collins' view was not that "the only valid and true meaning of these texts was the original (i.e., the literal) sense." On this point he was entirely correct. Instead, the problem was that "for scholarly purposes" this natural or literal sense of the texts was a priori prohibited from being messianic, which, of course, is how the New Testament cited them. This prohibition stemmed from a view of

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20 With reference to Isa. 7:14 in particular, Christopher R. North, "Immanuel," *IDB*, II:687, states that the view that it predicts the virgin birth of the Messiah "was almost unchallenged in Christendom until the end of the eighteenth century."

21 Ronald E. Clements, "Messianic Prophecy or Messianic History," *HBT* 1 (1979):87.

22 Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.; original publication date, 1890), p. 704. Note: the exact title of Collins' book was *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*.

23 Clements, "Messianic Prophecy or Messianic History," p. 87.

24 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Biblical Theology and the Interpretation of Messianic Texts," *AUSS* 34 (Autumn 1996):197. Kaiser goes on to note a bit of irony here: "Strangely enough, at almost the same time as this debate was given its logical and exegetical formulation by Collins, George F. Handel's oratorio, "The Messiah," was first published in 1742, less than twenty years after Collins published his work. That oratorio continues to be a favorite of many peoples to this day, even though many of the very texts that are in dispute in this central topic in biblical theology form the libretto for that soul-stirring music."

Israel's history that the messianic concept did not develop until at least the exilic period.<sup>25</sup> However, at its core, the exegesis performed to determine the "natural or literal meaning" of texts that had been recognized as messianic since the days of the New Testament and early church fathers was based on the foundation of rationalistic presuppositions.

Philosophical rationalism was prominent in the seventeenth century. Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) was recognized as one of the great rationalists, and he had considerable influence on biblical studies.<sup>26</sup> By the eighteenth century rationalism was strongly represented among biblical scholars. This fact is highly significant because with rationalism came a consequent denial of the the supernatural and therefore divine revelation. This in turn eliminates the possibility of predictive prophecy, messianic or otherwise. Other interpretations of all such prophetic passages had to be found, and this can skew the exegetical procedure in a specific direction.<sup>27</sup>

For an example of rationalists in the eighteenth century, Terry has this to say about J. D. Michaelis (1717-1791), a famous theologian and biblical scholar:

With all his greatness as a scholar and critic he imbibed many of the rationalistic notions of his time, and seems to have been deficient in religious convictions and experience. He was a fair specimen of the incipient neology, and retained the outward forms of orthodoxy, but went not to the extremes of rationalism.<sup>28</sup>

However, the influence of rationalism on biblical studies continued to grow.<sup>29</sup>

[J. G.] Eichorn [1753-1827] succeeded J. D. Michaelis at the university of Göttingen...His Introduction to the Scriptures and his commentary on the Apocalypse were remarkable for their bold rationalistic criticism. Explicit statements of the sacred writers were set aside or explained away by the most arbitrary assumptions. The Mosaic history was treated as consisting largely of ancient sagas or legends. Its miraculous narratives were explained as the vivid portrayal of natural events which was alleged to be characteristic of all ancient records of primeval and unhistoric times. A happy incident or a joyous thought was wont to be conceived and spoken of as the appearance or the salutation of an angel. The smoke, fire, and quaking of Mount Sinai (Exod. xix, 18) were merely a fire kindled by Moses himself for the purpose of impressing the people with awe, and the happy coincidence of a terrible thunderstorm. Eichhorn insisted that all ancient history, whether Jewish or pagan, should be treated alike, and that all miraculous elements should be eliminated by rational methods of interpretation.<sup>30</sup>

When Eichhorn applied his "rational methods of interpretation" to the messianic prophecies, this was the result:

Prophecy...could only have one meaning--the meaning that the OT *text* was understood to possess in the prophet's own time and milieu. Eichhorn, in particular, was most confident that this claim had eradicated the whole idea of messianic proof-texts as well as predictive prophecy itself. He boasted in 1793, "the last three decades have erased the Messiah from the OT."...Messianism was all but dead at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>31</sup>

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25 To this day, "many modern scholars believe that the concept of the Messiah arose during the exilic period" (Paul D. Wegner, *An Examination of the Kingship and Messianic Expectation in Isaiah 1-35* [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992], p. 1).

26 Spinoza was Jewish, and at the age of 23, the Jewish religious authorities issued a *cherem* (an ecclesiastical censure) against him, and the Roman Catholic Church added his works to their Index of Forbidden Books.

27 See also the discussion in footnote 39.

28 Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 706-707.

29 For a more complete summary of the responses, both liberal and conservative, to Collins, see Clements, "Messianic Prophecy or Messianic History," pp. 88-98, and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), pp. 13-23.

30 Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 713-14; brackets added.

31 Kaiser, "Biblical Theology and the Interpretation of Messianic Texts," p. 198; italics original.

As a description of the end of the eighteenth century, Eichhorn's statement might have been a bit exaggerated, but by the end of the nineteenth century, there was no doubt.

It is not difficult to trace how the effect of this new understanding of prophecy came increasingly to permeate Christian biblical scholarship during the nineteenth century. By the close of that century, in major works dealing with Old Testament prophecy such as those by W. Robertson Smith and A. F. Kirkpatrick, the notion of "messianic prophecies" as traditionally understood had almost entirely disappeared from the subject matter of prophecy.<sup>32</sup>

## Biblical Criticism

Although Spinoza has been called the "father of higher criticism,"<sup>33</sup> Eichhorn seems to be the first to have used the phrase, "higher criticism" in connection with biblical studies.<sup>34</sup> Defined abstractly, it is a legitimate study. As E. J. Young writes,

Higher criticism...occupies itself with the study of the date, authorship, place and circumstances of composition as well as the purpose and nature of the individual biblical books.<sup>35</sup>

However, James Orr in 1915 warned,

A chief cause of error in its application to the record of a supernatural revelation is the assumption that nothing supernatural can happen. This is the vitiating element in much of the newer criticism, both of the OT and of the NT.<sup>36</sup>

This assumption was certainly the basis on which Eichhorn and much of Old Testament biblical scholarship that followed him in the nineteenth century employed the discipline.<sup>37</sup> Because of this, the term "higher criticism" came to be associated with rationalistic presuppositions, and thus the term by itself became somewhat ambiguous. However, as defined by Young, the essence of this discipline, today often called "historical criticism," is a necessary part of biblical studies.

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32 Clements, "Messianic Prophecy or Messianic History," p. 89. North, "Immanuel," II:687, offers the same assessment of the situation with respect to Isa. 7:14: "From the end of the eighteenth century the traditional interpretation was being increasingly abandoned."

33 Noted by Edward J. Young, "Criticism, Old Testament," *BDT*, p. 150.

34 F. F. Bruce, "Criticism," *ISBE*, I:818.

35 Young, "Criticism, Old Testament," p. 150. Young also defines "lower criticism" in contrast to higher criticism: "Lower criticism deals with the text...its transmission and condition." The goal of lower criticism is to determine the original text, called the "autograph," when there are textual variants among the extant manuscripts. Today higher criticism is generally called "historical criticism," and lower criticism is called "textual criticism." The meaning of the word *criticism* in all of these disciplines is not per se the making of an unfavorable judgment but rather the making of a careful analysis or evaluation, as in the phrase, "critical assessment" of some situation or condition. Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 114, adds this observation: "'Critical' does not mean the same as 'skeptical,' just as 'academic' is not necessarily the opposite of the 'spiritual.' In essence, to be critical in the exegesis of Scripture means to bring into one's methodology the kinds of procedures that are characteristic of good scholarship." Silva, in Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), pp. 281-82, defines *criticism* this way: "When used with reference to biblical scholarship, the primary idea is that of investigating in scientific fashion the historical origins, text, composition, and transmission of literary documents."

36 James Orr, "Criticism, of the Bible," *Old ISBE*, II:749.

37 Much of the lengthy Introduction by Alexander to his two-volume commentary, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:1-78, traces in some detail the history of the critical approach to the Book of Isaiah to about the middle of the nineteenth century. Edward J. Young wrote a three-part paper tracing Isaianic studies from the time of Alexander's commentary to 1948: "The Study of Isaiah Since the Time of Joseph Addison Alexander," *WTJ* 9 (November 1946):1-30; 10 (November 1947):23-56; and 10 (May 1948):139-167.

Now historical criticism is an important study and should be supported and encouraged by all students of the Bible. But when historical criticism is controlled by a framework of naturalistic assumptions and philosophical aprioris, the results of painstaking historical investigation are vitiated.<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately, most of those scholars in the nineteenth century who wrote on issues dealt with by higher criticism indeed based their conclusions on rationalistic presuppositions.<sup>39</sup> Thus Franz Delitzsch in his preliminary remarks to his last book, *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession*, lamented this sad state of affairs in the closing years of his life at the end of the nineteenth century:

There is a crisis in the domain of the Bible, and especially in that of the Old Testament, in which the evening of my life falls. This crisis repels me on account of the joy of its advocates in destruction, on account of their boundless negations and their unspiritual profanity...<sup>40</sup>

This "crisis" he pinpoints is a basic "principle" of these "advocates" to "deny objective reality to everything that is supernatural, and especially to the spiritual miracle of prophecy."<sup>41</sup>

Higher criticism as practiced by most scholars continued to be based predominantly on rationalistic and

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38 A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), p. 45. Mickelsen also points out an inconsistency in those who worked under such rationalistic presuppositions: "They insisted that the Bible was like any other book, yet at the same time they described it as being produced by a complicated array of sources, redactors, and interpolators different from any other literary production" (p. 44).

39 Mickelsen, *ibid.* p. 44: "In the nineteenth century, a rigid historicism came to the forefront and received a wide hearing. The roots for this approach were planted in the eighteenth century, but in the nineteenth historical criticism came into its own." Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 63, concurs: "The radical treatment of Scriptures reached its full tide in the nineteenth century."

40 Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession*, trans. Samuel Ives Curtiss (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1891), p. 5.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 12. A classic example of how higher criticism works can be seen in Isaiah's mention of Cyrus in Isa. 44:28 and 45:1, a non-messianic prophecy. S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1891), places chapters 40-66 during the Babylonian era when "Jerusalem and the Temple have been for long in ruins" and "Israel is in exile," that is, subsequent to 586 (p. 217), not during the life of the prophet Isaiah (ca. 740-680), which he states quite directly: "This prophecy [chaps. 40-66] was not the work of Isaiah...but a prophet writing towards the close of the Babylonian captivity" (p. 223). But this point in time is still before the decree of Cyrus to rebuild Jerusalem (538). However, once the date of the prophecy is pushed to near the end of the exile, there is no problem. Cyrus comes on the scene just before 550. So Driver writes, "The prophecy opens at some date between 549 and 538: for the conquest of Babylon is still future; but the union of the Medes and the Persians appears to have already taken place. It introduces us therefore to the time while Cyrus is pursuing his career of conquest in N.W. and Central Asia. The prophet's eye marks him in the distance as the coming deliverer of his nation...and declares that he is God's appointed agent" (p. 218). Conservative scholar Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 1:24-25, makes these observations: "The successive writers of this modern school [19th century higher criticism], however they may differ as to minor points among themselves, prove their identity of principle by holding that *there cannot be distinct prophetic foresight of the distant future*. This doctrine is avowed more explicitly by some (as by Hitzig and Knobel) than by others (as Gesenius and Ewald;) but it is really the *πρώτον ψεύδος* [most prominent falsehood] of the whole school, and the only bond of unity between them. There is also a difference in the application of the general rule to specific cases. Where the obvious exposition of a passage would convert it into a distinct prediction, Gesenius and Hitzig usually try to shew that the words really relate to something near at hand, and within the reach of a sagacious human foresight, while Ewald and Umbreit in the same case choose rather to convert it into a vague anticipation. But they all agree in this, that where the prophecy can be explained away in either of these methods, it must be regarded as a certain proof of later date. This is the real ground, on which chaps. xl.-xlv. are referred to the period of the exile, when the conquests of Cyrus and the fall of Babylon might be foreseen without a special revelation. This is the fundamental doctrine of the modern neological interpreters, the *foregone conclusion*, to which all exegetical results must yield or be accommodated...He who rejects a given passage of Isaiah, because it contains definite predictions of a future too remote from the times in which he lived, to be the object of ordinary human foresight, will of course be led to justify this condemnation by specific proofs drawn from the diction, style, or idiom of the passage, its historical or archaeological allusions, its rhetorical character, its moral tone, or its religious spirit. On the discovery and presentation of such proofs, the previous assumption, which they are intended to sustain, cannot fail to have a warping influence" (emphasis original; brackets added).

naturalistic presuppositions into the twentieth century. Therefore, in 1960 Young could write,

In popular parlance, however, the term "higher criticism" has come to designate an approach to the OT which discards its absolute trustworthiness and in the study of the above mentioned questions [e.g., date, authorship, and the purpose and nature of the biblical books] feels free to set itself in conflict with express statements of the Bible.<sup>42</sup>

In other words, as Ramm points out, "the term *higher criticism* became synonymous with *radical criticism*, and so the expression is now ambiguous." Attention to definition and context, then, is important when reading or using the terms "higher criticism" or "historical criticism."<sup>43</sup>

Today several newer forms of critical study have developed, such as source criticism,<sup>44</sup> form criticism,<sup>45</sup> and redaction criticism.<sup>46</sup>

## The Effect on the Study of Messianic Prophecy

In 1858 E. W. Hengstenberg in his classic work, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Prophecies*, made this observation about the effect of rationalistic presuppositions on messianic prophecy:

Hitherto the conviction had been so universally entertained, that the Old Testament contained in general a genuine revelation from God, and, in particular, predictions of the Messiah, dictated by His spirit, that the disputes had been restricted to details alone. It is since the last quarter of the eighteenth century, that a complete division of opinion has gradually taken place with reference to the fundamental view itself. Starting with the doctrinal premises, that nature forms a complete and independent whole, upon which God will not and cannot operate, either by inspiration from within or miracles from without, a totally new attitude was of necessity assumed in relation to the messianic prophecies. Their very nature was destroyed.<sup>47</sup>

One of the first eighteenth century responses to Collins had come from Thomas Sherlock.

...Sherlock and others...argue for some form of return to a dual meaning in prophecy. An original meaning was to be allowed, which could be determined from the text itself and from the manner and circumstances of the prophetic occasion when it was given. A later, fuller meaning, which might be called typical (or typological), or spiritual, could then be upheld in which a much larger messianic application could be found.<sup>48</sup>

According to Clements, this approach did little to stem the tide of the new criticisms. Similarly, the leading responses of conservative, nonrationalistic scholars such as E. W. von Hengstenberg<sup>49</sup> and Franz Delitzsch to

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42 Young, "Criticism, Old Testament," p. 150; brackets added.

43 Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 9 (emphasis original).

44 The study of the sources used for the biblical literature. For example, the books of Samuel and Kings would seem to be primary sources for the books of Chronicles.

45 Bruce, "Criticism," I:822: "Form criticism...represents an endeavor to determine the oral prehistory of written documents or sources, and to classify the material according to the various 'forms' or categories of narrative, discourse, and so forth."

46 A recent attempt "to do more justice to the authors and redactors of biblical documents than they received in the heyday of source criticism and form criticism" (Bruce, *ibid.*, I:824).

47 E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Prophecies*, 2nd ed., 4 vols., trans. Theod. Meyer (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1858), IV:370.

48 Clements, "Messianic Prophecy or Messianic History," p. 88.

49 "The writer who carried forward most energetically the literary study of prophecy after the manner of Eichhorn was W. M. L. De Wette...Yet it was DeWette's successor in Berlin, E. W. Hengstenberg, who produced the work which most

the higher criticism of the nineteenth century also had little effect on those who represented the rationalistic and critical approach,<sup>50</sup> although all of these responses did provide a way of keeping the traditional messianic texts "messianic" for conservatives. However, toward the end of the twentieth century the slow death of messianism that started in the eighteenth century began to look as if it would indeed become final across the theological spectrum.

This bleak outlook is due to a most striking development in the latter part of the twentieth century and into this century: more and more conservative scholars now argue that many of the texts previously thought to be directly messianic are, in fact, not messianic at all.

Although few evangelicals would deny that there are some direct messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, it is becoming increasingly popular to reject the idea that the Hebrew Bible has specific predictions of the Messiah...[I]t is becoming quite common to state that the biblical authors did not have an intentional messianic meaning.<sup>51</sup>

For example, well-known evangelical scholar, Tremper Longman III writes,

It is impossible to establish that any passage in its original literary and historical context must or even should be understood as portending a future messianic figure.<sup>52</sup>

How do evangelicals reach such a conclusion? With alarming similarity to Anthony Collins, they claim a grammatical and historical exegesis of the passages indicates that the biblical author had in view only his contemporary situation. In discussing Ps. 110:1, H. W. Bateman concludes,

Thus it seems reasonable to suggest that Psalm 110 is a typological-prophetic oracle of the Lord from the preexilic time period. David prophetically spoke the psalm to his "lord," Solomon, when Solomon ascended to the Davidic throne in 971 B.C. Psalm 110 was then applied in the New Testament to Jesus Christ as the ultimate and unique Davidic King and Lord....

[I]s it true...that David knew and understood that this psalm predicted the coming of the Messiah? The answer is yes in that David viewed his son Solomon as the "messiah," that is, the anointed one. Solomon was the first to fulfill God's promise in 2 Samuel 7, which was applicable to every succeeding Davidic king who ruled as Yahweh's vice-regent over Israel (1 Kings 9:4-5; 1 Chron. 28:5-7; 2 Chron. 13:8). He was an earthly "messiah," the Lord's anointed. On the other hand the answer to the question is no in that David did not speak the psalm to the Messiah, the divine Lord. The New Testament authors applied Psalm 110 in light of their own context, which involved a more developed understanding of the Messiah and growing understanding of God's revelation.<sup>53</sup>

Even the famous "messianic text," Isaiah 9:6-7 (Heb., 9:5-6), in the view of another evangelical scholar, Paul Wegner, is not directly messianic, and the "child" is not explicitly the Messiah. The four names, "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace," are not titles of the child, but together all four elements form a single theophoric name of the child. Here is Wegner's view of the titles and the identity of the child:

We believe that it is much more reasonable to argue that the whole name should be divided into two parallel units each containing one theophoric element....If this interpretation is correct, the name would then be translated as "wonderful planner [is] the mighty God; the Father of eternity [is] a prince of peace [or well-being]"....

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decisively sought to arrest the progress of the newer understanding of prophecy. This was in his massive work entitled *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Prophecies...* (Clements, *ibid.*, pp. 91-92).

50 This assessment was expressed by Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, p. 23.

51 Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, pp. 1, 4.

52 Rydelnik, *ibid.*, p. 4, citing T. Longman III, "The Messianic Explorations in the Law and Writings," in *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, ed. S.E. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 13.

53 Herbert W. Bateman, "Psalm 110:1 and the New Testament," *BSac* 149 (October-December 1992):452-53.

Now the question remains as to who is the child. Isaiah has set up a consistent pattern throughout the Isaiah memoir (which I believe extends from vi 1 through ix 6[7]) wherein the names are used symbolically and have importance for his message. This name would be no different for it would extol God for his amazing dealings with the nation, i.e., the plan for deliverance and peace which Yahweh has for them. Yahweh is "a wonderful planner" since he brings about the expected deliverance and he is "the prince of peace" because he brings about a kingdom which will have no end of peace. We believe that Isaiah expected a coming deliverer who would fulfil the ideas expressed in this name. This deliverer does not correspond exactly to the later concept of the Messiah which included a restoration of the Davidic dynasty and an eschatological perspective, but it provided the early foundation and groundwork for this concept.<sup>54</sup>

In view of this trend within conservative Christian circles, it should come as no surprise that in much of the current evangelical literature, the "son" in Isaiah 7:14 is not taken to be a direct reference to the Messiah.<sup>55</sup> But, then, Isaiah 7:14 is a very difficult verse and has been given many interpretations over the centuries. What is surprising, though, is that many evangelicals now promote translations and interpretations that deny direct messianic prediction in many other passages that had been held to be such throughout church history. It is evident, of course, that these evangelical scholars are motivated neither by a desire to deny the messiahship of Jesus nor by rationalistic and naturalistic presuppositions that deny the possibility of predictive prophecy. Rather, they are convinced that sound exegesis leads them to those non-messianic interpretations.<sup>56</sup>

Without speculating on possible future developments, what about the traditional messianic texts at this point in history? Kaiser raises this question:

So what will it be? Does the OT contain specific and particular prophecies about the person and work of a coming Messiah? Or were these prophecies more general in their expectations, while their particulars dealt only with the historical realities of what was happening right then and there in the prophet's own day?<sup>57</sup>

Let there be no mistake: I believe there is direct messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. Is Isaiah 7:14 an example of a direct prophecy of the Messiah? Or is it cited by Matthew in the New Testament in some other sense? After all, the Greek verb *πληρώω* (*to fulfill*) is a broad term and is used in several different ways in the New Testament, only one of which is direct prophetic fulfillment. However, my answer to this question must await the thorough analysis presented in this book.

Nevertheless, the existence of direct messianic prophecy is no small matter for those who believe the Bible, both Christian and Jewish. As Kaiser wrote,

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54 Paul D. Wegner, "A Re-examination of Isaiah IX 1-6," *VT* 42 (January 1992):110-112; brackets original.

55 Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, p. 146: "For centuries, Christians understood Isaiah 7 to be a prediction of the virgin birth. Now it is not uncommon for evangelicals to assert that the Hebrew word Isaiah used does not mean 'virgin' at all, but rather 'young woman.' Moreover, the passage is not viewed as a prediction of Messiah's birth but rather of a child born in Isaiah's day." For example, John H. Walton, "Isa 7:14: What's In a Name," *JETS* 30 (September 1987):300, writes, "Exegesis gives no clue that Isaiah had been aware that he was speaking of the Messiah."

56 At the beginning of his paper, Walton stresses the importance of doing "exegetical analysis" without any presuppositions. I take exception to much in his paper, but it does show that Walton firmly believes that *exegesis* led him to his conclusions. Rashi, perhaps the best known Medieval Jewish commentator, had the same high view of Scripture as evangelicals, and as I argue in Chapter 3, he took essentially the same exegetical approach to interpretation. Of course it is possible for firmly-held theological beliefs to influence the performance and results of honest exegetical procedure, perhaps even subconsciously, in both Christian and Jewish scholars. Whether Rashi was influenced by his own view of the Messiah or by polemic considerations is discussed at length in Chapter 3, section "Michael Rydelnik on Rashi." See also Chapter 7, section "Rashi's Motivation."

57 Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, p. 23. Kaiser has almost an identical paragraph in his paper, "Biblical Theology and the Interpretation of Messianic Texts," p. 200, except that he adds this qualifying comment to the phrase "more general in their expectation": "the details of which would rest totally on the shaping and interpretations given by NT adherents after the appearance of one claiming to be the Messiah."

This muting of the messianic presence in the OT began with Anthony Collins' two volumes published in 1724 and 1727 and has continued to the present moment. This issue of the interpretation of the Messiah in the OT could be a defining moment for evangelical scholarship and ultimately for the Church's view of the way we regard Scripture.<sup>58</sup>

## Messianic Prophecy in Judaism

This may also be a "defining moment" for traditional or Orthodox Judaism on how it regards Scripture. The rationalism that has infected much of Christianity has not yet had an influence on traditional Judaism, but the danger is present and messianism is as important to Judaism as it is to Christianity. The twelfth of Maimonides' thirteen principles of the Jewish faith is this.<sup>59</sup>

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah; and even though he may tarry, nonetheless, I wait every day for his coming.

Indeed, there are many texts in the Tanakh that traditional Jews and Christians unite in affirming that a personal Messiah is predicted who will inaugurate the Messianic Age of righteousness on earth. One such text is found in Isaiah, chapter 11. The late Chief Rabbi Dr. J. H. Hertz called this text "the greatest and most famous of all the messianic prophecies."<sup>60</sup> The text in Isaiah 11 reads as follows:

A staff will emerge from the stump of Jesse and a shoot will sprout from his roots. The spirit of HASHEM will rest on him -- a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and strength, a spirit of knowledge and fear of HASHEM. He will be imbued with a spirit of fear for HASHEM; and will not need to judge by what his eyes see nor decide by what his ears hear. He will judge the destitute with righteousness, and decide with fairness for the humble of the earth. He will strike [the wicked of] the world with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be the girdle round his loins, and faith will be the girdle round his waist.

The wolf will live with the sheep and the leopard will lie down with the kid; and a calf, a lion whelp and a fatling [will walk] together, and a young child will lead them. A cow and bear will graze and their young will lie down together; and a lion, like cattle, will eat hay. A suckling will play by a viper's hole; and a newly weaned child will stretch his hand toward an adder's lair. They will neither injure nor destroy in all of My sacred mountain; for the earth will be filled with knowledge of HASHEM as water covering the sea bed.

It shall be on that day that the descendant of Jesse who stands as a banner for all the peoples, nations will seek him, and his resting place will be glorious.<sup>61</sup>

Both conservative Christianity and Orthodox Judaism must stand firm in their view of Scripture. It is the word of God--a God who can and did issue predictive prophecy that has already come to pass (e.g., Isa. 44:28) or will yet come to pass (e.g., Isa. 2:1-3; 11:1-10).

In its description of *Midrash Rabbah*, the Soncino Press makes the following statement:

Midrash Rabbah, one of the monumental productions of Rabbinic literature, is the most striking testimony to the joy and reverence with which the Jews have cherished the Bible.<sup>62</sup>

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58 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., review of *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard E. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham in *JETS* (March 1999):102.

59 Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (1135-1204), better known as Maimonides or by the acronym Rambam.

60 The late Chief Rabbi Dr. J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 2nd ed. (London: Soncino Press, 1981), p. 1023.

61 Isa. 11:1-10 (*Stone Edition*; brackets original).

62 Taken from the Web site of Soncino Press (soncino.com).

## Limitations on This Study

As already indicated, this book is written for conservatives within Judaism and Christianity who believe the Bible is the word of God.<sup>63</sup> Interpretations based on conclusions drawn from the various types of biblical criticism regarding the origin and integrity of the text of Isaiah are in general not addressed.<sup>64</sup>

The two tenets assumed without argument in this book are, therefore, as follows:<sup>65</sup>

- The entire Book of Isaiah was written by the eighth-century prophet, Isaiah.
- The entire book is the result of supernatural, divine revelation from God to Isaiah.

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63 For a lengthy nineteenth century critique of rationalism, see Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Prophecies*, IV:371-95. He ends that discussion with an inspiring testimony to his own belief in the word of God: "The present *Christology* is based upon the heartfelt conviction, that we have a sure word of prophecy, that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and that in the Spirit they testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. May this revised edition help to strengthen a conviction, of such importance to the Church!"

64 For example, Wegner, *An Examination of the Kingship and Messianic Expectation in Isaiah 1-35*, p. 133, claims that "it is difficult to determine the author and date of vv. 18-25 [of Isaiah 7]." He also argues that "it is very unlikely that originally Isa. 7:10-17 was intended to be understood messianically, but the redactional shaping of the passage appears to have been intended to engender these ideas" (p. 136). Some scholars rearrange the text. For example, R. B. Y. Scott, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, vol. 5 in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols., gen. ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), 5:220, writes, "It appears that the word order of these verses has been reversed. Vs. 16 is the continuation of the promise of deliverance in vs. 14, whereas vs. 15 (in the light of vss. 21-22) appears to be part of the threat to Ahaz in vs. 17." Other scholars delete parts of the text. For example, as cited by Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16, Second Article," p. 38, Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia* (1902) claimed that v. 15 is not original because he believes ׀ֶ connects vv. 14 and 16. Also, as noted by Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 66, Houbigant, Secker, Lowth, Gensenius, Hitzig, and Hendewerk all consider the phrase, "king of Assyria," in v. 17 to have been originally a marginal gloss. For a recent review of modern critical analyses of the Book of Isaiah, see Wegner, *An Examination of the Kingship and Messianic Expectation in Isaiah 1-35*, Chapter 1, "The Current State of Isaianic Studies," and for its application specifically to Isaiah 7, see the section, "What Is the Redactional Significance of the Passage," pp. 131-35.

65 For a defense of these conservative positions, see Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), pp. 329-51; Oswald T. Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974); and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), pp. 164-66.