

Chapter 12

Key Words in Isaiah 7:14

Ahaz has refused to ask for a sign and he has gone on with his court to weary God; therefore, for that reason, the Lord takes the matter out of his hands, withdrawing, as it were, the offer, and himself gives the sign.
--Edward J. Young

Introduction

Chapter 10 expended considerable effort to discuss and determine the fundamental meaning of the most debated word in Isaiah 7:14, namely, עֲלְמָה (‘*almah*). Chapter 11, in turn, discussed the four verbs and verb-like words in Isaiah 7:14. Based on the conclusions reached for ‘*almah* and for those four words, the verse would be translated as follows:

אֹת	לְכֶם	הוּא	אֲדֹנָי	יִתֵּן	לְכֵן
a sign	to you	he	Adonai	will give	Therefore
		(himself) ¹			

הִנֵּה	הָעַלְמָה	הָרָה	וַיִּלְדֶּת	בֵּן	וְקָרְאת	שְׁמוֹ	עִמָּנוּ	אֵל
Behold	(a/the) maiden	is pregnant	and she will bear	a son	and she will call	his name	Immanuel	

This chapter focuses on the remaining words that play a significant role in determining the meaning of the verse. They are: (1) the use of לְכֵן (translated *therefore*), (2) הִנֵּה (*behold*), (3) אֹת (*sign*), (4) the definite article on עֲלְמָה (‘*almah*), and (5) the name עִמָּנוּ אֵל (*Immanuel*).

1: לְכֵן

The word לְכֵן (*lākēn*) is classified as a *particle* in Hebrew grammar.² Adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions are all examples of particles. לְכֵן is the adverb כֵּן prefixed with the preposition לְ. The basic meaning of כֵּן is so

1 The separate pronouns like הוּא ("he") can also be used to add emphasis to the subject; see *GKC*, §§ 135a, n. 1, and 135c.

2 The information in this paragraph is taken largely from *GKC*, § 100, and *BDB*, pp. 485-87.

or *thus*. With the preposition לְ, BDB suggests three possible meanings: *according to such conditions, that being so, or therefore*. BDB also states that לְ is used "esp. [especially] in the proph. [prophets] where it often introduces, after statement of the grounds, a divine declaration or command," and cites Isaiah 7:14 as one of many examples. Note that seven out of eight of the standard Jewish and Christian translations cited in Chapter 11 translate לְ as "therefore." The *Jewish Bible 1985* translates it "assuredly."

It would appear that the meaning of לְ is straightforward in Isaiah 7:14. Ahaz had refused to accept the Lord's offer to ask for a sign confirming his promise to remove the threat of Rezin and Pekah (v. 11). "That being so," or "therefore," the Lord himself will give Ahaz a sign. BDB observes that the word is often used in the prophets to introduce a divine declaration.

Some commentators, however, read more into the word לְ and its use here. E. Henderson suggests "not withstanding" or "nevertheless."³ However, E. J. Young states that although this translation would meet the requirements of the context, this sense for לְ is "without parallel elsewhere."⁴ George Gray notes that August Dillmann argued that a sign introduced by לְ must be a threat of punishment.⁵ The context may or may not indicate that the sign is a threat, but that question cannot be answered by the use of לְ.⁶ Sometimes it does introduce a threat,⁷ but other times a blessing.⁸

It is helpful to review the conclusions of Chapter 8 regarding what this sign from the Lord portends--blessing or judgment. First, verses 15-16 refer to the short-lived desolation of Judah at the hands of Rezin and Pekah.⁹ Second, verse 17 introduces the judgment of Judah at the hands of Assyria, beginning with Tiglath-pileser.¹⁰ Third, verses 18-25 describe the further desolation of Judah during the remainder of the Assyrian period.¹¹

But these observations from verses 17-25 show the resultant judgment, doom, and desolation of Judah. It is verse 13 that shows the cause of these judgments, and it is verse 13 to which לְ directly refers in the flow of the text, thus identifying the way it is used in verse 14. Young offers a strong argument for this interpretation:

It is only by a consideration of the context...that one may properly determine the connotation of לְ.
[Karl] Budde is right in stressing the relationship of the particle to verse 13, for it is only in the light of this relationship that the true meaning may be ascertained. When, therefore, we do take note of this relationship, we immediately discover the force of the particle. We see that it serves to introduce a sign

3 E. Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 2nd ed. (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1857), p. 62.

4 Edward J. Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16," *WTJ* 15 (May 1953):109.

5 George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX*, in *The International Critical Commentary*, gen. ed. Charles Augustus Briggs (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 124; Dillmann's book, *Der Prophet Jesaja* (1890) was not accessible to me.

6 See, e.g., Gray (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX*, pp. 124-25), Young ("The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16," pp. 109-10), and Emil Kraeling ("The Immanuel Prophecy," *JBL* 50 (1931):283-84). The latter writes, "As a matter of pure philology the 'therefore' of 14a does not need to introduce a threat." After further argumentation, Kraeling draws his conclusion in a rather dramatic way: "We must therefore repudiate most emphatically the suggestion that the problem of whether this passage is ominous in any sense is decided in favor of the affirmative by the 'therefore' of 14a" (the entire sentence is italicized by Kraeling).

7 E.g., Isa. 1:24; 5:13, 24.

8 E.g., Exod. 6:6; Num. 25:12; Isa. 10:24; 28:16; 29:22; Jer. 16:14-15.

9 See "Issue 2" in the subsection "Verses 15-16" of Chapter 8.

10 See "The Beginning of the Judgment Announced" in subsection "Verse 17" of Chapter 8.

11 See the section "The Coming Desolation of Judah: 7:18-25 of Chapter 8.

of a different character from that which had previously been offered....The sign which Ahaz might have asked would have been for his benefit. Now, however, there is no longer any choice. Ahaz must receive such a sign as God will give him, a sign which will have a relationship to his own lack of faith and hence will be one of doom. Budde is right, therefore, when he concludes that there can no longer be any talk of God's patience. When לִּכְן is considered in its relationship to verse 13, it is a sign of doom and not of blessing for which we are to look.¹²

2: אֹת

אֹת ('ôth), "sign," also occurs in verse 11 and was discussed at some length in Chapter 8, "Issue 1" of the subsection "Verses 10-11." The conclusion was that אֹת in verse 11 was an example of use number 3 in the list given for the various uses of אֹת :

3. It may be a contemporary event, usually supernatural (a miracle), to prove that God has just spoken or to prove the truth of what he has just spoken (e.g., Exod. 4:8-9; 7:3; Deut. 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; Jud. 6:17; 2 Kgs. 20:9; Neh. 9:10; Isa. 38:7, 22); this use of אֹת is often accompanied by מוֹפֵת (*môphêth*), a masculine noun possibly from a root אִפַּת and translated *wonder*.

Thus in the case of verse 11, the sign would soon be given and would function as confirmation that God would keep the promise he had just made in verse 7, viz., that the plans of Rezin and Pekah would not stand or come to pass. It was also concluded that in verse 11 Isaiah was suggesting Ahaz choose a miraculous event for his sign. But now in verse 14 the following points are to be noted:

- It is God and not Ahaz who would select the sign.
- That sign is described in the remainder of verse 14.¹³
- The sign is introduced by the word הִנֵּה ("Behold!").

Several issues present themselves.

Issue 1

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- 12 Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16," pp. 110-11; brackets added. Young is citing Karl Budde, "Das Immanuelzeichen und die Ahaz-Begegnung Jesaja 7," *JBL* 52 (1933):22-54. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), pp. 208-209, suggests a middle of the road position between blessing or threat. "A final problem raised by this passage is its ambiguous nature....The presence of a transcendent and holy God with us ["Immanuel"] may well mean weal and woe together. To the extent that we are dependent upon him, his presence results in blessing; but to the extent that we refuse to depend upon him, his presence is an embarrassment and a curse. Both realities are implicit in his presence." However, Oswalt's subsequent comment on verse 13 is in full agreement with the view taken by Young. "The change from 'your God' in v. 11 [to 'my God' in v. 13] is ominous....Such an understanding lends support to the position mentioned above concerning the long-term import of Ahaz's act. He has alienated himself and his house from God. The whole verse [13] seems pregnant with threat."
 - 13 Alexander McCaul, *The Messiahship of Jesus: The Concluding Series of the Twelve Lectures on the Prophecies* (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1852), argues that the entire section, vv. 14-25, constitutes the sign. This view is discussed in Chapter 13 in the subsection "Interpretations" by E. Henderson and Alexander McCaul."

First, is אֹת used in the same sense in verse 14 as it was in verse 11, namely, a contemporary event to prove that God has just spoken or to prove the truth of what he has just spoken? This issue must be resolved by one or the other of the following two options:

- Whether the sign given by the Lord in verse 14 would occur within a sufficiently short period of time to consider it essentially contemporaneous with the Lord's promise regarding Rezin and Pekah (e.g., as in Jud. 6:17)
- Whether the sign would occur in the future, either near or far, relative to the promise regarding Rezin and Pekah (e.g., as in Exod. 3:12 and Jer. 44:29-30)

The first option identifies the use of אֹת as number 3 as cited above, making it the same use of אֹת as in verse 11. The second option identifies its use as number 5 from the list in Chapter 8:

5. It may be a predicted (future) event, supernatural or natural, that could not be foreseen and therefore to prove the divine causality of another event in the past (e.g., Exod. 3:12) or in the future (e.g., 1 Sam. 2:34; Isa. 37:30; Jer. 44:29-30)

Use 5 is also a confirmatory sign, as is use 3, but it does not occur immediately but in the future. In his commentary on Exodus, Walter Kaiser offers a comment that bears on the issue of how to classify the sign in Isaiah 7:14:

The "sign" here [Exod. 3:12] is confirmatory and appeals to faith rather than to immediate evidence or to the presence of the miraculous. The sign is not the same as Gideon's in Judges 6:17; for Gideon requested the sign; Moses did not. Therefore Moses' sign belongs in the same class as these signs about the future: 1 Samuel 2:34...Isaiah 7:14...and Jeremiah 44:29-30....Thus while God gave "signs" as "proofs" to the people (Exod 4:1-9), interestingly enough he gave no such "signs" to Moses himself but asked for belief and trust in his word and promised to be present...¹⁴

So according to Kaiser, the sign in Isaiah 7:14 falls into use 5 and not use 3 in the classification of "signs" developed in Chapter 8. This view is consistent with the analysis of אָתָּה, a Qal imperfect of אָתַּת, to give.¹⁵ Therefore, the occurrence of the sign will take place at some future time, not when it is announced. The future time, though, does not indicate whether the occurrence of the sign will be in the near or distant future.

However, as defined, use 5 is a bit more complicated than use 3. It has two variations, which are best explained graphically.

The Future Sign Proves the Divine Causality of an Event in the Past: Exodus 3:12

And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain" (NASB).

14 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Exodus*, vol. II in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), II:319; brackets added.

15 *BDB*, p. 678. See also the section "Verb 1: אָתַּת" in Chapter 11.

"Combining the Components for an Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14."

Issue 2

Second, does the sign given in verse 14 represent a different tone? There is a definite change in tone. In verse 11, the Lord identifies himself as Ahaz's God. After Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign at the gracious invitation of the Lord, Isaiah addresses Ahaz and his court ("house of David") in verse 13 and calls the Lord "my God" rather than "your God" as in verse 11. Isaiah also accuses Ahaz and his court of wearying God.

Issue 3

Third, is the promised sign in verse 14 intended to confirm merely the same pronouncement of God that the sign to be asked by Ahaz in verse 11 would have confirmed, namely, that the plans of Rezin and Pekah would not stand or come to pass? This is most unlikely.¹⁷ According to verse 16, the sign in verse 14 will indeed confirm that, but according to verse 17, the sign will in addition confirm much more. Verse 17 begins the description of the punishment the Lord will bring upon Judah at the hand of "the king of Assyria" (Tiglath-pileser), the very king Ahaz was hoping would remove the problem of Rezin and Pekah for him.¹⁸ Skinner makes this point very effectively:

There is a presumption that the *import* of the sign will have changed by what has taken place in the interval [from v. 11 to v. 14]. Isaiah's first message to Ahaz is an unqualified assurance of deliverance from the designs of Rezin and Pekah, and the sign first offered would be a sign of that and that alone....The Assyrian invasion is brought into immediate connexion with the attack of the allies, and a new forecast of the future is presented by the prophet in which three great events follow closely on one another: (1) the collapse of the project of the allied princes, (2) the total destruction of Syria and Ephraim by the Assyrians, and (3) the devastation of Judah by the same ruthless conquerors. And the most natural supposition is that the new sign will be an epitome of this new and darker outlook, that is to say it will be a pledge at once of the *immediate deliverance* and of the judgment that lies behind it.¹⁹

3: הִנֵּה

Both *BDB*²⁰ and *GKC*²¹ call הִנֵּה (*hinnēh*) a *demonstrative particle*. As such, it can be used absolutely before a complete noun-clause or verbal-clause, or it may take a pronoun as a suffix when the pronoun would be the natural subject of a noun-clause.²² Isaiah 7:14 is an example of the first use. Counting both of these uses, הִנֵּה occurs over a thousand times in the Hebrew Scriptures.

17 By contrast, John H. Walton, "Isa 7:14: What's In a Name?" *JETS* 30 (September 1987):295, considers it most likely, based on his view of the pregnancy, the birth of the child, and the naming of the child--all contemporary events pointing to "the beginning of God's action against Pekah and Rezin" that are "not far off." This view completely misses the connection between verse 13, the sign of verse 14, and the judgments on Judah that follow in verses 17-25.

18 Refer to the exegesis of verses 17-25 in Chapter 8.

19 J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1896), p. 60; emphasis original and brackets added. Brown reaches the same conclusion: "The fact that Jehovah [*sic*] is sore displeased with Ahaz is based upon his wearying God, by occasioning him to exhaust all means for the recovery of the king's loyalty, without success. The sign which the Lord gives, therefore, while pointing to relief from the allied armies, points also to distress from Assyria herself; hence the sign involves a threat as well as a promise" ("Exegesis of Isaiah VII. 10-17," p. 121).

20 *BDB*, p. 243.

21 *GKC*, § 147b.

22 *Ibid.*

BDB gives the basic meaning of הִנֵּה as *Lo! or Behold!*²³ and in *TWOT* Carl Weber suggests "Look!" or "See!"²⁴ *BDB* also cites Isaiah 7:14 as an example of its use "to introduce a solemn or important declaration,"²⁵ and *GKC* cites Isaiah 7:14 as an example of its use "to announce an event as imminent, or near at hand, and sure to happen."²⁶ Both are content to use "Behold!" as the translation for its various uses or nuances.

Thomas Lambdin, however, argues that the translation "behold" is "archaic," and he laments modern "translators' refusal to come to grips with the meaning and syntactical functions of הִנֵּה in terms of modern English correspondents."²⁷ He then proceeds to list various nuances in the uses of הִנֵּה. In those examples, he never uses the translation "Behold!" and in fact sometimes does not translate the word at all. For example, he translates Genesis 16:6 as "Your handmaid is in your charge; do to her..." Here הִנֵּה is not translated. But he also offers a second version: "*Since* your handmaid is..." (italics original). In this version he essentially translates הִנֵּה as "since," the result of which would certainly appear to be a paraphrase rather than a translation. Moreover, the context of verse 5 certainly suggests that Abram's response would contain some sort of emotion calling for an interjection or exclamation, something totally lost in the bland introductory phrase, "Since your handmaid is in your charge..." If "behold" is too "archaic," certainly Weber's basic meaning of הִנֵּה, "Look" or "See," supplies a needed and appropriate interjection: "Look, your handmaid is in your charge."

As another example, Lambdin suggests translating Genesis 37:19 as "Here comes the dreamer..." Again, translating הִנֵּה as "here" totally lacks any sarcasm or sneering that "Behold, the dreamer is coming" or "Look, the dreamer is coming" would convey when expressed with the right tone of voice.

BDB, *GKC*, and Weber seem to take the fundamental feature of הִנֵּה in its various uses to be an interjection displaying some sense of emotion or exclamation. Lambdin's translations of the different uses he defines generally lack this--the very feature that is central to the meaning and use of the word. Although Lambdin does not cite Isaiah 7:14 in any of his examples, it would probably fit in his category "predictor of existence." One of his examples of this category is הִנֵּה הָאִישׁ. He translates this as "Here is the man," supplying the verb "is" and again translating הִנֵּה as "here." By contrast, the Hebrew is better translated, "Look! The man!" Likewise, Isaiah 7:14 is best translated the same way: "Behold, the maiden..." or "Look, the maiden..."

Lambdin is right, though, that there are different nuances in the uses of הִנֵּה. "Behold!" may not be the best translation for all of these nuances, but it must be remembered that the English word "Behold!" also has its nuances, allowing it to match a number of nuances of הִנֵּה. הִנֵּה can reflect sarcasm, sneering, an announcement of an important fact or action, the introduction of an important declaration, the prelude to the announcement of a significant or important event to take place, et al. The latter two senses were suggested by *BDB* and *GKC*, respectively, for Isaiah 7:14, but they certainly do not exhaust the ways the word is used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. Weber suggests the general meaning of הִנֵּה to be "an interjection

23 *BDB*, p. 243.

24 Carl Philip Weber, הִנֵּה, *TWOT* I:220-21.

25 *BDB*, p. 244.

26 *GKC*, § 116p.

27 Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 168.

demanding a verdict,"²⁸ which no doubt comes close to encompassing most of its various nuances.

Applying all this to Isaiah 7:14, it would seem best to translate הִנֵּה as "Behold!" or "Look!"--here pointing either to an interjection leading to an important declaration or to the announcement of an event near at hand and sure to happen.²⁹

Behold [or Look], the maiden is pregnant [הַרְהָ] and she will bear a son...

Note that the idea of "an event near at hand" in Isaiah 7:14 can, of course, refer to a pregnancy and birth soon to take place. However, since Isaiah as a prophet is the one who spoke this clause while talking to Ahaz, the idea of "an event near at hand" can also be explained in terms of a prophetic vision. Isaiah sees the event in his vision, so for him both "behold" and the adjective הַרְהָ can have a present-time sense, even though the actual events might be far in the future.³⁰ As GKC states in his discussion of the *perfectum propheticum*, or prophetic perfect, "The prophet so transports himself in imagination into the future that he describes the future event as if it had been already seen or heard by him."³¹

Before concluding this section on הִנֵּה, it should be noted that הִנֵּה and the birth announcement it introduces is similar to other birth announcements in the Scriptures. The closest parallel is Genesis 16:11:

הִנֵּךְ הָרָה וְיִלְדֶתְךָ בֵן וְקָרָאתָ שְׁמוֹ יִשְׁמָעֵאל

The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are with child, and you will bear a son; and you shall call his name Ishmael... (NASB)

Judges 13:5 (repeated in verse 7) is another similar birth announcement (of Samson):

28 Weber, הִנֵּה, I:220.

29 Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 62, writes, "הִנֵּה is frequently used by the prophets to excite attention to the subject which they are about to announce." Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), I:285, makes essentially the same point: Isaiah's "reason for doing so [using הִנֵּה] was to attract attention to the announcement itself."

30 See the discussion in the section "Implication of Present Time in Isaiah 7:14" in Chapter 11, which in turn is based on the discussion in Chapter 7, subsection "The Contested Verbs."

31 GKC, § 106n. Franz Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols, vol. 7 in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols., C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975; original publication date, 1877), I:216, states that הִנֵּה "is always used by Isaiah to introduce a future occurrence," and uses this observation to argue that the pregnancy of the maiden must be future. His observation about Isaiah's uses of הִנֵּה in other parts of his book may be accurate, but since הִנֵּה does have other senses besides introducing future events (e.g., Gen. 16:6), Delitzsch's observation may mean only that Isaiah did not have occasion to use הִנֵּה elsewhere in any other sense. It does not prevent him from using the הִנֵּה in a present sense in his prophetic vision. It might also be noted, as Young points out, that "In the light of Isaiah 6:7, however, we cannot assert that הִנֵּה always introduces a future occurrence [in the Book of Isaiah], since in this verse it very definitely refers to what has already taken place" ("The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16," p. 115).

כִּי הִנֵּה הַרְהוּ וְיִלְדֵת בֵּן

For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son... (NASB)

Young is correct in his conclusion that one of the uses of הִנֵּה is to introduce an announcement of a birth of unusual importance, and Isaiah 7:14 is one such announcement.³²

There is also a similar announcement in the somewhat notorious "Poem of Nikkal."³³ In line 7 of the first part of the poem, it is stated that the goddess Nikkal has given or will give birth. The Ugaritic cognate of הִנֵּה is *hl*, and it is used to introduce this birth announcement:

Line 7: *hl glmt tld bn* "Behold, the girl bears [has borne] [will bear] a son"³⁴

There clearly is a similarity between this announcement and Isaiah's announcement. In fact, since the poem predates Isaiah, Theodor Gaster goes so far as to state, "these words [in the "Poem of Nikkal"] equate with the famous utterance, Isaiah vii, 14...thus shown to be a quotation!"³⁵ Young, however, offers the following warning:

There is danger, however, that in our exuberation over the remarkable material from Ras Shamra we be led into extravagant and untenable statements. It should be noted that in the Ras Shamra text the word הַרְהוּ which occurs in each of the Scriptural passages is missing. Isaiah 7:14, therefore, can hardly be regarded as merely a quotation from Ras Shamra.³⁶

Young's conclusion here is almost certainly correct: Isaiah did not quote from a poem about a pagan goddess that predates him by about 700 years. However, Young goes on to suggest that "behold" was used in "the ancient Orient" to introduce a birth announcement of "particular significance."³⁷ He does not give any examples

32 Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16," p. 113. His actual sentence is this: "...the phrase introduced by הִנֵּה is employed in the Scriptures to announce a birth of unusual importance." Virtually the same statement is found in his commentary some years later: "The language introduced by *hinnēh*, 'behold!' is employed in the Scriptures to announce a birth of unusual importance and significance" (*The Book of Isaiah*, I:284). Walton takes Young to task as follows: "Young goes so far as to maintain that 'behold' is 'employed in the Scriptures to announce a birth of unusual importance and significance'" ("Isa 7:14: What's In a Name?" p. 291, n. 8). This criticism, however, is both unwarranted and incorrect. First, the phrase, "goes so far as to maintain..." is an unwarranted pejorative phrase. Second, the criticism is also incorrect because in the context Walton is arguing that הַרְהוּ should be taken in a present sense and apparently takes Young's sentence as an argument to take it in a future sense. Difficult as it is to believe, Walton did not notice that Young actually does take Walton's view that הַרְהוּ is here used in a present sense (p. 286 of his commentary). Young's sentence was simply a generalization: *hinnēh* is used to introduce birth announcements. Whether or not the pregnancy has already begun is not indicated simply by the use of *hinnēh* to introduce it. On the other hand, I might point out that Young's sentence could have been improved to avoid confusion on a totally different issue, namely, the different uses of *hinnēh* in Scripture. As I argued in this section, *hinnēh* has several different uses in the Scripture, and introducing birth announcements is only one of them. Young's sentence, "The language introduced by *hinnēh*, 'behold!' is employed in the Scriptures to announce a birth of unusual importance and significance," is true: *hinnēh* is employed that way in Scripture. But it would have avoided possible confusion for Young to have written, "One use of *hinnēh* in Scripture is to introduce an announcement of a birth of unusual importance and significance. There are also other uses for it in Scripture."

33 See the subsection, "The 'Poem of Nikkal,'" in Chapter 10.

34 Translated by Bruce Vawter, "The Ugaritic Use of GLMT," *CBQ* 14 (October 1952):320; brackets original. Like Hebrew, Ugaritic does not distinguish tenses, so the verb *tld* here could be past, present, or future.

35 Theodor H. Gaster, "The 'Graces' in Semitic Folklore: A Wedding-song from Ras Shamru." *JRAS* (January 1938):50; brackets added.

36 Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16," pp. 113-14.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 114. In this connection, if the pharaoh of the Exodus is Amenhotep II (18th dynasty; fifteenth century B.C.)

from other Semitic languages, but of course it is possible that הַגִּיה could have been used for such birth announcements elsewhere in the ancient Orient. Young's conclusion is quite acceptable:

What is important...is not that Isaiah uses a phrase which had also occurred in Ras Shamra; what is important is that he uses this phrase in a context which in its significance differs completely from that in which it was found elsewhere. Granting, therefore, the similarity in language, we nevertheless insist that the words of Isaiah must be interpreted upon their own merit and not as bound by the same connotation which they bore in Ras Shamra.³⁸

4: The Definite Article on עַלְמָה

The most debated word in Isaiah 7:14 is עַלְמָה (‘*almah*), and the entire, rather lengthy, Chapter 10 was devoted to determining its fundamental meaning ("young unmarried girl") and its use in this verse. But the difficulties surrounding עַלְמָה do not end with Chapter 10. In Isaiah 7:14, the definite article, הַ,³⁹ is prefixed to עַלְמָה. Therefore, the reason for the definite article on the word must now be addressed. Moreover, this reason must take into account the fact that Hebrew has no word or prefix for the indefinite article corresponding to "a" and "an" in English.

One might assume *a priori* that the matter is quite simple and that the translation should be "the maiden." However, *GKC* has this note on one specific use of the article:

Peculiar to Hebrew is the employment of the article to denote a single person or thing (primarily one which is as yet unknown, and therefore not capable of being defined) as being present to the mind under given circumstances. In such cases in English the indefinite article is mostly used.⁴⁰

It is this use of the definite article that *GKC* attributes to עַלְמָה in Isaiah 7:14: "*the particular maiden*, through whom the prophet's announcement shall be fulfilled; we should say *a maiden*."⁴¹ *GKC* is a bit brief here, but Edward Young explains this use of the definite article in more depth:

The article may serve to designate the עַלְמָה as one that is particularly well known....

More natural, however, is the *generic* usage in which the article serves to designate some particular unknown person. This usage may best be rendered in English by the indefinite article, as is done in the Authorized Version. The purpose would then be to distinguish the עַלְמָה from some other kind of

rather than Ramesses II (19th dynasty; thirteenth century B.C.), then the "Poem of Nikkal" would roughly represent the same century as Moses, the author of Genesis. Also, the statement of the Angel of the LORD to Hagar in Gen. 16:11 would actually predate Nikkal's birth announcement, or at least the tablet on which it was recorded, by about 600 years.

38 Ibid., pp. 114-15.

39 When the definite article is prefixed to a word beginning with the gutturals א or ע or the letter ה, it is pointed הַ (J. Weingreen, *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew* [Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1939], p. 24).

40 *GKC*, § 126q.

41 *GKC*, § 126r (emphasis original). Kraeling, "The Immanuel Prophecy," p. 295, cites the same rule and applies it to Isaiah 7:14 in much the same way: "The article before ‘*almah* must not be stressed for there is a rule of Hebrew grammar that the article may be employed before a subject not previously referred to but assumed as existing under the given circumstances; according to this rule *ha* ‘*almah* ought to be rendered simply 'a damsel.'"

woman. "It is not an old woman, or a married woman which I behold in vision", Isaiah might then be paraphrased as saying, "but an עֲלֻמָּה. Behold! it is an עֲלֻמָּה which is with child." The generic usage of the article thus serves to focus particular attention upon the subject introduced, the עֲלֻמָּה.⁴²

This would seem to be the more common view,⁴³ but proponents of the alternative are not lacking. For example, conservative Christian scholar Charles Feinberg concludes that "The better interpretation of the passage would see a significance in the prophet's use of the definite article, pointing to a specific person."⁴⁴ Similarly, Jewish scholar Rabbi Nosson Scherman in his commentary on Isaiah writes,

The Hebrew definite article, ה , *the*, indicates that Isaiah is referring to a specific woman who was known to them, perhaps even someone who was standing nearby and could be pointed to.⁴⁵

It would be more accurate to say that the definite article *can* refer to a specific woman who was known to Isaiah and Ahaz. Scherman appears to argue that the Hebrew definite article always refers to a definite person or object. However, according to the grammarians G, K, and C cited above, there is another use for the definite article in Hebrew. Be that as it may, however, Rabbi Scherman was preparing the way to point out that according to Rashi the עֲלֻמָּה was Isaiah's wife, while according to Radak she may have been the wife of Ahaz. Although not mentioned by Scherman, Abenezra also takes the girl to be Isaiah's wife.

Rashi correctly argued that the child could not be Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, because Hezekiah had already been born when this meeting between Isaiah and Ahaz occurred. This point was also argued at length in Chapter 4, "Chronology of Ahaz and Hezekiah." The actual identity of the עֲלֻמָּה, however, is discussed in detail in Chapter 13. Here the comment by George Gray is sufficient:

The damsel would be a strange mode of reference either to the wife (or a concubine) of the king, to the prophet's own wife, or to some pregnant woman present at the interview and singled out by the prophet for his purpose.⁴⁶

The conclusion was reached in Chapter 10 that the basic meaning of עֲלֻמָּה is *young unmarried girl*. This, in addition to the conclusion regarding the prefixed definite article reached here, would call for the following translation:

Behold, a young unmarried girl is pregnant and she will bear a son...

42 Young "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16," pp. 117-18. Kraeling, "The Immanuel Prophecy," p. 295, cites the same rule and applies it to Isaiah 7:14 in much the same way: "The article before 'almah must not be stressed for there is a rule of Hebrew grammar that the article may be employed before a subject not previously referred to but assumed as existing under the given circumstances; according to this rule *ha'almah* ought to be rendered simply 'a damsel.'" Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX*, p. 133, concludes that "which of these grammatical possibilities was intended must be determined (if possible) by the entire context" (emphasis original).

43 E.g., Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 62; T. K. Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols., (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1880), I:46, citing Num. 11:27 as another example; E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Prophecies*, 2nd ed., 4 vols., trans. Theod. Meyer (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1858), II:45; Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 56, citing 2 Sam. 17:17 as another example.

44 Charles Lee Feinberg, "The Virgin Birth in the Old Testament and Isaiah 7:14," *BSac* 119 (July-September 1966): 255.

45 Nosson Scherman, *Isaiah*, in *The ArtScroll Series: The Later Prophets with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings*, gen. ed. Rabbi Nosson Scherman (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2013), p. 63.

46 Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX*, p. 125.

However, the English word, *maiden*, has the meaning "young unmarried girl" or "young unmarried woman." Therefore, the best translation in colloquial English:

Behold, a maiden is pregnant and she will bear a son...

Before leaving this section, a brief word must be given about the view of Charles Briggs that the definite article should be taken "as the sign of the vocative, *O though young woman*."⁴⁷ Briggs goes on to state that "this is favoured by the קְרָאתָ, which is pointed as 2 fem."⁴⁸ It is difficult to find other scholars who take the definite article as a sign of the vocative case. GKC does point out that the definite article is used "very often with the vocative"⁴⁹ but cites Isaiah 7:14 with the use of the article described above. Young simply states, "The word is not a vocative (Briggs, Hoffmann)."⁵⁰

5: עִמָּנוּ אֵל

Manuscripts and Word Forms

The name that הָעֵלְמָה gives the child is עִמָּנוּ אֵל transliterated 'immānū 'ēl or in colloquial English, *Immanuel*. It is critically important, of course, to also know the translation or meaning of this name.

עִמָּנוּ אֵל occurs only three times in the Hebrew Scriptures: Isaiah 7:14, 8:8, and 8:10. It is also found once in the New Testament, Matthew 1:23, transliterated into Greek: Ἐμμανουήλ. According to Ginsberg, "The name Immanuel does not appear at all in the talmudic or midrashic literature."⁵¹

Whether עִמָּנוּ אֵל is treated as one word or two varies. The Masoretic Text (*MT*) has it as two words in all three Isaiah texts, whereas 1QIsa^a from Qumran (the Dead Sea Scrolls) has it as one word in all three texts. The Hebrew text in the *Stone Edition* has it as one word in Isaiah 7:14, but two words in both Isaiah 8:8 and 8:10. The Hebrew text in the *Jerusalem Bible* has it as one word in Isaiah 7:14 and 8:8, but as two words in 8:10.⁵² Thus, the spacing in the extant Hebrew texts do not lead to any conclusions. For a nearby comparison, in all four Hebrew texts just mentioned, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, the name of Isaiah's second son in verse 8:3, is given in four words. Yet it is a name.

עִמָּנוּ is a combination of the preposition עִם ('im), meaning *with*, and the first person plural personal pronoun as a suffix, *us*, making *with us*.⁵³ אֵל ('Ēl) is "the one and only true God of Israel."⁵⁴

Therefore, עִמָּנוּ אֵל means, and can be translated, *with us [is] God* or *God [is] with us*. However, there are two

47 Charles Augustus Briggs, *Messianic Prophecy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), p. 195, n. 3; italics original.

48 Ibid. See the subsection, "Third Person or Second Person?" in Chapter 11 for a critique of Briggs' view that קְרָאתָ is second person feminine and not third person feminine.

49 GKC, § 126e.

50 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:286, n. 34.

51 Harold Louis Ginsberg, "Immanuel," *EncJudaica*, VIII:1293.

52 For the treatment of עִמָּנוּ אֵל in the LXX, see Ronald F. Youngblood, "Immanuel," *ISBE*, II:806.

53 See the use of עִמָּנוּ in Gen. 24:25; 1 Kgs. 8:57; Psalm 46:8, 12.

54 *BDB*, p. 42.

important questions:

1. Do the two possible *forms*, עִמָּנוּאֵל and עִמָּנוּ אֵל, that appear in various Hebrew texts (e.g., *MT* and 1QIsa^a) determine which of two possible *uses* is intended by Isaiah in a given text--the former use being the proper name of an individual, thus *transliterated* "Immanuel," and the latter use being a statement of reassurance, thus *translated* "God is with us"?
2. If the answer to the previous question is no, what is the intended use in each of the Isaiah texts: 7:14, 8:8, and 8:10?

Regarding the first question, one would presume the answer to be yes: עִמָּנוּאֵל would be used if the intent was to state a proper name, while עִמָּנוּ אֵל would be used to offer reassurance that God is with us. However, since the *MT* and 1QIsa^a use the same *form* in all three verses but are exactly opposite each other (*MT* has the two word *form* in all three verses and 1QIsa^a has the single word *form* in all three verses), the manuscripts cannot supply any help to determine which of the two possible *uses* was intended by Isaiah in each of the three verses. The answer to question one is therefore no, and the answer to question two is that the context alone must be used to reach a decision regarding the intended use in these three verses.

Context and Interpretation

Isaiah 7:14

There is little doubt that in Isaiah 7:14 עִמָּנוּ אֵל is the name given to the child by his mother.⁵⁵

Another question presents itself: in naming the child "Immanuel," does the mother simply intend to express that "God is with us" during these trying times, or does she believe this child is really God incarnate? This question is addressed in Chapter 14, subsection "The Name Immanuel and the Significance of 'God with Us.'"

Isaiah 8:8 and 8:10

Though this chapter deals primarily with Isaiah 7:14, since עִמָּנוּ אֵל occurs only three times Scriptures, a brief overview of these remaining verses is in order.

A brief overview of Isaiah 8 was given in Chapter 6 of this book. According to verses 5-8, because Judah had rejected the Lord and relied on Assyria to protect her from Damascus and Samaria, her land would be overrun by the Assyrians, as was also predicted in 7:17-25. Then in verse 8, making a direct reference to chapter 7, Judah is called the land of Immanuel in 8:8, referring to the boy in 7:14. However, verses 8:9-10 point out that nothing can frustrate the divine plan of mercy for Judah because "God is with us," an application of the meaning of the boy's name, Immanuel.

However, scholars differ in their interpretation of verses 8 and 10 as to whether עִמָּנוּ אֵל refers to the name of the child in 7:14 or simply the expression "God is with us." As John Oswalt observes,

O, Immanuel comes rather abruptly here, and the abruptness has caused a good deal of speculation

55 E.g., Rashi; Radak; *BDB*, pp. 42 and 769; Youngblood, "Immanuel," II:806; Gerard Van Groningen, "עמם," *TWOT*, II:677; Ginsberg, "Immanuel," VIII:1294; C. R. North, "Immanuel," *IDB*, II:685.

over possible interpretations.⁵⁶

Reference Works

Among the reference works, *BDB* does not take עִמָּנוּ אֵל as a name in either 8:8 or 8:10 and writes, "עִמָּנוּ אֵל" 8^{8,10} is declaration of trust and confidence, *with us is God!*"⁵⁷ Youngblood states that עִמָּנוּ אֵל is "a symbolic name or title given at birth to one or more male infants in the OT (Isa. 7:14; 8:8)" but is noncommittal about 8:10.⁵⁸ Note that he maintains the possibility that the child referred to in 8:8 is a different child than the one in 7:14. Van Groningen suggests that in 8:8 it is used as a name, though not that of the child in 7:14, while in 8:10 it is not used as a name at all:

Isaiah addresses Judah's king, of Davidic lineage, as Immanuel (8:8). The prophet also gives the meaning and application of the name by stressing that, in spite of what a disobedient king does, God will be with his covenant people (Isa 8:10).⁵⁹

North takes 7:14 and 8:8 to be the name of the child in 7:14 but does not commit on 8:10.⁶⁰ Ginsberg argues that עִמָּנוּ אֵל is used simply in the sense of "with us is God" in both 8:8 and 8:10.⁶¹

Commentaries

The commentaries are also divided. According to Rashi, Isaiah addresses the people of Judah as Immanuel in 8:8, but Isaiah does so because of the name given to the child in 7:14. Based on his interpretation of 7:14, that the prophetess (Isaiah's wife) named her child "Immanuel," Rashi explains 8:8 as follows:

This ["Immanuel"] is the tribe of Judah, whom the Holy One, blessed be He, promised to be with in the days of Hezekiah, as the words of the prophetess, who named her son Immanuel.⁶²

John Gill takes the view I take in Chapter 6 and in the second paragraph of this section, namely, that Judea was called Immanuel's land because the child of 7:14 was to be born there, and therefore, although overrun by the Assyrians, Judea would not be destroyed.⁶³

In the Targum Jonathan it is difficult to determine whether he called Judah "Immanuel" with Rashi or the "land of Immanuel" with Gill. Gill cites the targum as follows:

And he shall pass through the land of the house of Judah as an overflowing torrent, unto Jerusalem shall he come; and the people of his army shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.⁶⁴

56 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p.227.

57 *BDB*. p. 769; italics original. 1 Kgs. 8:57 and Ps. 46:8, 12 are cited as examples using slightly different phrases.

58 Youngblood, "Immanuel," II:806. Arthur Walwyn Evans, "Immanuel," *Old ISBE*, III:1457, draws the same conclusion as his successor, but unlike Youngblood, Evans does not even mention the use of עִמָּנוּ אֵל in 8:10.

59 Van Groningen, "עִמָּנוּ," II:677.

60 North, "Immanuel," II:685.

61 Ginsberg, "Immanuel," VIII:1294.

62 The translation of Rashi's commentary on the Chabad.org Web site; brackets added.

63 John Gill, *An Exposition of the Books of the Prophets of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (London: Matthews and Leigh, 1810; reprinted Paris: AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006), I:47.

64 *Ibid.* The translation of the Targum Jonathan in *The Chaldee Paraphrase on the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. C. W. H. Pauli (London: London Society's House, 1871), p. 26, ends with "O Israel." However, it includes the note, "The Royal Polyglot and other editions read עִמָּנוּ אֵל," Immanuel.

Both Gill and the Targum interpret the use in 8:10 to be the meaning of the name: "for God is with us" (Gill) and "because God is our help" (Targum).

Henderson argues that 8:8 does use the name of the child in 7:14, but that the land of Judah belonged to Immanuel as "not so much the country to which he belonged, as that which belonged to him; his own peculiar property."⁶⁵ This latter point is based on Henderson's view that the child of 7:14 is the Messiah. Regarding 8:10 he writes,

עִמָּנוּ אֵל is here to be taken, not as the name of IMMANUEL, but as an appropriation of its import; not however, without a recognition of Him to whom the name belonged.⁶⁶

Delitzsch takes both 7:14 and 8:8 as references to the child in 7:14 but interprets the use of עִמָּנוּ אֵל in 8:10 to be reassurance for Judah based on the meaning of the child's name--"pointing to the person of the Saviour, 'with us is God.'"⁶⁷

J. A. Alexander also takes 8:8 as a reference to the child in 7:14 and argues that the use in 8:10 is not the name per se. Rather:

The truth is, that even as a name Immanuel contains a proposition, and that here this proposition is distinctly announced, but with a designed allusion to the person whom the name describes. As if he had said, "The assurance of your safety [Judah] is the great truth expressed by the name of your deliverer, to wit, that God is with us."⁶⁸

This interpretation follows Henderson and likewise is based on Alexander's view that the child in 7:14 is the Messiah, to whom the land belongs.

Young follows suit. On verse 8:8 he writes,

But the bird [of prey = Assyria] does not belong there, for Judah belongs to Immanuel; but it is to be devastated by those who know not Immanuel. The climax of the verse is a prayer, addressed to the Messiah. Who cannot but weep that such an enemy should completely devastate thy land, O Immanuel? The land which Thou alone couldst promise to Thy people. Thy land, devastated by the Assyrian!⁶⁹

However, Young seems to take עִמָּנוּ אֵל in 8:10 as the name of the child in 7:14. His commentary contains his own translation of the book of Isaiah, and he translates עִמָּנוּ אֵל "Immanuel" rather than "God is with us" in 8:10. His reasoning is that since in 8:3-4 the coming doom was symbolically expressed in the name of Isaiah's son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, so in 8:10 the deliverance was symbolically expressed in the name of the child in 7:14, Immanuel.⁷⁰

65 Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 72.

66 Ibid., p. 73; capitalization original.

67 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:233-34.

68 Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1870), I:189; brackets added.

69 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:307; brackets added. Young also included this note: "'To base a far-reaching construction of Messianic belief on so ambiguous a passage is a mistake' (Gray). But would Isaiah have named the land after one of his own sons or after some hypothetical person? There is a seriousness in the passage which is overlooked by those who refuse to accept the Messianic reference" (I:307, n. 18). The quotation from Gray is from *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX*, p. 149.

70 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:308.

John Oswalt suggests that in 8:8 עִמָּנוּ אֵל is used as a name, but in a different way from several of the preceding scholars. He argues that there is an "initial fulfillment" and an "ultimate fulfillment" of the Immanuel prophecy. Verse 7:14 forms "a more poetic statement of the child's identity, pointing to the ultimate Immanuel, whereas 8:1-4 would constitute a more prosaic account and be limited merely to the person of Maher-shalal-hash-baz"; in 8:8 Judah is called "Immanuel's land," confirming that Maher-shalal-hash-baz is not the ultimate fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy.⁷¹ But since Judah is Immanuel's land, verses 8:9-10 give assurance that the plots and plans of Assyria "must eventually come to nothing, except as they coincide with those of the God who has chosen to be with us in the contingencies of our existence."⁷²

Conclusion

The view taken in Chapter 6⁷³ and repeated at the beginning of this section remains my view:

- Verse 7:14: There is little doubt that in Isaiah 7:14 עִמָּנוּ אֵל is the name given to the child by his mother.
- Verse 8:8: עִמָּנוּ אֵל as used in this verse is the *name* of the child in 7:14; the reason for its use by Isaiah in 8:8 is that, despite Assyria overrunning Judah, it will not be destroyed because it is Immanuel's land--it belongs to him.

Then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through, it will reach even to the neck; and the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel. (NASB)

- Verse 8:10: עִמָּנוּ אֵל as used in this verse is a reference to the *meaning* of Immanuel's name; Assyria will be unable to frustrate the divine plan of mercy for Judah because of the great truth expressed in the *meaning* of the name, viz., "God [is] with us."

Devise a plan, but it will be thwarted; state a proposal, but it will not stand, for God is with us. (NASB)

Among the sources summarized here, Gill, Henderson, Delitzsch, and Alexander take the same view.

The Resulting Translation of Isaiah 7:14

Based on the conclusions drawn in Chapters 10 - 12, the working hypothesis for the translation of Isaiah 7:14 is as follows:

אוֹת	לְכֶם	הוּא	אֲדֹנָי	יִתֵּן	לְכֵן
a sign	to you	he	Adonai	will give	Therefore
		(himself)			

עִמָּנוּ אֵל	שְׁמוֹ	וְקָרְאת	בֶּן	וְיִלְדֶת	הָרָה	הָעַלְמָה	הִנֵּה
Immanuel	his name	and she will call	a son	and she will bear	is pregnant	a maiden	Behold

71 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, pp. 213, 227.

72 Ibid., p. 228.

73 See Chapter 6, subsection "Chapter 8" (the biblical Chapter 8!) in the section "The Common Themes Through Chapters 7-12."

Or in somewhat literal English:

Therefore Adonai himself will give you a sign: Behold a maiden is pregnant, and she will bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel.