

# Chapter 13

## *The Interpretation of the Immanuel Prophecy*

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*. -- C. R. Brown

### **Strategy to Derive the Interpretation of The Immanuel Prophecy**

An author has a number of ways to develop the interpretation of a text for which there is a large number of differing views. One way, of course, would simply be to present his own interpretation and the arguments in its favor. Another approach would be to select a number of the more popular interpretations, critique them, and then develop his own interpretation. A third strategy might be to cite the interpretations most likely to be correct, in the author's opinion, explain the evidence for each of them, and then leave it at that.

The presentation I develop here is a modification and combination of all three approaches. The procedure in this chapter, then, is as follows.

- (1) A summary of the preceding chapters is given. Those chapters analyzed all the issues on which an interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 must be based. The argumentation was thorough, various views were analyzed, and conclusions were drawn.
- (2) The leading interpretations faithful to the integrity of the current Masoretic text and to the divine inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture are presented. Interpretations not meeting these requirements are not presented.
- (3) Those conclusions reached in Chapters 1-12 referred to in (1) above become in this chapter the building blocks for the interpretation of the Immanuel prophecy developed.

### **The Conclusions Reached In the Preceding Chapters**

Here is a list of the chapters and the assumptions and/or conclusions stated and defended in those chapters. The bibliographic information for the citations included here are not given but can be found in those chapters.

#### Chapter 1: "Introduction"

This book on Isaiah 7:14 is written for conservatives within Judaism and Christianity who believe the Bible is the word of God. Interpretations based on conclusions drawn from the various types of biblical criticism regarding the origin and integrity of the current Masoretic text of Isaiah are in general not addressed.

The two tenets assumed without argument in this book are, therefore, as follows:

- 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.

## Chapter 2: "Christian Hermeneutics"

Chapter 2 presented an overview of hermeneutics and exegesis as practiced by Christian scholars. It concludes with a summary of the hermeneutical presuppositions and principles that I will use in the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14.

- The Bible in its entirety is the result of supernatural divine revelation from God to the biblical authors and is inerrant.
- A biblical text has one meaning (or sense) and only one meaning.
- The meaning known to and understood by the human author, and which he intended to convey in his text, is in fact the single divine meaning of that text and therefore the only meaning that has divine authority.
- The only valid method to determine the intent of the original human author is grammatical-historical exegesis.
- The entire Book of Isaiah was written by the eighth-century prophet, Isaiah, and is not the redaction of multiple sources over several centuries.
- The New Testament citation of Isaiah 7:14 should not be used to guide in any way the application of the grammatical-historical method of exegesis of this text in the Old Testament or to influence the conclusions drawn therefrom.

The second and third points above are particularly important for the interpretation of prophecy, especially Isaiah 7:14. In the section "Interpretation of Prophecy" in Chapter 2, the conclusion was reached that both *dual sense* (also called *double sense*, *deeper sense*, *dual meaning*, or *double meaning*) and its closely related type of interpretation, *sensus plenior*, violate the principle of only one meaning (or sense) for a biblical text and was therefore rejected based on items two and three above.

However, there is another concept related to the interpretation of predictive prophecy that *is* valid and must be distinguished from dual sense and *sensus plenior*. It is *multiple fulfillment*. Another name for this concept is *generic prophecy*. Walter Kaiser was cited in Chapter 2 giving this definition of a generic prophecy:

It is as if the prophet, on receiving the divine oricle, looked out over the future horizon and was divinely enabled prophetically to see both one or more near results as well as a distinctive, but more distant climactic fulfillment, with both the near and distant results of that word so generically linked that the words possessed one meaning in a collective whole.

Whether or not Isaiah 7:14 is a generic prophecy is discussed in the section "The Views of Dual Sense and Multiple Fulfillment" in this chapter.

## Chapter 3: "Jewish Hermeneutics"

This chapter gave an overview of Rabbinic methods of Scripture exegesis in the interpretation of the Tanakh (Old Testament). The following summary was given as its conclusion.

Chapters 2 and 3 in this book are intended to set the hermeneutical foundation for the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14. In Chapter 2 on Christian hermeneutics, the grammatical-historical method was defined and several additional hermeneutical concepts were evaluated. In Chapter 3 on Jewish hermeneutics, a number of different

approaches to interpreting the biblical text were explored. It was found that since the time of Ezra there has always been an approach that sought to discover the literal, grammatical meaning of the biblical text. The *middoth* of both Rabbis Hillel and Ishmael in general encouraged and provided rules for this approach, culminating in the great commentators Rashi, Abenezra, and David Kimchi (Radak), all of whom championed the same grammatical-historical method used in Christian circles. However, in the terminology of Jewish commentators, the result of this methodology is the determination of the *peshat*--the literal, grammatical meaning of the biblical text. Thus, both conservative Christian scholars and Jewish scholars like Rashi, Abenezra, and David Kimchi agree this was the meaning of the message known to and communicated by the human author, who had received his message by revelation from God. Thus the interpretations of Isaiah 7:14 by Rashi and Radak play a role in the analysis of this text.

However, this does not mean that the practitioners of the grammatical-historical method, whether Jewish or Christian, always come to the same conclusion regarding the meaning of a given text. If the history of the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 shows anything, it confirms that fact beyond any shadow of doubt. Even Rashi and Radak disagreed as to the identity of the son to be born to the עַלְמָה (‘*almah*),

It is perhaps a step further to assert that the *peshat* is the **only** meaning that has divine authority. On this point, more Jewish scholars perhaps will dissent than Christian scholars, but there are scholars in both circles who will make such an assertion. Nevertheless, it is the underlying assumption that governs the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 taken in this book. The only meaning that has divine authority is the meaning Isaiah intended to convey as he spoke to Ahaz.

#### Chapter 4: Chronology of Ahaz and Hezekiah

Since some interpretations of Isaiah 7:14 take Immanuel to be Hezekiah, the date of Hezekiah's birth relative to the Syro-Ephraimite War and Isaiah's meeting with Ahaz become of paramount importance. However, the chronological problems related to the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah are the most difficult of all the kings of the divided monarchy. Chapter 4 discusses those problems in some depth and offers the following solution.

The three post-Thiele harmonizations are distinguished by the assignment of the sixteen-year reign of Ahaz mentioned in 2 Kings 16:2 to the following years :

- View I: 744/743 - 729/728 (Payne)
- View II: 736/735 - 720/719 (Stigers/Wood)
- View III: 732/731 - 716/715 (McFall)

The purpose of Chapter 4 was to determine Hezekiah's date of birth from the biblical accession statements in order to learn whether or not he had already been born when Isaiah gave the Immanuel prophecy in 7:14. The fall of Damascus was in 732, so a child being about two years old in 732 would have been born around 734, which was the most likely year Isaiah spoke to Ahaz. Compare 734 with the dates for the birth of Hezekiah calculated by the advocates of each of the three views in harmony with the accession statements:

- View I, J. Barton Payne: 751
- View II, Harold Stigers: 741/740
- View III, Leslie McFall: 739

Thus, Hezekiah was at least five years old when Isaiah predicted the birth of Immanuel. There is no known harmonization that places the birth of Hezekiah at or about 734, two years before the fall of Damascus.

#### Chapter 5: "The Syro-Ephraimite War"

The Syro-Ephraimite War was the immediate cause of Isaiah's meeting with Ahaz, as recorded in Isaiah chapter 7. The chronology proposed in Chapter 5 can be summarized as follows:

- In early 734 (or possibly late 735), Rezin and Pekah took the lead in forming a coalition of all the southern powers to withstand any future campaign of the Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser.
- Also in 734, when Ahaz refused to join the coalition, Rezin and Pekah planned to attack Judah.
- When Ahaz heard about this plan, still early in 734, he decided his only hope was to appeal to Tiglath-pileser to save him.
- Isaiah then comes to Ahaz and gives him the reassurance of the Lord that the goal of Rezin and Pekah to replace Ahaz on the throne would not come to pass.
- The attack came and two major battles were fought, followed by a siege on Jerusalem. This also took place in 734.
- At some point during the siege, late 734 or early 733, Ahaz seeks the help of Tiglath-pileser.
- With the arrival of the Assyrian king in the Syro-Palestinian region, Rezin and Pekah withdrew and returned home to engage Tiglath-pileser.

In the last section of Chapter 5, it was also concluded that Tiglath-pileser campaigned against Damascus during 733-732, with Damascus falling in 732. However, instead of Tiglath-pileser strengthening Ahaz, he afflicted Ahaz and forced him to pay tribute over and above the gold and silver he had sent with his original plea for help.

#### Chapter 6: The Broader Context of Isaiah 7:14

The following conclusions were reached:

- There would seem to be general agreement among Christian and Jewish scholars that Isaiah 1-12 represents a well-defined group of related chapters.
- The working hypothesis for this study is that the broader context of Isaiah 7:14 is chapters 7-12.

Chapter 6 also gave a summary of each chapter from 7 to 12. However, the important point is this: three passages, or more specifically, three individuals, play the central role in section 7-12. Isaiah presents:

- The sign of the child named Immanuel (chapter 7)
- The child "born" and "given to us," who will reign on David's throne forever (chapter 9)
- The Branch, acknowledged by all Christian and Jewish scholars to be the Messiah (chapter 11)

As a first step to see whether these three individuals are in any way connected, the passage 9:5-6 (Heb.) is examined in some depth in the Chapter 7.

#### Chapter 7: Isaiah 9:5-6

This chapter was quite lengthy and addressed Isaiah 9:5-6 in great detail. Both Christian and Jewish views are discussed. As a result of the analysis and argumentation, the following conclusions were reached:

- Hezekiah cannot be the child.
- All four names apply to the child.

- The child is the promised Messiah of Israel.

### Chapter 8: The Immediate Context of Isaiah 7:14

There are many interpretive issues in the verses before 14 and those that follow verse 14. They were discussed and conclusions were drawn. However, to put verse 14 in its proper context requires in general the following points:

- The working hypothesis of this study is that Isaiah chapter 7 alone is the immediate context of verse 7:14.
- Isaiah chapter 7 is best subdivided as follows:

Verses 1-9: The Lord's word of assurance to Ahaz  
 Verses 10-17: Ahaz's lack of faith and the Lord's sign  
 Verses 18-25: The coming desolation of Judah

Several critical points were argued and conclusions were drawn:

- Verses 13-16 represent a single prophecy and speak of a single child, namely, Immanuel.
- "Curds and honey" mentioned in verse 15 indicate deprivation of crops and neglected tillage. Being ravaged by two invading armies, the plowed fields turned to pastures, making milk and honey the main foods.
- The best translation of verse 15 should probably run something like this:

Curds and honey he will eat when he knows to refuse the evil and choose the good.

- The likely interpretation of verses 15 and 16 would seem to be the following.

Verse 15: *When*, or by the time, a boy born shortly after the meeting with Ahaz in 734 knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, he will be eating curds and honey, due to the devastation of Judah that will occur in late 734 and early 733 at the hands of Rezin and Pekah.

Verse 16: But *before* he will know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the "two kings," Rezin and Pekah, will no longer be a problem for Ahaz.

Just before this interpretation of verses 15 and 16, it had been argued that a child can know how to refuse the evil and choose the good at two or three years of age. Then the earliest he could be eating curds and honey would be 732 (two years old) or 731 (three years old), based on verse 15. But the child in 733--viz., when Rezin and Pekah are no longer a problem for Ahaz--though born, would not yet have reached the time of eating curds and honey, based on verse 16.

The conclusion reached for verse 17 was that the punishment of Judah described in verse 17 and more thoroughly in verses 18-25 is limited to Assyria. It begins with Tiglath-pileser and continues with future Assyrian kings, in particular, Sennacherib. However, the punishment of Judah goes beyond its Assyrian component in verses 17-25, continuing to the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple by Nebuchadnezzar. From that destruction to the present time, there has never been an independent government under the rule of the house of David. The State of Israel has now been reestablished in the land given to Abraham and his seed for an everlasting possession (Gen. 17:8; et al.), but there is yet no Davidic king ruling it. That awaits the Messiah.

### Chapter 9: Summary of Interpretations of Isaiah 7:14

Chapter 9 first presents J. A. Alexander's summary of the multitude of views on Isaiah 7:14. In his analysis, all the various interpretations can be classified under three main headings:

- I. Those in which the only birth and infancy referred to in these verses are the birth and infancy of a child born (or supposed to be born) in the ordinary course of nature, and in the days of Isaiah himself.
- II. Those that argue the prophecy relates to two distinct births and two different children.
- III. Those that apply all three verses [14-16] directly and exclusively to the Messiah, as the only child whose birth is there predicted, and his growth made the measure of the subsequent events.

Of all the various interpretations reviewed by J. A. Alexander, he suggests "that the choice lies between the supposition of a double sense and that of a reference to Christ exclusively, but in connection with the promise of immediate deliverance to Ahaz." He further stated,

The two particular interpretations which appear to be most plausible and least beset with difficulties, are those of Lowth and Vitranga, with which last Hengstenberg's is essentially identical. Either the Prophet, while he foretells the birth of Christ, foretells that of another child, during whose infancy the promised deliverance shall be experienced; or else he makes the infancy of Christ himself, whether foreseen as still remote or not, the sign and measure of that same deliverance.

After Alexander's commentary on Isaiah, several additional approaches were developed. Several commentaries and journal articles present various approaches. While presenting a number of approaches that Alexander also presented, Cheyne and Skinner each cite only one new approach, both of which are a somewhat allegorical approach to the text.

Cheyne mentions only one allegorical approach :

There are those who take "the young woman" to represent the people of Israel as the bride of Yahweh.

Skinner notes that a number of allegorical variations exist:

The *'almāh* might be a personification of the house of David or the religious community, and the child might be the Messiah or a figure of the new generation. Also, the birth may be explained simply as a general symbol of deliverance.

Kraeling limits his list of interpretive approaches to "current interpretations," and those "current interpretations" are limited to liberal scholars. He also makes this rather audacious statement:

In considering the messianic interpretation we need not lose any time with the orthodox theory of the early Christian apologists who found the virgin birth of Jesus predicted here.

In his own interpretation, Kraeling eliminated 7:15.

Lattery cites only one approach that is not found in Alexander's commentary, and that approach by Condamin suggests that there is textual corruption in Isaiah 7:14.

Young does not name the six approaches he cites by their main characteristic but rather identifies each by a specific expositor without mentioning whether others have also taken that approach. The first five scholars discussed by Young (Duhm, Kraeling, Budde, Hammershaimb, and Mowinckel) are liberal, and they all suggest

textual emendations. However, the sixth scholar Young discusses is an evangelical--William S. LaSor.

LaSor believes that the immediate fulfillment of the prophecy was to be a child born to a young woman in the normal biological way. Israel and Syria would be destroyed before the child was fully grown. The sign included not only the birth of the child but also the sequence of events described in verses 14-17 and expanded in verses 18-25. The prophet's message, therefore, had significance for his own generation, but that immediate fulfillment did not exhaust the prophecy. It also has a "deeper sense" that predicts the virgin birth of Jesus. This is a relatively common view, and a number of scholars have promoted some form of this approach over the years.

## Chapter 10: עֲלֻמָּה

Chapter 10 presented a very lengthy, detailed analysis of all the data needed to arrive at the basic meaning of the word עֲלֻמָּה in the Hebrew Scriptures. I believe the data surveyed justify the following conclusions listed in Chapter 10:

- The words בְּתוּלָה and עֲלֻמָּה are likely roughly synonymous.
- Neither בְּתוּלָה nor עֲלֻמָּה have *virgo intacta* as their basic meaning or include *virgo intacta* in their basic meaning.
- The primary focus of both בְּתוּלָה and עֲלֻמָּה is *age distinction*.
- The basic meaning of בְּתוּלָה is *a girl of marriageable age*.
- Although בְּתוּלָה most often is used of young girls who have never been married, it likely can be used of any young girl of marriageable age--unmarried, married, or widowed.
- The two uses of the masculine עֲלָמִים can hardly allow for any general conclusion. However, it can be said that neither of these uses can include the notion of "virgin."
- Several texts imply the basic meaning of עֲלֻמָּה is *a young unmarried girl*.
- That meaning fits, or can be used in, all the remaining texts where עֲלֻמָּה or its plural is used.
- No text in which עֲלֻמָּה or its plural is used implies a *married* girl, *married* woman, or widow. Its use in the Hebrew Scriptures is limited to young unmarried girls who have never been married.
- In Israelite society, an עֲלֻמָּה, if the question arose, would be presumed a virgin, unless there was definite evidence to the contrary.
- Biblical Hebrew, like the other Semitic languages, does not have a word that means *virgo intacta*. That condition can only be specified negatively (e.g., "who has not known a man").

The last subject investigated in Chapter 10 is the Greek word *παρθένος*, which was used in the LXX to translate *עַלְמָה* in Genesis 24:43 and Isaiah 7:14. It is surprising to find that *παρθένος*, long assumed by commentators to have a well-known, fixed meaning, namely, *virgo intacta*, is actually ambiguous. A number of scholars agree with Gordon Wenham that "it is doubtful whether *parthénos* necessarily denoted 'virgin' to the Septuagint translators." The whole analysis of *parthénos* in Chapter 10 suggests that Wenham, in addition to a number of other scholars cited, is correct in that conclusion. *Bethulah* and *'almah* appear to be rough synonyms in biblical Hebrew meaning "girl of marriageable age" and "young unmarried girl," respectively, and the early meaning of *parthénos*, as discussed in this section of Chapter 10, would certainly seem to be a good translation of either Hebrew word. The Greek data would therefore support rather than contradict the conclusions listed above.

However, *parthénos* did become more specific. The following conclusion was reached, as stated by Wenham:

The LXX usually translates Heb. *betûlâ* by Gk. *parthénos*, and twice (including Isa. 7:14, quoted by Mt. 1:23) it uses this term to translate Hebrew *'almâ*. Like *betûlâ*, Gk. *parthénos* originally meant a 'girl of marriageable age,' but in later Greek it came to denote a chaste girl, i.e., a virgin. It has this latter sense throughout the NT.

### Chapter 11: The Verbs in Isaiah 7:14

The following conclusions were reached:

Verb 1: יָתַן

This verb is straightforward:

יָתַן (*yitên*): third person masculine singular Qal imperfect of יָתַן , *to give, to put, to set*

The translation would be this:

Therefore the Lord himself will give to you a sign...

Verb 2: הָרָה

As mentioned in Chapter 11, this word is called a "verb" here simply for convenience. It is perhaps the most difficult of the four because it might be either an adjective or a participle and because the intended time reference, present or future, is also difficult to determine. However, it is perhaps the most important of the four since it has a bearing on the time of the conception. Before presenting any arguments for the most likely parsing, it is helpful to examine the final two verbs.

Verb 3: וְיִלְדֶת

There seems to be general agreement about this form:

וְיִלְדֶת (*we-yôledheth*): feminine singular Qal active participle of יָלַד , *to bear, to bring forth, to beget*

It was concluded in Chapter 11 that the "activity" of this participle is future to the time of Isaiah's prediction of the sign. However, whether the time of הָרָה is taken to be present or future is still an open question. The resulting two possible translations would be as follows:

(1) Present time for הָרָה : ...the maiden is pregnant and will bear a son...

(2) Future time for הָרָה : ...the maiden will conceive and will bear a son...

It was also noted that if הָרָה is taken as a future sense, the period of time from the point that Isaiah delivers the prophecy to the point of conception is unknown and cannot be determined from this verse.

#### Verb 4: וְקָרָאת

This word is a finite verb, and the majority view would seem to parse the verb as follows:

וְקָרָאת (*we-qārā'th*): third person feminine singular Qal perfect with waw-consecutive of קָרָא, *to call, to proclaim, to read*

However, there is the problem of the time indicated by וְקָרָאת. The conclusion was reached that the future best fits the development of the verse. Regardless of whether הָרָה is taken in a present or future sense, and since it was decided that the participle יֹלֶדֶת represents a future time in Isaiah 7:14, the waw on the following Qal perfect verb וְקָרָאת should be considered a waw-consecutive and the verb translated in a future sense: "she will call his name Immanuel." Further evidence of this conclusion is that babies are generally named at birth, which would be future to the state of pregnancy.

#### Conclusion

The key problem to resolve centers on the word הָרָה (*hārāh*). There are two issues:

1. Is it a *feminine singular adjective* or a *feminine singular participle (verbal adjective)*?
2. Is it used in a present or future sense?

On the first issue, *BDB*, Orlinsky, Alexander, and Young take הָרָה to be an adjective, and that is the view accepted here as a working hypothesis.

On the second issue, the following should be noted:

1. Two virtually identical texts, Genesis 16:11 and Isaiah 7:14, use both יֹלֶדֶת and וְקָרָאת in the same sense--a future sense.
2. The Genesis text must have a present sense for הָרָה .
3. Therefore, the conclusion seems rather likely that הָרָה in the Isaiah text is also used in the present

sense.

If this analysis is correct, then the translation of Isaiah 7:14 would be as follows:

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

However, it was noted that although I suggest the best reading is a present time for הָרָה and a future time for וְיִלְדֶת, the final, overall interpretation of the prophecy does not hinge on this reading. The same interpretation would still stand if both words are taken as futures. The present sense is my working hypothesis in this book. Nevertheless, since the present time is not a *certain* conclusion, both the present and future-time options for הָרָה are discussed in the section "The Components for an Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14" in this chapter.

### Chapter 12: Key Words in Isaiah 7:14

Chapter 10 expended considerable effort to discuss and determine the fundamental meaning of the most debated word in Isaiah 7:14, namely, עֲלֻמָּה ('*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	הוא	אֲדֹנָי	יִתֵּן	לְכֵן
a sign	to you	he	Adonai	will give	Therefore
		(himself)			

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

Chapter 12 focused 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 עֲלֻמָּה ('*almah*), and (5) the name עִמָּנוּ אֵל (*Immanuel*).

#### 1: לְכֵן

The word לְכֵן (*lākēn*) is classified as a *particle* in Hebrew grammar. 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* or *thus*. With the preposition לְ, *BDB* suggests three possible meanings: *according to such conditions*, *that being so*, or *therefore*. *BDB* also states that לְכֵן 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.

Concerning the use of לִיָּן in verse 14, the conclusion was reached that 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 לִיָּן directly refers in the flow of the text, thus identifying the way it is used in verse 14. Young was cited offering a strong argument for this interpretation:

We see that it [ לִיָּן ] serves to introduce a sign 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 לִיָּן is considered in its relationship to verse 13, it is a sign of doom and not of blessing for which we are to look.

## 2: אֹת

The conclusion reached in Chapter 8 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 (*môphēth*), a masculine noun possibly from a root אִפַּת and translated *wonder*.

In Chapter 12 it was concluded that אֹת in verse 14 was used in the sense of 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)

However, use 5 has two variations, which are explained graphically in Chapter 12:

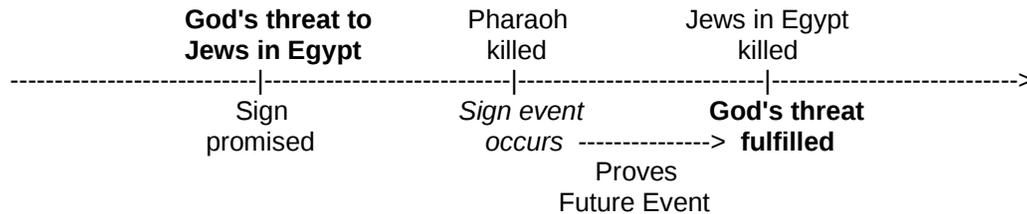
### *Proving the Divine Causality of an Event in the Past: Exodus 3:12*

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*).



*Proving the Divine Causality of an Event in the Future: Jeremiah 44:29-30*

"This will be the sign to you," declares the LORD, "that I am going to punish you in this place, so that you may know that My words will surely stand against you for harm." Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I am going to give over Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt to the hand of his enemies, to the hand of those who seek his life, just as I gave over Zedekiah king of Judah to the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, *who was his enemy and was seeking his life*" (NASB).



In both variations above, the occurrence of the promised sign (in italics) is a *future* event to the point of time at which God made his pronouncement and his promise of a sign. But in the first variation, the promised sign occurs at some point *after* the fulfillment of God's pronouncement; in the second variation, the promised sign occurs at some point *before* the fulfillment of God's pronouncement.

In the case of Isaiah 7:14, use 5 of אֹתָּהּ in verse 14 indicates that the occurrence of the sign will be in the future relative to the point the sign was promised, namely, this meeting between Isaiah and Ahaz. At the same meeting, God's pronouncement of judgment, doom, and desolation against Ahaz is given in verses 17-25. Now the central question presents itself: which variation of use 5 is intended? That is, does the promised sign in verse 14 occur before or after the fulfillment of God's judgment on Judah? It was concluded in Chapter 12 that due to the general difficulty of interpreting verse 14, the answer to this question must be based on the meaning of the sign in that verse and is therefore addressed later in this chapter, sections "The Components for an Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14" and "Combining the Components for an Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14."

In addition, it was concluded that the promised sign in verse 14 definitely represents a different tone from the sign in verse 11. Specifically, the sign in verse 14 is intended to confirm much more than the sign in verse 11. Not only will the plans of Rezin and Pekah not stand, but the Lord will bring "the king of Assyria" upon Judah.

### 3: הִנֵּה

Both *BDB* and *GKC* 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. Isaiah 7:14 is an example of the first use.

*BDB* gives the basic meaning of הִנֵּה as *Lo!* or *Behold!* and in *TWOT* Carl Weber suggests "Look!" or "See!" *BDB* also cites Isaiah 7:14 as an example of its use "to introduce a solemn or important declaration," 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." Both are content to use "Behold!" as the translation for its various uses or nuances.

The conclusion was reached to translate הִנֵּה in Isaiah 7:14 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:

Behold [or Look], the maiden is pregnant [ הָרָה ] 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, it was also concluded that 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 הָרָה can have a present time sense, even though the actual events might be far in the future, a phenomenon similar to the *perfectum propheticum*, or prophetic perfect.

#### 4: The Definite Article on עֲלְמָה

By citing GKC, E. J. Young, and George Gray, the conclusion was reached that in Isaiah 7:14 the definite article was used to designate a particular, though unknown, maiden as being present to the mind of Isaiah. The best translation in English would be "a maiden."

#### 5: עִמָּנוּ אֵל

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*. אֵל ( 'Ēl) is "the one and only true God of Israel."

The question here is whether the two possible *forms*, עִמָּנוּ אֵל and אֵל עִמָּנוּ, that appear in various Hebrew texts (e.g., MT and 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>) 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." Only three verses contain one or the other of these forms: Isaiah 7:14, 8:8, and 8:10. The conclusion reached was that the *form* does not determine which of the two possible *uses* was intended by Isaiah in each of the three verses. The context alone must be used to reach a decision regarding the intended *use* in these three verses.

The view taken in Chapter 6 (in its summary of Isaiah chapter 8) and again the view taken in this section of Chapter 12 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: אֵל עִמָּנוּ 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: אֵל עִמָּנוּ 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 Immanuel's 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)

### The Translation of Isaiah 7:14

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

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

הִנֵּה הָעַלְמָה הָרָה וְיִלְדֵת בֵּן וְקָרְאתָ שְׁמוֹ עִמָּנוּ אֵל  
Behold a maiden is pregnant and she will bear a son and she will call his name Immanuel

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.

### **Interpretations Cited and Organized by J. A. Alexander**

As noted in Chapter 9, and the summary of Chapter 9 in the previous section of this chapter, Alexander organized all the interpretations of Isaiah 7:14 up to the time he wrote (1870) into three "hypotheses." Each hypothesis was in turn divided into several "variations." Those scholars and their interpretations addressed in this chapter are listed here by the "variations" in which Alexander placed them. All of these views accept the Masoretic text. (However, for the "Old Jewish View," Justin Martyr [Christian], Trypho [Jew], and Jerome [Christian theologian], predate the *MT*).

Hypothesis I: A natural birth during the time of Isaiah and Ahaz

Variation 1: Old Jewish View  
Variation 2: Kimchi, Abravanel  
Variation 5: Abenezra, Rashi

Hypothesis II: Two distinct births and two different children

Variation 2: Robert Lowth

Hypothesis III: All three verses, 7:14-16, refer directly and exclusively to the Messiah, whose growth is the measure of the subsequent events

Variation 2: Campegius Vitringa  
Variation 4: E. W. Hengstenberg

Of all the proponents comprising the three hypotheses and their variations cited by Alexander, only Lowth, Vitringa, and Hengstenberg are endorsed by him:

The two particular interpretations which appear to be most plausible and least beset with difficulties, are those of Lowth and Vitringa, with which last Hengstenberg's is essentially identical. Either the Prophet,

while he foretells the birth of Christ, foretells that of another child, during whose infancy the promised deliverance shall be experienced; or else he makes the infancy of Christ himself, whether foreseen as still remote or not, the sign and measure of that same deliverance.<sup>1</sup>

Their views are addressed here as well as the views of the Jewish scholars listed above.

## The Views of Dual Sense and Multiple Fulfillment

This section considers Alexander's Hypothesis II, namely views that propose two distinct births and two different children.

### Robert Lowth

The basic concept in Lowth's view is that verse 14 refers to two distinct births of two different children. Thus it assumes a *dual* or *double sense*. The primary or lower sense of verse 14 describes the normal birth of a child. However, the terminology is selected so that the description can also apply in a higher sense to the miraculous birth of Jesus. Lowth summarizes his view as follows:

Agreeably to the observations, communicated by the learned person above-mentioned, which perfectly well explain the historical sense of this much-disputed passage, not excluding a higher secondary sense, the obvious and literal meaning of the prophecy is this: "that within the time that a young woman, now a virgin, should conceive and bring forth a child, and that child should arrive at such an age as to distinguish between good and evil, that is, within a few years, (compare ch. viii. 4.) the enemies of Judah should be destroyed." But the prophecy is introduced in so solemn a manner; the sign is so marked, as a sign selected and given by God himself, after Ahaz had rejected the offer of any sign of his own choosing out of the whole compass of nature; the terms of the prophecy are so peculiar, and the name of the child so expressive, containing in them much more than the circumstances of the birth of a common child required, or even admitted; that we may easily suppose, that, in minds prepared by the general expectation of a great deliverer to spring from the house of David, they raised hopes far beyond what the present occasion suggested; especially when it was found, that in the subsequent prophecy, delivered immediately afterward, this child, called Immanuel, is treated as the lord and prince of the land of Judah. Who could this be, other than the heir of the throne of David? under which character a great and even a divine person had been promised. No one of that age answered to this character, except Hezekiah; but he was certainly born nine or ten years before the delivery of this prophecy.<sup>2</sup>

Several proponents of Alexander's "hypothesis II" consider the child to which reference is made by the "lower sense" to be a son of Isaiah;<sup>3</sup> Lowth does not specify a specific child but, in the words of Alexander, assumes "any child born within a certain time."<sup>4</sup>

### William S. LaSor

Edward J. Young discusses the view of evangelical scholar William LaSor, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary until 1980.<sup>5</sup> He cites LaSor as follows:

The sign was to be the birth of a son and the subsequent destruction that would come upon Israel and

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1 Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1870), I:172.

2 Robert Lowth, *Isaiah: A New Translation with A Preliminary Dissertation and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory*, (Boston: Joseph T. Buckingham, 1815; first published 1795), p. 230.

3 Alexander lists Grotius, Clericus, and Barnes (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:170).

4 Ibid.

5 Edward J. Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16, Second Article," *WTJ* 16 (November 1953):44-45.

Syria before the child was fully grown.<sup>6</sup>

According to Young, the above statement by LaSor indicates that he (LaSor) "included not only the birth but also the sequence of events mentioned in vv. 14-17, and expanded in vv. 18-25."<sup>7</sup> LaSor argued that a sign not fulfilled for 750 years would have little value or significance for Ahaz, whereas one fulfilled within the next twelve years certainly would. Again Young cites LaSor:

The immediate fulfillment was to be in a child born of a young woman, a virgin who was married to a husband and who in due course gave birth in the normal biological way.<sup>8</sup>

But LaSor also argues that this immediate fulfillment does not exhaust the prophecy. In its "deeper sense," it predicts the virgin birth of Jesus.

Thus both Lowth and LaSor (and many others) advocate a dual or double sense for the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14.

### Analysis of Dual Sense

Since it has been concluded previously in Chapter 2 that double sense or dual sense is inconsistent with the view taken in this book and that the authorial intent is the only meaning of a biblical text with divine authority, the views of Lowth and LaSor, and a number of others who interpret Isaiah 7:14 in terms of a double sense, must be rejected.<sup>9</sup>

Before proceeding to Walter Kaiser's view, it is of interest to examine Ronald Youngblood's defense of dual sense.<sup>10</sup> He believes that the identification of Immanuel and his mother is the "most vexing question of all." He states that three basic approaches have been suggested:

- The nonfulfillment view, "which asserts that the 'almâ and Immanuel were people living in Ahaz' time only"
- The one-fulfillment view, "which understand Isa. 7:14 as only a prediction of the virgin birth of Christ"
- The double-fulfillment view, "which sees a near fulfillment in the days of Ahaz and a remote fulfillment in the NT period"

Youngblood rejects the first view in light of Matthew 1:23 and curiously also the second view "because it fails to do justice to the context of which Isa. 7:14 is an integral part." On the contrary, there is an explanation of verses 15-16 consistent with the "one fulfillment view," and it is developed in the section "The Messianic View" and the following sections in this chapter.

Youngblood's endorsement of view three, the double-fulfillment or dual-sense view, is weak, to say the least. First, he suggests that in the first or near fulfillment, the 'almâ is Isaiah's second wife after his first wife, the mother of Shear-jashub, died. This, of course, is sheer conjecture. Second, he continues to suppose that this girl, a virgin at the time of Isaiah's vision, becomes Isaiah's wife, is called "the prophetess," then becomes pregnant, gives birth to a son, and names him Immanuel, while Isaiah names him Maher-shalal-hash-baz. This

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6 William S. LaSor, *Isaiah 7:14-"Young Woman" or "Virgin"?* (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), p. 8; cited by Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16, Second Article," p. 44.

7 Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16, Second Article," p. 44.

8 LaSor, *Isaiah 7:14-"Young Woman" or "Virgin"?* p. 9; cited by Young, *ibid.*, p. 45.

9 See Chapter 2, subsection "Dual Sense" in the section "Interpretation of Prophecy"; and the summary of Chapter 2 earlier in this chapter.

10 Ronald F. Youngblood, "Immanuel," *ISBE*, II:807.

aspect of Youngblood's view raises the question of how Isaiah thought the land of Judah belonged to his son Immanuel (verse 8:8).<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Youngblood believes that in the second or remote fulfillment, that girl (Mary) is a virgin when she becomes pregnant and delivers her baby (Jesus) while still a virgin. This, of course, makes the prophecy inconsistent: the near fulfillment is a natural event, while the remote fulfillment is a supernatural event--a miracle. More specifically, the mother of the natural event could not be called an עֲלְמָה, while the mother of the supernatural event would be an עֲלְמָה, which makes the birth a miracle. However, instead of a dual sense, the single sense would be that an עֲלְמָה became pregnant and gave birth as an עֲלְמָה, which would be a miracle. This is discussed later in this chapter in the sections "The Messianic View," "The Components for an Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14" and "Combining the Components for an Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14."

### Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Generic Prophecy

Before stating Walter Kaiser's view of Isaiah 7:14, four observations are important. First, Kaiser is one of the foremost advocates of authorial intent as the only meaning of a biblical text with divine authority. As noted several times in previous chapters, that is my view as well.<sup>12</sup> Second, this view precludes the concept of double sense. Third, Kaiser strongly advocates *multiple fulfillment* for certain prophecies; such a prophecy is also called a *generic prophecy*.<sup>13</sup> Fourth, the concept of multiple fulfillment or generic prophecy is consistent with the view of authorial intent as the only meaning of a biblical text with divine authority.

A generic prophecy has one or more fulfillments before the final or climactic fulfillment. Kaiser, then, takes Isaiah 7:14 as a generic prophecy with one near fulfillment that occurs during the reign of Ahaz and the climactic fulfillment at the time of Jesus in his first advent. He therefore argues that the child in the near fulfillment is Hezekiah, a king in the Davidic line, and that the child in the ultimate fulfillment is, in fact, Jesus the Messiah, the climactic son of David.

As noted, the concept of a generic prophecy does not conflict with the view of authorial intent as the only meaning of a biblical text with divine authority. However, not every prophecy is a generic prophecy, so the current issue here is whether Isaiah 7:14 is a generic prophecy. I agree with Kaiser on almost every issue in theology and biblical studies, but this is one of his views that I do not accept. Kaiser takes the view that Isaiah 7:14 is a generic prophecy.

Kaiser's view can be summarized in three parts.

First, Kaiser argues that עֲלְמָה means "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14:

When all the passages in the OT with *‘almā* are investigated, the only conclusion one can arrive at is that it means a "virgin" here.<sup>14</sup> To date, no one has produced a clear context, either in Hebrew or in the

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- 11 In 1889 C. R. Brown wrote, "It is difficult to comprehend how Isaiah conceived of the land as belonging to his son (viii. 8)" ("Exegesis of Isaiah VII. 10-17," *JBL* 9 [1890]:125). When he wrote this, Brown was responding to the view that the entire fulfillment of 7:14-16 took place in the days of Ahaz; Brown had previously discussed the dual-sense view. Therefore, as Youngblood demonstrated, both of these views can include this feature of Immanuel = Maher-shalal-hash-baz. See also Rashi's view in the upcoming section, "The Jewish Views."
  - 12 See, for example, Chapter 2, sections "Historical Understanding of Hermeneutics," "The Conservative System of Hermeneutics," and "The Current Hermeneutical Crisis"; see also the summary of Chapter 2 in this chapter.
  - 13 See Chapter 2, subsection "Generic Prophecies" in the section "Interpretation of Prophecy"; see also the summary of Chapter 2 in this chapter.
  - 14 First, the conclusion reached in Chapter 10 of this book was that neither בְּתוּלָה nor עֲלְמָה have *virgo intacta* as their basic meaning or include *virgo intacta* in their basic meaning. Second, the conclusion was also reached that the basic

closely related Canaanite language from Ugarit (which uses the cognate *glmt*), where *‘almâ* can be applied to a married woman.<sup>15</sup>

With this I am in agreement.

Second, without using the name *generic prophecy*, Kaiser does take this as his view of Isaiah 7:14:

Given the frequency with which the OT and NT prophecy have both a now and not-yet aspect to their predictions, Ahaz is granted evidence of this sign in his own day, even though the full impact of all that God has in mind will not be realized until the Messiah himself is born in a unique manner in fulfillment of this passage.<sup>16</sup>

Third, Kaiser takes the near fulfillment of the child in this generic prophecy to be Hezekiah and the climactic fulfillment of the child to be the Messiah, Jesus himself at his first advent.

Unfortunately, there are serious problems interpreting this text as a generic prophecy. Following his interpretation of Isaiah 7:14, Kaiser addresses two objections to his view.

### *Objection One*

The first objection to Kaiser's view is that Hezekiah's birth was not a virgin birth. Kaiser's response:

That is true, of course, but emphasizing this misunderstands the connection that usually exists between the near and distant fulfillments of a [generic] prophecy. Rarely does the near event meet most, much less all, the details and expectations that the ultimate event completes. For example, five prophets in four different centuries declare that the crisis they are undergoing is in fact the "day of the LORD"; yet that in no way embraces all that God will do in his final day of judgment.<sup>17</sup>

Before commenting on Dr. Kaiser's response to this objection, it is helpful to examine several examples of a near "day of the LORD."

Alas for the day!  
For the day of the LORD is near,  
And it will come as destruction from the Almighty.

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meaning of *עַלְמָה* is a *young unmarried girl*. Third, it was concluded that in Israelite society an *עַלְמָה*, if the question arose, would be presumed a virgin, unless there was definite evidence to the contrary. Therefore, Kaiser's statement here has the same net result that was reached in Chapter 10. The *עַלְמָה* in Isa. 7:14 was not a loose woman!

15 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 160.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 161; brackets added. See also Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Promise of Isaiah 7:14 and the Single-Meaning Hermeneutic," *EJ* 6 (Fall 1988):66-67. In the subsection "Generic Prophecies" of section "Interpretation of Prophecy" in Chapter 2, I cite the first of Willis J. Beecher's four definitions of "generic prophecy" (*The Prophets and the Promise* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975; original publication date, 1905], pp. 130-131). That is the definition Dr. Kaiser uses to explain generic prophecies in a number of his books and articles. In fact, it is Dr. Kaiser who wrote the "New Introduction" to the 1975 reprint of Beecher's book. It is also the case that Dr. Kaiser generally uses the "day-of-the-LORD" texts as somewhat of a paradigm example of a generic prophecy. What is curious, however, is that later in the book, Beecher seems not convinced that the "day-of-the-LORD" prophecy is, in fact, a generic prophecy: "One notable phenomenon is that the day of Yahaweh [Beecher's spelling] is characteristically represented as 'near,' as impending...Perhaps this indicates that the prophets thought of the day of Yahaweh as generic, not an occasion which would occur once for all, but one which might be repeated as circumstances called for it. *However this may be*, the peculiarity in their representation exists. They picture the day as close at hand, not at one point of time only, but century after century" (pp. 311-312; emphasis added).

Has not food been cut off before our eyes,  
Gladness and joy from the house of our God?  
The seeds shrivel under their clods;  
The storehouses are desolate,  
The barns are torn down,  
For the grain is dried up.  
How the beasts groan!  
The herds of cattle wander aimlessly  
Because there is no pasture for them;  
Even the flocks of sheep suffer.  
Joel 1:15-18<sup>18</sup>

It is generally agreed that in Joel 1:1 to 2:11, the prophet is describing the devastation of the land of Judah by a plague consisting of an "army" of locusts.<sup>19</sup>

Another example of a near "day of the LORD" is found in Zephaniah.

So I will stretch out My hand against Judah  
And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.  
And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place,  
*And* the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests.  
And those who bow down on the housetops to the host of heaven,  
And those who bow down *and* swear to the LORD and yet swear by Milcom,  
And those who have turned back from following the LORD,  
And those who have not sought the LORD or inquired of Him."  
Be silent before the Lord GOD!  
For the day of the LORD is near,  
For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,  
He has consecrated His guests.  
Then it will come about on the day of the LORD's sacrifice  
That I will punish the princes, the king's sons  
And all who clothe themselves with foreign garments.  
And I will punish on that day all who leap on the *temple* threshold,  
Who fill the house of their lord with violence and deceit.  
Zephaniah 1:4-9

This near "day of the LORD" describes God's judgment on Judah executed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem was taken and the Temple destroyed. It should be noted that the descriptions of the event in Joel and the event here in Zephaniah are totally different. The only descriptive item that is the same in both texts is the name "day of the LORD" itself.

A third example follows the same pattern.

The word of the LORD came again to me saying, "Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,  
'Wail, 'Alas for the day!'  
For the day is near,  
Even the day of the LORD is near;  
It will be a day of clouds,  
A time *of doom* for the nations.  
A sword will come upon Egypt,  
And anguish will be in Ethiopia;

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18 Note also Joel 2:1-2.

19 Joel 1:4; 2:25.

When the slain fall in Egypt,  
They take away her wealth,  
And her foundations are torn down.  
Ethiopia, Put, Lud, all Arabia, Libya and the people of the land that is in league will fall with them by the sword."<sup>20</sup>  
Ezekiel 30:1-5

This near "day of the LORD" describes the total defeat of Egypt by Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. Again the description of the event here in Ezekiel is different from both the above descriptions of the "day of the LORD" in Joel and Zephaniah. Thus once again the only descriptive item that is the same in all three texts is the name "day of the LORD" itself.

Finally, here is one of the texts that describes the final, climactic "day of the LORD."

For behold, in those days and at that time,  
When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,  
I will gather all the nations  
And bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.<sup>20</sup>  
Then I will enter into judgment with them there  
On behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel,  
Whom they have scattered among the nations;  
And they have divided up My land.  
They have also cast lots for My people,  
Traded a boy for a harlot  
And sold a girl for wine that they may drink.  
Joel 3:1-3 Armageddon

Proclaim this among the nations:  
Prepare a war; rouse the mighty men!  
Let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up!  
10 Beat your plowshares into swords  
And your pruning hooks into spears;  
Let the weak say, "I am a mighty man."  
Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations,  
And gather yourselves there.  
Bring down, O LORD, Your mighty ones.  
Let the nations be aroused  
And come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat,  
For there I will sit to judge  
All the surrounding nations.  
Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.  
Come, tread, for the wine press is full;  
The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great.  
Joel 3:9-13

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!  
For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.  
The sun and moon grow dark  
And the stars lose their brightness.  
The LORD roars from Zion

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20 Hebrew meaning "Yahweh judges" or "Yahweh shall judge." According to LaSor, "Jehoshaphat," *ISBE*, II:979: "No location is given in Scripture for this final assize of the nations that were hostile to God's people, but it is clear from the context...that the name is to be interpreted as the scene of judgment, and not taken from the king of the same name. Ezk. 39:11 and Rev. 16:16 seem to locate it in the plain of Esdraelon (Armageddon)." See also Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 14:1-11.

And utters His voice from Jerusalem,  
And the heavens and the earth tremble.  
But the LORD is a refuge for His people  
And a stronghold to the sons of Israel.  
Joel 3:14-16

As with the previous three examples, the description here is quite different, except for the name "day of the LORD." It would seem that "day of the LORD" could be used as the *name of the generic prophecy*.

In contrast to the near and climactic "day-of-the-LORD" texts, the only two references to the **עִלְמָה** and the birth of her son Immanuel are essentially identical:

Isaiah 7:14: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

Matthew 1:22-23: Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."

Therefore, there are two significant differences between the two Immanuel texts and the "day of the LORD" texts:

There is no single "name," phrase, or clause, analogous to "day of the LORD," to identify and link together the two Immanuel texts as a generic prophecy.

All the "day-of-the-LORD" texts are surrounded by differing descriptions of their near events; the two Immanuel texts in their entirety are identical, single descriptions.

These two differences strongly suggest that the two Immanuel texts do not constitute a generic prophecy but rather two identical descriptions of one single event.<sup>21</sup>

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21 In addition to citing the "day of the LORD" as a generic prophecy, Kaiser mentions two other examples that he considers generic prophecies. See Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, p. 161, and *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), pp. 85-87, 231. *First*, he mentions the "many antichrists" who have already appeared and the final antichrist who is coming. However, this statement of the "many antichrists" and the final antichrist yet to come is in a *single verse*, namely 1 John 2:18. This can hardly be described as a generic prophecy that meets the definitions of Beecher and Kaiser himself (see the subsection "Generic Prophecies" in Chapter 2). It is a single verse (1 John 2:18) by one author (John), who also refers to "antichrist" in three of his other verses (2:22; 4:3; and 2 John 1:7). The name "antichrist" does not appear anywhere else in the Bible, Old or New Testament. Therefore, these four texts bear little similarity to the many "day-of-the-LORD" texts and thus may not constitute a true generic prophecy. However, one similarity to a generic prophecy is that John's four references to "antichrist" do, in fact, refer to a series of "antichrists" that culminate in "*the antichrist*." Also, these "antichrists" and "the antichrist" texts are each described with slightly different characteristics, as did the series of day-of-the-LORD texts. In his article "The Promise of Isaiah 7:14 and the Single-Meaning Hermeneutic," pp. 66-67, Kaiser also includes Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 11:21-35) and the final Antichrist (11: 36-39) in the series of John's "antichrists" and final antichrist. Of course, there is no names in Daniel 11 similar to "antichrist(s)," so there is no way to make a definite connection to John's verses to form a single generic prophecy. If one wanted to interpret these texts as a single generic prophecy, he could "name" it "Antichrist," just as "day of the LORD" could be used as the "name" of the very definite generic prophecy discussed in this section. To conclude this example, it must be noted that, like the day-of-the-LORD texts, the "antichrist" texts (with or without Daniel) are contrary to the two identical texts that refer to the **עִלְמָה** and her son Immanuel. *Second*, Kaiser also mentions the verse about Elijah in Malachi 4:5: "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD." This may very well be an example of a generic prophecy, and one might "name" this generic prophecy "Elijah," since it would play the same role as "day of the LORD" did in its generic prophecy. The first and only climactic text is in the OT (Mal. 4:5), and the climactic "Elijah" is the return of the real, historic Elijah. There are several near texts in the NT (Matt. 11:14; Luke 1:17), and the near "Elijah" was John the Baptist. However, the descriptions of the near and climactic "Elijah's" are different from each other, just as the descriptions were for the "day of the LORD" texts. Therefore, this example of a generic prophecy is also quite different

## Objection Two

The second objection to Kaiser's view is that Hezekiah had already been born when Isaiah gives this prediction in Isaiah 7:14. Kaiser's response:

The one remaining problem of the chronology of the kings of Israel and Judah, along with all their synchronisms between the two kingdoms, is a ten-year problem during the life and reign of Hezekiah. We believe that that can be accounted for in this prophecy as well as by a reexamination of the date for the Syro-Ephraimite War.<sup>22</sup>

It should be noted that to overcome this objection to Kaiser's view of Isaiah 7:14 requires the hope that scholars will someday make new discoveries and derive a new view of not just the date of Hezekiah's birth, but also the date of the Syro-Ephraimite War itself. In a more technical journal article, after Kaiser discusses the issues related to the dates of Hezekiah's reign and the Syro-Ephraimite War, he concludes with this statement:

When the data is further massaged and refined by some new discoveries we believe it will locate Hezekiah's birth and Isaiah's rebuke to Ahaz at some date early in this decade, perhaps four to six years prior to the fall of Damascus (c. 736-738 B.C.) and the deaths of Pekah and Rezin in 732 B.C.<sup>23</sup>

With regard to the current state of the chronology of these two historical events, this book has devoted the entire Chapter 4 to the subject of the chronology of Ahaz and Hezekiah and the entire Chapter 5 to the Syro-Ephraimite War. The following points are relevant.

First, the standard view of the date for the Syro-Ephraimite War held by most scholars was thoroughly presented in Chapter 5; see also footnote 78 in that chapter.

Second, in contrast to Kaiser's comment about a "ten-year problem during the life and reign of Hezekiah," Chapter 4 cited three post-Thiele harmonizations of the four synchronisms as recorded in the present Masoretic text. Based on these three harmonizations, there are three possible dates for the birth of Hezekiah. He was at least five years old when Isaiah predicted the birth of Immanuel. There is no known harmonization that places the birth of Hezekiah at or about 734, two years before the fall of Damascus. It would be difficult indeed for future scholars to come up with a new date for the Syro-Ephraimite War that is consistent with the external Assyrian and Babylonian records and with the four synchronisms of Hezekiah's reign.

## Conclusion

It would seem from the above analysis, that the view of Dr. Kaiser on Isaiah 7:14 is incorrect. The text is not a generic prophecy, and there is no way for Hezekiah to be the child referred to in this text; he had already been born prior to the meeting of Isaiah and Ahaz. Combining this conclusion of Dr. Kaiser with the preceding

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from the two identical texts that refer to the עִלְמָה and her son Immanuel. *Third*, also in Kaiser's article "The Promise of Isaiah 7:14 and the Single-Meaning Hermeneutic," p. 67, he states that there are enough "common elements" for the "Antichrist" texts and the "Elijah" texts to verify each as a generic prophecy. But where is the common element for the two Immanuel texts? Kaiser's answer: "In this case, the most essential common feature shared is that both Hezekiah and Messiah were from 'the House of David' which God had promised would never perish." Yes, both Hezekiah and Messiah are from the house of David. The problem is that "house of David" is nowhere mentioned within the two Immanuel texts, whereas "antichrist," "Elijah," and "day of the LORD" are all mentioned in each text, near and climactic, of these three generic prophecies. In fact, "House of David" is mentioned in the Book of Isaiah only in 7:2, 7:13, and 22:22. Verses 7:2 and 22:22 are irrelevant. Verse 7:13 leads into the Immanuel prophecy, but in this context "house of David" is used in verse 13 in a derogatory way to address Ahaz.

22 Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, p. 161.

23 Kaiser, "The Promise of Isaiah 7:14 and the Single-Meaning Hermeneutic," 66.

conclusion regarding the double sense view, the broad view that Isaiah 7:14 refers to two births must be abandoned.

## The Jewish Views

This section considers Alexander's Hypothesis I, namely, views that propose a natural birth of Immanuel during the time of Isaiah and Ahaz. However, only Jewish views are discussed here. Part of the purpose of this book is to include and to examine Jewish views, and the Christian scholars in this group are mostly liberal.<sup>24</sup>

Alexander subdivided Hypothesis I into five variations, but only three of them involved Jewish views.

Variation 1: Old Jewish view

Variation 2: Kimchi, Abravanel

Variation 5: Abenezra, Rashi

### Old Jewish View<sup>25</sup>

According to George Gray, the first "conflict of interpretation" between Christians and Jews involved Justin Martyr<sup>26</sup> (the Christian) and Trypho (the Jew).<sup>27</sup> Two issues were argued between Justin and Trypho that deal with Isaiah 7:14.

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- 24 Chapter 1, section "Limitations on This Study": "This book is written for conservatives within Judaism and Christianity who believe the Bible is the word of God. 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."
- 25 J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1896), pp. 63-64, suggests that there is evidence of a pre-Christian, Jewish interpretation of Isa. 7:14 that might have been Messianic. First, he cites the LXX translation *παρθένος* for *עַלְמָה*. He writes, "Probably it [the use of *παρθένος*] expresses a belief current in Jewish circles that the Messiah was to be born of a virgin." However, in the last section of Chapter 10, "The Meaning and Use of *παρθένος*," I argued at some length, citing a number of scholars, Jewish and Christian, that *παρθένος* did not mean *virgo intacta* when the LXX translation of Isaiah was written. (*παρθένος* had taken that meaning by the time the gospel of Matthew was written.) Skinner continues: "A good deal of evidence has been adduced to shew that such an expectation actually prevailed amongst both Alexandrian and Palestinian Jews, and if it existed it could hardly fail to influence the exegesis of this prophecy. It was only when the prophecy was appealed to by the Christians in proof of the Messiahship of Jesus that the Jewish exegetes seem finally to have repudiated the Messianic interpretation." Skinner's source was Mr. F. P. Badham's letter in the *Academy* of 8 June, 1895. Arthur Evans, "Immanuel," *Old ISBE*, III:1458, writes similarly: "The Alexandrian Jews interpreted the passage as referring to the virgin birth and the Messianic ministry." However, Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), p. 304, contradicts these claims: "There is not the slightest probability that Philo ever believed in, or even for one moment thought of, an actual virgin birth of a man of flesh and blood." Similarly Machen states, "There is no indication in Philo, as there is no indication elsewhere, that in pre-Christian Judaism of the period subsequent to the Old Testament there was any thought of a virgin birth of the Messiah." See also pp. 295-97. I have not included a study of this issue.
- 26 Martyred A.D. 166 according to Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. I: *Ante-Nicene Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950; original publication date, 1910), I:715.
- 27 Much of this summary concerning Justin and Trypho on Isa. 7:14 comes from 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. 134-35. Another source that discusses Justin's *Dialogue* is Cuthbert Lattey, in "The Term *Almah* in Is. 7:14," *CBQ* 9 (January 1947):94-95 and "Various Interpretations of Is. 7:14," *CBQ* 9 (April 1947):147-48. The *Dialogue* itself can be found here: 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). The *Dialogue* is divided into chapters, those dealing with the opposing views on Isa. 7:14 being 43, 66, 67, 77, 84.

First, Trypho argued that **עֲלִמָּה** means *νεᾶνις* instead of *παρθένος*, thus concluding the mother was not a virgin. Justin's response was that a child produced by ordinary human intercourse could not serve as a sign to Ahaz. Second, Trypho stated that the child was Hezekiah. Justin's response to this view was a question: how could it be that before Hezekiah knew how to call father and mother, he received the power of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria in the presence of the king of Assyria? Hezekiah never waged such a war.

Eusebius, known among the ancients as Eusebius Cæsarea and Eusebius Pamphili, was born almost one hundred years after the death of Justin.<sup>28</sup> He also argued the case against identifying the child as Hezekiah. In his *Demonstratio Evangelica*, he writes as follows:

And if the Jews refer the prophecy to Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, saying that his birth was thus predicted to his father, we answer that Hezekiah was not God with us, nor was any sign shewn forth in him of a divine nature. Nor was there any divine struggle or labour attendant on his birth. Hezekiah, moreover, can be shewn to be excluded by the date of the prophecy. For this prophecy was given about future events when his father Ahaz was actually king, whereas Hezekiah is known to have been born before Ahaz came to the throne.<sup>29</sup>

Jerome,<sup>30</sup> however, put an end to the view that the child was Hezekiah. According to T. K. Cheyne,

The theory that Immanuel = Hezekiah was long ago disproved by the remark of Jerome, that Hezekiah must have been at least nine years old when this prophecy was delivered (comp. 2 Kings xvi. 2, xviii, 2).<sup>31</sup>

George Gray writes similarly:

Very different from the rhetoric of Justin is the refutation of the Jewish theory by Jerome. Following Eusebius (*Dem. Ev.* vii. 1), he shows that Hezekiah was already born before the sign was given (2 K 16<sup>2</sup> 18<sup>2</sup>, 2 Ch. 28<sup>1</sup>).<sup>32</sup>

Jerome's argument was accepted by Jewish scholars. None of the great Jewish medieval commentators believed that Hezekiah was the child referred to in Isaiah 7:14.

### Abenezra, Rashi

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28 Eusebius was born around the year A.D. 260 and died 339 or 340 (Eusebius, "The Church History of Eusebius," trans. Arthur C. McGiffert, vol. I, *Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine in A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series*, 14 vols., ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1890; reprinted 1979], "Prolegomena," pp. 4 and 26).

29 *Demonstratio Evangelica*, Book VII, Chapter 1. I found this treatise online, a copy of the two-volume translation by W. J. Ferrar in 1920 and published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K), London. The URL is [http://www.preteristarchive.com/ChurchHistory/0312\\_eusebius\\_proof.html](http://www.preteristarchive.com/ChurchHistory/0312_eusebius_proof.html). According to McGiffert in his "Prolegomena" to "The Church History of Eusebius," p. 33, the *Demonstratio Evangelica* and *Præparatio Evangelica* "together constitute Eusebius' greatest apologetic work."

30 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. III: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950; original publication date, 1910), III:206, n. 3, notes that scholars have differed on the date of Jerome's birth: A.D. 331, 342, and 346. Schaff prefers 342. He simply states that Jerome died in the year 419 or 420.

31 T. K. Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1880), I:64. Cheyne does not cite Jerome's source, but see footnote 32 on Gray.

32 Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX*, p. 135. Throughout his commentary, Gray does not cite Jerome's source when he refers to Jerome. However, in his preface, Gray states, "I have made constant use of Jerome's Commentary as a good example of patristic scholarship and exegesis..."

Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchaki (Rashi)<sup>33</sup> and Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra (Abenezra)<sup>34</sup> propose that Isaiah in 7:14 is speaking of his own wife and the birth of his own son.<sup>35</sup>

### *Rashi's View*

In his commentary on Isaiah, Rashi confirms that the child of verse 7:14 is not Hezekiah:

Some interpret this as being said about Hezekiah, but it is impossible, because, when you count his years, you find that Hezekiah was born nine years before his father's reign.<sup>36</sup>

But, then, who is the mother and who is the child? Rashi comments as follows:

**the young woman:** My wife will conceive this year.<sup>37</sup>

**is with child:** This is actually the future.<sup>38</sup>

Thus Rashi takes the view that the woman is Isaiah's wife, but that she will conceive and be with child at some point after Isaiah's meeting with Ahaz. Thus Rashi places Isaiah chapter 7 earlier in time than chapter 8, at which point Isaiah's wife (called "the prophetess" in 8:3) actually does conceive and give birth to a son (8:3). Nosson Scherman also points to this view of Rashi in his introduction to chapter 8:

In Chapter 7, Isaiah had warned Ahaz that not only will Aram and Samaria be laid waste by the powerful Assyrian armies, but that Judah, as well, would be brought to the brink of utter destruction by the same overwhelming enemy. To strengthen this message, the prophet is commanded to inscribe it in an easily and universally understandable manner (*Rashi*).<sup>39</sup>

I agree with Scherman's summary. E. J. Young, a Christian scholar, also agrees. In his commentary on the Book of Isaiah, he includes this comment on 8:1:

In this symbolical act of writing, then, we have the general announcement of the same unhappy destiny that had been predicted in the previous chapter. Perhaps this chapter [chapter 8] is to be regarded as chronologically subsequent to the seventh, inasmuch as it sets forth in more detailed fashion the events of the future.<sup>40</sup>

Continuing with Rashi's interpretation of 7:14, he writes,

**and she shall call his name:** Divine inspiration will rest upon her.<sup>41</sup>

**Immanuel:** [That is] to say that our Rock shall be with us, *and this is the sign*, for she is a young girl, and she never prophesied, yet in this instance, Divine inspiration shall rest upon her. This is what is stated

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33 A.D. 1040-1105.

34 A.D. 1089-1164; *Ibn* is the Arabic equivalent of Hebrew *ben*, son of.

35 A number of liberal Christian scholars also take this view. Among them is William Gesenius. See Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:167, for his complete list.

36 Translation of Rashi's commentary on the Chabad.org Web site.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid. Note that Rashi agrees with the final translation given by me in Chapter 12, taking **יְהוָה** in a present sense.

39 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. 67.

40 Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), I:302; brackets added. Cheyne writes similarly: "The position of the latter prophecy indicates that it was delivered rather later than that in chap. vii" (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:52).

41 Translation of Rashi's commentary on the Chabad.org Web site.

below (8:3): "And I was intimate with the prophetess, etc.," and we do not find a prophet's wife called a prophetess unless she prophesied.<sup>42</sup>

Thus Rashi argues that the sign the Lord promised to give Ahaz in 7:14 is that under divine inspiration, Isaiah's wife will name the child when born "Immanuel," which means "God with us." Although his wife had never prophesied before, divine inspiration moved her to name the child Immanuel, and therefore she can be called a prophetess.

Thus on 8:3 Rashi comments as follows:

**and she bore a son:** He is the very son whom the prophetess called Immanuel, since the Holy One, blessed be He, would be at the aid of Hezekiah when he would reign. (It is impossible to say that it was another son, for we learned [in Seder Olam ch. 22] that in the fourth year of Ahaz, this prophecy was said, and in the fourth year of Ahaz, Pekah was assassinated, and it is impossible for two children to be born in one year, one after the other.) And Isaiah his father called him Maher-shalal-hash-baz, because of the calamity destined to befall Rezin and the son of Remaliah, who were coming to wrest the kingdom from the House of David and to curtail the kingdom of Hezekiah.<sup>43</sup>

According to Rashi, then, the "young girl" or "young woman" of 7:14 is "the prophetess" in 8:3, and Immanuel of 7:14 is Maher-shalal-hash-baz in 8:3. Isaiah's wife had never prophesied before, but the sign referred to in 7:14 is that she will name the son Immanuel, and "in effect, will foretell that God will be with the Kingdom of Judah and rescue Judah from the threat of Rezin and Pekah."<sup>44</sup> Thus in Rashi's view, she became a prophetess.<sup>45</sup> While the "young girl" named the son "Immanuel," Isaiah, also as a prophet, named this same son Maher-shalal-hash-baz because of the impending destruction of Aram and Samaria.<sup>46</sup> Both 7:14 and 8:3 refer to the same wife and the same son of Isaiah.

There are several problems with Rashi's view.

#### Problem 1: Shear-jashub (7:3)

In commenting on 7:14, as noted above, Rashi stated that the "young woman" was Isaiah's wife and "will conceive this year." However, he nowhere suggests that she was Isaiah's second wife. Therefore, she must already be the mother of Shear-jashub, a son whom the Lord told Isaiah to bring with him for the meeting with Ahaz and who was probably standing beside Isaiah as he talked with Ahaz (7:3). Isaiah 7:3 is the only reference to Shear-jashub in the Bible, and there is no way to be sure how old he was when this meeting took place. However, he could hardly be a new-born, and even at 2 or 3 years old, which is still unlikely, Isaiah could certainly not describe his wife as an **עֲלְמָה** if she was soon to be pregnant with their second son, Immanuel/Maher-shalal-hash-baz. The mother of Immanuel must be a first-time mother, and therefore the mother of Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz must be a different woman, namely Isaiah's wife, "the prophetess."<sup>47</sup>

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42 Ibid.; emphasis added and brackets original.

43 Ibid.; brackets original.

44 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 63. Scherman's statement that the name Immanuel will foretell God's rescue of Judah from Rezin and Pekah seems to differ slightly from Rashi's view that the name foretells God's aid to Hezekiah during his reign. However, this would be a small difference of little consequence.

45 Apart from the reason behind Rashi's view of "the prophetess," there are two views among scholars, both Jewish and Christian. Most seem to suggest that Isaiah's wife was called a prophetess in 8:3 simply because she was the wife of a prophet (e.g., Kimchi, Henderson, Alexander, Cheyne, Skinner, and Gray). Abenezra thinks that she may have prophesied, while Young and Oswalt suggest that either view is possible.

46 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 69. See also verse 8:4.

47 E[benezra] Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 2nd ed. (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1857), p. 70, summarizes the issue this way: "There is no ground whatever for supposing that she [the prophetess] was any other than the mother of Shear-jashub; and every attempt to identify her with the **עֲלְמָה**, chap. vii. 14, has failed."

Although Rashi does not directly address this problem with his view, he may have been aware of it since he does not take Shear-jashub as the name of a son of Isaiah. Commenting on 7:3, Rashi writes,

**and Shear-Yashuv your son:** The small remnant that will return to Me through you, and they are like your sons.<sup>48</sup>

On this verse, Rashi follows the Targum of Jonathan and substitutes "disciples" (plural) for "son" (singular).<sup>49</sup> However, there is little to suggest this substitution. "Disciples" are mentioned in 8:16, but in 7:3 (1) the word "son" is used, (2) it is singular,<sup>50</sup> (3) the name of the "son" is specified (Shear-jashub), and (4) the meaning of the name ("a remnant will return"<sup>51</sup>) is relevant to the current situation. Summarizing, Kimchi,<sup>52</sup> with virtually all scholars, takes Shear-jashub as the name of Isaiah's son, and there is no way to interpret the text otherwise.<sup>53</sup>

## Problem 2: Isaiah's Children (8:18)

In commenting on 8:18, Rashi takes Isaiah's "children" to be his "disciples" (the "disciples" mentioned in 8:16):

**Behold, I and the children... for signs:** For two signs: the disaster in store for Pekah, as the child was called Maher-shalal-hash-baz, and the salvation of the House of David, as the child was called Immanuel. This is the solution of the matter according to its simple meaning.<sup>54</sup>

**Behold, I and the children etc.:** They are the disciples, who are as dear to me as children; they shall be for signs and wonders that the Torah will survive.<sup>55</sup>

According to Young, there are three views of 8:18.<sup>56</sup>

(1) Isaiah, the writer, refers to himself and his two children, Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz.<sup>57</sup>

(2) Isaiah refers to himself, but the "children whom the LORD has given me" are the disciples who followed Isaiah and believed in God.<sup>58</sup>

(3) Isaiah does not refer to himself, but to the Messiah and to those children whom the Father gives the

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48 Translation of Rashi's commentary on the Chabad.org Web site.

49 Rashi's interpretation here is slightly different from the Targum of Jonathan, which paraphrases the text as, "you and your disciples who have not sinned and those who have repented of their sins" (translation by Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 59).

50 "Your son" in 7:3 is **בְּנִי**, which is comprised of the masculine singular noun, **בֵּן**, "son," and the second person masculine singular pronominal suffix **י**, "your" (more accurately, "thy").

51 Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 51, takes the translation and meaning to be "remnant shall turn," i.e., "turn to Jehovah," not "return from exile"

52 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 59.

53 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:271, in commenting on 7:3, suggests why the Lord told Isaiah to bring Shear-jashub to the meeting with Ahaz: "The presence of this son will bring vividly before the king the fact that, great as the judgment might be, there would nevertheless be a remnant delivered. The boy's very presence was to serve as a sign of hope, and would probably prepare the king for a prophecy from the Lord."

54 Translation of Rashi's commentary on the Chabad.org Web site.

55 Ibid.

56 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:316-17. It is of interest that Franz Delitzsch gives two views of 8:16 (*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:237), and Young gives three views of 3:17 (I:314-16).

57 Advocates of view (1) include Kimchi, Gesenius, Ewald, Barnes, Delitzsch, Cheyne, Skinner, Gray, Archer, Oswald, et al.

58 Rashi and John Calvin accept view (2).

Messiah.<sup>59</sup>

Rashi's view is essentially number (2): Isaiah does refer to himself, and the children "are the disciples, who are as dear to me as children." However, he differs in one respect from others who take view (2). In Rashi's interpretation, these children or disciples will be for signs, specifically two signs, based on the two names of a single child of Isaiah: "the disaster in store for Pekah, as the child was called Maher-shalal-hash-baz, and the salvation of the House of David, as the child was called Immanuel."

However, this is an unlikely interpretation of "the children whom the Lord has given me." The phrase is quite typical of what a father would say about his children, not his disciples. That observation plus the argument John Oswalt makes in his commentary both suggest the case for view (1) is stronger than that for view (2). Oswalt argued that the mention of "signs and wonders" in 8:18 implies that the "children" are Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz; their very existence, together with the evocative names Isaiah gave them, was testimony that God is working among his people.<sup>60</sup> Disciples are not characterized as "signs and wonders."

The preceding two problems with Rashi's view leave the עֲלְמָה and the child of 7:14 unidentified.<sup>61</sup>

### *Abenezra's View*

According to Alexander McCaul, Abenezra follows Rashi in the view that the עֲלְמָה of 7:14 is Isaiah's wife, but he carries this view further by arguing that Isaiah had three children rather than just one: Shear-jashub, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, and Immanuel, each of them being a sign to Judah.<sup>62</sup> Abenezra is right, of course, that Maher-shalal-hash-baz and Immanuel are not the same boy, but admitting Shear-jashub is also Isaiah's son presents the same problem faced by Rashi. Isaiah could not describe his wife as an עֲלְמָה if she was soon to be pregnant with their second son (or maybe even a third son). The mother of Immanuel must be a first-time mother, and therefore the mother of Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz must be a different woman, namely Isaiah's wife, "the prophetess."

### Kimchi, Abravanel

In contrast to Rashi, Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak)<sup>63</sup> and Rabbi Isaac ben Judah Abravanel<sup>64</sup> propose that Immanuel was a younger son of Ahaz by a second marriage.

### *Kimchi's View*

According to Alexander McCaul, Kimchi in his commentary on Isaiah argued, in agreement with Rashi, that Immanuel cannot be Hezekiah and thus also affirms that the "young woman" cannot be the mother of Hezekiah. McCaul continues by translating and citing the following from Kimchi's commentary:

This almah is either the wife of the prophet or the wife of Ahaz. The latter is the right interpretation, for if

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59 E. Henderson, John Gill, J. A. Alexander, et al., advocate view (3). The chief argument for (3) is the citation of this verse in Heb. 2:13, but it would be difficult to explain how "signs and symbols" could be applied to the Messiah's spiritual seed. However, this view is not further discussed.

60 John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), p. 236.

61 Kimchi's arguments against Rashi's view are presented in the subsection that deals with Kimchi's position.

62 Alexander McCaul, *The Messiahship of Jesus: The Concluding Series of the Twelve Lectures on the Prophecies* (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1852), p. 178.

63 A.D. 1160-1235.

64 A.D. 1437-1508; also spelled Abarbanel.

the wife of the prophet were intended, he would have said **הַכְּבִיאוּהָ**, *the prophetess*, as he says, viii. 3. "I went unto the prophetess." His words also, viii. 8, "shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel," prove that Immanuel was the son of the king.<sup>65</sup>

Nosson Scherman in the ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah also describes Kimchi's view. In commenting on 7:3, he points out that according to Kimchi

Isaiah's son [Shear-jashub] was given this name to symbolize that the remnant of Judah will return to their land after the exile (*Radak*).<sup>66</sup>

Commenting on verse 7:14, Scherman points out that "According to *Rashi*, the *young woman* was Isaiah's wife; according to *Radak*, she may have been the wife of Ahaz."<sup>67</sup> He continues:

*Radak*, however, translates וְקִרְאתָ שְׁמוֹ in the second person, *and you* (in the feminine form) *shall name him*. Thus, according to *Radak's* interpretation that the wife of Ahaz is the pregnant woman, Isaiah is instructing the queen to name her child Immanuel. *Radak* will therefore explain *the sign* differently [than *Rashi*].<sup>68</sup>

Thus, Kimchi explains verse 7:15 as follows:

From the time the child is born he will accept only good, tasty foods and refuse to eat foods that are not palatable, for he will immediately know to reject anything bad. *The child's birth will be a sign to Ahaz*, but not a sign that God will rescue Judah from Rezin and Pekah, for they will have abandoned their plan long before the birth of this child (*Radak*).<sup>69</sup>

Then regarding verse 7:16, Kimchi gives this explanation:

Rezin and Pekah will have already given up their designs against Jerusalem before Immanuel was born. The child's birth -- and the significance of his name -- will be a sign for the future: That these two kings will never again return to threaten the people of Judah and the city of Jerusalem (*Radak*).<sup>70</sup>

Commenting on verse 8:3, Scherman states that Kimchi "maintains that there were two sons and two mothers. The young woman in 7:14 is the wife of Ahaz, and it was she who named her son Immanuel. This child [in 8:3] however, is Isaiah's, and he would be named *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*."<sup>71</sup> In this verse, then, Isaiah refers to his wife as "the prophetess," and he, not the prophetess, names his son.

As cited by McCaul, Kimchi takes the phrase in 8:8, "will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel," to indicate that Immanuel was the son of the king.<sup>72</sup>

There are two problems with Kimchi's view. First, there is no evidence in sacred history for a marriage to a second wife by Ahaz that issued in the birth of a son.<sup>73</sup> Second, McCaul draws this conclusion:

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65 McCaul, *The Messiahship of Jesus*, p. 178.

66 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 59; brackets added.

67 Ibid., p. 63; italics original.

68 Ibid.; italics original and brackets added. See the section on this verb in Chapter 11 of this book. Most scholars, Jewish and Christian, including *Rashi*, take this verb as third person feminine singular, not second person feminine singular.

69 Ibid.; emphasis added.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid., p. 69; brackets added.

72 McCaul, *The Messiahship of Jesus*, p. 178. *Rashi* believes that in this verse Isaiah addresses the tribe of Judah directly and refers to them as Immanuel (Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 69).

73 With a bit of humor, McCaul said that "Kimchi not only invents a son, but finds for Ahaz a second wife" (*The Messiahship of Jesus*, p. 178).

As the Bible says nothing about this son of Ahaz, we cannot be surprised that it is altogether silent as to the fact of his eating butter and honey from the day of his birth, which Kimchi says was the sign given to Ahaz.<sup>74</sup>

### Additional Problems

An additional problem with the views of both Rashi and Kimchi is their application of *עַלְמָה* to a married woman, Isaiah's wife and Ahaz's second wife. The lengthy Chapter 10 in this book addressed every aspect of *עַלְמָה* to determine its use in the Bible. As a result of much research and the citation of many scholars, it was concluded that the meaning and use of *עַלְמָה* is *young, unmarried girl*. No text in which *עַלְמָה* or its plural is used implies a *married girl, married woman, or widow*. Its use in the Hebrew Scriptures is limited to young unmarried girls who have never been married.

Another point is not so much a problem but an observation of the theology of Orthodox Judaism. Conservative Christian scholars differ on a number of theological issues, and it is the same for Jewish scholars. It happens that the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 is a case in point for both Christians and Jews. With reference to three of the best scholars in Judaism, McCaul makes the following observation:

It is worthy of special notice that each of these Rabbinic interpretations [on Isa. 7:14 by Rashi, Ebenezra, and Kimchi] differs from the other two; the difference proving that the Jews have no certain tradition as to the accomplishment of this prophecy, but that each offers simply his own conjecture.<sup>75</sup>

The same can be said for conservative Christian scholars. The views based on dual sense and multiple fulfillment already discussed in the previous section represent several interpretations, and the following section will discuss yet another interpretation.

### **The Messianic View**

This section considers Alexander's Hypothesis III, namely views in which all three verses, 7:14-16, refer directly and exclusively to the Messiah, whose growth is the measure of the subsequent events.<sup>76</sup> Alexander writes,

The minor variations of this general hypothesis relate to the time when these events were to occur, and to the sense in which the growth of the Messiah is adopted as the measure of them.<sup>77</sup>

### Two Common Objections to the Messianic View

Before discussing two proponents of the Messianic view listed by Alexander, two common objections should be addressed.

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74 Ibid.

75 Ibid., p. 179; brackets added

76 Although Oswalt does not accept the Messianic view, he does agree that the three verses, 14, 15, and 16, all refer to the same child: "The text gives every reason to believe that a single child is intended in all these verses" (*The Book of Isaiah*, p. 208).

77 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:170.

## Objection One

The first objection is simple and general enough to be cited by anyone who does not accept the Messianic view. This objection argues that if the Messianic view is accepted, the event predicted by the sign, namely, the birth of the Messiah, is too remote to serve as the sign of the promise made to Ahaz regarding the two kings. In fact, so the argument goes, the occurrence of the sign must be near enough after the Lord promised it to give reassurance to Ahaz that these two kings will soon be gone.

A reasonable response is given by Alexander:

The assurance that Christ was to be born in Judah, of its royal family, might be a *sign* to Ahaz, that the kingdom should not perish in his day; and so far was the remoteness of the sign in this case from making it absurd or inappropriate, that the further off it was, the stronger the promise of continuance to Judah, which it guaranteed.<sup>78</sup>

The certainty of the *birth* of the Messiah in Judah guarantees for Ahaz the survival of the Davidic line and Judah itself, at least until that birth, despite the current activity of Rezin and Pekah and the following activity of Tiglath-peleser.

## Objection Two

The second objection to the Messianic interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 involves verses 15 and 16. "The Messianic View" as defined by Alexander refers all three verses, 14, 15, and 16, to the Messiah. However, it is clear that the curds and honey for food in verse 15 was the result of Rezin and Pekah, and that the curds and honey for food in verse 22 was the result of Tiglath-pileser and Sennacherib in verse 22.<sup>79</sup> The Messiah did not appear during either era. Therefore, there would seem to be a contradiction between verse 14 and verses 15 and 16. To resolve this objection is what Vitranga and Hengstenberg endeavored to do.

## Campegius Vitranga

Vitranga (1659-1722), a Dutch theologian and Hebraist, represents Variation 2 under Alexander's Hypothesis III. His two chief works are his dissertation on the synagogue, *De Synagoga Vetere Libri Tres*, and his *Commentary on Isaiah*.

According to Alexander, to solve the problem of verses 15 and 16, Vitranga suggests that in these two verses *the language is hypothetical* and that Isaiah, though he envisions the birth of the Messiah as a remote event, makes the birth of the Messiah the measure of the current events. Thus Vitranga argues that before the Messiah, *if he were born now*, would eat curds and honey and know how to distinguish good from evil, Rezin and Pekah would no longer be a threat. One might also express Vitranga's solution to the problem this way: Isaiah's vision of the birth of the Messiah in verse 14 is transformed by Isaiah in verses 15 and 16 into a hypothetical, early childhood of the Messiah as described in verses 15 and 16, had he been born at that time. However, Alexander also points out that this proposed solution has its own problem: the key phrase needed for this solution, namely, "if he were born now," is nowhere to be found in the context.<sup>80</sup> So is Vitranga's solution to be rejected because that phrase is not present? Vitranga's solution and the problem Alexander cited are addressed later in this chapter.

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78 Ibid. I:171.

79 For verse 5, see Chapter 8, "Issue 2" under subsection "Verses 15-16" in the section "Ahaz's Lack of Faith and the Lord's Sign: 7:10-17"; for verse 22, see Chapter 8, "The Beginning of the Judgment Announced" under "Verse 17" also in the section "Ahaz's Lack of Faith and the Lord's Sign: 7:10-17."

80 This is Alexander's description of Vitranga's view, somewhat reworded (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:171).

## Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg

Hengstenberg (1802-1869), a German Lutheran theologian, represents Variation 4 under Alexander's Hypothesis III. His major work was the four-volume *Christologie des Alten Testaments* (*Christology of the Old Testament*) translated into English by Rev. Theod. Meyer.

Hengstenberg introduces his own view after noting Vitringa's attempt to overcome the above problem. He writes,

A good beginning has already been made by *Vitringa*, without, however, completely attaining the object. In ver. 14, the Prophet has seen the birth of Messiah as present. Holding fast this idea, and explaining it, the Prophet makes him who has been born accompany the people through all the stages of its existence. We have here an *ideal anticipation of the real incarnation*...<sup>81</sup>

He goes on to say that all blessings and deliverances prior to the actual birth of the Messiah that were bestowed on the covenant people had their root in his future birth. When the covenant people entered the great crisis described in Isaiah chapter 7, they could take comfort in the vision of flesh and blood as Isaiah presents that vision in the birth of the Messiah.

Hengstenberg continues to explain his view as follows:

What the prophet means, and intends to say here is this, *that, in the space of about a twelvemonth, the overthrow of the hostile kingdoms would already have taken place*. As the representative of the contemporaries, he [Isaiah] brings forward the wonderful child who, as it were, formed the soul of the popular life. *At that time when this child knows to distinguish between good and bad food, hence, after the space of about a twelvemonth, he will not have any want of nobler food, ver. 15, for before he has entered upon this stage, the land of the two hostile kings shall be desolate*.<sup>82</sup>

Based on Hengstenberg's view, Alexander paraphrases Isaiah's statement this way:

As if he [Isaiah] had said, I see the virgin bringing forth a son, and calling his name Immanuel; I see him living in the midst of desolation till a certain age; but before that time arrives, I see the land of our invaders lying desolate.<sup>83</sup>

Alexander concludes his analysis of Hengstenberg's view as follows:

The only objection to this ingenious improvement on Vitringa's ingenious exposition, is that it rests upon a certain theory as to the nature of prophetic inspiration, or of the mental state in which the prophets received and uttered their communications, which, however probable, is not at present generally current with believers in the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, nor perhaps maintained by Hengstenberg himself.<sup>84</sup>

## Interpretations by E. Henderson and Alexander McCaul

As noted in the section "Interpretations Cited and Organized by J. A. Alexander" earlier in this chapter, of all the interpretations and proponents cited by him, only Lowth (Hypothesis II, views based on two distinct births and two different children), Vitringa, and Hengstenberg (both in Hypothesis III, views that take 7:14-16 to refer

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81 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), II:55-56; italics original.

82 Ibid., II:56; italics original, brackets added. Note that Hengstenberg takes the position that the "cream and honey" (also translated "curds and honey" [NASB]) indicates "a condition of plenty and prosperity." I have taken the opposite position (see Chapter 8, the subsection "Verses 15-16," and Issue 2), but that is not directly related to the issue at hand.

83 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:172; brackets added.

84 Ibid.

directly and exclusively to the Messiah) are endorsed by him. However, I included William LaSor and Walter Kaiser as modern examples of Hypothesis II. I also included the traditional Jewish views, primarily Rashi and Kimchi (Hypothesis I, views based on a natural birth during the time of Isaiah and Ahaz). In this section, I discuss the views of Henderson and McCaul. Alexander included Henderson in Hypothesis III but did not endorse him. McCaul, who came after Alexander, follows Henderson with only minor variations and thus is a later example of Hypothesis III. They are included here as an option to consider.

Henderson (1784-1858) was a Scottish minister and missionary who was an accomplished linguist and translator. He was fluent in over twelve languages, including Hebrew. Alexander McCaul (1799-1863) was an Irish Hebraist. Among other positions during his life, he was professor of Hebrew and rabbinical literature at King's College, London.

Alexander's only comment on Henderson is rather short:

Henderson departs from the ancient and almost universal explanation of the passage as a promise, and converts it into a threatening, not only against Israel, but against Judah; both of which kingdoms were to lose their kings before the twelfth year of our Saviour, when Archelaus was banished from Judea.<sup>85</sup>

For more detail, both Henderson and McCaul are discussed at some length in "Issue 6," under "Verses 15-16" of the section "Ahaz's Lack of Faith and the Lord's Sign: 7:10-17," Chapter 8. Issue 6 addresses the identity of, and connection between, the "two kings" and the "the land." It was concluded that the two kings must be Rezin and Pekah. To identify them differently would be to ignore Rezin and Pekah in the context and suddenly introduce two unnamed kings in the flow of the text. In turn, it is the virtual certainty that Rezin and Pekah are the two kings that determines the interpretation of "the land" as Syria and Israel, which then must be viewed as a single, threatening territory north of Judah.

In contrast to this standard view, Henderson argues that "the land" is all Israel, both the Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom, and that "the land" would lose both of its kings--the king in Samaria and the king in Jerusalem. This, according to Henderson, would explain how "the land" can be singular but have two kings. He translates the second clause in verse 16 this way: "the land, which thou destroyest, shall be forsaken by both its kings." Henderson's goal seems to be to extend the fulfillment of the prophecy in verse 16 to the time of Jesus, and he thus claims that its fulfillment for Judah, viz., when Judah was forsaken by its king, took place when Archelaus was banished and Judah was reduced to a Roman province. This, he emphasizes, was when Jesus was 12 years old.

However, Henderson's view definitely has a serious problem. A legitimate king of Judah must be in the line of David, and the last Davidic king of Judah was Zedekiah (ca. 597 - 587 B.C.), not Archelaus (4 B.C - A.D. 6, son of Herod the Great, 47 - 4 B.C.).

McCaul, like Henderson, extends to the time of Jesus the fulfillment of the prophecy in verse 16 that Judah would be forsaken by its king. Therefore, he faces the same problem: a legitimate king of Judah must be in the line of David, and the last Davidic king of Judah was Zedekiah. Nevertheless, the main objection to the view of both Henderson and McCaul on verse 16 remains, namely, that in the context of chapter 7, the two kings can hardly be anybody else but Rezin and Pekah.

In the discussion in Chapter 8 of Henderson and McCaul's interpretation of verse 7:16 regarding the "two kings" and "the land," it is mentioned that McCaul's view of the "sign" referred to in 7:14 does not necessarily depend on their interpretation of verse 16.

With regard to the sign in 7:14, McCaul writes as follows:

This wilful rejection of God's mercy justly deserved [offered in verses 10-12], and was immediately followed by a denunciation of, sore punishment by the hand of the Assyrian in whom Ahaz trusted. But

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85 Ibid., I:171.

still in this denunciation of wrath he confirms the assurance of mercy to the house of David, to whom he gives a sign, which includes not merely the miraculous birth of Immanuel, but the invasion of the Assyrian. *The sign is the whole prophecy*, from verse 14-25, and includes, first, the mercy to the house of David; secondly, the punishment of the unbelief of Ahaz. The promise that Messiah should be born secured the continuance of the house of David. The Assyrian invasion would be the immediate sign of the sin and folly of trusting in man rather than God, and a guarantee to the generation then living of the ultimate accomplishment of the promise of mercy. Part of the sign might require the lapse of ages for its fulfilment; but part was immediately at hand.<sup>86</sup>

Is the sign then the whole prophecy, namely, verses 14 through 25? But what is the content of these verses?

Several sections in Chapter 8 deal with verses 17-25. In the subsection, "The Beginning of the Judgment Announced," it is concluded that the punishment of Judah described in verse 17 and more thoroughly in verses 18-25 is limited to Assyria. It begins with Tiglath-pileser and continues with future Assyrian kings, in particular, Sennacherib. However, the punishment of Judah goes beyond its Assyrian component in verses 17-25, continuing to the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple by Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>87</sup>

Therefore, one could take the sign to be the whole prophecy from verse 14 through verse 25 if that "whole prophecy" is limited to the punishment by the Assyrian kings, or at most all the kings to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and the fall of Jerusalem. As McCaul stated, "the Assyrian invasion would be the immediate sign of the sin and folly of trusting in man rather than God." However, "the sign" cannot extend to the life of Jesus when both "kings" referred to in verse 16 are (finally!) removed from "the land."

But there is a problem in taking the sign to be the whole prophecy of verses 7-25, even if stretched only to the end of the Assyrian era. Such a sign active for a period of 124 years, that is, from 734 B.C. (Isaiah's meeting with Ahaz) to 610 B.C. (the end of Assyria),<sup>88</sup> has no precedent anywhere in the Bible. The sign given to Ahaz by the Lord is clearly limited to 7:14 or 7:14-16, where verse 16 is properly understood to refer to Rezin and Pekah.

However, one point made by McCaul is quite correct: "The promise that Messiah should be born secured the continuance of the house of David." Ahaz was afraid that Rezin and Pekah would put an end to the Davidic line, starting with himself! If the Davidic line continued until the future Messiah, clearly the plot against Ahaz would fail.

## The Components for an Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14

The components for the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 are the words of the text. The meaning and translation of those words reached their finale at the end of Chapter 12:

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

הִנֵּה	הַעַלְמָה	הָרָה	וַיֵּלֶדֶת	בֵּן	וְקָרָאת	שְׁמוֹ	עִמָּנוּ אֵל
Behold	a maiden	is pregnant	and she will bear	a son	and she will call	his name	Immanuel

Or in somewhat literal English:

86 McCaul, *The Messiahship of Jesus*, p. 180; italics original and brackets added.

87 In "Issue 2" under subsection "Verses 18-19" of Chapter 8, it is noted that some scholars believe Isaiah's prediction in verses 17-25 does, in fact, go all the way to Nebuchadnezzar.

88 Or 148 years if the sign is stretched to the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple (734 - 586 = 148).

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.

Based on the conclusions reached throughout this book, and summarized to some extent at the beginning of this chapter, the following components form the basis for interpreting Isaiah 7:14.

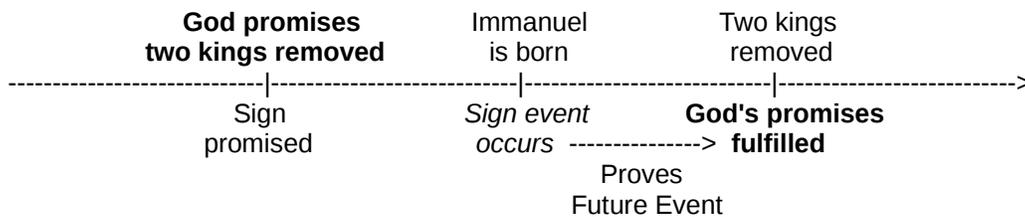
*First*,<sup>89</sup> verse 13-16 represent a single prophecy and speak of a single child, namely, Immanuel. Neither verse 15 nor verse 16 refer to a different child.

*Second*,<sup>90</sup> it was concluded in Chapter 12 that use 5 of אִיָּת ( 'ôth), "sign," as listed in Chapter 8, is the way it is used in verse 14. As with use 5, the *occurrence* of the sign will take place in the *future* relative to the point the sign was promised, in this case the meeting between Isaiah and Ahaz. However, use 5 has two variations, and the question still remains as to which variation is used in verse 14.<sup>91</sup> Does the occurrence of the sign take place *after* the event for which the sign was to give assurance, or does it take place *before* that event? That is, does the promised sign in verse 14 occur before or after the fulfillment of God's pronouncement about the two kings in verse 16? To prepare for the comparison of the two options, verses 14-16 are quoted:

Therefore, Adonai himself will give a sign to you: Behold, a maiden is pregnant and she will bear a son and she will call his name Immanuel.<sup>92</sup> He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows *enough* to refuse evil and choose good. For before the boy will know *enough* to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.<sup>93</sup>

Variation two<sup>94</sup> requires that Immanuel be born at some point between the meeting of Isaiah and Ahaz (when the sign was announced and promised) and the Lord's actual work of removing Rezin and Pekah, a period at most of two years (734-732), according to the study of the Syro-Ephraimite War in Chapter 5. Using the same graphics as in Chapter 12 for Jeremiah 44:29-30, variation two for Isaiah 7:14 would appear as follows:

*The Future Sign Proves the Divine Causality of an Event in the Future*



However, the conclusions reached in two previous sections, "The Views of Dual Sense and Multiple Fulfillment" and "The Jewish Views," leave no likely candidates for Immanuel during that two-year period: the dual

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89 For this material see Chapter 8, subsection "Issue 1," under "Verses 15-16" in the section "Ahaz's Lack of Faith and the Lord's Sign: 7:10-17"; and the summary of Chapter 8 in this chapter.

90 For this material see Chapter 8, subsection "Issue 1" under "Verses 10-11" in the section "Ahaz's Lack of Faith and the Lord's Sign: 7:10-17"; Chapter 12, subsection "Issue 1" in the section "2: אִיָּת"; and the summary of Chapters 8 and 12 in this chapter.

91 These two variations are graphically displayed both in Chapter 12 (see notes in footnote 90) and in the summary of Chapter 12 in this chapter, both locations using Exod. 3:12 and Jer. 44:29-30 as examples.

92 This translation is at the beginning of Chapter 12.

93 *NASB*.

94 Jeremiah 44:29-30 is an example of variation two.



Fourth,<sup>99</sup> the meaning of עַלְמָה (‘*almah*) is a *young unmarried girl*. No biblical text in which עַלְמָה or its plural is used implies a *married* girl, *married* woman, or *widow*. Its use in the Hebrew Scriptures, then, is limited to young unmarried girls who have never been married. In Israelite society, an עַלְמָה, if the question arose at all, would be presumed a *virgin*, unless there was definite evidence to the contrary. With most scholars, I accept the view that Biblical Hebrew, like the other Semitic languages, does not have a word that means *virgo intacta*. That condition can only be specified negatively (e.g., "who has not known a man"). Neither בְּתוּלָה nor עַלְמָה have *virgo intacta* as their basic meaning or include *virgo intacta* in their basic meaning.

Fifth,<sup>100</sup> no hard and fast conclusion can be drawn on whether to take הֵרָה in a present sense or a future sense. So should the phrase be translated as "is pregnant" or "will conceive"? It has been noted that if the future sense is accepted, the period of time from the point that Isaiah delivers the prophecy to the point of conception is unknown and cannot be determined from this verse. My working hypothesis is to accept the present sense. However, the final, overall interpretation of the prophecy does not hinge on this decision, as explained in the second component above.

Sixth,<sup>101</sup> it was also concluded in Chapter 12 that עִמָּנוּ אֵל, as used in 8:8, is the name of the child in 7:14; the reason for *this* use by Isaiah in 8:8 is that, despite Assyria overrunning Judah, it will not be destroyed because it, Judah, is Immanuel's land--it belongs to him. עִמָּנוּ אֵל, as used in 8:10, is a reference to the *meaning* of Immanuel's name; the reason for *this* use by Isaiah in 8:10 is that Assyria will be unable to frustrate the divine plan of mercy for Judah because of the great truth expressed in the *meaning* of Immanuel's name--"God [is] with us."

## Combining the Components for an Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14

The basis for combining the above components to form an interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 begins with the meaning and translation of the individual words in Isaiah 7:14. The next step is to use the six components of verse 14 as summarized in the previous section.

### The Implications of the Components of Isaiah 7:14

*First Component:* verses 13-16. The boy mentioned in verses 15-16 is Immanuel. The interpretation of those two verses is addressed in the next section, "The Interpretation of Isaiah 7:15-16."

*Second Component:* "sign." Isaiah introduces the sign by stating that the Lord will give לְכֶם אֹת, "to you a sign." The pronominal suffix כֶּם is second person masculine plural. The Lord through Isaiah is addressing not

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99 For this material see Chapter 10, subsection "Conclusions Regarding the Use of בְּתוּלָה and עַלְמָה in the Hebrew Scriptures" in the section "The Use of עַלְמָה in the Hebrew Scriptures"; and the summary of Chapter 10 in this chapter. However, all of Chapter 10 is relevant to these conclusions.

100 For this material see Chapter 11, sections "Verb 2: הֵרָה," "Verb 3: וְיִלְדֶת," "Putting the Verse Together," and "Implication of Present Time in Isaiah 7:14"; and the summary of Chapter 11 in this chapter.

101 For this material see Chapter 6, subsection "Chapter 8" (the biblical Chapter 8!) in the section "The Common Themes Through Chapters 7-12"; Chapter 12, section "5: עִמָּנוּ אֵל"; and the summary of Chapter 12 in this chapter.

just Ahaz but the entire current house of David. The sign itself, namely, a pregnant עִלְמָה and the birth of her son, Immanuel, promised by the Lord through Isaiah in verse 14, will occur at some point after the Lord removes Rezin and Pekah.

*Third Component:* "Behold." This often used Hebrew word describes an event, in this case the sign of the birth of Immanuel. Isaiah sees that sign with all of its parts in a vision from the Lord, and he sees the vision as present. However, the event, or occurrence of the sign, is in the future, near or far. But based on the second component, the occurrence of the sign is definitely after the Lord removes Rezin and Pekah.

*Fourth Component:* "a maiden." Isaiah sees an עִלְמָה, a young unmarried girl who has never married.

*Fifth Component:* "is pregnant." The maiden whom Isaiah sees is pregnant! How can this be? How can a young unmarried girl who has never married be pregnant? Had she "known a man" out of wedlock, making the child illegitimate? The Lord would certainly select only a virtuous girl "who has never known a man" to bear Immanuel.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, this girl is a virgin, and Isaiah is seeing a miracle of the Lord.

*Sixth Component:* "Immanuel." Still in Isaiah's vision, the maiden gives birth and names her son Immanuel. The only other mention of Immanuel in the entire Hebrew Scriptures are verses 8:8 and 8:10. Verse 8:8 mentions Immanuel himself, while verse 8:10 uses the meaning of his name to assure Judah why Assyria will be unable to frustrate the Lord's divine plan of mercy for Judah--it is because "God is with us." However, verse 8 makes the point that Immanuel owns the land of Judah. Yet nothing outside Isaiah's vision has been said about the birth of Immanuel in chapters 7 or 8. Nevertheless, in addition to the amazing facts about the girl and her son Immanuel in 7:14, Judah in 8:8 is said to be owned by Immanuel.

### The Conclusions Based on the Implications of the Components of Isaiah 7:14

What conclusions can now be drawn based on the components listed above?

- Based on the use of the word "sign" in 7:14, the occurrence of the sign would not occur until some point after the Lord removes Rezin and Pekah.
- No birth of a boy named Immanuel is recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures or in the extant literature of the intertestamental period.
- No miracle consisting of a virgin giving birth to a child is recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures or the intertestamental literature.

That would bring the virgin, her pregnancy, and the birth of Immanuel to the New Testament era. But who is the virgin and who is Immanuel?

It was argued at some length in Chapter 7 of this book (not the Bible!) that the "child," also called a "son," in *Isaiah chapter 9* is the Messiah. In addition, there is virtually no debate that the "shoot" who will "spring from the stem of Jesse" in *Isaiah chapter 11* is the Messiah. Then taking into account (1) the characteristics of Immanuel and his mother developed at length above, together with (2) the conclusion in Chapter 6 of this book that the broader context of Isaiah 7:14 is Isaiah chapters 7-12, it is logical to conclude that Immanuel in *Isaiah chapter 7* is also the Messiah. Thus, there are three references to the Messiah in the single context of Isaiah chapters 7 to 12:

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102 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 1:288-89, asks, "Was the child illegitimate or not? If the child were illegitimate, would such a birth be a sign? The whole context, indeed the whole Biblical context, rules this out. On the other hand, if the mother were a good woman, then the birth was out of the ordinary, an unusual birth. The mother is both unmarried and a good woman."

Messiah in Isaiah Chapter 7	Immanuel, Born of a Virgin	Owner of Judah
Messiah in Isaiah Chapter 9	The Child/Son Born to Us	On the Throne of David Forevermore
Messiah in Isaiah Chapter 11	The Shoot from the Stem of Jesse	The Spirit of Yahweh will Rest On Him <sup>103</sup>

The virgin mother of the Messiah is not identified in the Tanakh (Old Testament), and there is no evidence that Isaiah himself knew who the mother would be.<sup>104</sup>

## The Interpretation of Isaiah 7:15-16

### The Possible Contradictions

The conclusion in the previous section is that Immanuel is the Messiah. However, there are apparent contradictions in this view that need to be addressed.

I have argued that the "he" in verse 15 and the "boy" in verse 16 are the same boy and that this boy is Immanuel.<sup>105</sup> This interpretation is also part of "The Messianic View" introduced earlier in this chapter. However, it raises a problem with the conclusion just reached. Both the "curds and honey" mentioned in verse 15 and the two kings (Rezin and Pekah) mentioned in verse 16 are, without doubt, references to the time of Ahaz. Does that not mean Immanuel must be born shortly after Isaiah's vision in 7:14? In particular, verse 16 seems to require that Immanuel will be born *before* the fulfillment of the Lord's promise regarding Rezin and Pekah. However, according to the Messianic view and the arguments in the previous two sections, Immanuel is the Messiah and was born much later than the time of Ahaz. Is there a dilemma here? There are two apparent contradictions.

*First*, it is necessary to review the conclusion reached earlier concerning the second component of Isaiah 7:14.<sup>106</sup> Of the two variations for use 5 of אִוֶּת ("sign"), it was argued that variation one is far more likely: the birth of Immanuel, i.e., the actual occurrence of the Lord's promised sign, would come at some point *after* the fulfillment of the Lord's promise regarding Rezin and Pekah, and not before. As noted in the previous paragraph, however, verse 16 implies that Immanuel would be born *before* the removal of those two kings.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, there would indeed seem to be a contradiction between verse 14 and verse 16.

*Second*, this apparent contradiction is another way to describe the second of the two objections addressed at the

103 J. A. Motyer, "Context and Content in the Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14," *Tyndale Bulletin* 21 (1970):123, concludes something similar: "The content of Isaiah 7:14 does not dwell in isolation. It belongs to a connected and indeed interwoven series. Immanuel is the possessor of Judah (8:8); he is the ultimate safeguard against the machinations of the nations (8:10)--Isaiah could not have used the reassuring words 'God is with us' unless with a direct reference to the child whose name this was; Immanuel, consequently, is the great 'prince of the four names', the heir and successor of David (9:6, 7), and in the light of 10:21 the interpretation is irresistible that the one born in David's line is also unequivocally divine, 'the might God'; he is additionally the Prince of righteousness and peace, sovereign over a reconciled world (11:1ff.)."

104 It is of interest to note that in addition to Isaiah 7:14, the only other reference in the Old Testament to the mother of the Messiah is Micah 5:2 (Edward J. Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16," *WTJ* 16 [November 1953], p. 118; Micah 5:3 in Christian translations). However, עֲלָמָה is not used, and of course עֲמָנוּ אֵל only occurs in Isa. 7:14, 8:8, and 8:10. Instead of עֲלָמָה, the participle יוֹלֶדֶת is used, a third person feminine singular Qal active participle of יָלַד, *to bear, to bring forth*, here a mother bringing forth a child. The translation of the verse in the *NASB* is this: "Therefore He will give them *up* until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child." See also E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets*, 2 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1885), II:72, and Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), p. 174.

105 For this material see Chapter 8, subsection "Issue 1," under "Verses 15-16" in the section "Ahaz's Lack of Faith and the Lord's Sign: 7:10-17"; the summary of Chapter 8 in this chapter; and the first of the components listed in the section "The Components for an Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14," also in this chapter.

106 See the section "The Components for an Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14" in this chapter.

107 See also Chapter 8, subsection "Issue 4" under "Verses 15-16" in the section "Ahaz's Lack of Faith and the Lord's Sign: 7:10-17."

beginning of the section, "The Messianic View." That objection involved verse 15. The curds and honey used for food in verse 15 was the result of the invasion of the two kings, and the Messiah did not appear during that era. Therefore, there would also seem to be a contradiction between verse 14 and verse 15.

## The Proposed Solution

### *Vitringa's Solution*

Is there a solution to these two apparent contradictions between verse 14 and verses 15 and 16? I believe the key begins with Vitringa. As noted in the section, "The Messianic View," Vitringa suggests that in verses 15 and 16 *the language is hypothetical* and that Isaiah, though he envisions the birth of the Messiah as a remote event, makes the birth of the Messiah the measure of the current events. In other words, *if he were born now*:

- He would eat curds and honey at the time he knows to refuse evil and choose good (v. 15)
- But before he knows to refuse evil and choose good, the two kings will be no threat (v. 16)

As also pointed out by Alexander in the section, "The Messianic View," a criticism of Vitringa's solution could be advanced: the phrase, "if the Messiah were born now," is nowhere to be found in the context.<sup>108</sup> Admittedly, the use of that phrase would strengthen the Messianic view that the birth of the Messiah was definitely later than the Lord's removal of the two kings and possibly even later than Tiglath-pileser's campaign of 734-732. That criticism, however, is not very strong. Many biblical prophecies are purposely less complete than they could be. Therefore, despite that criticism, Vitringa has provided a solution to the problem of how the Messiah could appear in verses 15 and 16 when he was born much later than those events. Vitringa's solution answers not only the more general "Objection Two" at the beginning of the section, "The Messianic View," it also answers the two more specific contradictions above in "Possible Contradictions" between verses 14 and 15 and between verses 14 and 16.

### *The Adaptation of Vitringa's Solution*

Vitringa's solution to the problem of verses 15 and 16 by interpreting the text as hypothetical and using the phrase, "if he were born now," to explain how the Messiah fits in to the text, actually enabled later scholars to develop a very similar but somewhat more sophisticated solution.

*First*, the scholar chosen here is E. J. Young. Instead of interpreting verses 15 and 16 in terms of a hypothetical text and the phrase "if the Messiah were born now," he adapts Vitringa's concept into a *symbol of the infant Messiah*, clearly a similar concept in the interpretation of the text.<sup>109</sup>

Young, of course, accepts the Messianic view and has explained and defended it at some length. He begins with this fundamental requirement: if verse 14 is a prophecy of the birth of Messiah, "it is obvious that verse 15, which also has reference to the child, must be taken in a Messianic sense."<sup>110</sup> In his commentary on Isaiah he offers a definition of the relationship of the Messiah and verse 15:

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108 Nevertheless, Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:172, concludes that the view of Lowth and Vitringa "appear to be the most plausible" of all the views he presented. Regarding Hengstenberg, Alexander states that his view is "essentially identical" to Vitringa's. However, Vitringa's presentation is simpler and more to the point. Also, Alexander does believe that Hengstenberg's extension of Vitringa's view has a problem; see the presentation of Hengstenberg's view in the section, "The Messianic View." Finally, I have argued against the dual-sense and multiple-fulfillment view, which includes Lowth (see the section "The Views of Dual Sense and Multiple Fulfillment"). That leaves Vitringa.

109 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:227, has another, though slight, variation of Vitringa's solution: "When Isaiah speaks of Immanuel as eating thickened milk and honey, like all who survived the Assyrian troubles in the Holy Land; he evidently looks upon and thinks of the childhood of Immanuel as connected with the time of the Assyrian calamities." Delitzsch, of course, has more to say about this explanation and on p. 228 compares it with Vitringa's.

110 Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16, Second Article," p. 46.

The infancy of the promised Messiah is made the measure of the time that Judah will be in danger from her two enemies. This thought, namely, the duration of a period of difficulty, is expressed symbolically in that Immanuel is pictured as subsisting during his infancy on curds and honey.<sup>111</sup>

With somewhat more detail, he writes as follows, again in his journal article:

Verse 15...must be understood as teaching that the desolation of Judah, which the two northern enemies have caused, will be short and temporary. This truth is set forth by means of symbols. In fact, the infancy of the Messiah, namely, the period during which he subsists upon an unusual diet, is made the measure of the time of the desolation. "That this desolation should be temporary", says Alexander, "is expressed by representing it as coextensive with the early childhood of the person mentioned."<sup>112</sup>

Concerning verse 16:

The infancy of the Messiah serves to represent symbolically the fact that the desolation to come upon Judah will be very short-lived.

In fact, even before the child reaches the age of moral discernment (verse 16) the land, namely, Syria and Israel, will be forsaken of its two kings. However, although this is so, the Lord will bring against Ahaz days such as have never come before, days which are characterized by the designation, the king of Assyria. The prophecy, therefore, works itself into a great climax which culminates in these words, *the king of Assyria*. To Ahaz, it was a message of gloom and despair.<sup>113</sup>

Second, Vitranga's solution (interpreting the text as hypothetical and using the phrase, "if he were born now") and Young's solution ("a symbol of the infant Messiah") to the problem of verses 15 and 16 are quite similar, and are thus both appropriate to use against the same problem. Young presents the objection this way:

There is one cogent objection which may be adduced in opposition to the interpretation which has been set forth in this article. Verse 14, it may be objected, presents a prophecy of the supernatural birth of the Messiah. The prophet, in vision, beholds the virgin with child and about to bring forth a son. Verse 15, however, cannot be taken in the strictest sense as predictive prophecy. As a matter of actual fact, the true Messiah, when He was here upon earth, did not, in His infancy, eat butter and honey. The nature of the prophecy, therefore, changes; is not this a strong objection against the Messianic interpretation?<sup>114</sup>

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111 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:291. Note: the "curds and honey" have already been discussed at some length in Chapter 8, subsection "Issue 2," under "Verses 15-16" in the section "Ahaz's Lack of Faith and the Lord's Sign: 7:10-17." The conclusion was reached that the curds and honey indicated deprivation of crops and neglected tillage, not a royal diet or some type of delicacies. Young agrees with this view of the curds and honey in his earlier journal article cited in this section, but he changed his position in his commentary on page 291 to a royal diet. However, that does not effect his view of the relationship of the Messiah to verses 15 and 16.

112 Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16, Second Article," p. 47. In commenting on 8:4, Young contrasts this view of the Messiah's relationship to the current events in verses 7:15-16 to that of Maher-shalal-hash-baz in 8:4: "As in 7:15, 16 the infancy of the Messiah was made the measure of the time that Judah would suffer from her two adversaries, so here the infancy of Maher-shalal-hash-baz is made the measure of the time that would elapse before the king of Assyria would devastate Damascus and Syria."

113 Ibid., p. 48; italics original.

114 Ibid. This description of the objection seems to conclude that the Messianic view produces something confusing--or a "puzzle." Gordon J. Wenham, "Virgin," *ISBE*, IV:990, suggests that perhaps "this whole prophecy must have been a puzzle to its first hearers." Young in his response to this objection emphasizes that "the language of [some] prophecy is filled with mystery and even with obscurity. It is not simple history, written in advance, but is language of profound and beautiful symbolism, clothed in an aura of mystery" (Young's first paragraph to follow; brackets added). Oswalt uses the same description: "an aura of mystery about the Immanuel figure" (*The Book of Isaiah*, p. 212). Even Isa. 11:1 has a bit of mystery to it, and yet according to Rabbi D. H. Hertz, Isa. 11 is "the greatest and most famous of all the Messianic prophecies" (the late Chief Rabbi Dr. J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 2nd ed. [London: Soncino Press, 1981], p. 1023). The explanation to follow produces not something confusing or a puzzle but a reasonable interpretation of verses 14-16.

Young's response to this objection takes three somewhat lengthy paragraphs. But if the Messianic view is to stand, this strong objection must be answered successfully. Here are Young's three paragraphs.

In answer to this objection we would make the following remarks. It is perfectly true that verse 15 cannot, upon the interpretation which we have presented, be regarded as predictive prophecy. Rather, it takes the infancy of the promised Messiah, and makes that infancy a symbol of the short period of desolation at the time of Ahaz. This it accomplishes by picturing the future Messiah as subsisting upon a most unusual diet until He reaches the age where He will choose the good and reject the evil. There is, thus, it is true, a change in the nature of the prophecy. In verse 14 the birth of the Messiah is present to the prophet's vision. This is prediction, and in the birth of Jesus Christ it found its fulfillment. Verse 15, however, is of a different character. This fact must be freely admitted. Is this fact, however, truly an objection against the interpretation which we have been advocating? It should be noted that the language of prophecy is filled with mystery and even with obscurity. It is not simple history, written in advance, but is language of profound and beautiful symbolism, clothed in an aura of mystery. Who are we to set limits upon the categories and devices which the prophet might employ? We are not to define and circumscribe the bounds which must contain the prophetic inspiration; rather we are to come to that prophecy, as indeed to all sacred Scripture, ready to accept it as it is and to yield our obedience to it.

At any rate, whether we like it or no, Isaiah did utter in one verse a direct prediction and in the subsequent verse make the subject of that prediction a symbol of the situation existing in his own day. That he did so cannot really be brought forth as an objection against the prophecy as it stands. No doubt it is difficult, with our prosaic western minds, to grasp the rich symbolism of the Old Testament prophecies as we should. But we should be able to see that the procedure of the prophet, when studied in the light of all Scripture, was perfectly justifiable. One point at least we may stress. The interpretation which is here presented has not been obtained at the expense of altering the text, warrant for which, in our opinion, is entirely lacking.

Isaiah therefore, as a true prophet, beholds in a dim and strange vision an unmarried woman who is with child and about to bring forth a son, and who will call that son, Immanuel. The infancy of this child will symbolize the fact that the desolation of Judah at Ahaz' time will be short-lived, for the two enemy kings will soon be rendered powerless. However, to Ahaz a far greater danger will come, namely, the King of Assyria. The prophecy, thus, is fraught with great relevance for the time of Ahaz. Only he who has the eyes to see, however, will understand that relevance. And so it is with every proclamation of God's truth; only he who has the eye to see will discern its true import and relevance. It may very well be that even the prophet himself had but a dim understanding of the import of his prediction. He may at least have understood that he was speaking of the coming Messiah and the future salvation. In the light of the fulfillment, however, the heart of the prophecy becomes clear. For in all history, there is but one fulfillment of Isaiah's strange words, and that took place when the virgin Mary brought forth her first-born Son and laid Him away in the manger.<sup>115</sup>

In verse 14 Isaiah definitely gives a predictive prophecy, or better, direct prophecy, of the actual, supernatural birth of the Messiah. By contrast, Young three times, once in each of these three paragraphs, argues that the infant Messiah is described in verses 15 and 16, not as direct prophecy according to which the infant Messiah would be physically present during the time of Ahaz, but rather as a symbol. In verses 15 and 16, Isaiah makes the *subject* of his prediction a *symbol of the infant Messiah in the situation existing in Isaiah's own day*. Or in other words, the activity of the Messiah in his infancy symbolizes the fact that the danger from the two kings will be short-lived.

As already mentioned, Vitringa's description of a solution and Young's description of a solution both clearly reflect a similar concept in the interpretation of the text. However, Young's is a later version of the solution, and identifying the nature of Isaiah's prediction in verses 15 and 16 by making the infancy of the Messiah a symbol,

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115 Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16, Second Article," pp. 48-50. Twice in these three paragraphs Young referred to Jesus and the virgin Mary. These actual names of the Messiah and his virgin mother are nowhere mentioned in the Tanakh. I reserve that subject for Chapter 14, which discusses the New Testament citation of Isa. 7:14 in Matt. 1:22-23.

as Young has done, is probably the better description of that prediction.

## My Conclusion

Three categories of views on Isaiah 7:14-16 have been addressed in this chapter. Each was defined and presented in some detail.

- The views of dual sense and multiple fulfillment
- The Jewish views
- The Messianic view

Several problems in the views addressed in the first two categories were noted. Alleged problems by those not accepting the Messianic view were noted and answered. Therefore, I accept the Messianic view. The key points and conclusions in this view are as follows:

- All three verses, Isaiah 7:14-16, refer directly and exclusively to the Messiah.
- The critical points in Isaiah 7:14 are as follows:
  - Isaiah in verse 14 sees the sign with all of its parts in a vision from the Lord, and he sees the events of the vision as present.
  - Isaiah sees "a pregnant maiden," a pregnant **עַלְמָה**, a young unmarried girl who has never married. This pregnant girl is a virgin, and Isaiah is seeing a miracle of the Lord.
  - The sign itself, the pregnant **עַלְמָה** and the birth of her son, Immanuel, will occur at some point after the Lord removes Rezin and Pekah.
  - According to Isaiah 8:8, Judah is said to be owned by Immanuel.
  - No birth of a boy named Immanuel is recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures or in the extant literature of the intertestamental period.
  - No miracle consisting of a virgin giving birth to a child is recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures or in the extant literature of intertestamental period.
  - That brings the virgin, her pregnancy, and the birth of Immanuel to the New Testament era.
  - As the "child"/"son" in Isaiah 9 and the "shoot from the stem of Jesse" in Isaiah 11 refer to the Messiah, so Immanuel in Isaiah 7 is also the Messiah.
  - The virgin mother of the Messiah is not identified in the Tanakh (Old Testament), and there is no evidence that Isaiah himself knew who the mother would be.
- The critical points in Isaiah 7:15-16 are as follows:
  - Immanuel/Messiah was not born and was not physically present during the time of Ahaz.
  - Verses 15 and 16 can be interpreted in terms of a hypothetical text as if the Messiah were born then to serve as a measure of current events.
  - Verses 15 and 16 can also be interpreted in terms of a symbol of the infant Messiah in the situation

existing in Isaiah's own day.

It is important to note that the actual names of the Messiah and his virgin mother are nowhere mentioned in the Tanakh (Old Testament). I reserve that subject for Chapter 14, which discusses the New Testament citation of Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:22-23.

# Chapter 13 Appendix

## Dates of the Events

### Immanuel in Chapter 7

With regard to 7:14-16, based on the dates presented in Chapter 5, "The Syro-Ephraimite War,"<sup>116</sup> the meeting of Isaiah and Ahaz described in Isaiah chapter 7 took place in early to mid 734. The war with Rezin and Pekah took place from late 734 to early 733. With the arrival of Tiglath-pileser, the two kings returned to Syria and Israel. The Assyrian king then campaigned against both kingdoms during 733-732, with Damascus falling in 732.

There are several points derived from the conclusions reached in Chapter 8 of this book:<sup>117</sup>

- Two or three years is sufficient for a child to learn that it is right to obey his parents and wrong to disobey them.
- Eating curds and honey for the primary diet in Judah would begin in late 734 and early 733 due to the devastation of Judah at the hands of Rezin and Pekah, namely, the Syro-Ephraimite War.
- For a boy born shortly after the meeting with Ahaz in 734, the earliest he could be eating curds and honey would be 732 (two years old) or 731 (three years old).

This information enables interpreters to attach a rough year, or even a rough part of a specific year, to the time when the newborn Immanuel could eat curds and honey (verse 15) and when the two kings (Rezin and Pekah) would no longer be a threat to Judah (verse 16).

These calculations do not effect the view taken in this chapter placing the actual birth of Immanuel in the New Testament era. They simply, but roughly, determine when those in Judah would begin to eat curds and honey and when the two kings would leave Judah. The birth of Immanuel is used for the calculations as if he had been born at that time (Vitranga) or by placing in him in the text as a symbol (Young).

### Maher-shalal-hash-baz in Chapter 8

Rashi, Scherman, Young, and Cheyne all agree that this event described in chapter 8 chronologically occurs after the meeting of Isaiah and Ahaz in chapter 7. No one really knows when Isaiah received the directive from the Lord in 8:1-2. Franz Delitzsch opens his discussion on verses 1 and 2 as follows:

In the midst of the Syro-Ephraimite war, which was not yet at an end, Isaiah received instructions from God to perform a singular prophetic action.<sup>118</sup>

If the meeting of Isaiah and Ahaz took place in early to mid 734, and if the Syro-Ephraimite War took place from late 734 to early 733 as suggested above and in Chapter 5, then this call to Isaiah in 8:1 would likely be a bit earlier in 733 while the Syro-Ephraimite War was still going strong. However, it is also unknown when, after constructing the tablet (8:1), Isaiah "approached the prophetess" (8:3). Logic would seem to suggest that it was

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116 See section "Tiglath-pileser's Campaign of 734-732."

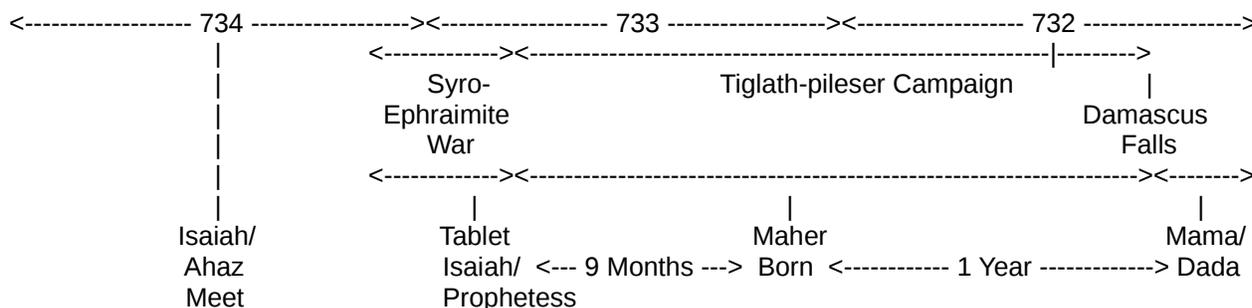
117 Chapter 8, subsections "Issue 2" and "Issue 4," under "Verses 15-16" in the section "Ahaz's Lack of Faith and the Lord's Sign: 7:10-17." Those conclusions are also summarized in this chapter in the section "The Conclusions Reached In the Preceding Chapters," subsection "Chapter 8: The Immediate Context of Isaiah 7:14."

118 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:228.

immediately.<sup>119</sup> The birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz after nine months would then be in late 733 after the beginning of Tiglath-pileser's campaign against Damascus and Samaria.

According to verse 4, Damascus and Samaria would fall "before the boy knows how to cry out 'My father' or 'My mother'" (8:4). Damascus fell at some point in 732. Note the "before." How long does it take before a new-born child "knows how to cry out 'My father' or 'My mother'"? According to the Web site webmd.com, roughly one year.<sup>120</sup> But based on the word "before," this year must extend beyond the fall of Damascus.

The events and numbers in the above two paragraphs can be pictured graphically:



The lengths are correct for the Syro-Ephraimite War and for Tiglath-pileser's campaign against Damascus and Samaria, but the exact locations to place the beginning and end of those two events cannot be precise. Neither can the placement of the three events described in 8:1-4 (conception, birth, and "mama/dada") be precise. However, based on all the extra-biblical data cited in chapters 1-12 of this book, and the descriptions in the Bible itself, I suggest this graphical scheme is roughly accurate.

One point about the boy, Maher-shalal-hash-baz: the fall of Damascus and the capture of Samaria will occur before he is about one year old and able to "cry out "My father" or "My mother."

119 Delitzsch takes this view and writes, "The birth of Maher-shalal took place about three-quarters of a year later than the preparation of the tablet" (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:230). Three quarters of a year, of course, is nine months, so Isaiah's wife, according to Delitzsch, became pregnant very soon after Isaiah constructed the tablet. Young agrees: "After the announcement made in the first verse, the wife of Isaiah became pregnant, and later gave birth to a child" (*The Book of Isaiah*, I:303).

120 "Around her first birthday, she'll start using these words properly to refer to you." This is the Web page: <https://www.webmd.com/parenting/baby/the-language-leap-from-ga-ga-to-mama>. Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:185-86, notes that some scholars think the time is three years, while most "later writers" suggest one year. Alexander himself seems to prefer one year but adds, "This very difference of judgment seems to show that the description was intended to be somewhat indefinite, equivalent perhaps to our familiar phrase a year or two, within which time we have reason to believe that the event occurred."