

## *Chapter 8*

### *The Immediate Context of Isaiah 7:14*

With reference to a given passage, the context has been loosely defined to be that which immediately precedes and follows. More accurately, it is the series of statements, arguments, and illustrations connected with the passage whose meaning is sought...The sober interpreter, then, must have constant reference to the context, as well for the signification of particular terms as for the general sense of the passage under consideration. To interpret without regard to the context is to interpret at random; to interpret contrary to the context is to teach falsehood for truth. --E. P. Barrows

#### **The Immediate Context of Isaiah 7:14 and Its Structure**

It was argued in Chapter 6 that the broader context of Isaiah 7:14 was the well-defined unit of Isaiah chapters 7-12. However, it is at least equally important to define the immediate context of a verse to be interpreted. The immediate context generally has a greater influence on the exegetical process to determine the meaning of that verse. The first order of business is to examine how various scholars subdivide chapters 7-12.

Gleason Archer divides chapters 7-12 into four sections, which he calls "sermons":<sup>1</sup>

- I. Rejection of Immanuel by worldly wisdom (7:1-25)
- II. Speedy deliverance foreshadowing the coming Deliverer (8:1-9:6)
- III. Inexorable doom of exile for proud Samaria (9:7-10:4)
- IV. Vanquishing of the false empire (Assyria): the glorious empire to come (10:5-12:6)

E. J. Young takes the section containing Isaiah 7:14 to be chapters 6-12 and divides this section as follows:<sup>2</sup>

- I. Isaiah's vision of the Holy God (6:1-13)
- II. The crisis and the promise (7:1-25)
- III. The Assyrian invader (8:1-9:6)
- IV. The threat of Assyria (9:7-10:34)
- V. Judah's hope in the Messiah (11:1-12:6)

George Robinson and Roland Harrison divide chapters 7-12 as follows:<sup>3</sup>

- I. Prophecy of Immanuel, history and prediction intermingled (7:1-9:6)
- II. Announcement to Israel of accumulated wrath and impending ruin (9:7-10:4)
- III. Assyria is declared to be the instrument of the Lord, the rod of his anger (10:5-34)
- IV. Israel's return from exile and a vision of Messiah's reign of eternal peace (11-12)

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1 Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 326; the verse numbers follow the Hebrew text.

2 Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), I:23-24.

3 George L. Robinson and Roland K. Harrison, "Isaiah," *ISBE*, II:887.

John Oswalt proposes the following division for chapters 7-12:<sup>4</sup>

- I. Children, signs of God's presence (7:1-9:6)
- II. Measured by God's standard (9:7-10:4)
- III. Hope despite destruction (10:5-11:16)
- IV. The song of trust (12)

The survey of these four scholars ends up in a tie! Archer and Young take chapter 7 as the first of the definable units, while Robinson/Harrison and Oswalt extend this first unit to 9:6. There is no doubt that the births of Maher-shalal-hash-baz in 8:1-4 and the "child" in 9:5-6 are relevant to the interpretation of 7:14, but this extension seems to be a bit large to classify as the *immediate* context of 7:14. Therefore, as a working hypothesis, chapter 7 alone is taken as this immediate context.

## The Subdivisions of Chapter 7

The next step is to consider how chapter 7 itself can be subdivided. J. A. Alexander states that the "common division" of chapter 7 consists of two subdivisions:<sup>5</sup>

Verses 1-16: The promise of deliverance from Syria and Israel

Verses 17-25: The threat of worse evils to be brought on Judah by Assyria in whom they trusted

This is a workable scheme but perhaps too broad. Young and Oswalt offer three subdivisions. Although they differ on the major divisions of chapters 7-12, they do agree on how chapter 7 should be subdivided: verses 1-9, 10-17, and 18-25. The two authors give different names to these subdivisions, but I would suggest the following:

Verses 1-9: The Lord's word of assurance to Ahaz

Verses 10-17: Ahaz's lack of faith and the Lord's sign<sup>6</sup>

Verses 18-25: The coming desolation of Judah

## The Lord's Word of Assurance to Ahaz: 7:1-9

According to the chronology developed in Chapter 5, the key events related to chapter 7 occurred 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 Tiglath-pileser.
- Also in 734, when Ahaz refused to join the coalition, the two armies of 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 their goal of replacing 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

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4 John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), pp. 61-62.

5 Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1870), I:156.

6 Verse 17 can be taken as the culmination of verses 13-16, which relate what is in store for Ahaz as a result of his rejection of the Lord, or it can be taken as the introduction of the coming desolation of Judah by Assyria in verses 18-25.

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.

### Verse 1

Now it came about in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not conquer it.

This verse gives a summary of the high points of the Syro-Ephraimite War<sup>7</sup> and coincides closely with 2 Kings 16:5. It first notes the alliance of Rezin and Pekah, then identifies their ultimate goal of capturing Jerusalem itself, and finally describes the end of the war in their failure to capture Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup>

### Verse 2

When it was reported to the house of David, saying, "The Arameans have camped in Ephraim," his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind.

At this point the text goes back in time to the beginning of the events that threatened Judah. Ahaz ("the house of David")<sup>9</sup> was told about the Syro-Ephraimite alliance<sup>10</sup> and their plans to invade Judah. From Isaiah's statement

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7 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:268.

8 The verb **יָבֹל**, "prevail" in "but could not prevail against it" (*Jerusalem Bible*), is a 3ms Qal perfect. For the singular, "he could not prevail against it," Alexander offers three possible explanations: "he (put by a common license for *they*, or meaning *each of them*, or referring to Rezin as the principal confederate)" (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:156-57).

9 The expression "house of David" in this verse is often taken to mean the king and the royal family or the king and his court (e.g., Henderson, Skinner, Cheyne, Alexander, Young, and Oswalt). It would seem, however, that its primary reference, at least here, is to Ahaz himself as king. The pronominal suffix on "heart" and "people" is the masculine singular **־ו** --"his heart" and "the heart of his people." Also, in his comments on v. 2, E. Henderson states that the house of David "signifies the royal family of which Ahaz was the *representative*, which sufficiently accounts for the **ו** in **לְבָבוֹ**

and **עַמּוֹ**" (*The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 2nd ed. [London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1857], p. 56; emphasis added).

Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:157, agrees and states that the "his" in "his heart" refers to Ahaz "as the chief and representative of the house of David." The phrase, "house of David," is used in Jer. 21:12: "O house of David, thus says the LORD: administer justice every morning..." J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), p. 470, takes "house" here to mean *dynasty*. Also in this case the following imperative verb **וַיַּעַשׂ**, "do" or "administer," is *plural* (3rd person masculine plural Qal imperative). However, Thompson goes on to explain who is responsible to administer justice according to this commandment to the "house of David": "The fundamental responsibility of a king to administer justice (*mišpāt*) is stated." So the primary focus of the phrase "house of David" can at times be the current Davidic king, and the evidence in Isa. 7:2 indicates that "house of David" in this verse refers to Ahaz.

10 There has been much discussion of the verb **נָחַת** (3fs Qal perfect) among commentators. The *NASB* translates the phrase, "the Arameans *have camped* in Ephraim" (emphasis added). According to *BDB*, p. 628, the basic meaning of the verb is *to rest*, and *BDB* lists Isa. 7:2 under the definition "*to rest, to settle down and remain*." According to Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 192, n. 1, the literal translation would be "Aram has settled down upon Ephraim," but he adds that this use of the verb is "not paralleled elsewhere in the OT." There is also the problem of this feminine verb with a masculine subject--"Aram" (**אַרָּם**); see the explanation by Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:158.

in verse 6, it would seem that Ahaz also knew about their plot to dethrone him and make Tabeel king in Jerusalem. This news created great fear in the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people.

### Verses 3-7

3 Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field

In verse 3 the Lord commissions Isaiah<sup>11</sup> to take his son, Shear-jashub, and go to Ahaz "at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field."<sup>12</sup> The message he was to deliver to Ahaz had two parts: (1) he was not to fear because (2) Rezin and Pekah would not succeed in their plan, verses 4-7:

4 and say to him, 'Take care and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands, on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. 5 Because Aram, *with* Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has planned evil against you, saying, 6 "Let us go up against Judah and terrorize it, and make for ourselves a breach in its walls and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it," 7 thus says the Lord GOD: "It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass.

The first real interpretive question arises in verse 3: why was Isaiah told to bring Shear-jashub? How was his presence related to Isaiah's mission? Was there some message for Ahaz contained in the meaning of his name ("a remnant will return")? From 8:18 this would seem likely. Oswalt points to the difficulty here:

Evidently that name was to have significance for Ahaz, but it is never specified what that significance was. As a result, a great deal has been written about the possible interpretations. Chiefly, these revolve about whether the implications of the name are positive or negative.<sup>13</sup>

The following is a summary of the issues involved. The second, third and fourth issues listed assume that Isaiah was told by the Lord to bring Shear-jashub because his presence, and specifically his name, is meant to carry a message for Ahaz.

1. Was Isaiah instructed to bring Shear-jashub as part of his message to Ahaz or for some other reason?
2. Does the concept of "return" refer to a return to the land or a return to the Lord?
3. The name Shear-jashub has a twofold implication, one negative and one positive: it simultaneously limits the "return" to a "remnant" but nevertheless gives assurance that the number is not zero. Which aspect of the name was intended as the message to Ahaz--the negative or the positive implication?
4. What was that message for Ahaz?

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Suffice it to offer here George Gray's conclusion of "what the context here seems to require, the friendly and temporary halt of an army in the country of allies" (*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. 116.

- 11 Isaiah in this verse refers to himself in the third person. He also uses the third person in chapters 37 and 38. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:270, suggests that he uses the third person in order to make himself less conspicuous.
- 12 Before Hezekiah's tunnel was completed, Jerusalem had no completely dependable source of water inside the city, and Ahaz was probably inspecting the city's water supply in case of siege or possibly to cut off a supply of water from the invaders, as Hezekiah did with the advance of Sennacherib (2 Chron. 32:1-4). However, the location of this pool is unknown. Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:158, states that it "has been placed by different writers upon almost every side of Jerusalem." Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 199, a modern scholar, seems to prefer the place where the Kidron and Tyropoeon Valleys come together on the southeast side of Jerusalem.
- 13 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 199.

(1) Concerning the first issue, Cocceius suggested that at least one reason for bringing Shear-jashub is that he might at a young age learn the duties of a prophet.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, according to T. K. Cheyne, "Shear-jashub went as a witness, either to chronicle events in his memory, or for his own sake as a means of religious education."<sup>15</sup> It would seem to me, however, that the Lord would hardly direct Isaiah to bring his son to the meeting with Ahaz for such reasons, much less include it in Scripture.

(2) Both Henderson and Skinner<sup>16</sup> quite adamantly assert that "return" here means return to the Lord, not return from exile, and cite 10:21-22 in support of their view. As Skinner puts it, "'remnant-shall-turn,' i.e., 'turn to Jehovah,' not 'return from exile' (ch. x. 22)." It is quite clear, of course, that "a remnant will return...to the mighty God" in 10:21. However, it is equally clear that "the remnant of his people" make a return to the land as part of the messianic hope in 11:11. Therefore, the precise meaning of a returning remnant must be determined by the immediate context, which in this case is 7:1-9.

(3) Verses 7:4-9 make it clear that Isaiah was sent to Ahaz to deliver the Lord's message that Rezin and Pekah will not succeed in their plans for Judah and Jerusalem and thereby encourage Ahaz to trust the Lord: "do not fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands" (v. 4); "it shall not stand nor shall it come to pass" (v. 7).<sup>17</sup> Based on this purpose of Isaiah's mission, it would seem highly likely that the presence of Shear-jashub with his significant name was intended to be a positive sign to Ahaz.<sup>18</sup>

(4) Concerning the actual message conveyed to Ahaz by Shear-jashub's name, one version of the interpretation in the previous paragraph is given by Young:

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.<sup>19</sup>

Gary Smith also sees the presence of Shear-jashub as a sign of hope for Ahaz, but instead of taking the remnant to be those remaining in Judah, he takes it to refer to Syria and Israel returning to Damascus and Samaria with only a remnant of their armies:

Isaiah's spoken message challenged Ahaz to trust God and not to fear the armies of Israel and Syria (Isa. 7:4-9). Since the word of the Lord in 7:7-9 announces the defeat of the king's enemies, it seems that Shear-jashub is a sign that Israel and Syria will be defeated and will return to their own land with only a remnant remaining (Tiglath-pileser III defeated both nations; cf. 2 K. 15:29; 16:7, 9). The use of the phrase "only a remnant of them will return" in Isa. 10:20-22 is distinct from 7:3-9 and Isaiah's son is not present.<sup>20</sup>

This view is closely tied to the immediate context and seems to me the best interpretation. Although Young's interpretation represents Shear-jashub as a positive sign to Ahaz, it portrays Judah as a mere "remnant." Although it would tell Ahaz that Judah will not be annihilated, this would be small encouragement indeed!

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14 Cited by Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:159.

15 T. K. Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols., (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1880), I:42.

16 Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 57; J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1896), p. 51.

17 NASB. Note the two divine names, *Adonai Yahweh*, used together in v. 7. According to Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:161, "The accumulation of divine names is, as usual, emphatic, and seems here intended to afford a pledge of the event, derived from the supremacy and power of the Being who predicts it."

18 A number of commentators take the message of Shear-jashub's name to Ahaz to be simultaneously both positive and negative (e.g., Delitzsch, Skinner, Gray, and Oswalt).

19 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:271.

20 Gary V. Smith, "Shear-jashub," *ISBE*, IV:456. Alexander McCaul, *The Messiahship of Jesus: The Concluding Series of the Twelve Lectures on the Prophecies* (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1852), pp. 179-80, also takes the presence of Shear-jashub as an intentional positive sign to Ahaz. However, he does not specify whether the "remnant" refers to Judah or to the what will be left of the armies of Syria and Israel.

Moreover, the Rezin/Pekah alliance did not reduce Judah to a remnant. Also, it is difficult to say whether the devastation brought on Judah by Tiglath-pileser was tantamount to reducing Judah to a "remnant."<sup>21</sup>

### Verses 8-9

8 For the head of Aram is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Rezin (now within another 65 years Ephraim will be shattered, so *that it is* no longer a people), 9 and the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.

These verses constitute the initial message from the Lord that Isaiah brought to Ahaz. As just noted, it challenges Ahaz to trust God and not to fear Syria and Israel because their plans against Ahaz and Judah will not succeed. However, verses 8-9 present three significant interpretive questions in this section of chapter 7. Verses 7-9 are translated as follows in the *NASB*:

Thus says the Lord God: "It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass. For the head of Aram is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Rezin (now within another 65 years Ephraim will be shattered, so *that it is* no longer a people), and the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you will not believe, you surely shall not last."

### *Issue 1*

What did the Lord (through Isaiah) mean by the 65 years in verse 8: "Within another 65 years Ephraim will be shattered, so *that it is* no longer a people"? What are the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem*? According to Henderson, "This has generally been considered a *locus vexatissimus*, both on account of the position of the words, and the chronological difficulty connected with the specific number of years."<sup>22</sup>

This statement containing the 65 years is translated in the *Jerusalem Bible* as "Within sixty five years Efrayim shall be broken in pieces, and no more a people." The *NASB* gives substantially the same translation: "Within another 65 years Ephraim will be shattered, so *that it is* no longer a people." The text, therefore, states that in 65 years the nation of Israel will cease to exist as a separate people. Now it is well known that the fall of Samaria to Shalmaneser with the resulting massive deportation of Israelites to Assyria (2 Kgs. 17:1-6) took place in 723 or 722. So the problem is this: if the meeting between Isaiah and Ahaz took place in 734, as is likely, this represents a period of only 11 or 12 years to the fall of Samaria, not 65 years.

A number of scholars point to Archbishop James Usher (1581-1656) for the origin of a view, still the commonly accepted view today, that explains the reference to 65 years.<sup>23</sup> The essence of the view is that after the strokes or blows inflicted upon Israel by Tiglath-pileser and Shalmaneser, a third and final stroke was brought by Esarhaddon (681-669). Those supporting this view include Lowth, Hengstenberg, Henderson, Alexander, Drechsler, Delitzsch, Cheyne, Skinner, Gray, and Young.<sup>24</sup>

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21 See Isa. 7:17-25; 2 Chron. 28:16, 20-25.

22 Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 59. *Locus vexatissimus* means "a most vexing or perplexing passage."

23 E.g., Henderson, Alexander, Cheyne, and Skinner. The monumental work by Bishop Usher (sometimes spelled Ussher) has recently, and for the first time, been translated into English from the original Latin: *The Annals of the World* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2003). The original title of the book was *Annales Veteris Testamenti, a prima mundi origine deducti, una cum rerum Asiaticarum et Aegyptiacarum chronico, a temporis historici principio usque ad Maccabaicorum initia producto* ("Annals of the Old Testament, deduced from the first origins of the world, the chronicle of Asiatic and Egyptian matters together produced from the beginning of historical time up to the beginnings of the Maccabees"). The work was originally published in 1650.

24 Both Skinner and Gray believe that this clause containing the 65 years is a gloss (Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 54; Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX*, p. 119). Gray suggests that the clause was added by "a seventh century scribe," making the prophecy *ex eventu* (after the event). Cheyne suggests that it might have been written later by Isaiah or by a "pious student and editor of Isaiah" (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:44). These three commentators simply agree that the theory of Archbishop Usher explains the

Delitzsch, Alexander, and Young present this view in the following way. They summarize the three successive, albeit separate, events that complete the full annihilation of the Northern Kingdom of Israel as follows.<sup>25</sup>

1. *The invasion by Tiglath-pileser in 733 or 732.* This was the response of Tiglath-pileser to Ahaz's plea for help. He completely conquered Syria (2 Kgs. 16:7-9), brought the northern part of Israel (Galilee and Gilead) into the Assyrian Empire together with the deportation of many or most in that area to Assyria (2 Kgs. 15:29), and set up the puppet king, Hoshea, in Samaria<sup>26</sup> over what was left of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (2 Kgs. 15:30).
2. *The conquest of Samaria by Shalmaneser in 723/722.* He deported many more Israelites to Assyria in 723/722 (2 Kgs. 17:1-6). The downfall of the government of the Northern Kingdom of Israel clearly occurred here, but that is not to say that there was no longer a recognizable territory of Israel or people of Israel, though small in number.<sup>27</sup>
3. *The importation of non-Israelites by Esarhaddon and possible deportation of Israelites.* The full "shattering" of the the people of Israel so that they are "no more a people" was not yet complete. "Even after this event [Shalmaneser's conquest], however, the nation Israel was yet regarded as standing" (Young; brackets added).<sup>28</sup> The final stroke was "the carrying away of the last remnant of the Ephraimitish population, and the planting of colonies from Eastern Asia by Esarhaddon" (Delitzsch; 2 Kgs. 17:24;<sup>29</sup> Ezra 4:2<sup>30</sup>).

This view can take two different forms, depending on whether or not 65 is taken as an exact number. The view also has several problems, although perhaps not necessarily decisive.

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belief of the Isaianic "editor." The others in this list accept the integrity of the text.

- 25 F. Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols., in 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:211-12; Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:162; and Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:275.
- 26 See Tiglath-pileser's claim to this effect in ANET, p. 284.
- 27 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:162-63, states that "the invasion by Tiglath-pileser, and the deportation by Shalmaneser are included [in the 65-year period] but the term of the sixty-five years is assigned, because with it expired every possible pretension of the ten tribes to be reckoned as a state or nation, though the real downfall of the government had happened many years before." Robert Lowth, *Isaiah: A New Translation with A Preliminary Dissertation and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory* (Boston: Joseph T. Buckingham, 1815), p. 227-28, citing "Dr. Jubb," suggests that after the kingdom itself had been destroyed by Shalmaneser, the Israelites who yet remained in the land "though small in number, yet might keep up some form of being a people, by living according to their own laws..."
- 28 Cf. the statement by Schrader cited by Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:44: "Even after 722 Samaria was 'quite a respectable power, with which the Assyrian kings had to reckon.'"
- 29 Delitzsch, along with other scholars (e.g., Henderson, Alexander, and Young), takes 2 Kgs. 17:24 to be a reference to the same resettlement described in Ezra 4:2. However, due to the mention of King Esarhaddon in Ezra 4:2, there is no question that it points to the final resettlement that "shattered" the people of Israel. However, 2 Kgs. 17:24 mentions no king. Verses 1-6 describe the fall of Samaria to Shalmaneser, with verse 6 referring to the *deportation* of Israelites. Then follows in verses 7-23 what seems likely to be an interlude detailing Israel's sins and the reason for its fall. Verse 24 likely returns to the description of the fall in verse 6 and refers to the *importation* of non-Israelites. Verses 6 and 24 certainly appear to refer to the same event. See also Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 333 as well as n. 96.
- 30 Esarhaddon is sometimes identified with "Osnapper" (also spelled "Asenapper") in Ezra 4:10, of whom it is also said that he brought foreign settlers into "the city of Samaria." However, according to William S. LaSor, "Esarhaddon," *ISBE*, II:128, most scholars take Osnapper to be Ashurbanipal (669-626). LaSor also states in his entry, "Ashurbanipal," that "it is uncertain whether the biblical name is derived from the Assyrian form known to us" (*ISBE*, I:321). For one theory of the derivation of Osnapper, see Jeffrey Tigay, "Asenapper," *EncJudaica*, III:693.

## Problem 1

Nowhere in the Bible or in the extant Assyrian records is it explicitly stated that Esarhaddon deported Israelites from Samaria. Ezra 4:2 does state that he resettled non-Israelites in the general area, although the city of Samaria is not specifically mentioned:

Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, importations are normally preceded by deportations of the native population. Also, even if Esarhaddon did not deport any Israelites, this in itself does not invalidate this view that he is the third component of the full destruction of Ephraim. Resettling many non-Israelites into the area of the former Northern Kingdom could certainly cause Israel to cease to exist as a separate, identifiable people.

## Problem 2

Proponents of this view, reaching back at least to Robert Lowth,<sup>32</sup> connect this importation (and possible deportation of Israelites still remaining in the regions of the former kingdom) with the exile of Manasseh (697/696 - 643/642), king of Judah, to Babylon recorded in 2 Chronicles 33:10-13. Arguing that it was Esarhaddon who had Manasseh carried off to Babylon, it is then concluded that at that same time and while in that general area he brought about the final devastation of Israel.

As Esarhaddon was then in the neighborhood of Samaria, it is highly probable, that he did then carry away the last remains of Israel; and brought those strangers thither, who mention him as their founder, Ezra iv. 2.<sup>33</sup>

However, when and by whom Manasseh was carried off to Babylon is much debated. Both Esarhaddon (681-669) and Ashurbanipal (669-627) campaigned successfully against Egypt and could have taken Manasseh prisoner, sending him off to Babylon.<sup>34</sup> LaSor states that it might have taken place under Ashurbanipal but considers Esarhaddon more likely.<sup>35</sup> Wood points out that the main argument for Esarhaddon is that he specifically mentions Manasseh second in a list of 22 kings, describing them as vassals whom he "required personally to bring valuable building materials to Nineveh in 678 B.C."<sup>36</sup> Esarhaddon records the event as follows:

I called up the kings of the country Hatti [Syria and its surrounding kingdoms] and (of the region) on the other side of the river (Euphrates) (to wit): Ba'lu, king of Tyre, Manasseh (*Me-na-si-i*), king of Judah (*la-ú-di*)...together 22 kings of Hatti, the seashore and the islands; all these I sent out and made them transport under terrible difficulties, to Nineveh, the town (where I exercise) my rulership, as building material for my palace...<sup>37</sup>

But this reference does not seem to describe the occasion when Manasseh was led off to Babylon with a hook in

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31 NASB.

32 Lowth, *Isaiah*, p. 227-28.

33 "Dr. Jubb," cited by Lowth, *Isaiah*, p. 227.

34 Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 365, n. 82, comments on whether Manasseh was or was not taken to Babylon: "II Chron. 33:11 states that he [Manasseh] was taken to Babylon. Some scholars believe that an error in location exists here; Babylon being substituted for Nineveh. Esarhaddon, however, rebuilt Babylon, after its destruction by his father, Sennacherib, and made it an integral part of the Assyrian domain once again. Manasseh may well have been held captive there. For texts, cf. Lukenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia* (Chicago, 1927), secs. 646, 647."

35 LaSor, "Esarhaddon, II:128 and "Ashurbanipal," I:321.

36 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 365.

37 ANET, p. 291; brackets added.

his nose and bound with bronze chains (2 Chron. 33:11). In addition, the record left by Esarhaddon states that all twenty-two kings went to Nineveh; none went to Babylon.<sup>38</sup>

Wood also gives the main argument in favor of Ashurbanipal:

In favor of Ashurbanipal is the fact that he put down a revolt of southern Mediterranean states in which Manasseh probably was involved, an occasion when such a captivity could easily have resulted. The revolt was widespread, coming to include even Babylon to the east, and it lasted over a period of five years (652-648). Since the biblical record speaks only of "captains" (*sare*) of the host effecting the captivity [of Manasseh], it may be that the Assyrian king himself was not present, which may explain why no official notice was entered in the Assyrian record.<sup>39</sup>

Both William LaSor and Donald Wiseman concur on the years during which this revolt occurred, and Wiseman agrees that it is likely that Judah was among those who plotted with Babylon against Ashurbanipal.<sup>40</sup>

Wood goes on to offer a second argument for the likelihood that Manasseh's captivity occurred during the reign of Ashurbanipal:

Furthermore, the latter view [for Ashurbanipal] better correlates with the biblical story, which implies that Manasseh's captivity came toward the close of his reign, following his many years of idolatrous practice. With the earlier occasion [under Esarhaddon], he would have reigned only seventeen of his fifty-five years when taken; while with the latter [under Ashurbanipal], about forty-six.<sup>41</sup>

Ashurbanipal's first campaign as king of Assyria was against Egypt in 667.<sup>42</sup> It is interesting that on his way to Egypt he, like Esarhaddon before him, received tribute from 22 kings, including Manasseh, again second in the list. In his own record of this campaign, Ashurbanipal states,

During my march (to Egypt) 22 kings from the seashore, the islands, and the mainland, [a list of the

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38 Curiously, LaSor, "Esarhaddon," II:128, takes this text in Esarhaddon's records to identify the most likely time for Manasseh's exile to Babylon. As argued above, however, this view does not quite work. Samuel J. Schultz and Roland K. Harrison, "Manasseh," *ISBE*, III:235, agree that it "may be incorrect" that Manasseh was taken prisoner to Babylon at the time these twenty-two kings took building supplies to Nineveh.

39 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 365; brackets added. Wood apparently based this on *WHAB*, p. 73: "Between 652 and 648 B. C. a serious revolt against Assyria occurred which was again led by Babylon. This was the probable occasion when Manasseh of Judah also revolted (II Chron. 33:10-13)." Roland K. Harrison, "Manasseh, Prayer of," *ISBE*, III:235, concurs: "Manasseh's exile may have occurred as a consequence of a revolt against Assyria in support of the viceroy of Babylon, Samaš-šum-ukīn (cf. *ANET*, p. 298), probably ca. 650 B.C." As an aside, note that Samaš-šum-ukīn was the brother of Ashurbanipal. Shortly before his death, Esarhaddon appointed his son Ashurbanipal as crown prince of Assyria and his other son Samaš-šum-ukīn crown prince of Babylonia. However, at the death of Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal claimed the supreme title and demoted his brother to "viceroy" of Babylonia. After apparently brooding over this, Samaš-šum-ukīn rebelled against his brother in 652 (LaSor, "Ashurbanipal," I:321).

40 LaSor, "Ashurbanipal," I:321; Donald J. Wiseman, "Assyria," *ISBE*, I:338.

41 Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 365; brackets added. "Dr. Jubb," cited by Lowth, *Isaiah*, p. 227, states, "The Jews in Seder Olam Rabbi, and the Tamuldist[sic], in D. Kimchi on Ezek. iv. say, that Manasseh king of Judah was carried to Babylon by the king of Assyria's captains, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11. in the twenty-second year of his reign; that is, before Christ 676, according to Dr. Blair's tables." Actually, 676 comes within a year of the chronology developed in Chapter 4 of this book for Manasseh's 22nd year. It also comes within two years of the date given by Wood (678) for the trip to Nineveh with building supplies by the twenty-two kings from "Hatti." However, 734 - 676 = 58. Lowth cites "Dr. Judd" again to argue that 65 is an exact number. It works on their scheme because Isaiah's meeting with Ahaz is taken to be 740 rather than 734. Lowth's recommended calculations have an additional problem: the arguments given by Wood place the exile of Manasseh on or about either his seventeenth or his forty-sixth year, not his twenty-second year. Other commentators (e.g., Hengstenberg, Drechsler, and Henderson) follow Lowth in taking the twenty-second year of Manasseh's reign as the year both the exile of Manasseh and the final destruction of Israel as a recognizable people occurred, both by Esarhaddon.

42 This date is given by Wiseman, "Assyria," I:338. LaSor, "Ashurbanipal," I:321, gives a date of 663, but this date could represent the end of the campaign.

kings follows] servants who belong to me, brought heavy gifts (tâ-martu) to me and kissed my feet. I made these kings accompany my army over the land--as well as (over) the sea-route with their armed forces and their ships (respectively).<sup>43</sup>

These vassals included kings from Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, and Cyprus. Manasseh's presence among them indicates that at this point early in Ashurbanipal's reign, ca. 667, he was a loyal vassal of the Assyrian king. However, according to LaSor,

The annals of Ashurbanipal leave much to be desired from the point of view of chronology, possibly because they were written down quite a few years later, and we are unable to put all the details of Ashurbanipal's campaigns in order with certainty.<sup>44</sup>

What, then, can be concluded about the exile and restoration of Manasseh?

Based on the biblical record and the Assyrian records, there is no way to answer this question with certainty. However, quite possibly Wright, Wood, Schultz, and Harrison are correct. The evidence cited seems to favor the view that Manasseh was taken prisoner to Babylon during the reign of Ashurbanipal. At the beginning of Ashurbanipal's reign, Manasseh was loyal to him. However, he likely joined Babylon in revolt and was then taken as a prisoner to Babylon after the revolt was crushed, ca. 648.<sup>45</sup> It must then simply be assumed that Manasseh, quite soon, once again professed loyalty to Ashurbanipal, perhaps relating his faithful vassalage during Ashurbanipal's first campaign in Egypt, and the Assyrian king restored him as king of Judah and a tributary of Assyria.<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that there is precedence for such a reversal being honored by Ashurbanipal.<sup>47</sup>

Regarding the final stroke or blow by which Esrahaddon finally "shattered" the people of Israel, it must be concluded that neither this act nor the 65 years mentioned in Isaiah 7:8 had any connection with the exile of Manasseh. Moreover, there is no logical reason why such a connection should be expected.

### Problem 3

For the 65 years to work out to be an exact number, this final blow by Esarhaddon would have had to occur in his final year (734 - 65 = 669). However, 669 was the year Esarhaddon began his second campaign against Egypt, and he died in Haran.<sup>48</sup> This was still far north of the northern regions of Israel, and it would also seem unlikely that he would import large numbers of foreigners to Israel on his way to conduct a major campaign against Egypt. On the other hand, this objection cannot be made if 65 is not interpreted as an exact number.

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43 ANET, p. 294; brackets added.

44 LaSor, "Ashurbanipal," I:321.

45 J. A. Thompson in commenting on 2 Chron. 33:11 states this conclusion quite succinctly: "Which king of Assyria is intended here is uncertain, but it was likely Asshur-banipal, who brought Babylon under his control in 648 B.C." (1, 2 Chronicles, vol. 9 in *The New American Commentary*, 41 vols., gen. ed. E. Ray Clendenen [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994], p. 369).

46 After relating Manasseh's exile to Babylon in 2 Chron. 33:11, verses 12-13 describe how he humbled himself and prayed to the Lord. There is an apocryphal work called "The Prayer of Manasseh," which purports to contain Manasseh's prayer while a prisoner in Babylon. 2 Chron. 33:18-19 does report that Manasseh's "prayer to his God" was recorded in "the records of the kings of Israel" and "the records of the Hozai." However, these records are no longer extant, and it is impossible to know whether the apocryphal "Prayer of Manasseh" is somehow related to them. See Harrison, "Manasseh, Prayer of," III:235-36 for more information.

47 LaSor, "Ashurbanipal," I:321, relates the following: "It is interesting to note in this connection that Ashurbanipal records that he carried the leaders of the Egyptian insurrection to Nineveh in chains (ARAB [D. D. Luckenbill, ed., *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*], II, §§ 771-74). Among these was Neco (AV Necho), who had entered into coalition with Tirhakah. Later, Neco was released and permitted to take up his rule at Sais (ANET, p. 295). This is similar to the biblical account of Manasseh's capture and subsequent restoration." It is also worthy of note that Necho retained his loyalty to Assyria to the end, when he unsuccessfully tried to save what remained of the Assyrian army from Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon at the battle of Carchemish (see 2 Kgs. 23:29-30; 2 Chron. 35:20-34).

48 LaSor, "Esarhaddon," II:128.

## Conclusion on Issue 1

The analyses of the three problems associated with the view that the third and final stroke against the Northern Kingdom of Israel was brought by Esarhaddon indicate that it is quite possibly correct, as long as 65 is not taken as an exact number. Young offers the following suggestion:

On the other hand, it may be that Isaiah is simply employing a round number, and merely intends to say that by about 670 B.C. the nation Israel would cease to exist as a separate people. If that be the case, the difficulty practically vanishes.<sup>49</sup>

This would seem to be the only conclusion possible based on the biblical data and the extant Assyrian records. Although scholars differ slightly on the dates, there is sufficient evidence that Esarhaddon was in a position to carry out the importation (and possible exportation) referred to in Ezra 4:2, and that he would have reason for doing so. Aaron Shaffer writes,

The third aspect of Assyrian imperial policy during the reign of Esarhaddon was the response to the danger of increasing Egyptian influence and intrigue among the vassal states of Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine, involving punitive campaigns against insurgent cities in 677 and 675 B.C.E. and an expedition to the Arabian desert in 676 B.C.E., and culminating in the defeat and conquest of Egypt in 671 B.C.E.<sup>50</sup>

Consistent with the dates given by Shaffer, in 677 Sidon rebelled against Assyria, and Esarhaddon subsequently destroyed it and executed the rebel king, Abdi-Milkuti.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps before or shortly after 677, other nearby kings in revolt were also dealt with in preparing for the campaign against Egypt. LaSor states that the attack on Egypt began in 675 and that it was preceded by stabilizing the Syrian region and making a treaty with king Ba'lu of Tyre.<sup>52</sup>

In connection with the destruction of Sidon, Charles Fensham makes the following observation:

We are not well informed in the OT about the time of Esarhaddon. We know, however, from a cylinder of Esarhaddon that he conquered Sidon during one of his campaigns, and it is most likely that northern Israel (Samaria) was also involved in the rebellion against the Assyrians. With such a rebellion the deportation could have taken place as the fulfillment of a curse of a vassal treaty.<sup>53</sup>

The next relevant question would be the date when the 22 vassal kings were made to take building materials to Nineveh, as recorded by Esarhaddon.<sup>54</sup> Although mentioning this event, neither LaSor nor Shaffer assign a date to it. As noted above, Wood takes the date to be 678. However, one could argue that if the 677 date is correct for

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49 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:276.

50 Aaron Shaffer, "Esarhaddon," *EncJudaica*, VI:853.

51 Both Mario Liverani, "Sidon," *ISBE*, IV:501, and the article "Sidon," *EncJudaica*, XIV:1506, written by the editorial staff, state that Sidon rebelled in 677. Wiseman writes that "king Abdi-Milkuti was executed (677), the city sacked, and its land given to Tyre" ("Assyria," I:337). The execution of a king would normally follow the fall of his city. The conclusion based on the work of these authors would be that the rebellion of Sidon was put down during the same year it began. A. Leo Oppenheim, "Esarhaddon," *IDB*, II:125, states that "energetic measures" were taken against both Sidon and Kundi in the year 677. Yet LaSor states that "Sidon was destroyed after a three-year siege" ("Esarhaddon," II:128). These dates, therefore, are inconsistent. However, it is generally admitted that it is difficult to set dates for events described in the records of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal.

52 LaSor, "Esarhaddon," II:128. Oppenheim, "Esarhaddon," II:125, also takes the date for the first Egyptian campaign to be 675. Wiseman ("Assyria," I:337) dates the beginning of the campaign against Egypt to be 671, somewhat later than LaSor and Oppenheim.

53 F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, gen. ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), pp. 66-67. For information on this cylinder, see Donald J. Wiseman, "An Esarhaddon Cylinder from Nimrod," *Iraq* 14 (Spring 1952):54-60.

54 *ANET*, p. 291.

putting down rebellions from kings in the regions of Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine, it would seem unlikely that just one year earlier 22 of them were loyal to Assyria. On the other hand, one could also argue that after being humiliated and essentially forced to humble themselves and personally undergo the difficult task of transporting building materials to Nineveh, these kings would be ripe for rebellion. So the date 678 for the trek to Nineveh is not to be dismissed lightly.<sup>55</sup>

As working hypotheses, then, one might accept the following dates:

- The date that the 22 kings from the areas of Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine were forced personally to bring building materials to Nineveh was during or about 678. According to Esarhaddon's list, Manasseh of Judah was included among these 22 kings.
- Esarhaddon subdued the revolts in the areas of Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine from 677 and 675. Based on the conclusion under "Problem 2 above," Manasseh apparently did not rebel against Assyria at this point but did so later under Ashurbanipal.
- Esarhaddon's importation of non-Israelites into the regions of Samaria, as per Ezra 4:2, and the possible deportation of almost all the remaining Israelites from the same area, likely occurred during this period of subduing revolts from kings in Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine, viz., 677-675.
- Esarhaddon's first Egyptian campaign likely took place between 675 to 671.

The question to address now is how all this helps interpret the 65 years mentioned in Isaiah 7:8. The year 677 is only 57 years from 734; 675 is 59 years. Both would seem to be a bit far off even for Young's suggested interpretation that "Isaiah is simply employing a round number, and merely intends to say that by about 670 B.C. the nation Israel would cease to exist as a separate people." The year 670 is 64 years from 734. However, since Egypt was the instigator of rebellions among various kings in Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine, the conquest of Egypt was the necessary and final work in the overall plan to subdue that entire region from Phoenicia to Egypt. A small part of that work was to deal with Samaria, but the work was not complete until Egypt was conquered. Therefore, it is possible that Isaiah's prophecy encompassed Esarhaddon's attack on that entire region, which included Samaria. According to the dates cited above as a reasonable working hypothesis, the conquest of Egypt was completed by 671. So using 65 as a "round number" brings us roughly within one to two years of when the overall attack on the region by Esarhaddon was completed. The prophecy would then simply predict that within 65 years Assyria would completely subdue that territory, which would include the final "shattering" of Ephraim described in verse 8.<sup>56</sup>

If the work of Esarhaddon finished off Samaria, what then is the implication of Ezra 4:10 where Ashurbanipal is

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55 Wiseman has a much different view on the date of the trek of the 22 kings to Nineveh and the conflict with Egypt. He states that in 672 Esarhaddon was in Nineveh and that in public ceremonies he appointed his son, Ashurbanipal, crown prince of Assyria and his other son, Samaš-šum-ukīn, crown prince of Babylonia. Wiseman also suggests that "as well as the the eastern vassals, rulers of Syria and the west whom Esarhaddon names in his annals must have been present." Although not citing where in Esarhaddon's annals this list of names is found, Wiseman lists Manasseh, king of Judah, and Ba'lu, king of Tyre, and seven other kings who are named in Esarhaddon's list of 22. He does not say how many vassals were present, but he certainly seems to be referring to the list of 22 kings from Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine. Thus Wiseman would place the forced journey to Nineveh to be in 672 or a bit earlier. Finally, Wiseman states that after these public ceremonies had taken place and Esarhaddon's two sons had been appointed crown-princes, "the way was thus open by the spring of 671 for Esarhaddon's ambitious project: the subjugation of Egypt" ("Assyria," I:337). By contrast, LaSor stated that the campaign against Egypt began in 675 ("Esarhaddon," II:128) and Shafer stated that Egypt was fully conquered by 671 ("Esarhaddon," VI:853). There dates are clearly inconsistent. The dates given in the bulleted list above remains my working hypotheses.

56 It is interesting to note that some commentators offer a list of texts to show that prophets sometimes do use exact numbers (e.g., Delitzsch: Isa. 16:14; 20:3; 21:16; 38:5; Ezek. 4:5), while others offer a list to establish the view that when prophets state a term of years they use round numbers (e.g., Skinner and Gray: 16:14; 20:3; 21:16; 23:17; Jer. 25:11). The careful reader will observe that several texts are included in both lists! This clearly demonstrates that one cannot argue that the 65 years in Isa. 7:8 is exact or that it is a round number by simply citing other prophetic texts that contain numbers.

said to have imported non-Israelites into Samaria? While there is no record of this importation in the extant sources,<sup>57</sup> such activity was standard Assyrian policy since Tiglath-pileser. If Samaria was a good candidate to receive deportees from some other location, there is no compelling reason to think that it was motivated by the presence of Israelites. At this point in time, they were no longer a recognizable people in the area in and around Samaria.

### Rashi's View

Rashi followed the calculations in *Seder Olam*,<sup>58</sup> which counted the 65 years from the prophecy of Amos in 7:11 rather than from Isaiah's meeting with Ahaz. Nossou Scherman in the *ArtScroll* commentary on Isaiah explains this view as follows:

Furthermore, their plan will never materialize because in sixty-five years, both Aram and Ephraim will be exiled by Sennacherib and disappear as independent nations (*Radak*). Actually, the exile of Ephraim and the other tribes of the Northern Kingdom did not take place sixty-five years from the day of Isaiah's prophecy in this verse [7:8], but from the time that the prophet Amos originally foretold of Israel's exile forty-seven years earlier. Accordingly, only eighteen years remained until total destruction would bring an end to the Northern Kingdom of Israel (*Rashi* from *Seder Olam*).<sup>59</sup>

This view is quite ingenious, and Rashi is to be commended for his attempt to maintain the truth of the Bible as the word of God, which is more than can be said about most modern commentaries on Isaiah. However, it has a number of problems.

First, far more is known today about biblical chronology than was known in the second century A.D., or even in Rashi's eleventh century. Amos' ministry is generally dated between 760 and 755.<sup>60</sup> Forty-seven years earlier than 734, the likely year for the meeting between Isaiah and Ahaz, is 781, which is over twenty years before the ministry of Amos began. Second, eighteen years after the meeting with Ahaz is 716, which is six or seven years after the fall of Samaria to Shalmaneser. Third, the view takes the major exile of Israel to be the work of Sennacherib. However, there is no evidence that Sennacherib ever exiled anyone from Samaria or the territories of the Northern Kingdom.<sup>61</sup> The bulk of the exile was under Shalmaneser (or as some would argue, Sargon), and the third, final but smaller, exile was under Esarhaddon.

### Issue 2

There has been much discussion of the literary form of these two verses. Together with verse 7, they are generally taken as poetic in form. Verses 8 and 9 consist of three distichs. The *NIV* prints the verses in poetic form, showing the parallelism. The *NASB* does not treat these verses as poetic; the following is the *NASB* translation showing the parallelism.<sup>62</sup>

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57 Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 73.

58 *Seder Olam*, סֵדֶר עוֹלָם, or "The Order of the World," is the name of two midrashic chronological works, *Seder Olam Rabbah* ("The Great *Seder Olam*:") and *Seder Olam Zuta* ("The Small *Seder Olam*"). *Seder Olam Rabbah* probably originated in the second century A.D., although its author (Yose b. Halafta, according to the Talmud) probably had access to much older traditions going back at least to the third century B.C. Judah M. Rosenthal, "Seder Olam," *EncJudaica*, XIV:1092, writes, "The book is written in a dry but clear Hebrew style. It is embellished with midrashic interpretations of biblical passages which are used as sources for the chronological calculations." Rosenthal also notes that "from the 11th century onward it became dominant in most of the Jewish communities in the world." The eleventh century was Rashi's century (1040-1105).

59 Nossou Scherman, *Isaiah*, in *The ArtScroll Series: The Later Prophets with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings*, gen. ed. Rabbi Nossou Scherman (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2013), p. 61; brackets added.

60 Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 318.

61 See Sennacherib's account in *ANET*, pp. 287-88.

62 Neither the *Jerusalem Bible* nor the *Stone Edition* print poetic passages in poetic form, not even the Psalms. The

For the head of Aram is Damascus  
And the head of Damascus is Rezin

(Now within another 65 years Ephraim will be shattered, *so that it is* no longer a people),

And the head of Ephraim is Samaria  
And the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.

But the parallelism is not perfect. The problem is that while the first and third distich form a perfect parallel, the middle (or final) distich is split:

Now within another 65 years Ephraim will be shattered, *so that it is* no longer a people.  
If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.

Commentators have suggested a number of different emendations of the text. Some combine the two lines and place them in what is thought to be their original position at the end; others simply treat both lines as a gloss. In opposition to these views, Henderson argues as follows:

As the two verses consist of three distichs, the first and last of which form a perfect parallel, the two middle lines have been regarded as disturbing the order, and are by some restored to what is thought to have been their original position at the conclusion; while by others they are entirely rejected as a gloss. Those who consider their occupying the place they now fill, to be the effect of inadvertent transposition on the part of some copyist, base their judgment on a principle of taste; those who consider them to be spurious, are influenced partly by this principle, and partly by the pressure of a supposed difficulty in their interpretation. Others, who are disposed to receive the distich either as it now stands, or as it may be transposed, are still dissatisfied with the number of the years, and propose, some one alteration, and some another. To these various theories, however, stands opposed the unanimous testimony of all the MSS. versions, and other sources of evidence which prove the integrity of the text. As to the alleged perfection of parallelism, numerous instances occur, in which it is broken in upon by the insertion of some sentence or sentences, which had so taken possession of the writer, that he would sacrifice taste rather than suppress them, or postpone their introduction. The present case is precisely one of these. Isaiah had the utter extinction of the ten tribes, as a people inhabiting the Holy Land, so powerfully impressed upon his mind, that before proceeding to announce, that, in the mean time, they too should not make further encroachments upon the Jewish territory, he predicts their ultimate doom. The words are, therefore, quite in their place.<sup>63</sup>

What is the meaning of the two distichs that do have the proper parallelism?

For the head of Aram is Damascus  
And the head of Damascus is Rezin

...

And the head of Ephraim is Samaria  
And the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.

At first these lines would seem to be stating the obvious, certainly not news to Ahaz! However, it must be remembered that the theme of this first section of chapter 7 is the Lord's word of assurance to Ahaz (vv. 1-9).

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*Jewish Bible 1985* does, but it rearranges the lines to make the parallelism exact. See the citation by Henderson to follow.

63 Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 59.

Therefore, these statements are designed to encourage Ahaz.

Rashi has this to say about the first statement: "In Damascus he shall be head, but not in Jerusalem."<sup>64</sup> The same explanation applies to the statement about "the son of Remaliah." Though both kingdoms would be destroyed, while still intact they will not conquer or annex Judah. Rezin and Pekah are kings of Syria and Israel and will remain kings of Syria and Israel only, and that was news designed to reassure Ahaz that he should not fear "these two stubs of smoldering firebrands." Commentators in general have followed Rashi in this interpretation.<sup>65</sup>

### Issue 3

A number of commentators question the integrity of the text here because a prediction that Ephraim would not be destroyed for 65 years would likely not allay Ahaz's fears.<sup>66</sup> However, as noted in Issue 2 above, the two distichs about the head of Aram and the head of Ephraim constitute the primary reassurance that the Lord is giving Ahaz through Isaiah: they would not take over the throne of Judah. The prediction of Israel's total and complete destruction in 65 years was perhaps added because, after all, Judah and Israel were brothers--essentially the same people.

Oswalt offers the following comment:

The statement that an event sixty-five years in the future would be of no consequence to Ahaz misses the point. Like all of us, Ahaz was required to exercise faith in the veracity of God's word *at that moment*, whether or not he lived to see the *complete* fulfillment of it.<sup>67</sup>

Alexander suggests that the 65-year clause

seems to have been added for the very purpose, as if he had said, "Ephraim is to last but sixty-five years at most, and *even while it does last* the head," &c.<sup>68</sup>

### Issue 4

Finally, what is the best translation and interpretation of the last stich in verse 9: "If you will not believe, you surely shall not last"?

As the last sentence of this section of chapter 7, the general idea is that God has now spoken and offered encouragement to Ahaz. Will he believe and put his trust in the Lord? If not, then what?

According to *BDB*, Isaiah uses a play on words here since the first verb is a Hiphil stem of  $\text{יָנַח}$ , and the second verb is a Niphal stem of the same root,  $\text{יָנַח}$ .<sup>69</sup> The verbs are parsed as follows:

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

65 After giving the meaning, "Damascus is the head of Syria *and of nothing else*" (emphasis original), Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 53, suggests, "We may even suppose (with Ewald) that Isaiah intended to add, 'but the head of Judah is Jerusalem and the head of Jerusalem is Jehovah of Hosts.'" If Isaiah intended to add this, he would have. However, it certainly is the implication he intended Ahaz to draw from what he did say.

66 E.g., Cheyne, Skinner, and Gray.

67 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 202; emphasis added.

68 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:163.

69 *BDB*, p. 53. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 193, n. 6, emphasizes the same point.

תִּאֲמַנּוּ : second person masculine plural Hiphil imperfect of אָמַן

תִּאֲמַנּוּ : second person masculine plural Niphal imperfect of אָמַן

*BDB* defines the root אָמַן as *to confirm, to support*. The Hiphil stem can mean *to stand firm* (Job 39:24), but in every other use means *to trust, to believe*. The Niphal stem can have several different nuances, but *BDB* puts Isaiah 7:9 under the meaning *to be confirmed, to be established*. The *Jerusalem Bible* follows these definitions quite closely: "If you have no faith you shall not be established."

Oswalt suggests that the wordplay could be translated something like this: "Unless you hold firm (in faith) you will not be made firm (in life)."<sup>70</sup> He also draws attention to the fact that the two verbs are plural:

Note that the verbs are plural, indicating that the choice is not only that of Ahaz, but also of the entire royal house and, to some extent, that of the nation as a whole.<sup>71</sup>

Gleason Archer summarizes Isaiah's point as follows:

Facing King Ahaz with this divine promise [in vv. 8 and 9], Isaiah was bidden to offer him one last opportunity to repent of his sinful life and put his trust in God. If he would trust the Lord's promise and desist from his unholy alliance with Assyria, Ahaz would benefit by this blow of judgment against his northern foes. Otherwise their defeat would bring him no personal deliverance, only disaster.<sup>72</sup>

The last section of chapter seven, verses 18-25, will show exactly what Tiglath-pileser does to Judah.

## Ahaz's Lack of Faith and the Lord's Sign: 7:10-17

### Verses 10-11

10 Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, 11 "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make *it* deep as Sheol or high as heaven."

Verse 10 introduces a new message from the Lord in verse 11. There are only two issues that arise in verse 10.

*First*, did the Lord himself speak directly to Ahaz, or did he again speak through Isaiah, his prophet? In verse 3 it is stated, "Yahweh said to Isaiah..." and in verse 7, "Thus says Adonai Yahweh..." It is clear from the context that God is giving the message to Isaiah that he wishes Isaiah to give to Ahaz. Thus, verse 10 is simply short for "Then Yahweh spoke again to Ahaz [through Isaiah]..." (brackets added). Oswalt uses this verse to give an excellent description of the way divine revelation works:

The statement that *the Lord spoke* is a good example of the prophetic self-understanding. The prophet does not speak for himself and he does not merely speak as bidden. Rather, when he speaks, God speaks. Yet this is not a kind of possession where the prophet is a helpless tool in a divinely manipulative hand, nor is there any evidence that it is the result of "capturing" God through a mechanical application of ritual or drugs. Rather, it is the clear-eyed recognition that the Transcendent can relate to the finite in such a way that neither the Transcendent is contained nor the finite violated. Neither God nor

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70 Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 60, calls this play on words "a beautiful instance of antanaclasis combined with paronomasia." The same play on the same verbs occurs in 2 Chron. 20:20.

71 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 193, n. 6.

72 Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *Isaiah*, vol. 2 in *The Biblical Expositor*, 3 vols., gen. ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Co., 1960), p. 133; brackets added.

Isaiah has become other than himself in the process, yet there has been such a community of thought and desire between the two personalities that Isaiah's words are God's. This relation is the foundation of a doctrine of revelation.<sup>73</sup>

*Second*, what is the significance of "again"? Was this new message given to Ahaz at a different time and place, or is it a continuation of the meeting described in verses 3-9? Henderson takes verses 10-25 to be a separate and distinct prophecy from that of verses 1-9 that deals with Assyria's attack on Judah, not Syria and Israel's attack; he argues that **יְוֹמָי** (*do again*<sup>74</sup>) shows that an interval of time had elapsed.<sup>75</sup> But according to other scholars, this is simply not true--the verb could mean either. Oswalt states,

The *again* may indicate that this confrontation between Isaiah and Ahaz took place at another place and time than that recorded in vv. 1-9 (cf. Gen. 8:10; etc)...However, *again* may merely indicate a second part of a single conversation, vv. 3-9 being the promise and vv. 10, 11 the challenge (cf. Gen 18:29; etc.). There being no evidence of a change in time or location, it seems best to see the paragraph as a direct continuation of vv. 1-9.<sup>76</sup>

Young makes an even stronger statement:

If v. 10 introduces a new oracle, unconnected with the preceding, the entire force of vv. 1-9 is lost. Verse 11 is pointless apart from a reflection upon the events of vv. 1-9.<sup>77</sup>

Therefore, verse 11 offers Ahaz the opportunity to request a sign "from the LORD your God" to confirm the promise made to Ahaz in verses 3-9.<sup>78</sup> Despite the hard heart and idolatry of Ahaz, the Lord identifies himself as the God of Ahaz, possibly because he is the representative of the house of David who currently occupies the throne.<sup>79</sup> Several issues arise.

### Issue 1

What is the significance of the word **אֵימָת** ( *'ōth*), "sign"? Commentators in general define "sign" as used in the Tanakh quite similarly. Skinner comments as follows:

The "sign"...plays a very large part in O.T. religion and with considerable latitude of meaning. The most important cases are those in which a divine revelation is attested by some striking event within the range of immediate perception through the senses.<sup>80</sup>

The word **אֵימָת**, "sign," occurs some eighty times in the Tanakh and is used in a number of senses. Kemper Fulleton suggests the following, somewhat broad, threefold classification for the use of signs in the Tanakh:

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73 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 204.

74 BDB, p. 415.

75 Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 60. More recently, John H. Walton, "Isa 7:14: What's In a Name?" *JETS* 30 (September 1987):289, also takes this view.

76 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 204. Skinner calls this "the most natural supposition" (*The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 54); see also Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:164.

77 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:278, n. 22.

78 The pronouns in "yourself" and "your God" are both masculine singular.

79 Delitzsch suggests two other, though closely related, reasons: to kindle a flame in Ahaz's hard heart or to draw his attention to the promises and duties in the Davidic covenant (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:213).

80 Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 55. Radak suggests that Isaiah ordered Ahaz to ask for a sign because the Lord was still Ahaz's God and would judge him favorably if he would trust in him (cited by Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 61).

If we examine the signs in the Old Testament according to their nature we discover an almost endless variety. It is needless to give examples. It is sufficient to observe that they may be equally well either miraculous or non-miraculous. But to be true to their quality as signs they must of course be able to arrest the attention. If we examine them according to their functions they will fall for the most part into a few well-defined groups. (1) There is first of all the great class of clearly *memorial signs*. These signs remind one of some important deed done, some fact or truth experienced, some relationship established, etc. [e.g., the rainbow, the Sabbath, circumcision, the stones set up at the Jordan, and Aaron's rod that budded (miraculous)]. (2) In the next place there are the clearly *confirmatory signs*. These are usually given to authenticate the work of some leader or the word of some prophet. Thus the miracles at the Exodus are signs to authenticate the leadership of Moses. Sometimes events of a strictly miraculous nature are accomplished in order to confirm the truth of a prophetic statement. The two classic examples are the miracle of Gideon's fleece (Judg. 6:36 ff.) and the miracle of the sundial of Ahaz (Isa. 38:7-8, 22 = II Kings 20:8,9). It is to be noticed that neither of these cases has any inherent connection with the event of whose accomplishment it is to be a pledge. At times also the confirmatory element lies in the fulfilment of a prediction of an event in the near future; the fulfilment is the sign or pledge that a prediction of an event to occur in the remoter future will also be fulfilled. In such cases the miraculous nature of the sign lies not in the nature of the events predicted but in the fulfilment of the prediction. They testify to the omniscience rather than to the omnipotence of God as that is revealed through the prophet. Sometimes such signs have no inner connection with the event of which they are pledges (cf. I Sam. 10:1-9); sometimes they have such a connection (I Sam. 2:34; Jer. 44:29-30). (3) A third class of signs may be called *prophetic signs*. These are neither memorial nor confirmatory signs, but are themselves prophecies. They might be called prophetic charades. They are signs in the sense of symbols. Such a sign is found at Isa., chap. 20, where the prophet goes naked and barefoot as a sign of the future captivity of those people who were intriguing against Assyria. In particular, symbolic names are often used as prophetic signs. Compare the names of Hosea's children (Hos., chap. 1).<sup>81</sup>

However, a more detailed classification of the uses of **אֹת** can help solve some exegetical issues. For example, in the following list, uses 3 and 5 clearly fit into Fullerton's category of confirmatory signs, but the distinction between these two is helpful in the exegesis of verse 14 in Chapter 12. The following classification scheme, then, recognizes eight uses.<sup>82</sup>

1. It may refer to luminaries to distinguish the seasons (Gen. 1:14; possibly Jer. 10:2)
2. It may refer to something discernible that represents a covenant or promise (Gen. 9:12-13; 17; 17:11; Isa. 19:20) or the Sabbath (Exod. 31:13, 17; Ezek. 20:12)
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 **מוֹפֶת** (*môphēth*), a masculine noun possibly from a root **אפֿת** and translated *wonder*.
4. It may be an appointed symbol of future events (e.g., Isa. 8:18; 20:3)
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.

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81 Kemper Fullerton, "Immanuel." *AJSLL* (July 1918):264-65; italics added and brackets added from Fullerton's footnote 1, p. 264. Emil G. Kraeling, "The Immanuel Prophecy," *JBL* 50 (1931):280, cites Fullerton's threefold classification positively.

82 These eight senses and the example verses were assembled from similar lists in *BDB*, pp. 16-17, Delitzsch (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:213-14), Skinner *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 55, Oswalt (*The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 205), and Robert L. Alden, "אֹת," *TWOT*, I:18-19.

2:34; Isa. 37:30; Jer. 44:29-30)<sup>83</sup>

6. It may be an ordinary event that acquires significance through its having been foretold or asked for (e.g., 1 Sam. 14:10)
7. It may be a "token" or symbolic means to remember a great event (Josh. 4:6), to preserve a warning from the Lord not to repeat an sinful or wicked event (Num. 16:38; 17:10), or to serve as a picture of what the Lord will do in the future (e.g., Ezek. 12:6, 11)
8. It may refer to an event, miraculous or natural, produced or used by a false "dreamer" or "prophet" to substantiate his message (Deut. 13:1-5; Isa. 44:25)

How is **אוֹת** used in verse 11? This case seems clearly to be an example of the third sense in the above list: the sign will function as contemporary confirmation that God will keep his promise he just made in verse 7: the plans of Rezin and Pekah will not stand or come to pass.<sup>84</sup> But was Isaiah asking Ahaz to request a miraculous sign? According to Oswalt, not necessarily--Isaiah was simply saying there was no limit on what Ahaz could ask.<sup>85</sup> However, since the sign suggested by Isaiah was defined as spanning the lowest depths to the highest heights, he most likely had something supernatural in mind. Young writes that "only a sign, such as the darkening of the sun or the recession of the shadow on the sundial, will convince the king."<sup>86</sup> Delitzsch is of the same opinion: "If this was to be attested to Ahaz in such a way as to demolish his unbelief, it could only be effected by a miraculous sign."<sup>87</sup>

## Issue 2

The second and third issues both deal with the second clause in verse 11. The Hebrew reads as follows:

הַעֲמֵק שְׂאֵלָה אִזְ הַגְּבִיָּה לְמַעְלָה:

Issue 2 has to do with the word **שְׂאֵלָה**, used in the first description of the sign. The word is in pause<sup>88</sup> because of the *Zāqēph Qātōn* accent ( : ) over the Aleph ( א ).<sup>89</sup> There are two quite different possibilities for translating

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83 Delitzsch, *ibid.*, states this use in an elegant manner: signs may be "a proof either *retrospectively* of the divine causality of other events or *prospectively* of their divine certainty" (emphasis added).

84 Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 55: "That for which a sign in here offered to Ahaz is the certainty of divine help, or (what is the same thing) the truth that God speaks to him through the prophet." Young puts it this way: "The sign for which Ahaz was to ask was intended to be an aid to faith" (*The Book of Isaiah*, I:281).

85 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 205.

86 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:279, n. 24.

87 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:214.

88 As discussed in Chapter 7, subsection "The Accents," in section "The Referent of the Titles: Preliminary Issues," verses are normally divided into two main parts. The 'Athnâch accent mark is placed on the tone (stressed) syllable of the last word in the first part or clause of the verse, and the Sillûq accent mark is placed on the tone syllable of the last word in the second part or clause of the verse, that is, the last word of the verse before the Sôph Pâsûq (:). These two words ending the two parts of a verse are said to be in pause because of the pause or break in the voice at these two points when reciting the text. In addition, the tendency in speaking is to prolong the accented syllable of such words. Therefore, the vowel of the tone syllable of a word in pause is generally lengthened, e.g., a short a becomes a long ā. See GKC, §§ 29i-v.

89 In addition to the vowel changes at the principal pauses at the 'Athnâch and Sillûq, there are often pausal vowel changes in words that subdivide the two principal clauses in the verse. To indicate these pauses, lesser, but still strong, disjunctive accents are used. The S<sup>e</sup>ghôltâ often subdivides the first clause at some point between its beginning and

this word.

- שֶׁאֵל : third person masculine singular Qal imperative of שָׁאַל , to ask, to inquire. First, because the word is in pause, the Pathah (short a) on the tone (stressed) syllable (א) is lengthened to a Qāmes (long ā). Second, the imperative can be lengthened by the הַ ending, as שְׁמַע (hear) is lengthened to שְׁמַעְהָ in Daniel 9:19.<sup>90</sup> Note that both שְׁאֵלְהָ and שְׁמַעְהָ are in pause due to the Zāqēph Qātōn accent. Note also that if the Qal imperative was intended by Isaiah, it is the same verb as the short form that begins the verse, שֶׁאֵל : "Ask a sign for yourself..." The longer form perhaps was chosen on account of its consonance with לְמַעְלָה (upwards, or above), used in the second description of the sign.<sup>91</sup>
- שְׁאוּל or שְׁאֵל : Sheol--feminine noun, underworld, grave. First, because the word is in pause, the Hōlem (long ô or ô) on the א can change to a Qāmes (long ā).<sup>92</sup> Second, the הַ ending could be a locative,<sup>93</sup> designating motion towards an object or motion to a place or, in a weaker sense, the place where.<sup>94</sup> The locative form might have been chosen, as in the previous paragraph, on account of its consonance with the last word in the verse, לְמַעְלָה (upwards or above),<sup>95</sup> which is also a commonly used locative.<sup>96</sup>

Thus there are two very different ways to translate שְׁאֵלְהָ . BDB cites verse 11 under both of these options.<sup>97</sup>

These two options are discussed after analyzing the two verbs הֶעֱמַק and הִגְבִּיהַ .

### Issue 3

The two verbs in the second clause of verse 11, הֶעֱמַק and הִגְבִּיהַ , also present difficulties. The two roots are, respectively:

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the 'Athnâch, and the Zāqēph Qātōn often subdivides the second clause at some point between the 'Athnâch and Sillûq. See GKC, § 29i; Delitzsch calls such pauses "half pauses" (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:214). In verse 11, there is no subdivision of the first clause, but the second clause is subdivided with a Zāqēph Qātōn on שְׁאֵלְהָ , which is the last word in the first subdivision.

90 See GKC, § 48i. Alexander (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:165) and Young (*The Book of Isaiah*, I:280, n. 25) call this lengthened for a "paragogic imperative."

91 This suggestion was made by Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:214, regarding the choice of the locative form of Sheol, the second possible translation; note the next paragraph, also referring to this same page of Delitzsch.

92 See GKC, § 29u.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid., §§ 90a, c, f, h. See also William R. Harper, *Elements of Hebrew by an Inductive Method*, 15th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), p. 137.

95 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:214.

96 BDB, p. 751.

97 Ibid., pp. 981, 983.

- עָמַק : *to be deep*; Hiphil stem, *to make deep*<sup>98</sup>
- הִגְבִּיהַ : *to be high, to be exalted*; Hiphil stem, *to make high, to exalt*<sup>99</sup>

Several commentators state that הִגְבִּיהַ and הָעֲמִיק could be either Hiphil imperatives or Hiphil infinitives absolute.<sup>100</sup> However, *BDB* lists each only one way--as infinitives.<sup>101</sup> Isaiah 7:11 is listed as an example in both cases. The entry for the first verb is this: "*Inf. abs. הָעֲמִיק* Is 7<sup>11</sup> = *Imv. make deep.*" Although not citing Isaiah 7:11 as an example, *GKC* in explaining the different uses of the infinitive absolute states use four as follows: "Finally the infinitive absolute sometimes appears as a substitute for the finite verb..."<sup>102</sup> One of the finite verb forms for which the infinitive absolute can substitute is the "emphatic imperative."<sup>103</sup>

Before suggesting an interpretation and translation of verse 11, notice must be taken of the last word of the second clause: לְמַעַלָּה .

- לְמַעַלָּה : the inseparable preposition, לְ (to), followed by the derivative noun מַעַל (higher part) from the verb stem עָלָה (*to go up, to ascend, to climb*) with the locative ending הַ .<sup>104</sup>

In addition, *BDB* also notes that in prepositional phrases the noun means *above, upwards*, so that the preposition is not translated; Isaiah 7:11 is cited under this meaning and translated *upwards*.<sup>105</sup>

### Conclusion on Verses 10-11

The most important decision is which option to choose for שְׁאַלָּה , *to ask* or *Sheol*. It has been argued that if faced with an unpointed text, the most likely interpretation would be *Sheol*.<sup>106</sup> The three Greek translations, Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, rendered the unpointed שאלה as βάθυνον εἰς ἄδην (*deep into Hades*). They were followed by Jerome (Latin Vulgate), Lowth, and other more modern commentators.

98 Ibid., p. 770.

99 Ibid., pp. 146-47.

100 E.g., Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:165, and Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 202, n. 1.

101 *BDB*, p. 770 and p. 147.

102 *GKC*, § 113y (italics original). With a touch of humor, Thomas O. Lambdin describes this use of the infinitive absolute this way: "For reasons that are quite obscure, instances occur in which the inf. absolute is used instead of a finite verb, nor is it clearly dependent on any other verb in the given clause" (*Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971], p. 159). Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:165, suggests that the use of the two infinitives absolute here is "equivalent to adverbs," and indeed, *GKC*, § 113h, recognizes such a use and calls it a "*casus adverbialis*." However, this use requires the use of a finite form of the same verb along with its infinitive absolute. *GKC* continues that as an adverb it is used "in connexion with some form of the finite verb, to describe more particularly the manner or attendant circumstances (especially those of time and place) under which an action or state has taken place, or is taking place, or will take place," listing Jer. 22:19 as an example. In the case of Isa. 7:11, there is no finite form of either הָעֲמִיק or הִגְבִּיהַ ; they are used alone. Thus their use here is a substitute for a finite verb.

103 *GKC*, § 113bb.

104 *BDB*, pp. 748-51.

105 Ibid., p. 751.

106 E.g., Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 55 and Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:214.

To take the word to be Sheol making the phrase "deep as Sheol," implies that the Lord offers Ahaz the option of asking for someone to be raised from the dead,<sup>107</sup> and this is highly unlikely. Rashi takes this view:

Ask for a sign in the depths of the abyss, to resurrect a dead person for you, or go up to the heights above to ask for a sign in the heavens.<sup>108</sup>

However, there are several arguments against this translation and interpretation. To cite Cheyne,

It is true that Isaiah must have believed in Jehovah's lordship over Sheol (I Sam. ii. 6), and true that there would be a certain fitness in the prophet's availing himself of the presumed fondness of the king for necromancy. On the other hand, (1) it seems probable that an offer of this kind would have been expressed more directly, and (2) we find Isaiah, at the very same period, denouncing necromantic practices in the strongest manner (viii. 19).<sup>109</sup>

Henderson uses even stronger language:

...the idea of evoking the dead, or obtaining a miracle from the abodes of the departed, is so repugnant to the whole tenour of Scripture, that we are compelled at once to reject this interpretation.<sup>110</sup>

The alternative of taking **שְׁמַעָה** to be the imperative verb *to ask* does not look particularly hopeful either. Something like, "ask it in the depth," according to Gray, "involves a weak repetition of *ask* and a mutilation of the parallelism in the last clause of the v."<sup>111</sup>

Alexander's suggestion provides perhaps the best solution.<sup>112</sup> In addition to the noun **שְׁאֵל** (Sheol), there is another derivative noun from the root verb **שָׁאַל** (*to ask*), namely, **שְׁאֵלָה**, a feminine noun meaning *request, thing asked for*.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, unlike both **שְׁאֵל** (the noun Sheol) and **שָׁאַל** (the imperative verb *ask*), this noun does not require lengthening with the ending **הַ** -- it already has that ending because it is a feminine noun.<sup>114</sup>

The unpointed text has the word **שאלה**. Instead of pointing it **שְׁמַעָה** as the Masoretes did, it might well be that this other noun was intended by Isaiah, and the correct pointing would thus be **שְׁאֵלָה**. Its meaning, *request*, clearly fits the passage, and now the second clause of the verse makes sense and retains its evident parallelism.

Based, then, on these conclusions, a literal translation would be something like this:

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107 In addition to raising someone from the dead, Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:165, suggests that it could also include the option of opening the earth. He himself, however, does not take the word to mean Sheol.

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

109 Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:45. Note that Cheyne does translate the word **שְׁאֵלָה** as Sheol, but to avoid necromancy he interprets the reference as metaphorical, as in Isa. 57:9.

110 Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 60.

111 Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX*, p. 122.

112 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:165.

113 *BDB*, p. 982.

114 This is the common ending to indicate a feminine noun; see *GKC*, §80c.

אִוּ  
or      שְׁאַלָה      הֶעֱמַק  
[a] request      make deep

לְמַעַלָּה:  
upwards      הִגְבִּיהָ  
make high [a request]

In the structure of the clause, the two words, שְׁאַלָה (*request*) and לְמַעַלָּה (*upwards*) are not really in parallel. As Young notes, "The contrast appears in the infinitives," הֶעֱמַק (*make deep*) and הִגְבִּיהָ (*make high*).<sup>115</sup> A reasonable translation in colloquial English might be the following:

Ask a sign for yourself from Yahweh your God; make a deep request or make it high above.<sup>116</sup>

Since it is highly unlikely the deep request has anything to do with Sheol and raising the dead, what is the meaning of the contrast here? Henderson offers what is likely the best answer: "Nothing more seems to be meant than what might take place miraculously upon earth, as contrasted with a miraculous sign in the heavens."<sup>117</sup>

### Verses 12-13

12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" 13 Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well?

The response of Ahaz with his obvious allusion to Deuteronomy 6:16 is both disingenuous and hypocritical. He had likely already decided that his only hope in this crisis with Rezin and Pekah was an alliance with Tiglath-pileser. But,

He knew well enough that if he were to ask for a sign, it would be granted to him, and as a consequence he would have been compelled to believe the Lord and to place his trust in him. This he did not wish to do. Not Yahweh but Assyria was his desire.<sup>118</sup>

So Ahaz found himself in a bit of a bind:

His problem was to avoid a blunt statement that nothing Isaiah could say or do would make him believe that God could deliver them from Syria and Ephraim without Assyria's help, but still prevent Isaiah from doing or saying something which would make his chosen course look like he did not believe in God.<sup>119</sup>

But Ahaz was good at diplomacy and quick thinking, so he made it appear that his refusal to ask for a sign was based on the prohibition against putting God to the test in Deuteronomy 6:16.<sup>120</sup>

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115 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:280, n. 25.

116 This is very close to the translation given by Young, *ibid.*, I:277.

117 Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 60. Young takes the same view (*ibid.*, I:280, n. 25).

118 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:280.

119 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, pp. 205-6. There is no reason to doubt that Ahaz believed in the existence of Yahweh, at least as one among many gods. However, he clearly preferred to serve other gods and not Yahweh. See Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:165.

120 See also Exod. 17:7; Ps. 78:18-19. Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:165, points out that Deut. 6:16 does not apply to a case like this in which the Lord himself exhorted someone to choose a sign to strengthen his faith, but rather the prohibition was against putting God practically to the test. Skinner puts it this way: "To 'put Jehovah to the proof' is a mark of unbelief (Ex. xvii. 7; Deut. vi. 16), but to refuse a proof which Jehovah Himself offers is an insult to the divine

Isaiah is not fooled. In verse 13 he takes Ahaz to task over not only trying the patience of men,<sup>121</sup> but also of "my God."<sup>122</sup> He changes "your God" in verse 11 to "my God" here. Who are these "men"? The interpretive Targum of Jonathan substitutes "prophets" for "men."<sup>123</sup> Oswalt observes that

...most commentators take "men" to refer to the prophet himself [Isaiah]. That may be so, but it may also refer to that faithful group of people in the land who were looking to their king for courageous, spiritual leadership.<sup>124</sup>

The main issue to note in verse 13 is that Isaiah's mode of address to Ahaz changes from the singular used in verses 4-11 to the plural in verses 13 and 14.

13 Then he said, "Listen [masculine plural] now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you [masculine plural] to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience [masculine plural] of my God as well? 14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you [masculine plural] a sign...

Addressing Ahaz in the singular returns in verse 16. Is there any interpretive significance in the use of the plural in verses 13 and 14? In the discussion of verse 2 above, it was argued on the basis of the two masculine singular pronouns in "his heart" and "his people" that the phrase "house of David" was an acceptable manner to address the current Davidic king as an individual.<sup>125</sup> Here the situation is different--the verb and pronouns now are masculine plural. Thus it would seem that the phrase "house of David" can also be used to address both the king, his family, and perhaps his court. Alexander suggests the following interpretation:

The plural form of the address does not imply that the Prophet turned away from Ahaz to others (Jerome), but that members of his family and court were, in the Prophet's view, already implicated in his unbelief.<sup>126</sup>

## Verse 14

Verse 14, of course, is the central verse to be interpreted and therefore is not covered in depth at this point. Despite the fact that Ahaz did not ask a sign from God, "the Lord [Adonai] himself" would give a sign of his own

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majesty which exhausts the patience of the Almighty" (*The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p: 55).

121 The Hebrew, אֲנָשִׁים , translated "men" in the *NASB* and the *Jerusalem Bible*, has the usual masculine plural ending. It is the plural of אִישׁ (BDB, pp. 35 and 60), which means *man* as opposed to *woman* (BDB, p. 35). Thus אֲנָשִׁים means *men* (males), not "humans," as translated in the *NIV*. See "An Evaluation of Gender Language in the 2011 Edition of the *NIV Bible*" by Wayne Grudem found on his Web site, waynegrudem.com, and also his book, *Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006).

122 The Hebrew verb תִּלְאוּ is a second person masculine plural Hiphil imperfect of לָאָה , meaning in the Hiphil stem *to weary, to make weary, to exhaust* (BDB, p. 521). It is used in the phrase, "that you will weary also my God." BDB suggests the translation, *exhaust the patience of* in Isa. 7:13. הִלְאוּת is the Hiphil infinitive construct of the same verb and is used in the phrase, "to weary men." Radak explains Isaiah's question to Ahaz in terms of weakness, viz., that Ahaz believes Yahweh is too weak to carry out his word (cited by Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 63). Ahaz may believe this, but it is probably not the import of the verse, since the verb used means "to make weary" rather than to consider Yahweh too weak.

123 *The Chaldee Paraphrase on the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. C. W. H. Pauli (London: London Society's House, 1871), p. 23.

124 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 209; brackets added.

125 See footnote 9 above.

126 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:166. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:284, states that the (masculine) plural, "to you," in "give to you a sign" in verse 14 includes the entire nation of Judah. However, it is difficult to extend the plural beyond the audience explicitly addressed in verse 13--"the house of David."

choosing to Ahaz and his court.<sup>127</sup> Determining the nature of this sign is the central mission of this book. At this point, then, the important issues in verses 15-16 are discussed next.

## Verses 15-16

### *Issue 1*

Does verse 15 continue the same prophecy given in verses 13-14 or is it a separate and distinct prophecy? The consequence, or in a sense the goal, of making it a separate prophecy is that "the boy" of verses 15-16 is then a different boy from Immanuel in verses 13-14. Very few commentators take the view of two separate prophecies. David Cooper is one of those who does.<sup>128</sup> Prior to his discussion of verses 15-16, Cooper took the position that the "son" of verse 14 was born of a virgin. He then argues that if a virgin birth had occurred during the time of Ahaz or Isaiah, a record would have been preserved at some point in Scripture. Since no such record exists, there was no virgin birth during that time. This argument is an example of *modus tollens*, and if the major and minor premises of the syllogism are assumed correct, the conclusion must be true. I believe all would agree with both premises and therefore the conclusion of the argument: there was no virgin birth during the time of Ahaz or Isaiah. The virgin birth of Immanuel must occur in the distant future after the present crisis with Ephraim and Syria is long over.

Next Cooper argues that verses 15-16 do, in fact, deal with the imminent invasion of Judah by Ephraim and Syria. From this he concludes that these verses constitute a second and separate prophecy from that in verses 13-14. As such, this prophecy must refer to a "boy" born of natural generation and whose earliest years can serve as a sign predicting the soon removal of the problem of Ephraim and Syria. Cooper identifies the boy as Isaiah's son, Shear-jashub, who of course is present during this meeting with Ahaz.

In Chapter 13, section "The Messianic View," I discuss the issue of whether a future birth of Immanuel, miraculous or natural, can still serve as a sign of the outcome of the present crisis faced by Judah. At this point, however, the issue is only whether there are two distinct prophecies and two different "boys" in verses 13-16. Cooper admits that a simple grammatical analysis connects verse 14 with verse 15: the antecedent of the "he" in the latter verse seems clearly to be the noun "Immanuel" in the former. How is it possible to avoid this conclusion? Cooper argues that there is a law of prophetic interpretation, and it alone can obviate this grammatical analysis.

Cooper calls this law "the law of double or manifold fulfillment of prophecy." The two names Cooper gives this law are unfortunate because there are two well known distinct hermeneutical terms used in the interpretation of prophecy that are similar in name, but only in name, to what Cooper applies to his argument: these hermeneutical terms are *dual sense* (or *double sense*) and *multiple fulfillment* (or *generic prophecy*). Dual sense and multiple fulfillment are discussed in the section, "Interpretation of Prophecy," in Chapter 2 and in the section, "The Views of Dual Sense and Multiple Fulfillment," in Chapter 13. However, neither of these two distinct hermeneutical terms refer to what Cooper means by "double fulfillment." What Cooper defines is what now is called "prophetic perspective" or "prophetic foreshortening." This phenomenon is found in some prophetic visions that describe two or more sequential events with no grammatical indication of the time intervals between them. This phenomenon does occur in prophetic writings, and Cooper gives what he considers three examples: Leviticus 26, Jeremiah 29:10-14, and Ezekiel 26:7-14. It is highly questionable whether the first two prophecies are examples of prophetic foreshortening, but the prophecy of the destruction of Tyre in Ezekiel 26:7-14 clearly is.<sup>129</sup>

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127 In לָכֵן (to you), the pronominal suffix (you) on the inseparable preposition (to) is masculine plural.

128 David L. Cooper, *Messiah: His Nature and Person* (Los Angeles: Published by Author, 1933), pp. 150-61. Another is Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Messianic Chronology* (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 1998), pp. 33, 37.

129 See also the discussion of prophetic perspective or prophetic foreshortening in the section, "Interpretation and Translation of Verse 8:23," in Chapter 7; Ezek. 26:7-14, the prophecy of the destruction of Tyre, is also discussed.

However, verses 13-16, as interpreted by Cooper, do not follow the pattern of prophetic foreshortening. The events separated by an undisclosed time gap in a passage to which prophetic foreshortening applies are always in chronological order. The events in all three of Cooper's examples are in chronological order. By contrast, on Cooper's interpretation of these verses, the event of the distant future (vv. 13-14) precedes the event to take place in the next few years (vv. 15-16). Verses 13-16 are thus not an example of prophetic foreshortening. The grammatical analysis prevails here--Emmanuel in verse 14 is the antecedent of "he" in verse 15.

A few commentators connect verse 15 with the prophecy in verses 13-14 but argue that it is actually verse 16 that begins a different and separate prophecy. For example, Calvin argues that "the boy" in verse 16 refers to all children in general. He interprets verse 16 to mean, "Before the children, who shall be born hereafter, can distinguish between good and evil, the land which thou hatest shall be forsaken."<sup>130</sup>

A slightly different approach to the view of two separate prophecies is taken by Michael Rydelnik in his recent book, *The Messianic Hope*. He argues that the new prophecy begins with verse 16, not verse 15, but still takes "the boy" to be Shear-jashub.

While many have considered v. 16 to be a continuation of the prophecy in 7:13-15, the grammar of the passage suggests otherwise. The opening phrase in Hebrew can reflect an adversative nuance, allowing for a disjunction between the child described in 7:13-15 and the one described in verse 16. There is a different child in view in this verse.<sup>131</sup>

It is interesting to observe the progression in this argument. Beginning with the observation that the opening phrase (mainly כִּי ) "can" have an adversative nuance, the conclusion is suddenly and dogmatically reached that the grammar of the passage "suggests" that a new prophecy here begins and that therefore "there is a different child in view in this verse." From "can" to certainty is certainly an curious form of argument.

It is true that כִּי can be used to introduce adversative and exceptive clauses,<sup>132</sup> but its more common use is in the sense of *for* or *because*. The *KJV*, *ASV*, *NASB*, and *NIV* (Christian) and the *Jewish Bible 1985*, *Jerusalem Bible*, and *Stone Edition* (Jewish) all translate כִּי as *for*.<sup>133</sup> Alexander states the following on this point:

The wasting of these kingdoms [Syria and Israel] and the deportation of their people by Tiglath-pileser (2 Kings xv. 29, xvi. 9), is here [ v. 16] predicted, which of course implies the previous deliverance of Judah and the brief duration of its own calamity, so that this verse assigns a reason for the representation in the one preceding. There is no need, therefore, of imposing upon כִּי at the beginning of the verse, the

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130 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 2 vols., trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003; original Latin publication date, 1555), I:250-51. Calvin argues that the definite article on "boy" ( הַ ) is not intended to point out a specific child but only to emphasize the age. Robert Vasholz, "Isaiah and Ahaz: A Brief History of Crisis in Isaiah 7 and 8," *Presbyterion* 13 (Fall 1987):82-83, takes a similar approach to making "boy" a sort of generic child. He argues that the definite article is used because the child is definite in the mind of the narrator and cites *GKC*, §§ 126q-r for examples of such a use. However, *GKC* does not cite Isa. 7:16 among his examples, although this does not in itself demonstrate that Vasholz is wrong. It is of interest to note that *GKC* does cite Isa. 7:14 with reference to the mother of Immanuel.

131 Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), p. 157. It should be noted that those who take "boy" in v. 16 to be Shear-jashub, as does Rydelnik, must place strong emphasis on the definite article, in contrast to Calvin and Vasholz (see footnote 130). However, the article alone would not seem adequate to identify "the boy" as Shear-jashub, who was standing right next to Isaiah (or perhaps in his arms). Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 64, suggests that if Isaiah was referring to his son, who was with him, he would have used הַיֶּלֶד הַזֶּה , *this child*, rather than simply הַיֶּלֶד , *the child* (see *GKC*, § 34e, for the article on the demonstrative pronoun).

132 *GKC*, § 163.

133 The *Jewish Bible 1917* has *yea*.

sense of *nay* (Piscator), *indeed* (Calvin), *although* (Alting), *but* (Umbreit), or any other than its usual and proper one of *for*, *because*....The true connection of the verses [15 and 16] has been well explained by Mauner and Knobel to be this, that Judah shall lie waste for a short time, and *only* for a short time, *for* before that short time is expired, its invaders [Rezin and Pekah] shall themselves be invaded and destroyed.<sup>134</sup>

He concludes,

This view of the connection is sufficient to evince, that the reference of this verse [v. 16] to Shearjashub (Lowth) or to *any child* indefinitely (Calvin), is as unnecessary as it is ungrammatical. A *child* is born [v. 14]--*he* learns to distinguish good and evil [v. 15]--but before *the child* is able to distinguish good and evil, something happens [v. 16]. If these three clauses, thus succeeding one another, do not speak of the same child, it is impossible for language to be so employed as to identify the subject without actually saying that it is the same.<sup>135</sup>

Therefore, one should conclude that verses 13-16 represent a single prophecy and speak of a single child, namely, Immanuel.<sup>136</sup>

## Issue 2

What is the significance of "curds and honey" (NASB) or "butter and honey" (Jerusalem Bible)?

- חֶמְצָאָה : feminine noun; according to *BDB*, it means *curd* or *curdled milk*.<sup>137</sup>
- דְּבַשׁ : masculine noun; *honey*.

What does such a diet imply? In his commentary, Young suggests that it is symbolic of a royal diet but offers no evidence for such a conclusion.<sup>138</sup> Rashi states that the child will eat curds and honey "for our land will be replete with good."<sup>139</sup> He does not directly state how this condition of the land comes about but seems to imply that it is due to the removal of the armies of Syria and Israel from Judah. This is how the editors of the ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah understand Rashi's comments:

Although the land had been impoverished by the invasions of Rezin and Pekah, there will soon be great prosperity, so great that from an early age the child will be pampered with rich delicacies, for the two kings will have been defeated (*Rashi*).<sup>140</sup>

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134 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:174-75; italics original and brackets added.

135 *Ibid.*, I:175; brackets added.

136 Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 64, draws the same conclusion: "No interpretation commends itself as consistent, but that which applies both verses [15 and 16] to Immanuel, the immediate antecedent."

137 *BDB*, p. 326. It should be noted that the well-known phrase, "a land flowing with milk and honey" (e.g., Exod. 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3) uses the same word for *honey* but the normal word for *milk*: חֶלֶב . The two words for curds and milk are used together in verse 22: "because of the abundance of the milk produced he will eat curds."

138 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:291. This represents a change in viewpoint for Young. In his earlier journal article he takes the other view: "In the light of verses 16 and 17...it is more in keeping with the content to understand the 'butter and honey' as referring to a time of devastation, and thus symbolically picturing the period of affliction" ("The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16, Second Article," *WTJ* 16 [November 1953]:47). From a liberal standpoint, Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX*, p. 130, argues that it implies "the food of the gods" and has its origin in Hebrew thought from Iranian or Greek mythology. However, he asserts with a great deal of dogmatism that this diet, either in v. 15 or v. 22, could not possibly suggest "a land devastated by war."

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

140 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 63.

Lowth<sup>141</sup> and Hengstenberg follow Rashi in his interpretation of the significance of this diet of curds and honey. Hengstenberg states that this diet indicates "a condition of plenty and prosperity."<sup>142</sup>

However, it seems that most commentators take the view that curds and honey as the primary diet represent a condition of deprivation and the cessation of agriculture throughout Judah (e.g., Delitzsch, Cheyne, Skinner, Young, and Oswalt). Being ravaged by two invading armies, the plowed fields turned to pastures, making milk and honey the main foods. Verses 21-22 clearly show the significance of a diet of curds and honey:

Now in that day a man may keep alive a heifer and a pair of sheep; and because of the abundance of the milk produced he will eat curds, for everyone that is left within the land will eat curds and honey. (NASB)

In fact, the entire passage, verses 18-25, gives the significance for eating curds and honey: utter deprivation of the land (v. 20); food will be available primarily from a "heifer and a pair of sheep" (v. 21); there will be an "abundance" of milk for the few left in the land to eat curds and honey (v. 22); vines will be replaced with "briars and thorns" (v. 23); "all the land will be briars and thorns" (v. 24); the once-fertile "hills which used to be cultivated with the hoe" will be filled with briars and thorns," and "they will become a place for pasturing oxen and for sheep to trample" (v. 25).

Commentators differ on whether the deprivation pictured in verses 15-16 is the same deprivation described in verses 18-25. The preceding context of verses 1-14 seems clearly to indicate that the two kings are Rezin and Pekah so that the deprivation of Judah referred to in verse 15 is at the hands of those two kings.<sup>143</sup> In his comments on verse 15, Alexander writes,

The simple sense of the prediction is that the desolation of Judah, caused by the invasion of Rezin and Pekah, should be only temporary.<sup>144</sup>

The cause of the deprivation to which verses 18-25 refer is discussed later in this chapter.<sup>145</sup> The important point now is simply that verses 21-22 show what Isaiah intended to describe by the phrase "curds and honey" in verses 15-16: he was using it to indicate deprivation of crops and neglected tillage. Cheyne makes the following comment on verse 15:

Milk and honey are not mentioned, as we should expect, as delicacies, but as a food involving privation (this is clear from v. 22). It is in vain to quote Deut. xxxii. 13, 14 in opposition, for milk and honey are there mentioned with wine and bread.<sup>146</sup>

### Issue 3

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141 Lowth, *Isaiah*, p. 230.

142 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:53. He goes on to argue that "it is altogether wrong, however, to suppose that vers. 21, 22, contain a threatening." Instead, those verses display "a ray of light to fall upon the dark picture of the calamity which threatens from Asshur..." (p. 54; emphasis original).

143 The identity of the "two kings" is discussed further in "Issue 4" and "Issue 6" to follow.

144 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:173.

145 See "The Beginning of the Judgment Announced" under "Verse 17" and "Issue 4" under "Verse 20."

146 Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:48. In Job 20:17 the same words for curds and honey are used and are, in fact, contrasted with the "poison of cobras" in v. 16. However, the present argument is not that curds and honey are not good foods, but that when taken as the primary diet lacking in bread and wine, they depict a lack of farming: "To be sure, curds and honey are not the bread and wine of a cultivated land, but they are still a desirable food" (Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 218).

What is the meaning of לְדַעְתּוֹ? The word can be parsed as follows:

לְדַעְתּוֹ : Qal infinitive construct<sup>147</sup> of יָדַע , *to know*, with inseparable preposition לְ , *to or for*, and third person masculine singular pronominal suffix וֹ , *him*.

A literal translation would be "to his knowing,"<sup>148</sup> but that does not capture the sense in which it would have been used by Isaiah. Alexander gives four possibilities:<sup>149</sup>

- *when he knows*
- *till he knows*
- *before he knows*
- *that he may know*

The last option should almost certainly be eliminated. As Skinner points out,

This [*that he may know*] is the rendering of the Vulgate and other ancient versions, and is maintained still by a few scholars. But the idea that eating butter and honey promotes the formation of ethical character is somewhat bizarre.<sup>150</sup>

Delitzsch states that לְ "prefixed to the verb does not mean 'until' (Ges. § 131, 1), for *Lamed* is never used as so definite an indication of the *terminus ad quem*."<sup>151</sup> He suggests that

the meaning is either "towards the time when he understands" (Amos iv. 7, cf. Lev. xxiv. 12, "to the end that"), or about the time, at the time when he understands (ch. x. 3; Gen. viii. 11; Job xxiv. 14).<sup>152</sup>

Oswalt points out that although temporal clauses are often introduced with infinitives construct prefixed with the inseparable preposition בְ , here לְ seems to perform that same function instead of its more common function of introducing purposive clauses.<sup>153</sup> Thus one of the two remaining options must be correct. Oswalt suggests the translation *before he knows*. Rashi, Lowth, Henderson, Skinner, Young, et al., suggest *when he knows*. This is also the translation in the *ASV*, *NIV*, *Jewish Bible 1917*, and *Jerusalem Bible*. It should be noted that the form of יָדַע in verses 16 and 8:4 is a simple third person masculine singular Qal imperfect--*the boy will know*. Therefore, the best translation should probably run something like this:

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

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147 This parsing is not entirely certain. As Oswalt points out, the word "appears to be an infinitive construct" (*The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 203, n. 3); italics added.

148 Ibid.

149 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:173.

150 Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 57; italics and brackets original.

151 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:221.

152 Ibid. Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:173, also emphasizes time: "It is clear, however, from the next verse, that this one must contain a specification of time, however vague."

153 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 203, n. 3; he suggests comparing GKC § 114o. Skinner admits that "exact parallels to this use of the preposition cannot be produced" but then suggests a comparison with Gen. 24:63 and Exod. 14:27 (*The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 57; emphasis original).

## Issue 4

The meaning of "good" and "evil" in this verse has a direct bearing on how long a period of time is intended. One would think there would be little disagreement about the meaning of good and evil, but commentators have three deferring suggestions.

1. The ability to distinguish between pleasant and unpleasant food.<sup>154</sup>
2. The ability to make moral distinctions.<sup>155</sup>
3. The ability to make an intelligent choice between the pleasant and the painful or what is helpful and what is harmful.<sup>156</sup>

The second view is the majority view, and it is also probably the correct view, because "the same words elsewhere constantly relate to moral distinctions and the power to perceive them"<sup>157</sup> (Gen. 2:17; 3:5; Deut. 1:39; i Kgs. 3:9, Isa. 5:20; Jonah 4:2).

What, then, is the number of years from birth to the point "the boy" knows how to distinguish good and evil? According to verse 15, he will be eating curds and honey "when he knows" how to do this. According to verse 16, "before the boy will know" to refuse the evil and choose the good, the "two kings" will no longer be a problem for Ahaz. In the context of this whole chapter, those two kings must be Rezin and Pekah.<sup>158</sup> From the point of time that Isaiah gives this prediction to Ahaz to its fulfillment is about two years, three at the most. Can a three-year-old child distinguish between right and wrong?

Gleason Archer argues that the ability to choose between good and evil represents "the age of moral accountability"--twelve or thirteen years of age. He reconciles this age with the prediction in verse 16 by extending that prophecy to include not just the fall of Damascus and subjugation of Samaria by Tiglath-pileser in 732 but also the absolute destruction of Samaria by Shalmaneser in 723/722.<sup>159</sup>

This interpretation is certainly possible but probably not the best. First, in verse 16 the time period seems clearly to be related to the removal of the threat of the "two kings," who are almost certainly Rezin and Pekah. Second, verse 8:4 defines a similar time period before the "the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria." The two kings here are clearly Rezin and Pekah. The child here is identified as Maher-shalal-hash-baz, and the time period is defined as "before the boy knows how to cry out 'My father' or 'My mother'" (NASB). Isaiah likely sired the child soon after his meeting with Ahaz, and taking into account the nine months for the child to be born, his birth likely occurred in 733 or early in 732. Thus the fall of Damascus and the capture of Samaria likely took place within a year of the birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz. The parallel between 7:15-16 and 8:4 is significant: a child is involved in both and both use a very similar way of indicating the time limit for the fulfillment of the prophecy. Therefore, it is quite likely that the time period is the same and that the same event is prophesied--the fall of Damascus and Samaria, removing the threat of the "two kings" to Judah.

Returning to 7:15-16, the question now needs to be answered: is two or three years enough time for a child to

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154 According to Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:48, Ferdinand Hitzig, a German theologian and biblical critic, took this view, citing 2 Sam. 19:35. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX*, p. 131, also takes this view. It is definitely the minority view.

155 This is the majority view: e.g., Alexander, Cheyne, Young, and Oswalt.

156 Although he acknowledges that most commentators take option 2, Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 57, takes this view. He argues that it expands the period described to 10 or 12 years, whereas 2 or 3 fits the time period between Isaiah meeting with Ahaz and the known Assyrian invasions.

157 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:174.

158 Henderson takes a different view of "the land" and the "two kings," and this is discussed under "Issue 6" to follow.

159 Archer, *Isaiah*, p. 134.

distinguish between good and evil, or perhaps better, between right and wrong? It is certainly not enough time to enable a child to make a reasonable decision about the rightness or wrongness of dropping the atomic bomb on Japan or prosecuting the war in Vietnam. However, two or three years is quite sufficient for a child to learn that it is right to obey his parents and wrong to disobey them.

Therefore, 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.

According to the argument just given--viz., that a child can know how to refuse the evil and choose the good at two or three years of age--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.

Sorting out the issues involved in verses 7:15-16 represent difficult interpretive questions. But the above solution seems to be the best for this issue.

#### Issue 5

Does Ahaz fear "the land" or "both her kings"? Surprising as it may be, commentators differ on this question and so do the translations. For example, the *KJV* has Ahaz dreading "the land," while the *NASB* has him dreading the "two kings." Before directly addressing this issue, several key words should be noted.

- תִּעָזֵב : third person feminine singular Niphal imperfect of עָזַב , *to leave, to forsake, to loose*; *BDB* cites Isaiah 7:16 under the definition *to be forsaken*.<sup>160</sup>
- הָאֲדָמָה : feminine singular noun, *ground, land*, prefixed with the definite article, הַ ; *BDB* cites Isaiah 7:16 under the definition *land, territory, country*.<sup>161</sup>
- אֲשֶׁר־אֵתָּהּ : the indeclinable relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר , *who, which, that*, etc., connected by *Maqqēph* to the masculine singular personal pronoun אַתָּה , *you*.
- קָץ : *BDB* takes this to be a masculine singular Qal active participle of קָץ ,<sup>162</sup> *to feel a loathing, to feel an abhorrence, to feel a sickening dread*, although Qal active participles coincide in form with the third person masculine singular Qal perfect;<sup>163</sup> *BDB* cites Isaiah 7:16 under the definition *to feel a sickening dread*.
- מִפְּנֵי : masculine singular noun, *face*, prefixed with the preposition מִן , *from*; according to *BDB*, the

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160 *BDB*, pp. 736-37.

161 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

162 *Ibid.*, pp. 880-81.

163 *GKC*, § 50b.

resulting meaning is *from the face of, from the presence of, from before*.<sup>164</sup>

Since the verb **תִּעָזֵב** is feminine singular and the noun **הָאֲדָמָה** is also feminine singular, they almost certainly go together: "the land will be forsaken." Also, the pronoun **אֶתָּהּ** is the subject of the participle **קֹץ**. But a Hebrew participle is generally regarded as a verbal adjective and indicates a state of continued activity. Thus, instead of "you dread," "you are dreading" is probably closer to the intended meaning.<sup>165</sup>

However, is it the land that Ahaz dreads or is it the two kings at the end of the verse?

#### Option 1

The first option translates the Hebrew words in the second clause of verse 16 in a way that makes Ahaz dread the land.

As just noted, there is little doubt that *the land* is the subject of the verb *to forsake* ("the land will be forsaken"), and *you* is the subject of the participle *dreading* ("which you are dreading"). This is assumed in both Options 1 and 2. In Option 1 the words in the second clause of verse 16 are connected as follows:<sup>166</sup>

- Option 1 connects the verb **תִּעָזֵב** ("will be forsaken") with **מִפְּנֵי** ("from the presence of") in the sense that the meaning of the main clause is obtained by linking these two words together as if in sequence: "will be forsaken from the presence of both her kings."
- Option 1 also connects the relative pronoun **אֲשֶׁר** ("which") with the participle **קֹץ** ("dreading") in the sense that the clause, "which you are dreading," becomes the *entire* relative clause defining or identifying "the land": "the land which you are dreading."

This structure would result in a translation that would read something like this:

"the land which you are dreading will be forsaken from the presence of both her kings"

Or for a smoother English translation:

"the land which you are dreading will be forsaken by both her kings"

Young favors Option 1 and translates the entire verse as follows:

For before the child knows to reject the evil and choose the good, the land which thou abhorrest will be forsaken of her two kings.<sup>167</sup>

This structure is further discussed in Option 2. However, even apart from grammar, Option 1 is less likely because it makes the land the main object of Ahaz's dread rather than the two kings of Syria and Israel.

#### Option 2

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164 *BDB*, pp. 816, 818.

165 J. Weingreen, *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew* (Oxford: The Charendon Press, 1939), p. 66.

166 In the two bulleted statements for both Option 1 and Option 2, the "connections" drawn between key words are based on Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:174, although I include additional explanation that Alexander does not have.

167 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:278.

This option places Ahaz's dread on the two kings rather than the land. In Option 2 the words in the second clause of verse 16 are connected as follows:

- Option 2 takes תֵּעָזֹב ("will be forsaken") absolutely, that is, not connected with any other phrase, such as "from the presence of both her kings" as it is in Option 1.
- Option 2 connects the participle קָץ ("dreading") with מִפְּנֵי ("from the presence of") in the sense that מִפְּנֵי begins the second part of the relative clause begun by the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר ("which"), making the entire relative clause "which you are dreading from the presence of both her kings."

This structure might seem strange. What could the relative clause, "which you are dreading from the presence of both her kings" possibly mean? Nevertheless, the connection of the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר ("which") with קָץ ("dreading") as in Option 1 is said by Alexander to be "contrary to usage."<sup>168</sup> Although he does not explain why it is contrary to usage, he is probably correct.

According to *GKC*, a dependent relative clause qualifies or defines an immediately preceding substantival idea, or simply a noun, and belongs syntactically to the main clause.<sup>169</sup> This is quite similar to a relative clause in English grammar, which also is used to define or identify the noun that precedes it. But in Hebrew the construction of such a clause differs from that in English. Weingreen gives some helpful examples using several different English relative pronouns.<sup>170</sup> His example based on the English relative pronoun *whose* is this:

As expressed in English idiom: "The man whose book I took"  
 As expressed in Hebrew idiom: "The man *who* I took *his book*"

Note that in Hebrew the word "his" must be introduced to link back to "the man."

The relative clause in the English example is "whose book I took." Its intent is to define or identify "the man"--it is the man whose book I took. The relative clause in Hebrew idiom is "who I took his book." Note that this relative clause, though it sounds awkward to English ears, still defines or identifies "the man"--it still means the man whose book I took.

Now in verse 16, how would one write the clause if the intent is to identify a "land" by its two kings? Here is the English version compared with Weingreen's example:

the man	whose book	I took
the land	whose kings	you dread

As per the pattern, the relative clause, "whose kings you dread," defines or identifies "the land"--it is the land whose kings you dread.

Now here is the Hebrew version, again compared with Weingreen's example:

the man	<i>who</i>	I took	<i>his book</i>
the land	<i>which</i>	you dread	<i>her kings</i>

The relative clause here is "which you dread her kings," though awkward to English ears, still defines or

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168 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:174.

169 *GKC*, § 138a.

170 Weingreen, *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew*, p. 135.

identifies "the land"--it still means the land whose kings you dread. Note that just as "his" must be introduced to link back to "the man," so "her" must be introduced to link back to "the land."

In verse 16 there are additional details built in to create the entire main clause. **מִפְּנֵי** (*from the presence of*, or simply *of*) is added to the clause because "both her kings" who define or identify "the land" in the relative clause will themselves forsake the land. This makes the relative clause more complex. "The land" is identified as "the land which you are dreading both her kings," but it includes the additional identifying feature that it is also "the land forsaken of both her kings." This single complex relative clause could be separated into two relative clauses, each with its own **אֲשֶׁר** as in Genesis 24:7 where "Yahweh the God of the heavens" is defined or identified with three separate relative clauses, each with its own **אֲשֶׁר** ("which"):

The Lord, the God of heaven, *who* took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and *who* spoke to me and *who* swore to me, saying, "To your descendants I will give this land," He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there. (NASB; italics added)

Thus, verse 16 could have been worded like this:

"the land which you are dreading both her kings and which will be forsaken of both her kings"

But just as in Genesis 24:7, there must be something to complete this main clause: "He will send His angel before you..." So Isaiah used only one relative clause and used **מִפְּנֵי** (*from the presence of*, or simply *of*) to complete the thought in the main verb **תֵּעָזֵב** ("will be forsaken").

English idiom: "the land will be forsaken of *whose* two kings you are dreading"

Hebrew idiom: "the land will be forsaken *which* you are dreading of both *her* kings"

Note that this is the word order of verse 16:

תֵּעָזֵב / הָאֲדָמָה / אֲשֶׁר-אֶתָּה / קָן / מִפְּנֵי / שְׁנֵי / מְלָכֶיהָ  
her kings / both / [from the presence] of / are dreading / which-you / the land / will be forsaken

As was noted above, Alexander states that the connection of **אֲשֶׁר** ("which") with **קָן** ("dreading") as in Option 1 is "contrary to usage." In a sense **אֲשֶׁר** is connected to **קָן** to form the first part of the relative clause: "which you are dreading." But to say that *the land* is that which Ahaz is dreading is contrary to Hebrew idiom in the formation of a relative clause. The wording of the relative clause, according to Hebrew idiom, must be in two parts: "which you are dreading" must be *followed by what he was dreading*--here the land's two kings. The first part of a relative clause, "which you are dreading," must point forward, not backward. It is in this sense, then, that **קָן** is to be connected with what follows it, here **מִפְּנֵי**, and not with the relative pronoun **אֲשֶׁר** that precedes it, which would end the relative clause contrary to Hebrew idiom.

Option 2 is taken by Alexander, Delitzsch, and Oswalt. Their translations are quite similar:

"the land, of whose two kings thou art afraid, shall be forsaken"<sup>171</sup>

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171 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:174.

"the land will be desolate, of whose two kings thou art afraid"<sup>172</sup>

"the territory whose two kings you dread will be desolate"<sup>173</sup>

Also, the *Jewish Bible 1917*, *Jewish Bible 1985*, *Stone Edition*, *Jerusalem Bible*, the *ASV*, *NASB*, and *NIV* all translate the clause in this way.<sup>174</sup> Since this option has the two kings as the object of Ahaz's dread, it is almost certainly correct.

## Issue 6

The last issue in verses 15-16 that needs discussion is the identity of, and connection between, the "two kings" and "the land." One land but two kings? How can this be? What land is meant and who are the two kings?

As pointed out under Issue 4, these two kings, interpreted within the context of this whole chapter, must be Rezin and Pekah. To identify them differently would be to ignore the context and suddenly introduce two unnamed kings in the flow of the text.

But if the two kings are Rezin and Pekah, why is only one "land" (singular) mentioned? It must be stressed that Isaiah himself connects "the land," a feminine singular noun, with "both *her* kings." Grammatically, "her," a feminine singular pronoun, must refer to "the land," and therefore the two kings must be the kings of that land. If the conclusion about the identity of the two kings is correct, then Isaiah is saying that Rezin and Pekah are "her kings"--the kings of that land.

The explanation is probably quite simple. Skinner writes, "Ephraim and Syria are treated as one territory, ruled by two allied kings."<sup>175</sup> Young takes the same view and identifies "the land" as "Syria and Israel considered as a unit" and "both her kings" as Rezin and Pekah.<sup>176</sup> It is really the virtual certainty of Rezin and Pekah as 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.

Before leaving this issue, the view of Henderson and a few others must be addressed. Henderson<sup>177</sup> takes a most unusual view that falls outside both of the two options considered under Issue 5. He takes the land to be *all* of Israel (calling it Canaan), both the Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom, that 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 v. 16 this way: "the land, which thou destroyest, shall be forsaken by both its kings."

However, tempting as this interpretation might be, it falls pray to the same objection leveled against Option 1: it takes the entire relative clause to be "which thou destroyest," which is contrary to Hebrew idiom. In addition, Henderson advances several highly dubious claims to support this construction. Also, *to destroy* is not a meaning for *יָרַק* that *BDB* supports. 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, and he cites Luke 2:42, 46. Why did he cite this text? Is 12 years old the year that Jesus, or at least children in general, could distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong? I believe every parent would be highly insulted by such a claim, if that is Henderson's claim.

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172 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:221-22.

173 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 203.

174 The *KJV* follows Option 1 and has Ahaz dreading the land.

175 Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 57.

176 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:292-93.

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

But Henderson's view has another 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.).

With regard to the "two kings," Alexander McCaul cites Henderson and takes essentially the same view, namely, that the fulfillment of the prophecy in verse 16 extends to the time of Jesus.<sup>178</sup> However, McCaul takes the fulfillment for Judah to be the year when Herod the Great died (4 B.C.), which was when Jesus was 2 years old, rather than when Archelaus was banished from Judah (A.D. 6). Despite that minor difference, McCaul, like Henderson, believes that this view of "the land" and the "two kings" "confirms the Messianic interpretation" of Isaiah 7:10-25.<sup>179</sup>

However, since McCaul, like Henderson, extends to the time of Jesus the fulfillment of the prophecy in verse 16 that Judah was to be forsaken by its king, 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.

This interpretation of verse 7:16 regarding the "two kings" and "the land" is also discussed in Chapter 13 of this book in the subsection "Interpretations by E. Henderson and Alexander McCaul." Also discussed is McCaul's view of the "sign" referred to in 7:14, and it does not necessarily depend on Henderson and McCaul's interpretation of verse 16.

## Verse 17

The NASB translates verse 17 as follows:

The LORD will bring on you, on your people, and on your father's house such days as have never come since the day that Ephraim separated from Judah, the king of Assyria.

### *The Content of Verse 17*

There are two spectacular features of this verse. First, it follows verse 16 without even a conjunction or connection of any kind, or as Young puts it, verse 17 "is asyndetically joined to the preceding [verse]."<sup>180</sup> Delitzsch considers this lack of connection between the two verses "very effective"<sup>181</sup> in the reaction it creates in Ahaz.

The second spectacular feature of verse 17 is the sudden introduction of "the king of Assyria," added "with piercing force,"<sup>182</sup> at the close of verses 16-17.<sup>183</sup>

Delitzsch describes the effect this way:

The very king to whom Ahaz had appealed in his terror, would bring Judah to the brink of destruction....The hopes raised in the mind of Ahaz by ver. 16 are suddenly turned into bitter disappointment.<sup>184</sup>

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178 Alexander McCaul, *The Messiahship of Jesus*, pp. 180-82.

179 *Ibid.*, p. 182.

180 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:294, n. 43; brackets added.

181 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:222.

182 *Ibid.*

183 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:295, agrees: "The verse concludes with a tremendous climax."

184 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:222.

According to the chronology developed in Chapter 5, this meeting with Ahaz takes place before he actually appealed to Tiglath-pileser for help. Ahaz probably assumed that Isaiah did not know of his plan to save Judah, as well as his own throne, from Rezin and Pekah. But then, in a very dramatic way, verse 17 announces the judgment that will come upon Judah as a result of this plan.

The grammar here is quite fascinating. The apparently dangling phrase, "the king of Assyria," functions as a *second*, and totally unexpected, direct object of the verb יָבִיא , *will bring*. Delitzsch points out that the direct object particle, אֵת , generally used only with definite direct objects (those having the definite article, *the*), is often used on the second of two direct objects when the first object is indefinite and less precise.<sup>185</sup> Here the first direct object of the verb is the indefinite noun "days," and the second direct object, much more precise than the first, is the "king of Assyria." Thus, even though מֶלֶךְ (king) does not have the definite article, it is preceded by אֵת and the phrase is correctly translated as "the king of Assyria."

Note also that, as in verse 16, the pronouns here are masculine singular: "on *you*," "on *your* people," and "on *your* father's house." Isaiah is directing this judgment of the Lord directly on Ahaz. Oswalt writes,

By holding this phrase ["the king of Assyria"] back until the end of the line its impact is doubled. It is not at all difficult to see the prophet using a device such as this to give a final blow to Ahaz's self-sufficiency. Verses 14-16 had perhaps lulled him into complacency. Even if he had done the wrong thing, it was going to turn out all right. But with devastating suddenness Isaiah let's him know that good days will not come. What is coming upon Jerusalem is the awful thunder of war-chariots. Whatever a man trusts in place of God will one day turn to devour him.<sup>186</sup>

Yahweh will bring on Ahaz, his people, and his father's house days worse than any that had come upon Judah since the revolt of the northern tribes.<sup>187</sup> Since that revolt, Judah had suffered much at the hands of foreign powers.<sup>188</sup> But nothing like this.<sup>189</sup> This judgment, which included the very house of David, meant the loss of national independence with a member of the house of David on the throne. Delitzsch explains:

The appeal to Asshur [Assyria] laid the foundation for the overthrow of the kingdom of Judah, quite as much as for that of the kingdom of Israel. Ahaz became the tributary vassal of the king of Assyria in consequence; and although Hezekiah was set free from Asshur through the miraculous assistance of Jehovah, what Nebuchadnezzar afterwards performed was only the accomplishment of the frustrated attempt of Sennacherib.<sup>190</sup>

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185 Ibid. See also GKC, §§ 117cc-II.

186 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 214; brackets added.

187 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:175, mentions that the clause translated in the NASB, "since the day that Ephraim separated from Judah," could be construed to refer to the retreat of the current invaders under Pekah. However, after discussing some grammatical nuances for and against this interpretation, he remarks that the departure of the Ten Tribes under Jeroboam is "the unanimous decision of all versions and interpreters, so far as I can trace it."

188 See the discussion of this issue by Alexander, *ibid.*, I:175-76.

189 Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:49, has an interesting idea as to how this prophecy of coming judgment might have affected Ahaz: "It is probable enough that this prophecy only confirmed Ahaz in his resolution of sending an embassy to Assyria. He may have hoped thus to render the fulfilment of the prophecy impossible."

190 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:222. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:295, writes similarly: "The threat is directed against Ahaz, but also against his people and the house of his father. It is to be fulfilled, then, so it would seem, not in the coming of one particular king alone, but in the coming of a period of depression and affliction caused by Assyrian kings generally. Days are to come, days which these kings will introduce. These days would culminate in the exile which would bring the theocracy to an end." Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:176, points out that the revolt of Hezekiah and even longer periods of liberty in later times were "mere interruptions of the customary and prevailing bondage."

After Babylon, there was Persia, Syria (under Greek rule), and finally Rome. From the fall of Jerusalem during the reign of Zedekiah, no Davidic king has reigned, even to this day. The next Davidic king to rule the restored nation of Israel will be the Messiah.

### *The Beginning of the Judgment Announced*

Before leaving verse 17, it is important to mark the beginning of this punishment the Lord will bring upon Judah. Further discussion of this question is given under "Issue 4" of verse 20, but it is important to see what verse 17 contributes to the question.

Verse 17 specifically states that the Lord will bring "the king of Assyria" "on *you*" (singular = Ahaz). It would certainly seem, therefore, that this punishment will come, or at least begin, with Tiglath-pileser shortly after the fall of Damascus and Samaria.

This seems also to be the import of the account in 2 Chronicles 28:16-21. Verse 16 and verses 20-21 read as follows:

At that time King Ahaz sent to the kings of Assyria for help...Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him. Although Ahaz took a portion out of the house of the LORD and out of the palace of the king and of the princes, and gave *it* to the king of Assyria, it did not help him.<sup>191</sup>

Young agrees that the judgment of Judah begins with Tiglath-pileser:

With Tiglath-pileser III the destruction of the theocracy began and a new period was introduced. What set in motion the train of events leading up to the exile and the abolishing of the democracy was the coming of this particular Assyrian king.<sup>192</sup>

Skinner draws the same conclusion: "There is nothing improbable in the supposition that Isaiah expected the Assyrian invasion of Judah...to happen simultaneously with the destruction of Samaria and Damascus."<sup>193</sup> Of course, "simultaneously" is not quite accurate. Damascus fell first and then Samaria.

Alexander also agrees that the threat in verse 17 must refer to Ahaz and his time but goes on to state that "the true sense of *thy people and thy father's house*" must apply "to him and his successors jointly."<sup>194</sup> Therefore, he continues:

The transition from an independent to a servile state took place before the death of Ahaz....It is implied, of course, in this interpretation, that Sennacherib's invasion was not the *beginning* of the days here threatened, which is rather to be sought in the alliance between Ahaz and Tiglath-pileser, *who came unto him and distressed him and strengthened him not* (2 Chron. xxviii. 19, 20), but exacted repeated contribution from him as a vassal; which degrading and oppressive intercourse continued till his death, as appears from the statement (2 Kings xviii. 7), that *Hezekiah rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not*, clearly implying that he did at first, as he offered to do afterwards, on Sennacherib's approach, with confession of his fault, renewal of his tribute, and a repetition of his father's sacrilege (2 Kings xviii. 13-16). That during the whole term of this foreign ascendancy, Judah was infested by Assyrian intruders, and by frequent visitations for the purpose of extorting their unwilling tribute, till at last the revolt of Hezekiah, no longer able to endure the burden, led to a formal occupation of the country, is not only possible in itself, but seems to be implied in the subsequent context (verses 18-20).<sup>195</sup>

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191 NASB; note the alternate spelling of Tiglath-pileser.

192 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:295

193 Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 57.

194 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:176; italics original.

195 *Ibid.*; italics original.

Therefore, the conclusion seems quite clear: 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, as pointed out in the previous section, "The Content of Verse 17," 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,<sup>196</sup> but there is yet no Davidic king ruling it. That awaits the Messiah.

## The Coming Desolation of Judah: 7:18-25

Young states that "verses 18-25 form somewhat of an excursus to the present verse [verse 17], singling out and developing one particular aspect of the promised threat."<sup>197</sup> What is this "particular aspect of the promised threat"? Verses 18-25 focus primarily on the effect on the land and population of Judah. Oswalt summarizes as follows:

The armies of their enemies will blanket the land like swarms of bees and flies. The Judeans will be disgraced in defeat. The countryside will be so depopulated that there will be no one to eat the produce of the few remaining animals or to cultivate the once-fertile hills. The land will return to wilderness. Had Ahaz been able to believe that God is indeed present with his people, it need not have been so. But because he trusted something less than God, that object of trust now becomes the instrument of the very devastation he dreaded.<sup>198</sup>

### Verses 18-19

Again, the *NASB* translates these verses as follows:

18 In that day the LORD will whistle for the fly that is in the remotest part of the rivers of Egypt and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. 19 They will all come and settle on the steep ravines, on the ledges of the cliffs, on all the thorn bushes and on all the watering places.

### *Issue 1*

Some commentators take verse 18 and following as a separate prophecy. One argument for this view is the recurrence of the phrase "in that day" (vv. 18, 20, 21, 23), indicating a series of later and separate oracles. However, Isaiah elsewhere strings a single prophecy together with a series of this expression (e.g., 19:16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24), as do other prophets (e.g., Hosea 2:16, 18, 21; Zech. 12:3, 4, 6, 8, 9). Also, as Oswalt points out, the congruence of verses 15 and 22 suggests that these two paragraphs were delivered at the same time.<sup>199</sup> No new prophecy was introduced in verse 18. As argued in this book, it is my view that the entirety of chapter 7 was delivered by Isaiah to Ahaz during a single meeting.

### *General Content of Verse 18-19*

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196 Gen. 17:8; et al.

197 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 1:294-95; brackets added. Also Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 215: "The function of these verses [18-25] is to spell out in more detail the veiled threat of v. 17." And Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 1:223: "What follows in vers. 18-25, is only a further expansion of ver. 17."

198 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, pp. 215-16.

199 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

As many commentators have observed, Isaiah predicted in 5:26 that God would whistle for nations to come and devastate the land of Judah, and here in verse 18 he identifies those nations--Egypt and Assyria. The "rivers of Egypt" probably are the Nile Delta in Lower (northern) Egypt where the Nile splits into many rivers and flows into the Mediterranean Sea. Concerning the flies and the bees, Cheyne, Skinner, Delitzsch, and Young take the flies and bees to be appropriately symbolic of Egypt and Assyria, respectively. However, it seems more likely that Isaiah simply uses two familiar and annoying insects to represent these nations without intending an analogy between the insects and the distinctive characteristics of those nations.<sup>200</sup> The Targum of Jonathan simply calls the flies "numerous" and the bees "strong." Finally, the intent of verse 19 is not limited to describing a military invasion, although that may be the prominent idea, but also the ubiquitous and oppressive presence of Egypt and Assyria in the country and in the affairs of Judah.<sup>201</sup>

## Issue 2

There is a difference of opinion regarding the role Egypt is to play in this prophetic judgment. At the time of this meeting between Isaiah and Ahaz, around 734, Egypt was not a threat to Judah and would not be for many years. Therefore, Oswalt suggests "that Isaiah is speaking generally, demonstrating Judah's vulnerability to powerful enemies on either hand apart from God's protection."<sup>202</sup> However, there is an alternative to this view.

In 609 Pharaoh Necho II, in order to regain world prominence for Egypt, marched north to aid what remained of the Assyrian forces against the Babylonia, which was on its way to becoming the new world leader. Josiah (640-609) apparently favored Babylon over Assyria and attempted to stop Necho. Josiah failed in his attempt, his army was defeated, and he was killed. After only a three-month reign by Josiah's middle son, Jehoahaz, Necho, now in authority over Judah, put Eliakim, whom he renamed Jehoiakim, on the throne. He demanded tribute from Judah, and Jehoiakim was his vassal for the next three years, during which Necho remained dominant in the West.<sup>203</sup> His domination came to an end in 605, however, with his utter defeat by Nebuchadnezzar at the world-changing Battle of Carchemish in 605.

In view of this history, some scholars, including Henderson and Delitzsch, believe that Isaiah's prediction in verses 18-19 includes these events from 609-605. There seems to be no good reason for rejecting this interpretation. It is the only period after 734 that Egypt plays any role in the affairs of Judah. Babylon then takes over the roles played earlier by Assyria and then Egypt until Judah ceases to be a nation when Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586.

In either case, verse 20 refers only to Assyria, and verses 20-25 deal explicitly with the imminent threat during the Assyrian period, as argued in the previous section, "The Beginning of the Judgment Announced."

## Verse 20

According to the *NASB*, verse 20 can be translated as follows:

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200 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:177-78.

201 Ibid., p. 178; see also Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, pp. 216. Alexander also discusses the numerous interpretations of the four terms used in verse 19 to describe where these flies and bees will alight: "on the steep ravines, on the ledges of the cliffs, on all the thorn bushes and on all the watering places" (*NASB*). But Isaiah is probably just using the symbolism of flies and bees "to express the general notion of a country overrun, infested, filled with foreigners and enemies, not only by military occupation but in other ways" (Alexander, *ibid.*). Alexander cites Radak that these four descriptions are sites of towns (*ibid.*). The Hebrew word for the last of these four descriptions is הַנְּהַלְלִים, a hapax legomenon, and its meaning is uncertain. The *LXX* has "trees," the *Vulgate* "holes," the *KJV* and *Stone Edition* "bushes," the *NASB* "watering places," the *Jerusalem Bible* "branches." The Targum of Jonathan has "houses of praise," and Rashi apparently accepts this rendering (translation of Rashi's commentary on the Chabad.org Web site).

202 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 216.

203 For an excellent and more detailed summary of these events, see Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, pp. 366-73.

In that day the Lord will shave with a razor, hired from regions beyond the Euphrates (*that is*, with the king of Assyria), the head and the hair of the legs; and it will also remove the beard.

This verse, like verses 17 and 18, emphasizes that it is Yahweh who executes this punishment. Assyria is completely subject to the Lord's control. The abruptness of the mention of "the king of Assyria" is similar to the startling use of the same phrase in verse 17.

### Issue 1

Is the word "hired" the correct meaning and translation?

According to *BDB* שְׂכִיר is either an adjective that means *hired* or is an adjective used as a substantive (noun) that means *hireling, hired laborer*. In this entry that includes every occurrence of שְׂכִיר, Exodus 22:14 and Isaiah 7:20 are the only two verses cited as a simple adjective meaning *hired*.<sup>204</sup> Most commentators and the *KJV*, *ASV*, *NIV*, and *NASB* all translate this word as "hired." Of the four main Jewish translations, three of them--*Jewish Bible 1917*, *Jewish Bible 1985*, and *Jerusalem Bible*--translate it as "hired," while the *Stone Edition* follows Rashi and translates it "large." *BDB* does not support this meaning.<sup>205</sup> Therefore, "hired" is almost certainly correct. Here שְׂכִיר has the definite article and a feminine singular ending to match the feminine singular noun "razor." Thus the Hebrew phrase would be "a razor the hired" or in better English, "a hired razor."

### Issue 2

Does verse 20 predict that the Lord is going to shave the king of Assyria?

The Targum of Jonathan, the Peshitta,<sup>206</sup> Radak, Abenezra, and Abравanel interpret the verse to say that the Lord shaves the king of Assyria and his army. According to the Targum,<sup>207</sup> the hair of the head represents the king, the hair of the legs his soldiers, and the beard his officials. Radak and Abenezra understand this shaving of the king of Assyria to refer to Sennacherib when his army is miraculously destroyed during the siege of Jerusalem.<sup>208</sup> Sennacherib, of course, was not killed when his army was slain, but he was killed in Nineveh about twenty years later by two of his sons.<sup>209</sup> Rashi, however, cites the Talmud in which a somewhat different view is taken. The "beard" in this verse is really the beard of Sennacherib, and it was destroyed by fire.<sup>210</sup>

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204 *BDB*, p. 969.

205 The Codex Vaticanus and Codex Alexandrinus of the *LXX* translate שְׂכִיר *drunken*, followed by the Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion Greek translations. However, the original error is likely mistaking שְׂכִיר for שָׂכַר, *drunken*.

206 The Syriac Old Testament translated into the Eastern Aramaic dialect in the second or third century A.D. (Christian).

207 As related by Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 65, in the ArtScroll commentary.

208 Cited by Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 65.

209 2 Kgs. 19:35-37.

210 b. Sanh. 95b-96a contains an embellished Haggadic interpretation of the shaving of Sennacherib's beard: it was destroyed by fire. "R. Abbahu said: Were not the [following] verse written, it would have been impossible to conceive of it: viz., In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, namely, by the riverside, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall consume the beard. The Holy one, blessed be He, went and appeared before him [Sennacherib] as an old man, and said to him, 'When thou goest to the kings of the east and the west, whose sons thou didst lead [to battle] and cause their death, what wilt thou say to them?' He replied, 'I too entertain that fear. What then shall I do?' asked he. 'Go,' He replied, and disguise thyself'. 'How shall I disguise myself?' 'Bring me a razor, and I myself will shave thee'. He answered. 'Whence shall I procure it?' 'Enter that house and take it', He rejoined. So he went and found it there. But the Ministering angels appeared to him in the shape of men grinding palm kernels.

Theodoret, a Christian,<sup>211</sup> also took verse 20 to mean that it was the king of Assyria whom the Lord shaved but believed that the razor he used was the Medes and the Persians.<sup>212</sup>

Three uses of the inseparable preposition ב (in, with, by) in this verse are critical to determining whether the king of Assyria is himself shaved or whether he does the shaving as the Lord's razor.

- בַּתְּעַר : feminine singular noun תְּעַר , razor; prefixed with ב <sup>213</sup>
- בְּעֵבְרֵי : plural of masculine noun עֵבֶר , region across, region beyond; prefixed with ב <sup>214</sup>
- בְּמֶלֶךְ : masculine singular noun מֶלֶךְ , king; prefixed with ב <sup>215</sup>

Using "with" as the meaning of ב , the three phrases would be translated as follows:

"with a razor the hired" (viz., "with a hired razor")

"with regions across [the] River [Euphrates]"<sup>216</sup>

"with [the] king of Assyria"

However, it is unlikely that ב would be used in the sense of "with" when prefixed to a noun that refers to a region. "In" fits the noun better. Therefore, the first part of the verse could be translated as follows:

In that day Adonai will shave with a hired razor in regions across the River with the king of Assyria the head and hair of the feet...

If "king of Assyria" is the intended direct object of the verb "will shave," it is most unlikely that the word "king" would be prefixed with a preposition. Also against this view is the fact that there are direct objects for the verb "to shave" directly indicated by the usual sign of a definite direct object, אֶת . Consider the two verbs used in verse

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'Give me the razor,' said he. 'Grind a griwah of palm kernels,' they replied, 'and we will give it thee'. So he ground a griwah of palm kernels, and they gave him the razor. By the time he returned, it had become dark. 'Go and bring some fire', He ordered. So he went and brought fire. Whilst he was blowing it [into a blaze], it caught hold of his beard, whereupon He shaved off the hair of his head together with his beard." (This tractate was translated by Jacob Shachter under general editorship of Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein, *Soncino Babylonian Talmud*; taken from [www.come-and-hear.com/sanhedrin](http://www.come-and-hear.com/sanhedrin).)

211 Theodoret (ca. A.D. 393 - ca. 458/466) was an influential Christian theologian at the Antiochian School, one of the two major centers of biblical exegesis and theology. The other school was at Alexandria, and there were numerous differences on their approaches to Scripture. For more information on these two schools, see Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.; original publication date, 1890), pp. 637-50, and for a simpler explanation see Kaiser in Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., and Moisés Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), pp. 264-67.

212 Noted by Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:179.

213 *BDB*, p. 789. The Targum of Jonathan paraphrases תְּעַר ("razor") depicting various weapons of war, but this can hardly be justified with so much attention to hair in the verse.

214 *Ibid.*, p. 719.

215 *Ibid.*, p. 572.

216 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:179, points out that נְהָר can be used for the Euphrates River even without the definite article; see Jer. 2:18.

20.

- **יִגְלַח** : third person masculine singular Piel imperfect of **גָּלַח** , *to shave, to shave off*; *BDB* states that in Isaiah 7:20 there are three direct objects of this verb: "the head" (**הָרֵאשׁ**), "hair of the feet" (**שְׂעַר הַרְגְּלַיִם**), and "the beard" (**הַזֶּקֶן**);<sup>217</sup> finally, **הָרֵאשׁ** ("the head") and **הַזֶּקֶן** ("the beard") both have the usual sign of a definite direct object, **אֶת** .
- **תִּסְפֶּה** : transitive Qal imperfect of **סָפַה** , *to sweep away, to snatch away*; according to *BDB*, this form of the verb is used in only two passages: as a second person masculine singular in Genesis 18:23, 24 and as a third person feminine singular in Isaiah 7:20 .<sup>218</sup>

Thus there is little doubt that the objects of the verb "to shave" are at least "the head" and "hair of the feet," not the "king of Assyria."

"The beard," however, raises a question. It is obviously a direct object, but of which verb? As mentioned, the *BDB* entry on **יִגְלַח** ("to shave") lists all three nouns as direct objects of **יִגְלַח** ("will shave"), but the *BDB* entry on **תִּסְפֶּה** ("to sweep away") lists **תִּסְפֶּה** ("will sweep away") as transitive, thus requiring a direct object.<sup>219</sup> But if all three direct objects belong to the verb **יִגְלַח** , what is the direct object of **תִּסְפֶּה** ?

It would seem best to base the solution of this problem on the Masoretic accent. The <sup>ʾ</sup>*Athnâch* is on **הַרְגְּלַיִם** ("feet"), making that word the end of the first clause of the verse. Therefore, the direct object **אֶת־הַזֶּקֶן** ("the beard") was apparently taken by the Masoretes as the object of the verb **תִּסְפֶּה** ("will sweep away").<sup>220</sup>

But this raises yet another question. What is the subject of the verb **תִּסְפֶּה** ? Adonai is clearly the subject of the verb **יִגְלַח** ("will shave") with the two direct objects being "the head" and "hair of the feet." According to *BDB* the verb **תִּסְפֶּה** is third person feminine. Among the possible subjects, "Adonai" and "king" are both masculine but "razor" is feminine. So the intent of the second clause of the verse following the <sup>ʾ</sup>*Athnâch* (a mere two words!) could be "the beard [the] razor will sweep away" or "[the] razor will sweep away the beard."<sup>221</sup>

However, instead of reaching across the <sup>ʾ</sup>*Athnâch* back to the first clause of the verse for the subject of a verb in the second clause, there is another possible explanation. *GKC* states that since Hebrew, as other Semitic languages, recognizes only two genders, masculine and feminine, the feminine form of a verb is sometimes

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217 *BDB*, p. 164.

218 *Ibid.*, p. 705.

219 It is difficult to tell whether these two articles have the same author. It seems likely from the Preface, but it is difficult to determine.

220 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:179, suggest that the separate mention of the beard may reflect the "oriental fondness" for it and the dishonor associated with the loss of it.

221 Alexander, *ibid.*, takes this view, but he translates the verb "it will take away."

used in the sense of a neuter referring back to something abstract.<sup>222</sup> An example in this same chapter of Isaiah is cited by *GKC*: "*it* shall not stand, neither shall *it* come to pass," (v. 7). The "it" refers back to all the plans of Rezin and Pekah in verses 5 and 6, which would be difficult to classify as either masculine or feminine. Similarly, here in verse 20, the verb can be translated "*it* will sweep away," where "it" refers back to the whole activity described in the first clause of the verse, namely, Adonai hiring a razor and starting to shave various parts of the body--"*it* will sweep away the beard" as well. The direct object of the verb is still אֵת הַזָּקֵן , "the beard."

It should be noted that both of these grammatical constructions for the subject of the verb תִּסְפָּה ("will sweep away") present the same essential meaning. Thus verse 20 might reasonably be translated as follows:

"In that day Adonai will shave with a hired razor in regions across the River with the king of Assyria the head and hair of the feet, and also it will sweep away the beard."

Numerous translations reflect this interpretation of verse 20:

On the same day shall the LORD shave with a hired razor that is hired (namely with them beyond the river with the king of Ashshur) the head, and the hair of the legs: and it shall also sweep away the beard. (*Jerusalem Bible*)

In that day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired in the parts beyond the River, even with the king of Assyria, the head and the hair of the feet; and it shall also sweep away the beard. (*Jewish Bible 1917*)

In that day, my Lord will cut away with the razor that is hired beyond the Euphrates--with the king of Assyria--the hair of the head and the hair of the legs, and it shall clip off the beard as well. (*Jewish Bible 1985*)

In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, namely, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall also consume the beard. (*KJV*)

In that day will the Lord shave with a razor that is hired in the parts beyond the River, *even* with the king of Assyria, the head and the hair of the feet; and it shall also consume the beard. (*ASV*)

In that day the Lord will shave with a razor, hired from regions beyond the Euphrates (*that is*, with the king of Assyria), the head and the hair of the legs; and it will also remove the beard. (*NASB*)

Summarizing, the verse likely means that Adonai will do the shaving with a razor hired in regions across the Euphrates River, that is, with the king of Assyria--the king of Assyria being the razor the Lord will use to do the shaving.

### Issue 3

The Lord "hiring" anyone to do anything is a rather strange concept. What is the significance of the word "hired"?

Many commentators agree on why Isaiah used the word "hired" (e.g., Henderson, Alexander, Delitzsch, Cheyne, Skinner, and Oswalt). At the meeting with Isaiah, Ahaz had already planned to send Tiglath-pileser a generous tribute to come and save him from Rezin and Pekah--tantamount to "hiring" the king of Assyria. Perhaps Ahaz intended to keep his plan a secret. That is what makes verse 20 so striking. According to Oswalt,

Isaiah here shocks Ahaz with his evident knowledge of the affair, for the reference to the *king of Assyria*

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<sup>222</sup> *GKC*, § 122q.

would be unnecessary unless the agreement between the two kings were in the background.<sup>223</sup>

Delitzsch regards Isaiah's statement here as "the bitterest sarcasm for Ahaz."<sup>224</sup> But why is that? The answer is that while Ahaz might intend to "hire" the king of Assyria to save him, the Lord was going to hire the king of Assyria to "shave" Judah and thus punish Ahaz for looking to Tiglath-pileser to save him rather than looking to the Lord. Alexander summarizes the overall intent of verse 20 as follows:

According to the common reading, which is no doubt genuine, the king of Assyria is called a hired razor...[because just] as Ahaz had profaned and robbed God's house to hire a foreign razor, with which Israel and Syria might be shaven, so God would make use of that self-same razor to shave Judah, i.e., to remove its population, or its wealth, or both.<sup>225</sup>

Shaving the head, the legs,<sup>226</sup> and especially the beard, of course, was a common way of humiliating captives after a battle. However, since there would be no open warfare between Assyria and Judah until Sennacherib's invasion, this is likely a figurative description of a completely humiliated nation. As Gray puts it, Judah is here personified as a man.<sup>227</sup> Nevertheless, actual warfare will take place with Sennacherib, Necho, and finally Nebuchadnezzar.

#### Issue 4

An important question remains, and it bears on the interpretation of verse 17 and verses 18-25, especially verses 21-25. When will the Lord begin "shaving" Judah using "the king of Assyria" as his razor? Despite the use of "curds and honey" in verse 21, this shaving does not represent the same deprivation mentioned in verse 15. That deprivation of the land of Judah was brought about by the ravages of Rezin and Pekah, as argued previously in this chapter.<sup>228</sup> This more thorough ravaging of the land described in verses 20-25 is the work of an Assyrian king. The question is which Assyrian king.

Also as argued earlier in this chapter,<sup>229</sup> the Lord's punishment of Judah using Assyria began with Tiglath-pileser shortly after he defeated Rezin and Pekah. However, did he ravage the land of Judah to the degree indicated here in verses 21-25? That is probably not the case. Henderson states,

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223 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 217. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 58, though he recognizes the likely reason for the word "hire" here, draws from it an unnecessary conclusion: "There may possibly be here an allusion to the 'hiring' of Assyria by Ahaz (2 Ki. xvi. 7 f.); if so the prophecy is almost certainly later than vv. 1-17." However, as argued in Chapter 5, subsection "The Prosecution of the Syro-Ephraimite War," the meeting between Isaiah and Ahaz most likely took place before Ahaz sent his appeal to Tiglath-pileser. Also as noted in this chapter, "Issue 1" of subsection "Verses 18-19," the congruence of verses 15 and 22 suggests that these two paragraphs were delivered at the same time. In his note on v. 20, Cheyne suggests that "if chap. vii. be a summary of various prophecies, this will probably be a somewhat later insertion" (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:50). Yet in his comment on Ewald's view of v. 18, Cheyne writes, "If v. 15 was spoken to Ahaz...must not v. 22 have been so too, for without it v. 15 is unintelligible?" (p. 49). Of course, these two statements by Cheyne are not incompatible, but they do show the propensity of the liberal mindset for textual emendation. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX*, p. 139, takes a most curious view of the significance of the word "hired," namely, that "Yahweh pays for services rendered," and then cites Ezek. 29:19f.

224 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:225.

225 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:179; brackets added.

226 The word translated "legs" by the NASB is רַגְלֵי , a feminine noun. According to the uses cited in *BDB*, pp. 919-20, it almost always means *foot*. However, when שְׂעָרַיְ , a masculine noun, *hair*, is used in construct with it, *BDB* takes the combined meaning to be "hair of the private parts," rather than hair of the feet or legs, and cites Isa. 7:20. The *NIV* translates the phrase this way, while the *Jerusalem Bible* follows the NASB.

227 Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah I-XXXIX*, p. 139.

228 See "Issue 2" under "Verses 15-16" in this chapter.

229 See "The Beginning of the Judgment Announced" under "Verse 17" in this chapter.

The punishment began to be inflicted by Tiglath-pileser, 2 Chron. xxviii. 16-21, and was renewed by Sennacherib, and succeeding monarchs.<sup>230</sup>

Sennacherib is likely the Assyrian king responsible for the devastation of the land and the implied deportations described in verses 21-25. Nevertheless, as Oswalt points out in his comments on verses 21-22, these conditions resulted from various Assyrian campaigns from 734 to 701.<sup>231</sup> However, there is little doubt that this havoc reached its climax with Sennacherib's invasion in 701. He conquered all of Judah, except Jerusalem. As cited earlier in this chapter, Alexander made this observation:

That during the whole term of this foreign ascendancy [734-701], Judah was infested by Assyrian intruders, and by frequent visitations for the purpose of extorting their unwilling tribute, till at last the revolt of Hezekiah, no longer able to endure the burden, led to a formal occupation of the country, is not only possible in itself, but seems to be implied in the subsequent context (verses 18-20).<sup>232</sup>

Verses 8:1-8 add additional information that again points to Sennacherib. Shortly after his meeting with Ahaz, Isaiah's wife conceives and bears a son, whom God directs Isaiah to call Maher-shalal-hash-baz ("swift is the booty, speedy is the prey"). Verses 4-8 follow:

"Before the boy knows how to cry out 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria." Again the LORD spoke to me further, saying, "Inasmuch as these people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoice<sup>233</sup> in Rezin and the son of Remaliah; now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, even the king of Assyria and all his glory; and it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks. 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...."<sup>234</sup>

The word צוּאֵר , "neck," seems clearly to be a metaphor for how far Assyria will "sweep on into Judah." Since the "sweep" stops short of the head, this would again imply the invasion of Sennacherib. According to the paraphrase in the Targum of Jonathan, the king of Assyria, called an "overflowing torrent," will reach as far as Jerusalem, and no farther. Radak's explanation is summarized in the ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah as follows:

Isaiah foresees Sennacherib overrunning all of the land, up to its *neck*--but not the city of Jerusalem, the "head" of the land. When the Assyrian king camped outside Jerusalem intending to conquer the city, it was as though the waters had reached the neck.<sup>235</sup>

Concerning the significance of the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz ('swift is the booty, speedy is the prey'), its

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230 Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 66.

231 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 218.

232 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:176; brackets added.

233 The word translated "rejoice" here, מְשׂוֹשׂ , is not a verb but a noun in construct with Rezin, and it means *exaltation* or *joy* (see *BDB*, p. 965). Both Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, pp. 225-26, and Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:187, discuss various interpretations of this difficult phrase. Radak postulated that there was a group of people in Jerusalem who disliked the militarily weak Judah and preferred the militaristic kings of Rezin and Pekah (cited in the ArtScroll commentary, Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 69). The best solution would seem to be that proposed by Alexander, namely, that the joy was over the departure of Rezin and Pekah from Judah. Since this is a prophecy subsequent to Isaiah's meeting with Ahaz in chapter 7, this statement could then describe the rejoicing of the people of Judah at the arrival of Tiglath-pileser--before both Ahaz and Judah learned the real consequences for them of that arrival. Consistent with this interpretation, Alexander adds that the particle אֵת on רְצִין (Rezin) "denotes the direct occasion of the joy" (I:187); he suggests the reasonably literal translation of: "joy with respect to Rezin and the son of Ramaliah" (I:186).

234 *NASB*; poetic format was removed.

235 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 69.

primary significance was the soon and quick defeat of Damascus and Samaria by Tiglath-pileser.<sup>236</sup> However, it had a secondary, and perhaps more important, significance as well: the Lord's use of Tiglath-pileser as the beginning of his punishment on Judah, which would culminate in the devastation by Sennacherib of all of Judah, except Jerusalem. During this period from Tiglath-pileser to Sennacherib, most of the treasures of Jerusalem would also be carried off to Assyria in the form of tribute. Delitzsch's explanation is right on the mark:

The inscription upon the table [v. 8:1], which was adopted as the name of the child, was not a purely consolatory prophecy, since the prophet had predicted, a short time before [in the meeting with Ahaz in chapter 7], that the same Asshur which devastated the two covenant lands would lay Judah waste as well.

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Mahershalal could not comfort them; for they knew that when Asshur had done with Damascus and Samaria, the troubles of Judah would not be over, but would only then be really about to commence.<sup>237</sup>

### Verses 21-22

21 Now in that day a man may keep alive a heifer and a pair of sheep; 22 and because of the abundance of the milk produced he will eat curds, for everyone that is left within the land will eat curds and honey.

In "Issue 2" under "Verse 20" it was noted that a number of the standard Jewish sources interpret verse 20 to mean that the Lord will "shave" the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, by the miraculous destruction of his army during his siege of Jerusalem. That in turn would imply that verses 21-25 must refer to conditions in Judah *after* Sennacherib returns to Nineveh. The ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah summarizes Radak's comments as follows:

After the defeat of the Assyrian invaders, the righteous survivors of Judah will enjoy miraculous prosperity in their desolate land. God will bless their possessions so that only a few animals, a heifer and two sheep, will be sufficient to support a person.<sup>238</sup>

Although this view acknowledges that the land was made "desolate" by Sennacherib, it makes verses 21-25 describe "miraculous prosperity" that the Lord provides for the "righteous survivors of Judah." Such a view indeed tends to follow from the interpretation that the Lord "shaves" the Assyrian king, Sennacherib. However, it is quite the opposite of the view that must be given to these verses if it is Sennacherib who shaves Judah as a punishment from the Lord. In "Issue 2" under "Verse 20" it was argued that Sennacherib was the razor hired by the Lord that shaved Judah, not the object of the Lord's shaving. In turn, as argued in "Issue 4" under "Verse 20," verses 21-25 describe a desolation brought upon Judah by the Lord as punishment, the consequences of which for the people of Judah will be the opposite of "miraculous prosperity."

Oswalt summarizes verses 21-22 as follows:

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236 See Chapter 6, footnote 17.

237 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:231; brackets added. Note also 10:5-6 where the terms "spoil" and "plunder" again describe what Assyria will do to Judah (see Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 263).

238 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 65. Radak here follows the Targum of Jonathan. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 217, n. 10, points out that the Targum in verse 22 has "good things" rather than the MT "making milk," and "all the righteous who remain" rather than the MT "everyone who remains." Scherman also points out that in commenting on v. 22 Radak suggests that the great abundance of milk and honey "will make the land seem to flow with milk and honey, as described in Deuteronomy 31:20" (p. 65). See, however, Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:181, where he argues that this analogy fails on a number of points. He concludes that "it [curds and honey] is here mentioned neither as a delicacy nor as plain and ordinary food, but as a kind of diet independent of the cultivation of the earth, and therefore implying a neglect of tillage and a pastoral mode of life, as well as an unusual extent of pasturage..." (pp. 180-81).

Although some commentators, following the lead of the Targum, have tried to make these verses speak of the blessedness of the remnant, it is clear that the main theme of this utterance along with the following is of the depopulation of the land so that it reverts from a crop-growing to a herding region in which there will be so few people that a minimum of animals will produce more than enough food.<sup>239</sup>

Delitzsch concurs and gives a more detailed description in his summary of verses 21-22:

The former prosperity would be reduced to the most miserable housekeeping. One man would keep a milch cow and two head of sheep (or goats) alive with the greatest care, the strongest and finest full-grown cattle having fallen into the hands of the foe...But this would be quite enough, for there would be only a few men left in the land; and as all the land would be pasture, the small number of animals would yield milk in abundance. Bread and wine would be unattainable. Whoever had escaped the Assyrian razor, would eat thickened milk and honey, that and nothing but that, *ad nauseam*. The reason for this would be, that the hills, which at other times were full of vines and corn-fields, would be overgrown with briars.<sup>240</sup>

In verse 21, that a man "will keep alive" a heifer and a pair of sheep (or goats), also implies scarcity and not abundance. The verb **יָחִיֶּה** is a third person masculine singular Piel imperfect of the root **יָחַי**, *to live*. According to *BDB*, the Piel stem for this verb is most often used in the sense of *to preserve alive, to let live*.<sup>241</sup> Thus, in general, under the desolation brought upon Judah by Sennacherib, about three animals were all that a man was able to retain and to keep alive.

On the other hand, although verses 21-22 speak of desolation, there is a positive element here, as noted by Rashi: those few not killed or deported indeed had sufficient food.<sup>242</sup>

### Verses 23-25

23 And it will come about in that day, that every place where there used to be a thousand vines, *valued* at a thousand *shekels* of silver, will become briars and thorns. 24 *People* will come there with bows and arrows because all the land will be briars and thorns. 25 As for all the hills which used to be cultivated with the hoe, you will not go there for fear of briars and thorns; but they will become a place for pasturing oxen and for sheep to trample.

The general intent of these verses is clearly to describe the effect of depopulation of the land itself. Valuable, cultivated vineyards will become overgrown with briars and thorns, and men will go there only with weapons. Fields on hillsides, once cultivated with the hoe, will also be taken over by briars and thorns and become a place for oxen and sheep to trample. However, there are a few details here that call for attention.

### *Issue 1*

What is the significance of the expensive vines in verse 23?

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239 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 217.

240 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:225.

241 *BDB*, p. 311. Note, however, that Isa. 7:21 is listed under the meaning of *to nourish*. In only one other verse might this verb have the sense of *nourish*--2 Sam. 12:3.

242 "The righteous who were saved from the sword of Sennacherib he is bring them good news, that sustenance will be prepared for them after the desolation" (translation of Rashi's commentary on the Chabad.org Web site). Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 218, follows Rashi in this: "Although I take the position that the primary reference of the oracle is negative, I see no need to deny the positive element in it. To be sure, curds and honey are not the bread and wine of a cultivated land, but they are still a desirable food. Although Ahaz, through his policies dictated by human wisdom, will have plunged the land to disaster, nonetheless God is still with his people, and the survivors of Ahaz's act, few though they be, will be provided for."

Oswalt thinks there might be an allusion here to the song of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7.<sup>243</sup> This does seem unlikely, however. In the vineyard song, the vine is figurative and represents Judah. Here in verse 23, the vines are literal, and their present state is a result of physical devastation at the hands of an invading army.

The price of these vines is a silver shekel per vine. This would be an exorbitant price for a vine, and Oswalt suggests that Isaiah is speaking hyperbolically.<sup>244</sup> A thousand shekels for a vineyard is mentioned in Song of Songs 8:11, but this is the price paid for the produce of the fruit. Alexander is probably correct in saying that Isaiah here simply means a very valuable vineyard.<sup>245</sup> The point of the verse is that even such a vineyard will become deserted, taken over by briars and thorns.

## Issue 2

Why must men carry bows and arrows when entering the land of these former vineyards? Commentators have made numerous suggestions, but the most common are for protection against wild animals (e.g., Rashi) or for hunting (e.g., Calvin). However, since neither are explicitly mentioned, there would seem to be no reason against carrying weapons for both purposes.<sup>246</sup>

## Issue 3

The clause about the briars and thorns in verse 25 is the most difficult. The issue turns on the correct parsing of the verb **תָּבוֹא**, a Qal imperfect of **בֹּא**, *to go or to come*: is it second person masculine singular (2ms) or third person feminine singular (3fs)? *BDB* recognizes both uses but does not cite Isaiah 7:25;<sup>247</sup> *GKC* takes it to be the former (2ms).<sup>248</sup> **יִרְאֵת**, *fear*, is a feminine singular noun in construct with **שְׁמִיר וְשִׁית**, *briars and thorns*. If the verb is taken as a 3fs, "fear" becomes the subject of the verb: "fear of briars and thorns shall not come there," i.e., to the hills. The Targum of Jonathan, LXX, Radak, Abravanel, *Stone Edition, Jewish Bible 1985*, and *KJV* take the clause this way. The result is that verse 25 becomes a positive statement rather than a continuation of the desolation described in verses 23-24. The ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah summarizes Radak's interpretation as follows:

Although there will be great destruction over the entire land, some areas will remain fertile. So fertile will they be that although the people will hoe them normally, they will produce crops far beyond their normal capacity. The people will therefore permit animals to graze in these lands without being afraid that the livestock will deplete the land needed to produce crops for the human population (*Radak*).<sup>249</sup>

The alternative, however, is more likely. If the verb is taken as a 2ms, "fear" becomes the object of the verb: "you will not go there for fear of briars and thorns."<sup>250</sup> The *Jewish Bible 1917*, *Jerusalem Bible*, *ASV*, *NIV*, and *NASB*, together with most scholars now take this view.<sup>251</sup> According to Oswalt, the other option

manifestly flies in the face of the context. Whereas vv. 23 and 24 speak of desolation, this verse, using

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243 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 218.

244 Ibid.

245 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:181.

246 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:299.

247 *BDB*, p. 97.

248 *GKC*, § 118l.

249 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 67.

250 According to *GKC*, § 118l, "The accusative is sometimes used of abstract ideas to state the reason (*accus. causae*), e.g., Is 7<sup>25</sup> *thou shalt not come thither יִרְאֵת שְׁמִיר for fear of briars*" (italics original).

251 E.g., Henderson, Alexander, Delitzsch, Cheyne, Gray, Young, and Oswalt.

the same language, is made to speak of promise. Furthermore, the latter half of the verse does not make sense in this light. If the land is cultivated with no briars there, it is hardly the place where herds and flocks are allowed.<sup>252</sup>

Alexander summarizes the option suggested here as follows:

Thus understood, the verse [25] continues and completes the description of the general desolation, as manifested first by the people's living upon milk and honey, then by the growth of thorns and briars in the choicest vineyards and the terraced hills, and by the conversion of these carefully-tilled spots into dangerous solitudes, hunting grounds, and pastures.<sup>253</sup>

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252 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 219.

253 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:183; brackets added.