

# Isaiah 7:14: A Virgin Shall Conceive

## Jeff Smelser

### Introduction:

- I. *And Trypho answered, "The Scripture has not, 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,' but, 'Behold, the young woman shall conceive, and bear a son,' and so on, as you quoted. But the whole prophecy refers to Hezekiah, and it is proved that it was fulfilled in him, according to the terms of this prophecy. Moreover, in the fables of those who are called Greeks, it is written that Perseus was begotten of Danae, who was a virgin; he who was called among them Zeus having descended on her in the form of a golden shower. And you ought to feel ashamed when you make assertions similar to theirs, and rather [should] say that this Jesus was born man of men.."* (Justin Martyr, 67)
  - A. Trypho anticipated two major points of contention in the modern Is. 7:14 debate between theological liberals and theological conservatives:
    1. The meaning and translation of *'almah*
    2. The allegation that a child divinely begotten by a virgin is a notion derived from pagan myths
- II. The question of an 8th century B.C. reference is often discussed in theologically polarized fashion, reflecting the threat that rationalism and higher criticism posed in the 19th century and continuing into the 20th century and the perception that the RSV with its translation of Is. 7:14 ("...Behold, a young woman shall conceive...") was advancing the cause of unbelief.
  - A. "...the student who regards Is. 7:14 as a prophecy of the birth of Christ, finds in this passage Old Testament support for the doctrine of the virgin birth. But a student who sees no reference to the birth of Christ in Is. 7:14 will challenge the fact that *almah* means anything but a young woman." (Sauer, 551)
  - B. "Basic to all the evangelical discussion of Isa 7:14 is the question, 'Does the verse predict Jesus Christ?' Liberalism tends to say no..." (Payne, 75).
  - C. E. J. Young contrasts the perspective of those "who regard the New Testament as divinely inspired" with those "who do not share such a high view of the New Testament," saying the latter "have not regarded the Old Testament passage as a prophecy of the virgin birth of our Lord." (Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy...II," 98)
  - D. "The great and only difficulty lies in disbelief in predictive prophecy and in the almighty power of God; or in the desire to throw discredit upon the divine Sonship of Jesus." (Wilson, 316)
  - E. Wilson's assertion is essentially what Ira Rice charged in more colorful language, when he wrote of RSV translation committee member Harry M. Orlinsky, "...if he didn't make a harlot out of Mary and a bastard out of our Lord Jesus Christ, please tell us what else!" (*Contending for the Faith*, Feb. 1978, as quoted by King, "A Plea for Sanity on Isaiah 7:14," 666. Was it merely by chance that Dan's article was put on page 666?) To be sure, Orlinsky, a Hebrew Union professor, may have had just the perception of Mary and Jesus that Rice alleged. But that doesn't disprove the legitimacy of the RSV rendering.
- III. And yet many who acknowledge God's purpose to foretell the birth of Jesus in Is. 7:14 (i.e., conservatives) also see a possible reference to an 8th century B.C. mother and child. In the 19th century, these included J. A. Alexander, Albert Barnes, Milton Terry, and others, and in the 20th century, Gleason Archer, Walter Kaiser, William Sanford LaSor, John Oswalt, John Walton, Herbert Wolf and others. We might make special note of J.W. McGarvey who apparently

belonged in this company (McGarvey 25f), and in light of the venue of this presentation, Robert Milligan, who believed that the child to be born to the virgin of Isaiah 7:14 was Maher-shalal-hash-baz, who was a type of the Christ. (Milligan, 115)

- IV. Discounting the pagan origin idea, we will only consider the significance of *'almah*. Specifically, we are concerned with the following two questions:
- A. Does Is. 7:14 refer to an 8th century B.C. birth that would foreshadow Jesus' virgin birth, or does it refer exclusively to the birth of Jesus?
    1. There is no doubt that Jesus was born of a virgin (Mt. 1:20, 25; Lk. 1:34)
    2. There is no doubt that this was in fulfillment of prophecy (Mt. 1:23)
    3. There is doubt that God could have explicitly foretold the virgin birth without doing so by means of a lesser birth that served as a foreshadow. (cf. Micah 5:2; Dan. 11; etc.)
    4. We only ask of what kind is this prophecy? Is it the kind we see in Micah 5:2, or is it the kind we see in 2 Sam. 7:12-16?
  - B. If there is an 8th century reference, who is the *'almah* and who is the child?

### Body:

#### I. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- A. **The threat Ahaz faced from Israel.** Assyria had become a threat to Israel during the reign of Pekah (2 Kings 15:29). Meanwhile, in Judah, Ahaz was co-regent along with his father, Jotham, for a time before becoming sole ruler of Israel. In that general period of time, Pekah and Rezin became allies against Judah, sent by the Lord (2 Kings 15:37), as punishment for Ahaz's abominations (2 Chron. 28:1-6). Israel killed 120,000 of Judah in one day. And they carried away 200,000 to be slaves. But a prophet named Oded admonished the men of Israel, and consequently, the captives were released (2 Chron. 28:8-15). Then Ahaz was told that Syria was encamped in Ephraim, i.e., Syria had allied itself with Israel, and was perhaps physically in position to attack (Isaiah 7:1). Rezin, King of Syria, and Pekah, King of Israel, had conspired to defeat Judah and put "the son of Tabeel" on the throne (Is. 7:5).
- B. **Isaiah's message.** Against this backdrop, probably in about 734 B.C., Isaiah, accompanied by his son Shear-Jashub ("a remnant will return") met Ahaz and told him he need not be fearful. Regarding the ominous threat from Israel and Syria, the Lord's assurance was "It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass" (Is. 7:1-7). In short order the land of the two kings whom Ahaz feared would be forsaken (Is. 7:16) and within 65 years, Ephraim would be so shattered that it would no more be a people. But Ahaz was also told that if he did not believe, he would not last (Is. 7:9)
- C. **The sign.** Isaiah offered Ahaz a sign of Ahaz's choosing, but Ahaz declined, unwilling to yield to the Lord's will. Ahaz preferred to look to the Assyrians for help (2 Kings 16:7). Nonetheless, the Lord would give Ahaz a sign, but it would be one of the Lord's choosing:
  1. Isa. 7:14-16: "Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey at that time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good. For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken."
- D. **The ensuing events.** Tiglath-Pileser would indeed attack Syria and kill Rezin (733/732?):
  1. "Tiglath pileser entered Damascus, executed Rezin its king, ravaged the city, and deported a large portion of its population. Then Tiglath-pileser organized the territory

of the former state of Damascus into four Assyrian provinces. While his predecessors had been content to take tribute from conquered peoples, Tiglath-pileser adopted the policy of incorporating them into his empire. Among those who hastened to Damascus to pay tribute to Tiglath-pileser we meet the name Iauhazi of Judah, i.e. Jehoahaz, the fuller form of the Biblical name Ahaz.” (Pfeiffer, 334f)

2. In 732, at the time of an Assyrian attack on Israel, Hoshea killed Pekah and became King in his place (2 Kings 15:29-30). Then in 722 B.C., twelve years from the time of Isaiah’s conversation with Ahaz, Israel would fall to the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:3-6). And about 669 B.C., 65 years after Isaiah’s conversation with Ahaz, King Esarhaddon of Assyria populated the land of Israel with foreigners (2 Kings 17:24ff, Ezra 4:2). But in turning to the Assyrians, Ahaz had invited trouble. They would also come and afflict Judah severely, as Isaiah had warned (Is. 7:17ff).

## II. THE MAJOR POINTS AT ISSUE

A simplistic presentation of major points at issue between those who see an exclusive reference to Jesus and those who see an initial reference to 8th century B.C. events. There are variations for each side.		
	<b>VIEWPOINT: Exclusive Reference to Jesus</b>	<b>VIEWPOINT: Initial reference to 8th century</b>
<b>The meaning of ‘<i>almah</i>’?</b>	“young woman,” “maiden,” but in Is. 7:14, the young woman is necessarily a virgin	“young woman,” “maiden,” though possibly used of one who was in fact a virgin
<b>The identity of ‘<i>almah</i> and her son’?</b>	Mary/Jesus	various/various
<b>The meaning of “sign”?</b>	supernatural event	indication
<b>How would it be a sign to Ahaz, or 8th century Judah?</b>	assurance that his dynasty would survive, and the Messiah would come	deliverance would come within the timeframe of the child’s infancy/youth
<b>The significance of “Immanuel”?</b>	“ <i>God with us</i> ” = deity incarnate	“ <i>God with us</i> ” = God’s presence
<b>The meaning of “your land”?</b>	Immanuel owns the land	Immanuel lives in the land

### A. The meaning of ‘*almah*’?

1. As will become evident, there is not so much difference in the understanding of the word itself as one might suppose. The differences arise primarily when other than lexical factors are brought into view, e.g., what bearing Matthew’s quotation has.
2. There are 8 occurrences in the OT other than Is. 7:14
  - a. Two are possibly technical terms in connection with music.
    - 1) 1 Chron. 15:20 “harps tuned to alamoth” (in accordance with maiden’s voices, i.e., soprano? or by a choir of maidens?)
    - 2) Psalm 46:1 (*superscription* in English Bibles) “set to Alamoth” (in accordance with maiden’s voices, i.e., soprano? or by a choir of maidens?)
  - b. The other occurrences of ‘*almah*’ are the following:
    - 1) **Gen. 24:43:** ‘*almah*’ is used of the girl who would be the answer to Eliezer’s prayer, who had turned out to be Rebekah, who was in fact a virgin.

- a) But we know that she was a virgin because she was described as a *bethulah* (24:16), and more especially because it is said, “no man had had relations with her” (24:16).
- b) It is also worth noting that in verse 43 where Abraham’s servant uses the word *’almah*, he is describing the words of his earlier prayer.
- 1] The first account of that prayer (24:12-14) has the word *na’arah* (girl) where the second account has *’almah*.
  - 2] It would seem then that a stronger argument could be made from Gen. 24:43 for associating *’almah* with *na’arah* than with *bethulah*.
- 2) **Ex. 2:8:** *’almah* is used of Miriam “so the girl went and called the child’s mother.”
- 3) **Ps. 68:26 (68:25 in English Bibles):** “The singers went on, the musicians after them, in the midst of the maidens beating tambourines”
- 4) **S. of Solomon 1:3:** “Your name is like purified oil; Therefore the maidens love you.”
- 5) **S. of Solomon 6:8:** “There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and maidens without number.”
- 6) **Prov. 30:19:** The entire section, verses 18-21, is:

*There are three things which are too wonderful for me,  
Four which I do not understand:  
The way of an eagle in the sky,  
The way of a serpent on a rock,  
The way of a ship in the middle of the sea,  
and the way of a man with a maid;  
This is the way of an adulterous woman:  
She eats and wipes her mouth,  
and says, “I have done no wrong.”*

- a) This passage is much debated, and no consistent interpretation is offered on either side of the Is. 7:14 debate.
- 1] Sauer says the passage speaks “of the unchastity of an unwed maiden” (553). Similarly, Young said the maid is not married, and allowed that she might be an “evil woman.” (“The Immanuel Prophecy...II,” 28).
  - 2] Hengstenberg thought the passage spoke of “young love” of a virgin, the kind that leads to marriage (419), and Hindson says she is “virtuous” and is a “virgin maid.”
  - 3] Machen supposes at least it is not clear that she was not a virgin (288, n. 6)
- b) *’almah* need mean nothing more than “young woman” here even if the context may suggest she is a virgin. Might not we convey precisely the same thought by saying in English, “the way of a man with a young woman,” wherein the phrase “young woman” itself says nothing of virginity even though the passage as a whole might indicate virginity?

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3. *'elem*, the masculine form of *'almah*, does not indicate virginity.
    - a. 1 Sam. 17:56 has Saul referring to David as *'elem*, and the lad whom Jonathan would send to fetch the arrows as a signal to David was referred to as *'elem* in 1 Sam. 20:22. "In neither of these cases is the sexual chastity of the individual a viable issue." (Walton, 292)
    - b. Sauer supposes this does not "throw much light on the meaning of *'almah*." (553)
  4. It is generally conceded that *'almah* itself does not mean virgin.
    - a. Dan King catalogued the treatment of *'almah* in the various Hebrew lexicons and found "virgin" given as a meaning in only two of twelve.
      - 1) He further noted that in those, it was offered only as a secondary meaning.
      - 2) Moreover, those two were 19th century lexicons, and King discussed the reasons for the greater reliability of more recent lexicons. (King, "A Plea for Sanity...", 668)
    - b. Delitzsch wrote, "It is also admitted that the idea of spotless virginity was not necessarily connected with *'almâh* (as in Gen. xxiv. 43, cf. 16)..." (217)
    - c. Young wrote, "We are far from asserting that this word is the precise equivalent of the English 'virgin'. It rather seems to be closer to words such as 'damsel' or 'maiden', words which most naturally suggest an unmarried girl."
      - 1) However, in the very next paragraph, he wrote, "we believe that the meaning of the prophet is best brought out by the English word 'virgin'."
      - 2) Young's primary concern was that the word clearly indicate that the woman was unmarried. That becomes clear in his continuing remarks: "Such a translation [virgin, JS] is far more accurate than the words 'a young woman'. What is needed in a translation is some word which will definitely preclude any reference to a married woman." ("The Immanuel Prophecy... II," 35f)
    - d. Hindson says, "All agree that it denotes a girl or young woman above the age of childhood who has arrived at sexual maturity," and quotes Gray as saying "it asserts neither virginity nor the lack of it."
    - e. Counter to all the foregoing, Wolf, who sees an 8th century reference in Is. 7:14, nonetheless concludes that *'almah* means virgin, this on the basis of the Ugaritic text 77, the poem describing the wedding of Nikkal and the Moon (see below). But he says, "This does not mean, however, that the mother was a virgin *at childbirth*." (Wolf, 455) Wolf sees a wedding and consummation taking place in Is. 8:1-3. (See below)
  5. It is generally conceded that *bethulah* comes closer to indicating virginity than does *'almah*.
    - a. Machen wrote, "It may readily be admitted that *'almah* does not actually indicate virginity, as does *bethulah*; it means rather a young woman of marriageable age." (288)
    - b. Hindson admits, "The more commonly used word for virgin in the Old Testament is *bethulah*."
    - c. Young attempted to mitigate the impact of the point by suggesting that perhaps a "betrothed virgin" was permitted to have sexual relations with her intended, this primarily on the basis of Dt. 22:23-24 where the sexual infidelity of a betrothed
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virgin was punishable by death just as was the adultery of a married woman. Young also suggests the possibility of a married *bethulah* on the basis of Joel 1:8. (“The Immanuel Prophecy...II, 31ff)

- 1) He argued that ‘*almah* is never used of a married woman.
    - a) It would be more accurate to say we might find it difficult to prove that any of those of whom the word is used were married. But it would also be impossible to prove some of them weren’t.
    - b) For Young’s case to stand, it is necessary that ‘*almah* exclude the possibility of being married.
  - 2) Young noted that in both Gen. 24:16 and Jdg. 21:12, *bethulah* is accompanied by a phrase stating that the woman in view had not known a man, and argued that this is due to the ambiguity of *bethulah* itself.
  - 3) Young argued that all of the other terms that might have been used in Is. 7:14 either leave open the possibility that a very young girl, not of marriageable age, or that a betrothed girl, who perhaps was permitted to have sexual relations with her betrothed, or perhaps even a married woman was intended.
  - 4) Therefore, he concludes, ‘*almah* is used because it is the only word that would not suggest these ideas and would clearly indicate an unmarried woman. (“The Immanuel Prophecy...II,” 30-35)
- d. Similarly, Alexander (who allowed the possibility of an 8th century reference in Is. 7:14) supposed the *bethulah* was not always used “in its strict sense” of virgin, this based on Dt. 22:19, and on Joel 1:8 where he apparently understood it to be used of a married woman.
- 1) Therefore he surmised that had Isaiah used the word *bethulah*, “there would still have been room for the same cavils.”
  - 2) He concludes, “it is enough for us to know that a virgin **or unmarried woman** [emph. mine, JS] is designated here as distinctly as she could be by a single word.” (Alexander, 168)
- e. This reasoning that *bethulah* was perhaps somewhat ambiguous and therefore ‘*almah* was used instead in order to clearly indicated “unmarried woman” falls short of affirming that ‘*almah* means virgin. *If* it provides some evidence that *bethulah* might not always unequivocally mean virgin, it does not make ‘*almah* equal to virgin. The argument that *bethulah* was unsuitable for Isaiah’s announcement was merely a response to the argument that if “virgin” had been intended, *bethulah* would have been used. Young made no effort to suggest that ‘*almah* itself means virgin, and in fact affirmed that it does not. Young only aimed to leave the door open for the *context* to provide a basis for translating ‘*almah* as virgin.
6. But it is said ‘*almah* never “excludes the idea of virginity,” a negative argument that falls short of what is needed. And yet it is the strongest lexical argument that can be made in the attempt to associate the Hebrew ‘*almah* with virginity.
    - a. Melvin Curry quotes Bruce Vawter as saying, “if *almah* the feminine of the rare *elem*, youth, does not etymologically mean anything more than a young woman, and if *bethulah* is the specific word for virgin, the commentators have correctly

- pointed out that nowhere in the OT is *almah* used in a way that certainly excludes the idea of virginity.” (Vawter, “The Ugaritic Use of GLMT,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 14 (1952): 319, as quoted by Curry, “Plea For Sanity... (Part II),” 674)
- b. Machen wrote: ‘there is no place among the seven occurrences of ‘*almah* in the Old Testament where the word is clearly used of a woman who was not a virgin.’” (288)
  - c. But absent an unequivocal affirmation of virginity, it is the fact of giving birth that excludes virginity. To indicate that a woman who gives birth is a virgin, an expression that *necessitates* virginity is required.
  - d. “In English a fiancée is often also a virgin (though the percent of semantic overlapping of these two words is in sad decline). That does not mean that the word ‘fiancée’ means ‘virgin.’ Someone could show me a thousand passages where ‘fiancée’ was used to refer to a virgin, but that would not change the meaning.” (Walton, 292)
7. Especially in the 20th century, after the discovery of a corpus of Ugaritic literature, evidence from cognate languages has been cited in discussions of the meaning of ‘*almah*. I’m in over my head just talking about the Hebrew, and therefore in considering the evidence from other Semitic languages, I’m going to do nothing more than call attention to some of the documents and relevant discussions so that you can examine them yourselves.
- a. **Ugaritic** On the close relationship between Ugaritic and Hebrew, see *Ugarit and the Old Testament*, by Peter C. Craige. Relative to ‘*almah*, two documents are thought to be important:
    - 1) *The Legend of King Keret*
      - a) *glmt*, the Ugaritic equivalent of the Hebrew ‘*almah*, is used twice with reference to Hurriya, the daughter of King Pebel, whom King Keret seeks as a wife.
      - b) See Wolf, p. 450; also Walton, p. 292f, and Young, “The Immanuel Prophecy, Isaiah -7:14-16,” (May 1953) p. 123.
    - 2) *The Wedding of Nikkal and the Moon*
      - a) In this poem, the word *glmt* is again used, but here it is used in parallel fashion to *bilt*, the Ugaritic equivalent of *bethulah* (“virgin”). In both instances, the reference is to Nikkal, a lunar goddess who will marry Yarih, the Moon god, and will conceive.
      - b) An English translation of the poem is found in *Ugaritic Literature, A Comprehensive Translations of the Poetic and Prose Texts*, by Cyrus H. Gordon.
      - c) See also Gordon’s article “‘Almah in Isaiah 7:14” p. 106, Young, “The Immanuel Prophecy, Isaiah -7:14-16” pp. 120-122, Young, *The Book of Isaiah*” p. 287, Walton p. 292f, Wolf p. 450.
  - b. For discussion of Arabic and Syriac cognates, see Sauer, p. 554f.
8. It is argued that because the Septuagint rendering of ‘*almah* in Is. 7:14 is *parthenos*, we must conclude the meaning of ‘*almah* is virgin.
- a. But even *parthenos* does not always indicate virginity.

- 1) According to LSJ, *parthenos* may be translated *maiden*, *girl*, and is used of “unmarried women who are not virgins” as well as of virgins. (*Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, 9th edition revised and augmented by Sir Henry Stuart Jones, with a revised supplement, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996)
  - 2) According to BDAG, *parthenos* is used “gener. of a young woman of marriageable age, w. or without focus on virginity,” although in the New Testament and “other early Christian literature” it is said to be used of “one who has never engaged in sexual intercourse,” and the glosses offered are “*virgin*, *chaste person*.” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edition, revised and edited by Frederick William Danker, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
  - 3) In Pindar’s Pythian Odes, Coronis, who is pregnant by Apollo and has incited his jealousy by infidelity with Ischys, is referred to as *aparthenos*
  - 4) In the Septuagint rendering of Gen. 34:3, *parthenos* is twice used of Dinah who was no longer a virgin.
  - 5) An analogy can help us understand how *parthenos* could sometimes be used not merely to refer to someone who happens to be a virgin but to actually mean virgin and yet at other times might not mean virgin at all. Consider the usage of *boy* or *girl* in certain contexts. Setting aside the loose morality that often lies behind such usage, we sometimes hear that “a *girl* becomes a woman” or “a *boy* becomes a man” in a context where the change of status is by means of a first sexual experience. In such contexts, the term *boy* or *girl* necessarily includes the idea of virginity. But that doesn’t prevent us from using the terms *boy* and *girl* in other contexts with no reference to the lack of sexual experience.
    - a) That is not to say *parthenos* is generally equivalent to *girl*, nor to suggest *parthenos* is as weak a reference to virginity as *girl* generally is.
    - b) It is only meant to illustrate that the word could itself necessarily indicate virginity in one context, and yet not necessarily indicate virginity in another.
  - b. My own thinking is that the Septuagint translation reflects a supposition that a virgin was in view, but not necessarily a supposition she would still be a virgin at the time of the birth. The Septuagint uses future tense verbs, “will conceive” (*en gastri hexei*; v.l. *lēmpsetai*), “will bear” (*texetai*) and therefore the thought could easily have been that the prophet envisioned a virgin who would marry and conceive naturally.
  - c. So then, because of the flexibility of the word *parthenos*, the Septuagint translation of ‘*almah*’ at Is. 7:14 does not offer certain proof that the woman was understood to be a virgin. Because of the future tense verbs, there is no reason to suppose the translation presumes a virgin birth. And in any event, the Septuagint translation certainly does not prove that ‘*almah*’ itself means *virgin*.
9. Some suppose the quotation in Mt. 1:23 determines the meaning of ‘*almah*’ in Is. 7:14.
- a. **“Exclusive Reference to Jesus” Viewpoint** (Those who believe Is. 7:14 refers exclusively to Jesus are represented herein by Delitzsch, Hindson, Machen, Moriarty, Payne, Reymond, Sauer(?), Wilson, and Young.)



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- 1) With reference to Matthew's citation of Is. 7:14, Payne says "it simply is not right to use a verse that is not about a virgin birth to substantiate a virgin birth." (Payne, 77)
    - a) I would say Matthew is not citing Is. 7:14 so much to substantiate a virgin birth as to reveal that the virgin birth which he otherwise substantiates was prophesied in the O.T.
    - b) Moreover, I would not say Is. 7:4 is not about a virgin birth any more than I would say 2 Sam. 7:12-16 is not about Jesus. The virgin birth may not have been the *immediate* application of Is. 7:14, but certainly the Lord had the virgin birth in mind as the ultimate application.
  - 2) On the other hand, Payne himself acknowledges that "the formula in Matt 1:22, 'that it might be fulfilled,' need not in itself imply anything more than a verbal allusion and does not require Isa 7:14 to have been directed toward Jesus." (*Ibid.*)
    - a) In answer to the question, "Does Matt 1:23's formula of citation require Isa 7:14 to foretell Jesus?" Payne responds, "the answer appears to be no." (However, he offers this question as an example of what he considers "wrong questions.") (*Ibid.*)
    - b) Payne cites Mt. 2:15 and Mt. 2:17 "which merely provide new applications for the thoughts and phraseology of Hos 1:11 and Jer 31:15." (*Ibid.*)
    - c) Payne's primary concern seems to be that whatever Matthew meant by virgin had to be the meaning in Is. 7:14 else Matthew's credibility suffers. But if Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14 necessitates that the Isaiah passage was a reference to a virgin, how is it that Payne thinks Mt. 1:23 could allow the possibility that Is. 7:14 wasn't directed toward Jesus?
  - b. **"Initial 8th Century Reference" Viewpoint.** Among those who see a possible reference to an 8th century B.C. mother and child, there is a variety of explanations concerning the relationship between such OT/NT counterparts as Is. 7:14 and Mt. 1:23. These include but are not limited to the following:
    - 1) **double fulfillment** - According to Walton, in this hermeneutic, it is supposed that "there is a contemporary intention that can be identified exegetically and a far-off fulfillment that is assumed to have been intended because of the NT usage." In Walton's categorization, this view assumes "the OT authors intended that meaning." i.e., the meaning recognized by the NT authors. (Walton, 302)
      - a) Milton S. Terry said admitting double fulfillment would "unsettle all scientific interpretation." (Terry, 491)
      - b) Yet he himself allowed that "It is not impossible, however, that such an event occurred in the days of Ahaz, and served, in its way, as a type of the birth of Jesus from the Virgin Mary." Nonetheless, he insisted, "upon this supposition the language of the passage would have no double sense, and its fulfillment in the birth of Jesus would be like the fulfilment of Hosea xi, 1 in the return of the child Jesus out of Egypt." (*Ibid.*, 494f, n. 3.)
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- c) For Terry, “in the case of types the language of the Scripture has no double sense. The types themselves are such because they prefigure things to come, and this fact must be kept distinct from the question of the sense of language used in any particular passage.” (*Ibid.*, 494)
- 2) **sensus plenior** - Walton says “many who believe in *sensus plenior*” see “the NT meaning as allowable if it was one that was divinely intended even though the human author of the OT knew nothing of it.” (*Ibid.*)
- a) Walton notes, “The difficulty here is that one must assume that God is engaging in a large program of subtle and sophisticated double entendre. Many find it difficult to think that God was deliberately concealing a portion of the inspired message to unveil it at a later date.” (*Ibid.*)
- b) But is not what Walton supposes many find difficult to believe exactly what is affirmed in 1 Pt. 1:10-12; Rom. 15:25; and Eph. 3:5? And moreover, isn’t “subtle and sophisticated double entendre” an apt description of such passages as Hos. 11:1; Gen. 22:1-18; Psalm 22; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; etc.?
- c) For a negative critique of *sensus plenior*, see Kaiser.
- 1] Kaiser says “Bruce Vawter brilliantly slammed the door on **sensus plenior**.” (Kaiser, 58) Vawter’s point via Kaiser can be summarized as follows: Scripture is the product of God through human instrumentality, so that if man is ignorant of the meaning of what he writes, any truly *human* instrumentality has effectively been eliminated and therefore the result is not scripture. (Kaiser 59) This seems to me to put an arbitrary and artificial meaning on “instrumentality.”
- 2] Kaiser himself goes on to insist that “all mechanical or totally passive ideas of revelation are certainly excluded” by 1 Cor. 2:6-16, particularly because “Paul chose to use the word ‘taught’ (**didaktos**)” in vs. 13. (*Ibid.*, 60)
- 3] While we are hard pressed to defend the notion that all scripture involved only “mechanical or totally passive” activities on the part of the human author (e.g., Lk. 1:3; 1 Cor. 7:6-7, 40), is it not clear that prophets, both Old Testament and New, did on occasion write or speak things they themselves did not understand? (1 Pt. 1:10-12; Acts 2:39; 1 Cor. 14:27-28; Jn. 11:49-51)
- 3) **name model** - This is the model Walton himself suggests.
- a) He looks to names given at birth that later prove to have been predictive, and argues that they were expected so to be. He mentions “Jacob” in particular (Gen. 27:36).
- b) In this he sees a paradigm for understanding prophesies.
- 1] As with names, he supposes “the prophetic word, whether of a predictive nature or not, was expected to have an appropriateness that would only be unfolded as history took place,” but that “the prophet could not begin to anticipate specifically or even generally what form the appropriateness would take.”
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- 2] So then he supposes that Isaiah would have expected that his reference to a child named “God with us” “might eventually take on other appropriateness.” But he supposes “even Matthew would have believed that Isaiah would be astounded at the way that his prophetic words were proving appropriate” (Walton, 299f)
- 4) **generic prediction** - This is advocated by Kaiser who borrows the designation from Willis J. Beecher. Kaiser quotes Beecher, “A generic prediction is one which regards an event as occurring in a series of parts, separated by intervals, and expresses itself in language that may apply indifferently to the nearest part, or to the remoter parts, or to the whole -- in other words, a prediction which, in applying to the whole of a complex event, also applies to some of its parts.”
- a) So, while denying that he is arguing for “a double sense or multiple meaning,” and while scoffing at *sensus plenior*, Kaiser supposes Is. 7:14 has reference to the birth of Hezekiah as well as the birth of Jesus.
- b) He believes seeing Hezekiah and Jesus in Isaiah 7:14 is in keeping with the single-meaning hermeneutic inasmuch as “both share enough distinctive common elements so that a single sense and meaning links them....In this case, the most essential common feature shared is that both Hezekiah and Messiah were from ‘the House of David’ which God had promised would never perish.” (Kaiser, 67)
- 5) For my part, I would say God certainly had in mind the birth of a Messiah *to a virgin*, Isaiah probably didn’t fully comprehend that, and in any case there was an 8th century B.C. birth in view which was to foreshadow the birth of the Messiah, but that as the theme is developed through chapter 11, the language and focus turns more and more pointedly to the Messiah himself rather than to the 8th century child who would foreshadow him.

#### B. The identity of ‘*almah* and her son?

1. **“Exclusive Reference to Jesus” Viewpoint** Of course those of this viewpoint see only Mary as the ‘*almah*, and only Jesus as the son.
2. **“Initial 8th Century Reference” Viewpoint** A number of identifications have been suggested by those of this viewpoint, including the following:
  - a. Some suppose Is. 7:4 refers collectively to many young women who would bear sons at this time (Koehler in “Zum Verständnis von Jes 7,14,” ZAW 67 (‘55) 48-50, according to Moriarty, 231)
  - b. Some have suggested the woman is an unspecified wife or concubine of Ahaz.
  - c. Some suppose the young woman is Abi, the daughter of Zechariah, wife of Ahaz and mother of Hezekiah (2 Ki. 18:2).
    - 1) Though the chronology is difficult to establish with certainty, as early as Jerome it has been recognized that there is a chronological difficulty that seems to preclude the identification of Hezekiah with the child.
    - 2) 2 Kings 18:1-2 tells us Hezekiah came to the throne at age 25. 2 Kings 16:1-2 tells us Ahaz reigned 16 years beginning at age 20, which would make him 35 or 36 when he dies and Hezekiah takes his place.

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- a) But if Hezekiah was 25 when his father Ahaz was 36 (at most), then Hezekiah was born when his father was 11 at most.
  - b) Moreover, this would mean Hezekiah was born well before the prophecy which supposedly foretells his birth.
- 3) Kaiser favors Hezekiah as the identity of the one who would serve as a sign to Ahaz's generation "while also embodying the wonderful names of that coming Davidic prince." While acknowledging the chronological problem, he anticipates "new discoveries" that will help refine the chronology and solve the problem. (Kaiser, 64ff)
- d. Contextually, I think the strongest case can be made for the prophetess, and the child is Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.
- 1) Oswalt favors this identification. (213)
  - 2) Milligan sees the name as a comforting assurance. "This name, it seems, was given to the first born son of Isaiah by a second wife, to indicate that God was still among his people for their protection and deliverance (Is. 7:13-16). And as evidence of this, Isaiah was directed to announce the speedy fall of the two kings, Rezin and Pekah, who were then threatening to overthrow Jerusalem. 'Before the child [Immanuel],' said God by the Prophet, 'shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.' (Isa. 7:16.) And in order to impress this matter still more deeply on the minds and hearts of the people, God further instructed Isaiah to call the same child *Maharshalal-Hashbaz, Haste-to-the-spoil--Speed-to-the-prey*: indicating by this name that in a very short time, even 'before the child should know to cry, My father and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria would be taken away by the king of Assyria.' (Isa. 8:1-4)" (Milligan, 115)
  - 3) Wolf sees the name as evoking the coming judgment: "Hence, 'Immanuel' expresses the promise aspect of the sign, whereas 'Maher-shalal-hash-baz' relates more to its judgmental side. (Wolf, 454f)
  - 4) Payne discounts this possibility saying, "nothing suggests that Isaiah's allegedly 'earlier' wife suffered death or displacement." (79)
    - a) But why must we presume Isaiah's wife, the mother of Shear Jashub, had died?
    - b) Could not the Lord have instructed Isaiah to take a second wife? (cf. 2 Sam. 12:8.)
  - 5) Payne also seems to think it unlikely that Isaiah could have married a woman in the interval between Is. 7:25 and Is. 8:1.
    - a) But couldn't Is. 8:3 be the account of his taking her to wife? We need not think of an elaborate wedding. Cf. Gen. 24:67.
    - b) On the other hand, Wolf thinks he sees evidence of a ceremony in the text.
      - 1] Wolf finds a close verbal parallel to "getting witnesses"(8:2) in Jer. 32:10, where the context mentions two copies of a deed, one sealed and one open.
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- 2] He notes that the tablet (*glywn*) of Is. 8:1 has a root in common with the “open deed” of Jer. 32:11.
  - 3] Based on the use in Est. 3:14 and 8:13 of the cognate verb for publishing a decree, he finds further evidence that *glywn* “refers to a published official document of some sort.”
  - 4] Wolf sees in the sealed copy of the deed in Jer. 32 a possible counterpart to the binding of the testimony and sealing of law in Is. 8:16.
  - 5] “Baruch was asked by Jeremiah to keep the purchase deeds in an earthen vessel (Jer 32:14). Likewise Isaiah request that his disciples (vs. 16) preserve what may have been the marriage deed with the key reference to the symbolic name of his son.” (452)
  - 6] Wolf notes the use of *t’wdh* (“attestation,” NAS: “testimony”) in Is. 8:16 and 8:20 and compares its only other occurrence in the OT, Ruth 4:7. There, the removal and handing over of a sandal was a “testimony.” In that particular instance, the transaction was the handing over of the right/responsibility to take Ruth as a wife. Wolf asks, “Is it not likely that a similar legal transaction is in view in both chapters?” (*Ibid.*)
  - 7] In Mal. 2:14, Wolf sees the ideas of witness to a legal transaction (a covenant) and a marriage coming together: “A marriage is a covenant, and the Lord himself is said in Malachi to be a witness to the marriage of individuals.” (*Ibid.*) He also sees evidence for marriage as a covenant in Ezek. 16:8 and for witnesses to a marriage in Gen. 24:50.
  - 8] Wolf brings other evidence to bear, but in the end, the picture he suggests is a wedding ceremony involving two documents, one sealed and one open for ready reference, just as would be the case in other legal transactions. The open document, which might have been either a duplicate of the sealed document or a summary of the sealed document, is perhaps titled, “to/for/concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz” (thus explaining the prefixed *lamed* which functions as an inseparable preposition meaning “to” or “for”) and emphasizes “the fact that this marriage will not be childless, in line with the prediction of 7:14.” The document would include information about the bride-price that was paid. One of the witnesses was Uriah the priest, which Wolf suggests would not have been “at all inappropriate for the union of a well-known prophet and prophetess.” The marriage ceremony in verses 1-2 is followed by the consummation of the marriage in verse 3.
- c) Wolf’s work is interesting, but I think perhaps he has made more of some of the evidence he cites than is warranted, and has built a case for a sort of ceremony that goes beyond what we know about weddings in Israelite culture.
- 6) Specifically, my reasons for favoring this identification are as follows:
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- a) **The close connection in the text.** Isaiah's message to Ahaz continues through the end of chapter 7. Immediately thereafter, the Lord tells Isaiah to write on a table, "Maher-shalal-hash-baz" (swift is the booty, speedy is the prey), this being the very name that the LORD will tell Isaiah to give to his child. Then verse 3 says, "So I approached the prophetess and she conceived and gave birth to a son."
- b) **The similar references to the fall of Syria and Israel in terms of the child's infancy or youth.** The Lord speaks of the son in a manner similar to the prophecy of Is. 7:15, "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."
- c) **The association of the name "Immanuel: with the child.** The words of Is. 8:5-8 are closely connected with Maher-Shalal-hash-baz inasmuch as they develop the meaning of his name, the speedy judgment coming by means of the Assyrians (cf. Is. 10:5ff). But in this section, so closely connected with the Maher-Shalal-hash-baz, the name used for the one addressed is Immanuel (8:8). The Lord describes not only the Assyrians' devastation of Syria and Israel, but also their advance on into Judah, described as "thy land O Immanuel," using the name of the child as given in Is. 7. Immanuel and Maher-Shalal-hash-baz are one and the same, one name indicating the favorable aspect of God's presence, and the other God's coming judgment. See Wolf, who advocates this view.
- d) **Isaiah said his sons were signs.** Chapter 7:14 tells us the birth of a son was to be part of a sign, and chapter 8 tells us of the birth of a son to Isaiah, and Isaiah says, "I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and wonder in Israel..."

### C. The meaning of "sign"?

#### 1. "Exclusive Reference to Jesus" Viewpoint

- a. "An ordinary birth can hardly be said to constitute a sign, but an unusual birth, if the mother is not a married woman, would, provided the woman were a good woman, indeed be a sign." (Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy..." 36)
- b. "The truth is that all these interpretations which find in the child-bearing of the *'almah* only an ordinary birth are opposed by the way in which the promise is introduced. Why should an ordinary birth be regarded as a "sign"? That word naturally leads us to think of some event like the turning back of the sun on Hezekiah's dial, or the phenomena in connection with Gideon's fleece." (Machen, 290f)
- c. Of course we can suppose Young and Machen and commentators in general are aware that in and of itself, the word translated *sign* requires no more than an indication of some sort, whether natural or supernatural. E.g., Sauer admits, "The word *oth* itself does not indicate whether a miraculous element is involved in it or not. It is used of natural signs, and it is used of miraculous signs." (556)
- d. But the argument is generally made that this particular context requires something supernatural. After describing various interpretations that see a reference only to "the birth and infancy of a child born...in the ordinary course of nature," Alexander said, "A further objection...is, that although they may afford a

*sign*, in one of the senses of that term..., they do not afford such a sign as the context would lead us to expect.” (Alexander, 167) The factors often thought to call for some extraordinary sign are the following:

- 1) The offer to Ahaz of a sign as “deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” (Alexander, Payne, Sauer)
- 2) The use of the word “Behold” in designating the sign. (Sauer)

## 2. “Initial 8th Century Reference” Viewpoint

- a. The sign need not have been anything more than the occurrence of stipulated events whereby it would become evident that God’s word would be or had been accomplished. Compare Ex. 3:11-12 and Is. 37:30ff (=2 Kings 19:29ff).
- b. Among the signs promised to Saul were the fact that he would be told his father’s donkeys had been found, and that he would meet three men going up to Bethel, “one carrying three kids, another carrying three loaves of bread, and other carrying a jug of wine.” They would give him two loaves of bread. He would also meet some musical prophets who would be prophesying, and the Spirit of the Lord would come upon Saul himself so that he would prophesy (1 Sam. 10:1-7). Some of these things are mundane events that would serve as signs merely because they would be precisely what had been foretold, though there was nothing extraordinary about the events in and of themselves.
- c. In 1 Sam. 2:34 the sign of the judgment on Eli’s house was the death of both of his sons on the same day, and in Jer. 44:29-30 the sign of the destruction of the Jews in Egypt would be that Hophra, “the benefactor of the defecting Israelites,” would be given over to his enemies. (Walton, 294)
- d. Luke 2:11-12 “there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign unto you: Ye shall find a babe wrapped in a swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”
- e. In several of these, “the sign serves as an indicator that the fulfillment is under way.” (*ibid.*)
- f. Isaiah says, “I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts”

## D. How it would be a sign to Ahaz, or 8th century Judah?

1. “Exclusive Reference to Jesus” Viewpoint The means of explaining how the birth and attendant circumstances would be a sign vary widely among those who see Is. 7:14 as referring exclusively to Jesus.
  - a. Some of those who suppose Is. 7:14 refers only to the birth of the Messiah have supposed that vs. 16 refers to some contemporary child (according to Alexander: Junias, Usher, Calvin). Among these, some take vs. 15 to refer to the child of verse 14, and others take vs. 15 to refer to the child of verse 16. But Alexander remarks, “A *child* is born -- *he* learns to distinguish good and evil -- but before *the child* is able to distinguish good and evil, something happens. 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.” (175)

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- b. Alexander mentions some others (Michaelis and Henderson) who supposed the political events under consideration were in fact accomplished in the first century during the childhood of Jesus. (170)
- c. Some aptly note that Isaiah alters his speech from addressing Ahaz in the singular (vs. 11) to addressing the house of David (vs. 13, so Moriarty) and an audience addressed in the plural (vs. 14, so Young). Though they don't overly stress the point, it suggests a lessened need to explain how the sign was relevant in the 8th century, particularly to Ahaz.
- d. Reymond offers a bold explanation, making the remoteness and uncertain time frame an enhancement of the sign. The time lapse until the fulfillment of prophecy "need not diminish the contemporary relevance to Isaiah's warning" just as "the Lord's second coming should motivate our faithful conduct, no matter how distant it may be." (Payne, quoted by Reymond, 11) In fact, Payne argues that just as our not knowing when the Lord will return should be added incentive, so also the prophecy could serve as a motivator "provided only that the contemporary audience does not know when this fulfillment is to take place." (Payne, via Reymond, 11)
- 1) I think Reymond and Payne have confused promise with sign.
  - 2) What Ahaz was given was not merely a promise nor merely a threat intended to motivate, but a sign intended to confirm.
- e. Similar in its attempt to turn the difficulty to an advantage is another explanation described by Alexander: "the assurance that Christ was to be born in Judah, of its royal family, might be a sign to Ahaz, that the kingdom should not perish in his day; and so far was the remoteness of the sign in this case from making it absurd or inappropriate, that the further off it was, the stronger the promise of continuance to Judah, which it guaranteed. Especially is this the case, if we suppose it to have been a familiar doctrine of the ancient Church, that the Messiah was to come, and that for his sake, Israel existed as a nation" (171)
- f. Some suppose the time span of Jesus' childhood is set forth as a representation of the time, as equivalent to the time, that remained until the abandonment of Israel and Syria.
- 1) For example, according to Alexander, Vitranga supposed "the Prophet, while he views the birth of Christ as a remote event, makes it the measure of the events at hand--*q.d.* before the Messiah, *if he were born now*, could know how to distinguish good from evil, &c." For his part, Alexander responds, "The only objection to this ingenious explanation is, that the conditional expression on which all depends, *if he were born now*, is precisely that which is omitted, and of which the text contains no intimation." (Alexander, 171)
  - 2) "[the promises pertaining to the Messianic hope] should have been close to the thought of the royal house which took so prominent a part in the liturgical celebration of the covenant made with the Davidic dynasty." (Moriarty, 233)
- g. Moriarty suggests the possibility that the poem of Nikkal and the Moon might give evidence that an extraordinary royal birth could have been on people's minds in ancient times. "The discovery of the striking Ugaritic parallel to 7,14 in the NKL poem (text 77,7 in Gordon) also warns us against assuming that the
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idea of an extraordinary royal birth was unknown in the ancient East” (Moriarty, 233) Moriarty’s thought is that to a people in high expectation of a coming Messiah, a further prediction that he would come might indeed serve to give them confidence they would get through the present troubles.

- h. Notice that several of these explanations of how the promised birth would be a sign to Ahaz are at odds with the insistence that a sign be something extraordinary: It is said that an ordinary birth would not be a sign because something humanly inexplicable was required, but the sign to Ahaz was nothing more than an ordinary assertion inasmuch as he would not live to see its accomplishment.
2. **“Initial 8th Century Reference” Viewpoint** The context pertains to Ahaz’ fear of Israel and Syria, who have allied themselves together against Judah (7:1ff) with the aim of deposing Ahaz and replacing him with the son of Tabeel. (7:6) The Lord’s message is that it won’t happen (7:7). The sign is intended to confirm this.
    - a. If the promise of a future Messiah were a sign that Judah could not be conquered by Syria and Israel (because Judah of necessity must yet exist for the Messiah to come), it would be a sign that Judah would not be conquered by anyone at all.
      - 1) And yet of course, eventually (but before the Messiah came) Judah was conquered and even devastated.
      - 2) Nonetheless, the Messiah came, and thus it becomes obvious the assurance of the Messiah’s coming in no way assured the safety of Judah from any given desolation.
    - b. Similarly, if the promise of a future Messiah were a sign that the line of David could not be interrupted while Ahaz was on the throne (because the line of David must remain intact for the Messiah to come), why wouldn’t it be a sign that the line of David would not be interrupted during the reign of Ahaz’s successors?
      - 1) And yet of course, eventually the line of David was interrupted.
      - 2) Nonetheless, the Messiah came, and thus it becomes obvious that the assurance of the Messiah’s coming in no way assured Ahaz’s continued rule.
    - c. But Walton’s suggestion that “the sign serves as an indicator that the fulfillment is under way” works well. When Ahaz saw the events coming about as predicted in Is. 7:14-15, he would know that the time of the promised deliverance was at hand. The connection of the lands of Syria and Israel being forsaken with the child being old enough to refuse evil and choose good points to the actual childhood of Immanuel and its coinciding with the period of time until Judah’s enemies are brought low.

#### E. The significance of “Immanuel”?

1. **“Exclusive Reference to Jesus” Viewpoint**
  - a. Supposing he has established that a virgin birth is unambiguously indicated in Is. 7:14, Reymond argues that a child so born would necessarily be “unique” and says, “It does not do justice to the child’s uniqueness among men as *virginally conceived* to argue...that the name Immanuel was intended merely to symbolize the fact that God was present with the nation in her coming deliverance and nothing more....but a *virginally-conceived* child who would bear the name “Immanuel”...might well *be* in fact what his name suggests.” (Reymond, 7)

- b. Payne argues that Immanuel is not merely providential, (“God’s help will be with us”) but is incarnational based on Matthew’s citation and also based on “Isaiah’s violent condemnation of Ahaz.” Payne explains, “The king’s disbelief...comports badly with any promise of alleged immediate providential consolation.” (Payne, 81)

2. **“Initial 8th Century Reference” Viewpoint**

- a. “Perhaps the most attractive option is that Immanuel and Maher-shalal-hash-baz were one and the same. If this were so, this passage [8:8] would form a more poetic statement of the child’s identity, pointing to the ultimate Immanuel, whereas 8:1-4 would constitute a more prosaic account and be limited merely to the person of Maher-shalal-hash-baz.” (Oswalt, 213)
- b. Wolf asks, “If the child of Isaiah and the prophetess fulfilled the prophecy of Immanuel, why did Isaiah name the same child Maher-shalal-hash-baz?” After noting that Immanuel is viewed as being “on the scene” once Maher-shalal-hash-baz is born” and seeing this as evidence for identifying the two as the same, Wolf continues, “Hence, ‘Immanuel’ expresses the promise aspect of the sign, whereas ‘Maher-shalal-hash-baz’ relates more to its judgmental side. The question whether 7:14-15 denotes promise or judgment has sharply divided commentators, but both deliverance and defeat must be in the picture.” (Wolf, 454f)
- c. But if Maher-shalal-hash-baz was a sign of God’s care for his people, he was only a glimmer of what would be 700 years later, when Immanuel would actually be “God with us.”

F. **The meaning of “your land”? (8:8)**

1. **“Exclusive Reference to Jesus “ Viewpoint**

- a. “...would Isaiah have named the land after one of his own sons or after some hypothetical person? There is a seriousness in the passage that is overlooked by those who refuse to accept the Messianic reference.” (Young, *The Book of Isaiah* 307, n. 18)
- b. “The fact that the newborn son who is called Immanuel in 7:14 seems to have the Palestinian area named after him, as “lord of the whole land of Israel (8:8), does correspond to the proclamation that the child called *ēl gibbôr*, “Mighty God,” in 9:6 has no end to the increase of his government on the throne of David (9:7).” (Payne, 75)

2. **“Initial 8th Century Reference” Viewpoint**

- a. Consider Isaiah’s own name, related to “Joshua”/“Jesus” and meaning “Jehovah saves” or “Jehovah is salvation.” Do we lack appreciation for the seriousness of the text if we suppose references to Isaiah are in fact references to an 8th century B.C. man?
- b. Like so many people and events that foreshadow the Christ, the application to the Christ is so much more compelling than the original manifestation, which was, after all, only a shadow. So here in Isaiah, we have a virgin conceiving and giving birth while in the case of the Messiah, we have one who gives birth while yet a virgin. Here, we have a child named God with us, while in the case of the Messiah, we have God with us! Here, we have a child addressed regarding his land, while in the case of the Christ, He is Lord over the land and all else. And indeed, as the theme is further developed in Isaiah 9 and 11, the prophet’s

attention is turned more and more explicitly to the Christ himself rather than to the child that foreshadows the Christ.

### III. THE NATURE OF O.T. PROPHECY

- A. Consider examples where the fulfillment in the Messiah presses the language to service beyond its O.T. use, for example, making what was only figurative in the OT literal in its messianic application.
1. 2 Sam. 7:12ff is very much parallel to Is. 7:14ff in that both are manifestly predictions, both have reference to an OT event, both have messianic import, and in both cases, the NT application presses the language to greater specificity than does the OT application.
    - a. 2 Sam. 7:12ff clearly applies to Solomon. See 1 Chron. 22:6-10, 2 Chron. 6:7-10.
    - b. 2 Sam. 7:12ff clearly applies to Jesus. See Heb. 1:5b.
    - c. The language of 2 Sam. 7:14b “I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men,” refers to Solomon. See 1 Kings 11:14, 23, 26.
    - d. But the same language is true in a much more specific and literal sense with reference to Jesus (Mt. 26:67, 27:25)
  2. So also in the case of Ps. 22, though it is not manifestly a prediction, we see language applicable to the OT referent that is all the more specifically and literally applicable to Jesus.
    - a. We can easily understand Ps. 22 to be a description of David’s own plight as he flees from Absalom. When he says “they cast lots for my garments,” it is a figurative way of saying they are eager to take anything that is mine. (Notably, Absalom had taken David’s wives in the sight of all Israel.)
    - b. But it is literally true of the Christ, the son of David (Jn. 19:23-24).
    - c. We can imagine David saying “they pierced my hands and my feet” (Ps. 22:16) after he has fled barefoot (2 Sam. 15:30) and been the target of Shimei’s stones (2 Sam. 16:6).
    - d. But how much more explicitly the language is true of the Christ.
  3. Delitzsch’s comment that the prophet must not have been referring to his wife for if that had been his intention, he could hardly have expressed himself in a more ambiguous and unintelligible manner” by choosing to refer to her as *hâ’almâh* (217) fails to take into account the language of foreshadowing. When God told Abraham to take his son and offer him as a sacrifice, He referred to the son as “your son, your only son whom you love” (Gen. 22:1). In fact, Abraham had another son, Ishmael, for whom he had demonstrated his love (Gen. 17:18). While it is true that one could explain the language by noting that Ishmael was the son of a handmaid, and was not to be Abraham’s heir, and was now gone away, still it seems apparent the Lord spoke as He did not because it was the most appropriate language to describe the immediate referent, namely Isaac, but because it was the most appropriate language to later be recognized as referring to the only Son of God whom He loved, whom Isaac foreshadowed.
- B. Specifically, this section of Isaiah, chapters 7-9, has other prophecies that are of the foreshadowing sort.

1. Heb. 2:12-13 quotes three passages from the OT, putting all of them in the mouth of the Messiah so that he speaks the words in the first person.
  - a. The first is a quotation from Psalm 22:22, where David has been describing his own plight, which itself foreshadows the suffering of the Messiah. Ps. 22:22 is a promise of David's that he would declare the Lord's name unto his brethren, but Heb. 3:2 makes that statement belong to Jesus, who was the son of David.
  - b. The second is a phrase found in 2 Sam. 22:3; Is. 8:17; and Is. 12:2 (In all three passages, the LXX (Rahlfs' edition) has *pepoithōs esomai ep' autōi* and Heb. 2:13a has *egō esomai pepoithōs ep' autoi*. It seems reasonable to suppose that inasmuch as the writer of Hebrews quotes Is. 8:18 in 2:13b, Is. 8:17 is at least included as a source for the quotation in 2:13a. In Isaiah 8:17, it is Isaiah who speaks; in Heb. 2:12a the words are spoken by Jesus.
  - c. The third is a quotation from Is. 8:18, "Behold, I and the children whom God hath given me." In Is. 8:18, these words belong to Isaiah. In Heb. 2:13, they belong to Jesus.
2. Then "why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth" use a son of the prophetess to foreshadow the Christ?

### Conclusion:

- I. *almah* doesn't necessarily mean virgin, but if used of a reputable woman, you would charitably assume she was a virgin.
- II. Even so, the language of Is. 7:14 does not seem likely to have led a Jew of the 8th century B.C. to understand that a child would be born without a human father. If this was to be a sign to Ahaz or to the house of David at that time, what they would have understood Isaiah to mean is germane. Let us imagine that in Jerusalem at that time, it could safely be assumed that an unmarried woman was a virgin (an assumption that seems indeed charitable given what we know about that society from Is. 3:16-23; 4:4; Hos. 4:13-14; and Amos 2:7-8). Let us imagine that we live in that society and that the prophet announces that he has seen a vision of a maiden, pregnant, and soon to bear a child who will be called Immanuel, and that the child will eat curds and honey when or before he is old enough to distinguish between good and evil and at that time the threat from Syria and Israel will be gone, and that all of this constitutes a sign. Even if, as Young insists, the maiden be unmarried, would we not suppose that this maiden will evidently be getting married very soon and will soon thereafter conceive?
- III. In Is. 7:14, *almah* refers to the "the prophetess," whom we may assume was a virgin inasmuch as she was young and therefore likely not a widow. And yet there is no hint that she would remain a virgin until giving birth. In fact, Isaiah "approaches" her and as a result she conceives.
- IV. But as is the case with other events and prophecies that have OT events in view, the significance of the details as realized in the foreshadowed life of the Messiah are not identical to their OT counterparts. In fact, the realization in the life of the Messiah presses the language to service beyond what was needed in the first realization. Just as David's enemies might well be supposed to have cast lots for his clothing and pierced his hands and feet only figuratively, those who crucified Jesus did these things literally. Just as it can be argued, with a bit of mental flexibility, that Isaac was Abraham's son, his only son, the characterization is much more readily applicable to Jesus, God's unique ("only begotten") son. So while in the OT, a young woman, who might have been presumed a virgin, would marry and bear a child who would signify God's presence, in

the NT a young woman who would yet be a virgin when her child was born would bring into the world a son who would himself be God with us.

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