THE USE OF ISAIAH 7:14 IN MATTHEW 1:23[1]

Isaiah chapter seven has been the topic of much discussion for centuries with the majority of the interest centering on Matthew's citation of Isa 7:14 in Matt 1:23.[2] At the center of the discussion are most often three issues: 1) Does עַלְמָה mean "virgin"?[3] 2) What is the identity

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[1] While Matthew's citation of Isa 7:14 comes from the Septuagint, the citation is nearly exact with the only difference being that Matthew states, "they will call his name" (καλέσουσιν) while the Septuagint reads "you will call his name…" (καλέσεις). This issue is far from settled by the MT since the form is a second person feminine singular perfect (קָרָאת), which seems awkward since the king is being addressed. Instead, it may be better understood as a third person feminine singular perfect. (cf. Ges-K §74g; Bauer-Leander §54r).

[2] Ignatius of Antioch [A.D. 30-107], in his Epistle to the Ephesians, quotes Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14 in an early defense of orthodoxy. (Cf. Ign. *Eph*. XVIII). Also cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum* ii, 28, 32, 33, and 39. Since then this passage has been the center of almost an infinite number of studies. Although dated, for two articles that trace the history of the interpretation Isa 7:14 cf. Edward E. Hindson, "Development of the Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14: A Tribute to Edward J. Young," *Grace Theological Journal* 10, no. 2 (1969), or Edward J. Young, "The Study of Isaiah since the Time of Joseph Addison Alexander," *Westminster Theological Journal* 9, no. 1 (1946).

[3] The first issue is one of lexicography and seeks to determine the distinctions between עַלְמָה and בְּתוּלָה in an effort to either validate or invalidate the Septuagint's translation of עַלְמָה as παρθένος. Cf. Gerhard Delling, "παρθένος," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. V (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), C. Dohmen, "עַלְמָה," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Frabry, trans. David E. Green, vol. XI (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), M. Tsevat, "בְּתוּלָה," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis, vol. II (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), John H. Walton, "עֲלוּמִים," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), John H. Walton, "בְּתוּלָה," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997). For works dealing directly with this issue cf. Charles L. Feinberg, "The Virgin Birth in the Old Testament and Isaiah 7:14," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 110, no. 475 (1962); Charles L. Feinberg, *Is the Virgin Birth in the Old Testament?* (Whittier, CA: Emeth Publications, 1984); Charles D. Isbell, "Does the Gospel of Matthew Proclaim Mary's Virginity?," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 3, no. 2 (1977); George L. Lawlor, *Almah - Virgin or Young Woman?* (Des Plaines, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1973), Richard Niessen, "The Virginity of The עַלְמָה in Isaiah 7:14," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 546 (1980); August Pieper, "The Great Prophecy of the Virgin's Son in Its Historical Setting: Isaiah 7:10-16," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 91, no. 3 (1994); Alfred von Rohr Sauer, "The Almah Translation in Is. 7:14," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 24 (1953). Of the seven times that עַלְמָה is used in the OT, only twice is it translated as παρθένος (Gen 24:43 and Isa. 7:14). Of the remaining five occurrences, four are translated as νεᾶνις (Exod 2:8; Ps. 68:26; Cant. 1:3; and 6:8). In each of these four passages the notion of virginity easily fits each context. In the final occurrence the Septuagint translators' rendering does not account for the term (Prov 30:19). Therefore, it appears that the notion of virginity could be understood as *one characteristic* of all of these young women, yet most certainly not the only characteristic. When considering the etymology of the term, Dohmen concludes that "to date, no generally satisfactory etymology for Heb. *'almâ* has

of Immanuel and the 'almah in Isaiah 7:14?[4] 3) What is the relationship between Jesus of

Nazareth and the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14?[5]

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been proposed" (TDOT XI: 158). One note of interest between the words of Isaiah 7:14 and the Ugaritic KTU 1.24, 7 is that they are very similar in their wording. The Ugaritic text is transliterated *hl ǵlmt tld bn* "behold, the *young maiden / damsel / virgin* will bear a son" (cf. A. van Selms, *Marriage and Family Life in Ugaritic Literature* (1954), 108ff; Antoon Schoors, "The Immanuel of Isaiah 7,14," *Orientalia Lovaniensia periodica* 18 (1987),74; or Cyrus H. Gordon, "'Almah in Isaiah 7:14," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 21 (1953). It appears, however, that the only commonality between the two passages is that each is a birth oracle (also cf. Gen 16:11). Concerning בְּתוּלָה more conclusive evidence can be found. While the term is often used in the Bible to denote virginity and thus be translated as παρθένος (cf. Gen 24:16; Exo 22:15f; Lev 21:3, 13f; Deut 22:19, 23, 28; 32:25; Jdg 19:24; 21:11f; 2 Sam 13:2, 18; 1 Kgs 1:2; 2 Kgs 19:21; 2 Chr 36:17; Est 2:17; Psa 44:15; 77:63; 148:12; Job 31:1; Amos 5:2; 8:13; Zech 9:17; 23:4; 37:22; 47:1; 62:5; Jer 2:32; 18:13; 26:11; 28:22; 38:4, 13, 21; Lam 1:4, 15, 18; 2:10, 13, 21; 5:11; Ezek 9:6; 44:22), בְּתוּלָה is not always translated in such a manner (Cf. Est 2:2 [κοράσιον]; Isa. 23:12 [θυγάτηρ]; and Joel 1:8 [νύμφην]). There are two problematic Biblical passages when one tries to argue that בְּתוּלָה always conveys the notion of virginity in the Bible. First, in Joel 1:8 בְּתוּלָה is translated νύμφην. In this verse the בְּתוּלָה mourns for the "husband of her youth" (חֲגֹרַת־שַׂק עַל־בַּעַל נְעוּרֶיהָ). The NET Bible tries to reconcile this problem by creatively translating the verse "Wail like a young virgin clothed in sackcloth, lamenting the death of her husband-to-be." However, this solution is unsatisfactory given the lexical evidence. Concerning the OT usage of בְּתוּלָה, Tsevat states "out of 51 times that *bethulah* occurs in the OT, 3 times it clearly means "virgin" (Lev. 21:13f.; Deut 22:19; Ezek 44:22), and once it certainly does not … Joel 1:8" (TDOT II: 341). In light of this evidence, it seems reasonable that a בְּתוּלָה is not necessarily a "virgin". The second problematic passage is Gen 24: 14-43. In Gen 24:16, the term בְּתוּלָה is used. However, the term is qualified with the statement וְאִישׁ לֹא יְדָעָהּ ("a man she had not known"). Later in the passage (Gen 24:43) the girl is simply called a עַלְמָה with no qualifying statement concerning her relationship with a man. It appears that the term עַלְמָה needed no explanation in 24:43 because the virginity of the girl was either 1) assumed lexically or 2) made clear in the previous context. If the latter is chosen then it must be concluded that בְּתוּלָה and עַלְמָה carried the same basic meanings in Israel. Further, of בְּתוּלָה, Tsevat concludes that the term "does not mean 'virgin' in any language exclusively (Aram.), mainly (Heb.), or generally (Akk.)" (TDOT II, 340). Finally, the Ugaritic cognate *btlt* conveys anything but virginity as it is used in the epithet of the goddess 'Anat, the consort of Baal, who has had sexual intercourse repeatedly (Cf. KTU[2] 1.4 III, 24). In conclusion, the notion of virginity can not be proven definitively of either עַלְמָה or בְּתוּלָה through a pure lexical study since the evidence is either inconclusive (as in the case of עַלְמָה) or used in instances in the ANE where virginity is clearly not conveyed (as is the case with בְּתוּלָה) . The fact that both terms seem to carry the notion of virginity in the Hebrew Bible may be more a result of Israelite culture and the Old Testament Law than lexicography; for any "young maiden" in Israel (בְּתוּלָה or עַלְמָה) who was also found to be a "virgin" was to be stoned in front of her father's house (Deut 22:20-21). So long as the nation was following Torah, it seems logical that every "young maiden" living in Israel would have been a "virgin", whether an עַלְמָה or בְּתוּלָה. The only seeming exception is Joel 1:8 (a time of national rebellion).

[4] The second issue is one of exegesis. This issue often assumes a "near" referent in Isa 7 and seeks to identify the sign child within the context of 7 with some interpreters extending their discussion into chapter 8.Cf. Andrew H. Bartelt, *The Book around Immanuel: Style and Structure in Isaiah 2-12*, Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego, ed. William Henry Propp, vol. 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996); Antti Laato, *Who Is Immanuel?: The Rise and the Foundering of Isaiah's Messianic Expectations* (Åbo: Åbo Academy Press, 1988); Robert L. Reymond, "Who Is the עַלְמָה of Isaiah 7:14," *Presbyterion Covenant Seminary Review* 15 (1989); John H. Walton, "Isa 7:14: What's in a Name?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. 3 (1987); Edward J. Young, "The Immanuel Prophecy," *Westminster Theological Journal* 15, no. 2 (1953). For a good example of one who includes chapter 8 in his discussion cf. Herbert M. Wolf, "A Solution to the Immanuel Prophecy in Isaiah 7:14-8:22," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972). For those who hold to a direct prophetic fulfillment of Matt 1:22-23 which identifies Jesus as the sign child and Mary as the '*almah*, verse 16 is most problematic since it seems to look for contemporary validation in Ahaz's day.

Unfortunately, as one traces the history of Bible interpretation, several trends become evident. First, with the rise of higher criticism also came the atomization of the text and the emphasis on sources, redactors, authors, texts, pericopes, etc. Second, as a result of the rejection of the biblical text's unity, the location of the search for meaning changed from within the text itself to a supposed historical background that produced the text.[6] Third, since the Bible's unity was rejected, so also was any view of a unified narrative of the Bible leading toward a history-centered conception of progressive revelation rather than a text centered one.

The ramifications of these trends for the present discussion are obvious. It is not the biblical text as a whole, or prior biblical text in particular, that are sought to assist in seeking the meaning of Isaiah's words in chapter seven or Matthew's use of them in Matthew chapter one. Instead, it has become commonplace to seek a historical solution to the historical situation presented in Isaiah 7 in isolation rather than to seek a contextual resolution to Israel's greater problem presented in the broader narrative of the book of Isaiah and the Bible. It is this later approach that this chapter will follow in order to demonstrate that Matthew's use of Isaiah 7 appropriately fits both the broader biblical context as well as the textual particulars in Isaiah 7 itself. Thus, before one can correctly consider Isaiah's words in Isaiah chapter 7, the broader Biblical narrative with which Isaiah's ministry and writings are situated must be understood.

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[5] The third issue is one of intertextuality and seeks to explain the manner in which the New Testament writer is using the Old Testament. Cf. J. T. Willis, "The Meaning of Isaiah 7:14 and Its Application in Matthew," *Restoration Quarterly* 21 (1978).

[6] John H. Sailhamer, The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), pp.100-11. As a direct result of this change, the meaning of "historical-grammatical" interpretation also shifted. What once meant reading historical texts in order to evaluate word and grammar usage transitioned to reading historical texts in an effort to recreate the "historical milieu" that produced the alleged biblical source text, pericope, or textual redaction.

The Literary Context of the Book of Isaiah

The book of Isaiah does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, the prophet's ministry and writings are situated in the story of the nation Israel.[7] Moreover, the "God with us" (i.e., Immanuel) language does not begin with Isaiah 7. Instead, this language has played a central role in the biblical narrative up to this point.

In the book of Exodus the LORD dwells among his people traveling with them along the way. However, because of Israel's rebellion with the golden calf the LORD informs Moses that He will not go with Israel into the land lest He destroy them because they are stiff-necked. Instead, He will send His angel before Israel in order to drive out the inhabitants of the land.[8] Moses then entreats the LORD to go with Israel. The LORD responds by promising Moses, "My presence (lit. "My face", Heb. פָּנַי) will go with you, and I will give you rest."[9] For, as Moses correctly asks, "How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you *go with us* (עִמָּנוּ)?"[10]

In Exodus 34:6-7 the LORD reveals Himself to Moses and states, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness and truth, who keeps loving-kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet he will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the equity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." These verses are telling in that they begin to foreshadow what the LORD has in store for this rebellious and stiff-necked people.

Unfortunately, it does not take long for Israel to reject LORD at Kadesh Barnea as they refuse to take the land that they were given as an inheritance. Therefore, in Numbers 14:9, Joshua entreats Israel to reconsider and says, "…do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear

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[7] For a more complete understanding of the approach taken here, please refer to the article, "Finding Jesus in the Old Testament," by Dr. Charles Baylis at www.BiblicalStory.org, "Resources," "Articles." Web address: http://thebiblicalstory.org/baylis/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/JesusInOT060314a.pdf (accessed June 10, 2015).

[8] Exo 33:1-3.

[9] Exo 33:14.

[10] Exo 33:16.

the people of this land, for they shall be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and *the LORD is with us* (וַיהוָה אִתָּנוּ); do not fear them."

The LORD does not desert Israel for their disobedience at Kadesh Barnea even though that generation would perish in the wilderness. In Numbers 23:21, Balaam prophesies concerning Israel saying, "No misfortune is seen in Jacob, no misery observed in Israel. The LORD his God is with him; the shout of a king is among him (יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו עִמּוֹ וּתְרוּעַת מֶלֶךְ בּוֹ).

Unfortunately the LORD informs Moses the Israel will forsake the LORD and break the covenant the He made with them. Moreover the LORD states, "On that day I will become angry with them and *forsake them*; I will *hide my face from them*, and they will be destroyed. Many disasters and difficulties will come upon them, and on that day they will ask, 'Have not these disasters come upon us because our God is not with us (Heb. אֱלֹהַי בְּקִרְבִּי)?'"[11] What is important about this passage is that it links the language "forsake them," "hide my face," and "God is not with us" or "God is not in our midst." The same language is used in Deuteronomy 32. Although the LORD had raised Israel (vv. 1-14), they nation would rebel against the LORD and seek after other gods thus rejecting the LORD and neglecting the Rock who begot them (vv. 15-18). In response the LORD states, "I will hide my face from them (v. 20)" and "I will heap misfortunes upon them (v. 23)."[12] In other words, the LORD will judge His people for there is no one who can deliver them from His hand of judgment (e.g., Assyria). However, after the LORD judges Israel and the nation's strength is gone, He will vindicate and atone for both His people and His land (vv. 34-43). Thus, Deuteronomy 32 spells out Israel's future in great detail. One final note is worth mentioning. While there are several other passages that could be expanded upon to make the point here, 2 Samuel 7 connects the "God with us" language specifically to the king of Israel.[13]

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[11] Deut 31:16-18.

[12] In contrast to Exo 33:14 yet per Deut 31:16-18.

[13] Cf. Jdg 6:13; 2 Chr 13:12; 32:7; Psa 46; Eze 10. In addition, the language that the LORD would "hide His face" from Israel is also particularly relevant since it is directly related in Deut 31 and 32. Cf. 2 Sam 7:3, 9, 13-15.

It is within this context that the book of Isaiah and Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14 should be considered. Thus, in an effort to efficiently and effectively cover each of these issues, this chapter will first evaluate the historical and literary context of the Book of Isaiah with chapter seven as the chief focus. Second, the historical and literary context of the Book of Matthew will be addressed with chapters 1-4 receiving most of the attention. Third, the problems with typological interpretations will be enumerated. Finally, a direct fulfillment view of Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14 will be explained.

The Historical and Literary Context of Isaiah 7

Historical Context of Isaiah 7

Isaiah, whose name means "the LORD is salvation", prophesied to the Southern Kingdom during the reigns of Uzziah (792-740 B.C.), Jotham (750-731 B.C.), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.) and Hezekiah (729-686 B.C.), kings of Judah.[14] Nothing is said of Isaiah's death in the Hebrew Bible, but Jewish tradition records that Isaiah was sawed in two during Manasseh's reign.[15]

In 738 B.C. Tiglath-pileser began to press west and into Syria.[16] After four years of relative peace in the region, Assyria again focused its attentions *a-na Pi-li* ℘*-ta* ("to Philistia').[17] It was around this time that Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus joined forces in order to resist

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[14] These dates were acquired from Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 320. Cf. Isa 1:1.

[15] Hebrews 11:37 may be an allusion to Isaiah's demise. For the tradition concerning Isaiah's death cf. *Ascen. Mart. Isa.* 5:1-2 in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*, vol. 2, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 163.

[16] John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller, eds., *Israelite and Judaean History* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International; London: S C M Press, 1977), 423.

[17] James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d with Supplement ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 272.

the Assyrian westward conquests.[18] After a four-year co-regency with Jotham beginning in 735 B.C., Ahaz began to rule alone over Judah in 731 B.C. upon Jotham's death.[19] In an effort to ensure that Judah would join the coalition of Aram and Israel, Rezin and Pekah plotted to overtake Judah and replace the new king over Judah with a king (a son of Tabeel) who shared their desires to form an alliance against the Assyrians.[20] When word came that the coalition was camped in Ephraim, "the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind."[21] In response to the severity of the situation, Ahaz secured his kingdom's safety by turning to the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser for protection.[22] In order to gain the Assyrian king's graces Ahaz "took the silver and gold found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift."[23] It is at this point that the prophet Isaiah was most likely commanded by God to take his son Shear-jashub and go to meet Ahaz at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the fuller's field.[24]

Literary Context of Isaiah 7

While the historical context is the "context" most often discussed with reference to Isaiah 7, it is the literary context of the Book of Isaiah as a whole within which Isaiah 7 is positioned as well as the literary context of the position that the Book of Isaiah holds in the biblical narrative itself that is more relevant to the discussion. According to Dyer and Merrill, the

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[18] Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 425.

[19] Ibid., 320.

[20] Cf. Isa 7:6.

[21] Isa 7:2.

[22] 2 Kgs 16:7-9.

[23] 2 Kgs 16:8.

[24] Isa 7:3.

purpose of the Book of Isaiah is "to display God's glory and holiness through His judgment of sin and His deliverance and blessing of a righteous remnant."[25] As becomes clear in the Book of Isaiah, the deliverance of the LORD and the blessing of His righteous remnant will come through the ministry of the suffering servant.

The Book of Isaiah is most often divided into two major sections: chapters 1-39 dealing mostly with the judgment upon Judah, Israel, and the surrounding nations, and 40-66 dealing with the deliverance and restoration of a united Israel. Chapters 1-39 can be subdivided into four sections: chapters 1-12; 13-27; 28-35; and 36-39.[26] Chapters 1-12 tell of the judgment upon the nation and the promised peace brought to both the nation and the world through the Messiah.[27] Chapters 13-27 present God's judgment upon the surrounding nations.[28] Chapters 28-35 present God's judgment upon Samaria and Jerusalem. Chapters 36-39 present the bridge from Judah's impending judgment by Assyria to their judgment at the hands of Babylon. The second major section of Isaiah (40-66) expands upon the glimmers of Messianic hope and deliverance sprinkled throughout chapters 1-39. In this section the focus turns from one of judgment and condemnation to one of comfort, deliverance, and promise of restoration through the Suffering Servant.

The purpose of Isa 7 is twofold. First, the chapter introduces the judgment upon the House of David resulting from their continued disobedience to the men of God (i.e., prophets)

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[25] Charles Dyer and Eugene H. Merrill, *The Old Testament Explorer: Discovering the Essence, Background, and Meaning of Every Book in the Old Testament*, Swindoll Leadership Library, ed. Charles R. Swindoll (Nashville: Word, 2001), 527.

[26] Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 13.

[27] Ibid., 14-5.

[28] Ibid., 46.

and compounded by the disbelief of King Ahaz (i.e, the rejection of God Himself).[29] In chapter 7, Isaiah is sent by God to King Ahaz in order to comfort the king and ensure him that the coalition of Israel and Aram coming against him would not succeed. In other words, Isaiah was to remind Ahaz that the LORD his God was with Him. Ahaz needed only to respond in faith. In order to provide Ahaz with tangible proof that he and the nation could rely upon Yahweh to protect them, God commanded Ahaz to ask for a confirming sign to calm the king's fears. However, God warns that disbelief on behalf of Ahaz would bring peril upon the House of David.

Second, Immanuel, the hope for the restoration of the nation, is introduced. Instead of following the command of Isaiah and asking for a confirming sign, Ahaz had already turned to Assyria for protection from the imminent threat posed by Israel and Aram and therefore rejected God's command to ask for a sign that the LORD is with him.[30] In response to Ahaz's rebellion, God Himself gives the House of David a sign: that of Immanuel.

Exegetical and Expositional Issues in Isaiah 7

Many commentators either gloss over or leave unaddressed the exegetical and expositional questions raised in Isaiah 7 in their effort to provide a historical sign child that would validate Isaiah's words to Ahaz. However, it is these issues that most strongly argue for a future fulfillment in Jesus Christ. In other words, most "solutions" concerning the identity of Immanuel revolve around the assumption that the "sign child" must have been born within a year or so of the prophecy since the child was to be a sign to Ahaz. For, as the reasoning goes, if the child were not born within the immediate timeframe then how could the child have served as a "sign" to Ahaz?

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[29] For good discussion here cf. Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 302-4.

[30] Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 425.

Why the shift from the second person singular pronoun (i.e., Ahaz) in verse 11 to the second person plural pronoun (i.e., House of David) in verses 13 and 14?

While in Isaiah 7:11 Ahaz was commanded individually to request a sign from the LORD (מֵעִם אוֹת שְׁאַל־לְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ), upon Ahaz's rejection the LORD promises to give the House of David (plural) a sign in Isaiah 7:14 (לָכֵן יִתֵּן דְּנָיָא הוּא לָכֶם אוֹת).[31] While the assumption among scholars is that the "sign" promised in Isaiah 7 is for Ahaz, the text may not warrant such a conclusion. If the sign was to Ahaz then the demand for an immediate sign is warranted.[32] However, the shift from the singular "you" in verse 11 to the plural in verses 13-14 warrant the understanding that the sign was meant for the "House of David" more broadly.[33] Thus, the impact of the sign needs to be understood to account for both Ahaz *and* the House of David. Further, if the "sign" was for the "House of David" then the passage needs to be re-evaluated to discern if Immanuel was to be an *immediate* sign or a *future* one. Yet, if one argues that Immanuel was to be a future sign then one must ask if there was any contemporary validation of the "sign" to either Ahaz and/or Judah.

This exegetical issue raises a secondary question: Does the birth of a historical "Immanuel" achieve what commentators claim that it does? In short, the answer is no. First, Isaiah's son Maher-shalal-hash-baz is considered. It should be kept in mind at this point that

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[31] This objection is most often handled in one of two ways. First, it is argued that Ahaz was not alone but had others with him, cf. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets*, 31 n. 30. While this is possible, it seems that this is reading into the text characters which are not stated to be present by the author in order to extract from the text the desired interpretation. Second, it is argued that "Ahaz" and "the House of David" are synonymous. This second issue will be revisited below.

[32] However, if the sign was meant for Ahaz then why is his name only mentioned twice more in the Book of Isaiah (14:28 records his death and in 38:8 a mention of a staircase named after him) and never again in 7-12?

[33] It should also be remembered at this point that the events recorded in Isaiah 7 are part of a larger composition. Thus, the question must be raised as to 1) why the author included this passage? and 2) how does it relate to the rest of the book?

most interpreters contend that Ahaz has already made a treaty with the Tiglath-pileser of Assyria by the time that Isaiah 7 occurs. Therefore, in this scenario the disobedient king is promised a "sign" from the LORD Himself.[34] It is generally agreed that the validation of the sign is found in the deliverance of 7:16, "but before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right (before about age 20), the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste."[35]

From Ahaz's perspective though such a "sign" could hardly be considered as coming from the LORD since only two things need occur to bring about the events in 7:16. First, some "young maiden" of Isaiah's choosing must become pregnant (or even less threatening, is already pregnant).[36] The impregnation of a "young maiden" is easily within Isaiah's personal control and would require little divine intervention since Isaiah's odds were 50/50 that he would be right in the prediction of a male child. That a young maiden would have a male child should hardly be considered miraculous.

The second thing that must occur is that the Assyrians needed to come to the rescue of Judah. Second Kings 16:9 makes clear that this is what in fact happened.[37] Yet from Ahaz's perspective this can hardly be understood as God's doing since it was *Ahaz himself* who solicited the help of the Assyrians. Further, he gave away the treasures from God's temple to do it. It is difficult to understand how the "sign" *from God* that some young maiden impregnated by Isaiah and giving birth to a son proved that *God* would deliver Judah from Israel and Aram since it was

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[34] This sign was to be one of both deliverance (v. 16) and judgment (v. 17-25).

[35] Cf. Murray R. Adamthwaite, "Isaiah 7:16: Key to the Immanuel Prophecy," *Reformed Theological Review* 59, no. 2 (2000). One problem is here is that 7:16 points toward around 20 years of age (cf. Deut 1:39) while 8:4 points toward infancy. This appears to point toward the possibility that more than one child is in view (i.e. one older and one younger, as in Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz).

[36] It is interesting to see how creative interpreters are in an effort to reconcile the "prophetess" in 8:3 with the requirement that she be an "almah". This conundrum forces many to conclude that Isaiah's wife, the mother of Shear-Jashub, cannot be the one in view here. They are then forced with the choice of adultery, polygamy or the unrecorded death of Isaiah's first wife. Moreover, the grammar of the phrase הָעַלְמָה הָרָה is considered below.

[37] It should be noted that some argue that Isa 7 and 2 Kgs 16 record different accounts.

Isaiah, not God, who caused the birth of a child and it was *Ahaz*, not God, who caused the

Assyrians to come to his aid. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine that Ahaz would have viewed

the birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz (who was not named Immanuel) to be a "sign" of deliverance

from God (7:16). So, if God's "sign" of the birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz would have been

ignored, why would Ahaz have expected the ensuing judgment of vv. 17-25 to follow such a

birth? In conclusion, such a "sign" would not have had any intrinsic value to Ahaz toward

validating impending deliverance or predicting impending judgment. Instead, when he saw the

immediate demise of both Israel and Aram at the hands of Assyria he could only conclude that

he had in fact made the right decision in rejecting Isaiah and his God. It is only if and when

judgment came upon Judah that he would know that Isaiah's sign of Maher-shalal-hash-baz was

truly from God. Thus, the *future events* would have validated the past "sign," not the other way

around. In other words, those who hold this view argue that the sign of the birth was to validate

the future events, yet this seems not to be the case.

The logical objection to the conclusion that Hezekiah is Immanuel, aside from the

chronological problems which exist concerning the date of Hezekiah's birth, follows much the

same logic with only one difference: if the "sign" child is Hezekiah then *no* interference is

required from God or from His prophet.[38] Instead, it is Ahaz, not Isaiah who approaches "the

'almah" in order that she bear a son.

The results in this scenario are the same as above: Ahaz's choice to ally himself with

Tiglath-pileser rather than the LORD leads to Ahaz's deliverance. Further he accomplished this

by taking "the silver and gold found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal

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[38] The only possible exception to the exclusion of divine intervention in this scenario would be the possibility that Hezekiah was the product of a virgin conception (a notion not supported in even Jewish interpretive tradition).

palace and [sending] it as a gift to the king of Assyria."[39] It is difficult to see how these events in any way are threatening to Ahaz since Judah was already under fierce attack by the surrounding nations.[40] Further, it is even more difficult to imagine how such a course of events would have caused the nation to see any significance in Isaiah or the claim of his name that "Yahweh saves" since it would appear that it was Ahaz, not God, who was doing the "saving." Here again, as was the case with Maher-shalal-hash-baz, future events would serve to validate the past "sign" which is the opposite of what these interpreters are arguing.[41]

Since Ahaz did not respond in faith, how is it that the house of David did not last?

In 7:9 Ahaz is told, "if you (plural, house of David) do not believe then you (plural, house of David) will not last." If the threat was meant for Ahaz individually then why did he have a relatively long reign? Conversely, if the threat was not for Ahaz individually but for the "House of David" more broadly (thus the plural "you"), then one must ask in what way did the "House of David" not last.

The answer to this question lies in what precedes and what follows this passage. As Isaiah correctly charges, the house of David had continually tried the patience of men (i.e., prophets). Now they had tested the patience of God as well. In response to this disobedience Judah and her kings were heading for captivity. The LORD was going to hide His face (Isa 8:17) from the nation and her king (i.e., He would no longer be with them), as promised per Deuteronomy 32. Moreover, the Davidic line was being cut off (Isa 7:9), and God was returning to the root of Jesse (i.e., David, Isa 11) to fulfill His promise to David. Thus, a new shoot would

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[39] 2 Kgs 16:8.

[40] Cf. 2 Chr 28.

[41] The argumentation for an unnamed son born from an unnamed "almah" is the same as is found here since it seems safe to assume that every "young maiden" in King Ahaz's house was most likely "approached" and became pregnant at some point.

come forth. That is, "a child will be born to us, a son has been given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore" (Isa 9:6-7). In other words, a descendant of David who is literally "God with us" will be born and all that was promised to David in 2 Samuel 7 will be fulfilled.

Why the shift back to the singular in 16-17?

Not only does the text shift from the singular to the plural, but in verses 16 and 17 it shifts back to singular again. As explained above, it would be the near future events that would validate the future sign of a virgin birth. If this is the case, then what is the relationship between vv. 10-14 and 15-25? In response to this issue, two courses of action are often taken. The first deals with the relationship between vv. 14-17. It is the approach of many critical scholars to simply omit the verses that produce difficulties for their view. Such an approach is arbitrary at best.[42] Instead, effort must be made to account for all the verses in the passage without simply deleting from consideration those that are problematic to one's view. Therefore, several grammatical factors must be assessed.

First is the relationship between vv. 14 and 15. There is nothing grammatically that requires these two verses remain together. Moreover, one must ask what role Shear-jashub is playing in this chapter. It is only after Ahaz's rejection that his role becomes clear. Israel's

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[42] For a review of the omissions by various scholars cf. J. A. Motyer, "Context and Content in the Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14," *Tyndale Bulletin* 21 (1970), 118. McKane openly admits his errant approach and offers little defense in stating, "I acknowledge that this proposal to delete v. 15 is to some extent a confession of failure in the face of the difficulties presented by vv. 14-17 and I admit that there I not textual support for it. I believe, nevertheless, that there are reasons for taking this course…"McKane, "The Interpretation of Isaiah VII 14-25," 212.

promise of deliverance will ultimately lead to Israel's judgment: the remnant will return. Thus, before Shear-jashab (a youth) will turn twenty, these events will occur.

Second, it must be recognized that verse 16 begins with כִּי that introduces a relative clause inseparably connecting it to verse 15. Therefore, vv. 15-16 must be considered together. Moreover, the judgment upon Judah in v. 16 stands in contrast to the judgment that will befall both Israel and Aram. Therefore, just because Judah has been delivered in the near term from Pekah and Rezin by Assyria, they will not escape the judgment of God that will be brought on them by Assyria. So, vv. 15-17 must remain intact. Finally, the "in that day" clauses in vv. (18, 20, 21, and 23) refer to the judgment that is introduced in v. 17. As such, vv. 15-25 must be understood as one literary unit. Therefore as introduced above, it is the near-term events recorded in verses 15 to 25 which will validate the future sign of Immanuel.

Why the shift by Isaiah from referring to the LORD as "your God" (i.e., Ahaz's God) in verse 11 to "my God" (Isaiah's God) in verse 13?

As explained above, the "God with us" language resided with the king per the Davidic Covenant. Thus, because of Ahaz's (and the house of David's) rejection of the LORD, the LORD would no longer be with Ahaz (i.e., "your God"). Instead, the LORD would hide his face from them (Isa 8:17) and the house of David would have to wait for the LORD, Isaiah's God, to bring forth His "God with us" promise.

Is the phrase הָרָה הָעַלְמָה to be understood as present tense or future tense?

The verbal adjective הָרָה in this construction could be understood as either stative of a present tense condition (i.e. 'the young maiden is pregnant') or it could be used to convey a

future sense (i.e. 'the young maiden will become pregnant').[43] However, the issue cannot be settled by Hebrew syntax as Kaiser explains: "Hebrew syntax prevents us from assuming that the birth oracle refers to a woman who is already pregnant."[44] Therefore, the present or future nature of the pregnancy of the 'almah is indeterminate from the grammar in Isa 7:14 and must be determined from the context. Further, all agree that the construction in Micah 5:3 (MT 5:2) of עַד־עֵת יוֹלֵדָה יָלָדָה should be translated as present tense but understood as a future event ('until the time when she who is pregnant gives birth'). All additionally agree that this is a Messianic passage. Therefore, even the reference to a distant future birth does not need to be in the future tense but could be understood in the same manner as a "prophetic perfect" in Mic 5:3.

What is the function of the definite article in הָעַלְמָה?

While some have tried to translate this as indefinite (e.g. 'a virgin' or 'a young maiden'), Hebrew grammar argues against such a conclusion. Gesenius explains that the article is used here "to denote a single person or thing" (i.e. the one virgin).[45] If Gesenius is correct then only one 'almah can be the referent of the prophecy. If the 'almah was present during Ahaz's day then Matthew must either be 1) mistaken in his claim that Jesus' birth fulfilled the prophecy of the virgin (i.e., ἡ παρθένος) giving birth to a son, or 2) appealing to some "greater fulfillment" of the typology that must be found within Isaiah 7-9.

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[43] Cf. Paul Jouon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. T. Muraoka, Revised ed., 3 vols., Subsidia Biblica - 14/1 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2003), § 148; Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 260-1. McKane enumerates those who view the 'young woman' as now pregnant and finds himself in agreement with their conclusions (cf. William McKane, "The Interpretation of Isaiah Vii 14-25," *Vetus Testamentum* 17, no. 2 (1967), 213. However, most commentators understand this statement to be future in nature, whether short term or long term.

[44] Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah1-12*, trans. John Bowden, 5th ed., The Old Testament Library, ed. Peter Ackroyd et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 157.

[45] Wilhelm Gesenius, E. Kautzsch, and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon), § 126r.

Historical Context and Literary Context of the Gospel of Matthew

The Historical Context of the Gospel of Matthew

Before consideration of Matthew's use of Isa 7:14 in Matt 1:23 can commence, a brief review of the historical and literary context of Matthew is also necessary. Israel had rejected the LORD their God and so the LORD had sent the nation back into slavery. As prophesied by Daniel, the nation's deliverance would appear in the fourth kingdom (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and finally Rome).

Sometime around the middle of the first century A.D., Matthew, a disciple of Jesus, wrote his Gospel.[46] Some 20-30 years after his Messiah had been crucified, Matthew wrote to record "selected events from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in order to confirm to a Jewish audience that Jesus is indeed the Messiah and to explain God's kingdom program for the present age in light of Israel's rejection of her King."[47]

The Literary Context of Matthew 1-4

The Gospel of Matthew, like Isaiah, can be divided into two main sections: chapters 1-9 which serve to identify and validate Jesus of Nazareth as the Promised Messiah of the Old Testament, and chapters 10-28 which present Israel's rejection of her King and the subsequent delay of Israel's earthly kingdom while the Message of the King goes forth to the nations.

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[46] Mark Bailey and Tom Constable, *The New Testament Explorer: Discovering the Essence, Background, and Meaning of Every Book in the New Testament*, Swindoll Leadership Library, ed. Charles R. Swindoll (Nashville, TN: Word, 1999), 1-2; contra Guthrie who dates Matthew somewhere around 85 A.D. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 53-6. For a more recent discussion concerning the date if Matthew cf. D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 76-9.

[47] Bailey and Constable, *The New Testament Explorer: Discovering the Essence, Background, and Meaning of Every Book in the New Testament*, 2-3. This rejection was not to be a surprise since the prophets had already foretold of it (Cf. Isa 8:11-22, compare with Heb 2:13-14; Zech 12:10-14; Psa 118:5-29).

Chapters 1-9 can be subdivided into three sections. Chapters 1-4 serve to validate Jesus as the Messiah via Old Testament prophecies beginning with Jesus' genealogy and birth and endings with the inauguration of His ministry. Chapters 5-7 serve to validate the identity of the Messiah through His words as the Promised Greater Moses of Deut 18:18-19. Chapters 8-9 serve to validate that Jesus is the Messiah through the presentation of His miracles that match the Messianic miracles promised in the Old Testament.

Matthew 1:23 falls within Matthew's presentation of Jesus' birth and early ministry. In this section Matthew is seeking to validate the identity of Jesus as the Messiah through demonstrating that the events surrounding Jesus' birth, baptism, and temptation are a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. In order to do this, Matthew not only turns to Isaiah 7 for validation that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah in his first four chapters, but he also either cites or alludes to Isaiah 9:1-2; 11:1-2; 40:3; 42:1; and 61:1 as well. Therefore, Matthew has connected the identity of the one born in Isaiah 7 with that of the child in Isaiah 9 and 11 as well as the Suffering Servant of 40-66.[48]

In order to proceed, three issue should be addressed from within the Book of Matthew in order for some conclusions to be drawn concerning Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14: the significance of the genealogy in Matthew 1, Matthew's use of πληρόω, and the hermeneutical validity of Matthew's argument.

The Significance of the Genealogy in Matthew

In his article entitled "Difficulties of New Testament Genealogies," Larry Overstreet asserts that "the book of Matthew was written for the Jewish people and it demonstrates to them

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[48] While it is clear that Matthew has connected these passages in Isaiah, this is not what is at issue here. Instead, the issue is whether or not these passages are connected within the Book of Isaiah itself; for only then should Matthew's connections serve to prove that Jesus is the Messiah via the Book of Isaiah.

that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah. To the Jewish mind one question would be of supreme importance, and this would be, 'Is he of the house of David?' The genealogy presented by Matthew answers at the beginning in the affirmative."[49] Yet if this statement is true then one must pose the question, "if Jesus was born of a virgin then how does presenting the father's genealogy demonstrate that Jesus is 'of the house of David'?" Instead, should Matthew not be presenting Mary's genealogy if this were his chief goal?

Since Matthew's genealogy is the genealogy of Joseph (who was not the father of Jesus if he was born of a virgin) the purpose for Matthew's presentation of it must be brought under consideration. While Overstreet does a good job of enumerating observations about Matthew's presentation of this genealogy, one observation of particular interest that he failed to mention is the fact that this genealogy traces the Davidic kingly line from David through Ahaz (1:9) to Joseph, the husband of Mary.[50] Could it be that this genealogy is somehow related to the "Immanuel" birth contained in the immediately following verses?

In Matthew's genealogy every child was recorded to have been "born" (ἐγέννησεν– aorist *active* indicative third person singular) to his father. However, in 1:16 Jesus is born (ἐγεννήθη– aorist *passive* indicative third person singular) to Mary, not Joseph. The significance of the different verbs used here emphasizes that Joseph's blood is not present in the Messiah.[51] In other words, this line (which runs through Ahaz) has been "cut off" from the Messiah. It is this

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[49] R. Larry Overstreet, "Difficulties of New Testament Genealogies," *Grace Theological Journal* 2, no. 2 (1981), 314.

[50] Albright makes the point that Jesus was identified as the "Son of Mary" in Mark 6:3 and argues that this is a possible reference to a rabbinic custom whereby if a man's father was unknown, he was identified by his mother (William Foxwell Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, Anchor Bible, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, vol. 26 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1971), 10.) Also cf, TB *Yebamoth* iv 13. However one might wonder why the mother's names of the Kings of Judah are consistently listed throughout Kings and Chronicles but not so for the kings of Israel.

[51] Cf. Donald Senior, *Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 38-9.

writer's contention that the threat in Isaiah 7:9b was that Ahaz's Davidic line would not be established if he did not believe God. In other words, if he rejected God then God would reject him. While Ahaz thought that for the Davidic Covenant to remain intact God must preserve his Davidic Line, Ahaz was woefully mistaken. Instead, the Davidic Kingdom was headed for exile and the Davidic throne was going to sit empty until it was filled by Immanuel, the ultimate Davidic King, who would be born of a virgin.

Matthew's Use of πληρόω in Matt 1:22

In Matt 1:22 Matthew states "now all this took place to *fulfill* what was spoken by the LORD through the prophet." Therefore, the manner in which πληρόω is being used in this construction is of utmost importance to the present discussion.

In the New Testament πληρόω is used to mean "to fill with content" (as in John 16:6), "to fulfill a demand or claim" (as in Rom 8:4), "to fill up completely a specific measure" (as in Matt 23:32), or "to complete" (in a temporal sense as in Luke 7:1).[52] However, Matthew 1:22 πληρόω means " 'to complete,' prophetic sayings which were spoken with divine authority and which can thus be called directly the words of God."[53] Such usages are found in each of the gospels (cf. Matt 1:22; 2:15, 23; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9; Mark 14:49; Luke 4:21; 24:44; John 12:38; 15:25; 18:9, 32; 19:24, 36). While John uses πληρόω with some consistency, Matthew's usage far outnumbers the other gospel writers.

In Matthew 1:22, Matthew implements the introductory formulas ἵνα πληρωθῇ (Matt 1:22; 2:15; 4:14; 12:17; 21:4; 26:56) or ὅπως πληρωθῇ (Matt 2:23; 8:17; 13:35) nine times. The

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[52] Gerhard Delling, "Plerow," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Griedrich, vol. VI (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964)., 289-96.

[53] Ibid., 294.

construction ἵνα πληρωθῇ is also used once by Mark (cf. Mark 14:49) and five times by John (cf. John 12:38; 15:25; 18:32; 19:24; and 36). John also uses the construction ἵνα τελειωθῇ in order to make the same point (cf. John 19:28). In each of these constructions (both ἵνα πληρωθῇ and ὅπως πληρωθῇ) it is the gospel writer's intention to validate Jesus as the Messiah through demonstrating how the Old Testament "prophetic" passages were being fulfilled either by Jesus directly or by the events occurring around Him. Further (with the possible exception of the current passage under consideration), none of these passages are citing something that has been "fulfilled" beforehand. In other words, the "fulfillment" of each of these prophecies is reserved for the Messiah. While it is acknowledged, however, that a few of the gospel writer's citations are difficult to identify with their exact Old Testament citation (e.g. Matt 2:23), it should also be granted that none of the citations involving πληρόω, setting aside for now Matthew 1:23, involved a previous fulfillment. All were reserved for and to be fulfilled by the Messiah. Therefore, in dealing with the use of Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23, it is necessary to determine if Matthew's use of the introductory formula ἵνα πληρωθῇ is consistent with the other uses or exceptional.

An Evaluation of the Validity[54] of the Hermeneutical Approaches to Matt 1:23[55]

Matthew chapters 1-2 seek to convince the reader that Jesus is the Messiah. Matthew's argument in 1:22-23 seems straightforward: the birth of Jesus is the birth of Immanuel (J=I). However, this statement only proves that the birth of Jesus is the birth of

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[54] Throughout this section the terms "validity" and "truth" are used as in the formal discipline of logic.

[55] Since it is assumed in this study that Matthew's purpose is trying to validate the identity of Jesus as the Messiah, the *sensius plenior* model is not evaluated in this section for if God's intention is not determinable from the Old Testament passage itself but must instead be revealed in the progress of revelation then a return to the original passage seems fruitless. Instead, *sensius plenior* relies upon the authority of the New Testament writer's divinely inspired revelation. In essence then, Jesus' birth is the Messiah's birth promised in Isa 7:14 because Matthew said it was so.

Messiah (J=M) if it is also true that the birth of Immanuel is the birth of Messiah (I=M). In other words, the veracity of Matthew's argument depends on the veracity of his unstated premise that Immanuel is the Messiah (I=M). If this line of thinking is correct then the proof of this unstated premise can only be found in the Book of Isaiah.

Those who demand a historical birth of the Immanuel prophecy in Isaiah 7 as a sign to Ahaz must by necessity conclude two things: 1) Jesus is not Immanuel and 2) Immanuel is not Messiah. In an effort to remedy this contradiction many interpreters turn to typology for assistance. The problems for such an approach are twofold. First, the issue for them then becomes one of determining *how* the birth of Jesus is *like* (i.e., greater than) the birth of Immanuel. However, explaining how Jesus' birth is like that of Immanuel's birth serves no purpose in the validation of Matthew's argument unless such a relationship is anticipated via previous revelation. Unfortunately, no such revelation anticipating a *greater type of birth* is given (i.e., from a "young maiden" to a "virgin"). Instead, the contrast provided in Isaiah 7-11 is the failure of Ahaz (i.e., the house of David) that has been rejected by the LORD and the successful reign of a future king, a shoot from the stump of Jesse, one God will be with, who will restore the fortunes of Israel.

Addressing the Issues: A Conclusion and Summary

The Exact Nature of the Immanuel Sign

In Isaiah 7:1-2 an imminent threat is posed against both the Davidic Kingdom and the Davidic Line. In short, the future of the "eternal" Davidic Covenant was at stake. It is for this reason that God sends Isaiah (whose name "the LORD is salvation" was to serve as a sign to both Ahaz and the nation) and Isaiah's son Shear-jashub (the meaning of whose name "the

remnant will return" is not clear at this point in the passage) to comfort and assure both Ahaz and the House of David that they would be delivered.

The manner in which Isaiah comforts Ahaz is to spell out for him what will take place over the next 65 years: namely, that Judah will be delivered but both lands of these two kings will be destroyed. In response to this report Ahaz, who stands in for the House of David as a whole (thus the plural in Isa 9:6), must believe. For Isaiah states, "If you (plural, house of David) will not believe, you (plural, house of David) surely shall not last." This threat of God given to the House of David in v. 9b is the key to the interpretation of the passage.

In order for Ahaz to be comforted God commands Ahaz to ask for a "sign" which would validate their impending deliverance. In other words, Ahaz was to ask for a *sign* that would serve to validate that certain *events* would come to pass. Ahaz only needed to respond in faith.

However, as is learned in 2 Kings 16:7-9, Ahaz had apparently already sought deliverance (i.e. "salvation") from Tiglath-pileser and not the LORD. This action was a direct affront to the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:8-16), the Mosaic Covenant (Deut 17:17-19), Isaiah, and God Himself. Therefore, in response to God's gracious promise of deliverance, Ahaz spurned both God's salvation and His threat to cut off Ahaz and the Davidic Line.[56]

The significance of the Immanuel sign then is this: in response to Ahaz's rejection of a "sign," which was to serve as a validation that events in the near future were certain to happen, God gives Ahaz a "sign" which would be validated by events which would certainly happen in the near future. In essence the tables have been turned (see table below).

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[56] Footnote Davidic Covenant, Ps 2, etc. the irony of cutting off Davidic Line.
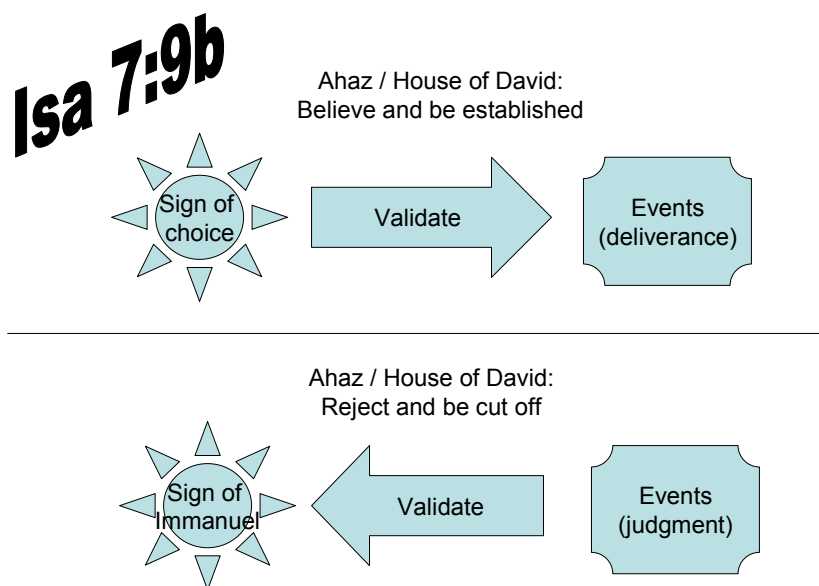
King Ahaz had determined to seek deliverance *without* God by rejecting the Davidic Covenant and aligning with the nations (thus Isaiah's shift from *you*r God in v. 11 to *my* God in v. 13). In response, God would cut off Ahaz's Davidic Line (v. 9b, 14), discipline Israel at the hands of the nations (vv. 7:15-25; 8:1-22), and return to the "root of Jesse" (11-12) to bring forth the child Immanuel (9:1-7), the final fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant (Matt 1:1), who would ultimately deliver Israel from the nations and restore the Davidic Kingdom (Isa 40-66).

Therefore, when Ahaz saw that events promised by God come to pass (i.e. short term deliverance followed by famine and disgrace), Ahaz could know that God's sign of Immanuel would come to pass as well.

However, this sign was apparently only made known to Ahaz and the House of David since another "sign" is presented to the people of the nation via the faithful witnesses of Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. In order to make known the impending judgment which was to come upon the nation Isaiah writes "swift is the booty, speedy is the prey" upon a large tablet before the two witnesses. This will be the name of Isaiah's son that his wife is about to conceive. The prophecy is that before this son "Maher-shalal-hash-baz" is old enough to utter the words "my father" or "my mother" judgment will have fallen on Samaria and Damascus.

Further, the land of Immanuel (God's promised Davidic Messiah) will be overrun by the Assyrians who will be on the verge of overtaking the Holy City as well. Now the only hope for the nation is Immanuel Himself to be born.

Supporting Evidence

Signs to Israel

Several factors support such a conclusion. First, this view allows for Isaiah, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, Shear-jasub, and Immanuel to function as signs to Israel within Isaiah 7-8. Isaiah's name ("the LORD is salvation") serves as a reminder to both Ahaz and Israel that their deliverance resides not with the nations but with the LORD (7:1-14).[57] Shear-jashub's name ("the remnant will return") serves both as a judgment that the nation will go into exile as well as a message of hope that the faithful remnant will return from exile (7:15-25).[58] Maher-shalal-hash-baz's name ("swift is the booty, speedy is the prey") serves to remind the nation that the very nation to whom they turned for deliverance will plunder the nation and leave it desolate (8:1-8).

Second, in 8:3-4 the LORD commands Isaiah saying "Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz; for before the boy (הַנַּעַר) knows how to cry out 'my father' or 'my mother' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried way before the king of Assyria." While this is the same introductory language to that of Isaiah 7:16, most commentators point out that an age difference exists between these two boys. If Isaiah 7:16 is to be understood in light of

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[57] It is no coincidence that Jesus' name comes from this passage. While one could ask why Jesus was not named Immanuel ("God with us"), the significance of Jesus' name ("Yahweh saves") in relationship to Isa 7:1-14 needs to be emphasized. Ahaz, as well as the nation, sinned and rejected the notion that "the Lord is salvation" (i.e. Isaiah) so the sign of Immanuel is given. His name will be "Yahweh saves" for he is the ultimate deliverer for the nation.

[58] The difficulty here is demonstrating the break between vv. 14 and 15 by way of grammatical structure. However, it is just as difficult to connect them since the grammar throughout vv. 15-25 is difficult and much disagreement surrounds the structure here. Therefore, context, not grammatical structure must be relied upon to make this distinction. The proposal of a break here is argued for contra Kaiser who argues "Isaiah 7:15-17 cannot be separated from 7:14, as some have attempted to maintain, for everything in the context demands that the description of this son continue throughout the so-called 'Book of Immanuel' (7:1-12:6)" Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 162. However, this section is to address this objection. These problems have caused some to opt for the deletion of various verses throughout this section. Cf. McKane, "The Interpretation of Isaiah VII 14-25," 212.

Deuteronomy 1:39, then somewhere around the age of twenty is in view.[59] However, here in 8:3-4 the age of the child must be still an infant.[60] Could it be that Isaiah's two boys are being used in parallel fashion as signs to the nation?[61]

Therefore, Shear-jashub accompanies Isaiah to meet Ahaz and the name of the boy serves as a sign to Ahaz. Conversely, Isaiah goes to the priests in order to establish "faithful witnesses" to the people that the Assyrians are coming. Thus the name of Maher-shalal-hash-baz serves as a sign to the nation just as the name Shear-jashub serves as a sign to Ahaz and the House of David.

The Identity of הָעַלְמָה

Another strength of this view is that it does not strain the normal use of the definite article. Instead of being forced to opt for some sort of typological, analogous, or *sensius plenior* view of this passage, the referent הָעַלְמָה can rightly be associated with Mary, mother of Jesus.

Further, for those who hold that the prophetess of Isaiah 8:3 is הָעַלְמָה, this view eliminates the need to try to explain how such a conclusion is warranted. Instead, if the prophetess was the mother of Shear-jashub as well, then it would be clear to all that in no way could a married mother in the home of her husband be considered הָעַלְמָה of Isaiah 7:14. Rather, the obvious contrast between the two women can remain intact.

More Strengths

This view allows the nature of the sign given to Ahaz to be in keeping with the supernatural nature of the sign Ahaz was commanded to ask for. Second, this view addresses the

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[59] For good discussion here cf. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 315.

[60] Cf. John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 113; Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, 338; John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 223; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 303-4; J. A. Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 90-1.

[61] Thus Shear-jashub in 7:15-16 and Maher-shalal-hash-baz in 8:4.

need for contemporary validation of the sign given to Ahaz without the need for contemporary execution of that sign. Third, this view best handles the connection between the name Immanuel ("God with us") and the Davidic Covenant. Fourth, this view needs not enter into the unfavorable and difficult position of trying to prove that Hezekiah was not already born when the sign of Isaiah 7:14 was given. Fifth, this view best explains the expectation for the Messianic Davidic King to be born not only in the Book of Isaiah, but also in passages like Micah 5:2-5a.[62] Finally, this view allows one to stand in agreement with Matthew 1:22-25; Luke 1:26-38; and John 1:13.

Weaknesses

There is one primary weakness with the view presented here. Namely, the distinction that has been drawn between vv. 14 and 15 is difficult to demonstrate from the context of chapter 7 alone. However, the conclusions concerning the relationship between these two verses has been done in an effort to satisfy both the near context of chapter 7 as well as the broader context of chapters 8-12. Therefore, while this distinction may be considered a weakness when dealing with Isa 7 in isolation, it becomes a strength when due consideration is given to the more broad context of the Immanuel section of Isaiah.

Conclusion

The overwhelming majority of interpreters hold that there was a contemporary fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 in Ahaz's day. Most opt for either Maher-shalal-hash-baz or Hezekiah as Immanuel. Therefore, when addressing Matthew's use of Isa 7:14 in Matthew 1:23, these interpreters are forced to recognize some type of typological fulfillment taking place. While a

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[62] **Micah 5:2-5** [2] "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *too* little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity." Therefore He will give them *up* until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel. [4] And He will arise and shepherd *His flock* in the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they will remain, because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth. [5] This One will be *our* peace."

few centuries ago most would hold to a "prophetic fulfillment" understanding of this passage, a wholesale exodus of this position has occurred which was initiated in large part by the work of Duhm in 1892.[63] However, after consideration of Isaiah 7-12, the hermeneutic of prophetic fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23 provides the most answers *within the context of Isaiah*.

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[63] Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia*, 4, neu durchgesehene aufl. ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892).