Chapter Two

Isaiah 7:14 and its Immediate Context

I. Introduction

The fundamental rule of biblical exegesis is that context determines meaning. When it comes to Isaiah 7:14, its proper interpretation depends on more than the lexical meanings of certain words. It must be derived from considering essentially five contexts: (a) the pericope of 7:13-25, (b) the *immediate literary context* of chapters 7-12, known by most scholars as "The Book of Immanuel," (c) the *greater literary context* of chapters 1-39 (i.e. Proto-Isaiah), (d) the *historical context* in which Isaiah 7 is set, that of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, and (e) the *historical context* in which Proto-Isaiah was compiled and which serves as the basis to speculate on the *occasion* and *purpose* of Proto-Isaiah.

In the course of this thesis, we will address all five contexts mentioned above. In this chapter, though, we will focus on the immediate context of Isaiah 7:14. Yet before we do so, we must do two things. We must first review the past scholarship on Isaiah 7:14 and take note of both the insights and shortcomings scholars have made in their attempts to exegete this verse and its surrounding context. We must then analyze the specific textual variants found in Isaiah 7:14. Then and only then can we look at Isaiah 7:14 within the context of both the immediate prophecy of 7:13-25 as well as the greater "Immanuel section" of chapters 7-12. In the course of this chapter, it will be argued that when read within the immediate literary context of Isaiah 7-12, Isaiah 7:14 is first and foremost a prophecy about the birth of a royal son of Ahaz who would become king and whose reign would witness the humiliation of Assyria. In the subsequent chapters it will

be argued, based on historical analysis and the analysis of the greater literary context of Proto-Isaiah, that Immanuel was understood to be Hezekiah.

II. Past Scholarship of Isaiah 7:14

The scholarship surrounding the exegesis of Isaiah 7:14 is legion. Nevertheless, despite the vast amount of variation in interpretation, we find the same basic elements in most exegetical work. Quite obviously the essential question regarding Isaiah 7:14 is, "To whom was Isaiah originally referring at the time?" By and large, there are four proposals scholars have made concerning the identification of the Immanuel child and his mother, the עַלְמָה of 7:14:

> (a) she was Ahaz's wife or concubine, thus making the child a prince, possibly Hezekiah;[64]
>
> (b) she was Isaiah's wife, the prophetess mentioned in chapter 8, thus making the child Isaiah's son born in chapter 8;[65]
>
> (c) עַלְמָה is a general term that referred to all pregnant women at the time, thus making the child a reference to all babies born at that time who would be young children by the time the Syro-Ephraimite threat would be gone;[66]
>
> (d) she is Mary, the mother of Jesus, and therefore Immanuel is Jesus.

Despite these different conclusions, there is a general consensus among scholars regarding a number of exegetical issues surrounding Isaiah 7:14. J. Alec Moyter, for example, correctly points out that according to the immediate context of 7:13-25:

> (a) Immanuel's birth was to take place in conjunction with the events of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis;

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[64] John D. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC; Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985), 98-101; John J. Scullion, "An Approach to the Understanding of Isaiah 7:10-17," *JBL* 87 (1968): 288-300.

[65] Herbert M. Wolf, *"A Solution to the Immanuel Prophecy in Isaiah 7:14-8:22,"JBL* 91 (1972,): 449-456; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 1-39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 212-213; J. Alec Moyter, "Context and Content in the Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14,"*TB* 21 (1970): 124.

[66] William McKane, "The Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14-25," *VT* 17 (1967): 208-219.

(b) he would be born at a time when the Davidic dynasty was 'disestablished;'

(c) because he is called Immanuel, the situation was not devoid of hope.[67]

Like many scholars, Moyter denotes Isaiah 6-12 as "The Book of Immanuel," and argues that the visionary chapters of 6 and 12 act as its prologue and epilogue.[68] Within this section, Moyter also notes a correlation between the Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14 and the messianic figure of Isaiah 9 and 11. Based on this parallelism between chapter 7 and chapters 9 and 11, we can reasonably conclude that the Immanuel child of Isaiah 7 is the same child mentioned in both Isaiah 9 and 11. Moyter shows this parallelism within these chapters in the following chart. He notes that the initial prophecy focused on Judah while the later prophecy focused on Ephraim (Israel):[69]

The Moment of Decision	(7:1-17) The Lord's warning comes to Judah. On the king's decision hangs the future of the dynasty.	(9:8-10:4) The Lord's word comes to Ephraim. A wealth of imminent divine anger awaits disobedience.
The Judgment	(7:18-8:8) The Assyrian Invasion: Damascus and Samaria are despoiled; Judah overwhelmed as by an all but fatal flood.	(10:5-15) The Assyrian Invasion: Samaria has fallen; Judah is under threat; the punishment of Assyria is certain.
The Remnant	(8:9-22) The foes of God's people are doomed, but His people are secure. It is not, however, an unconditional security: those who reject His word are without hope.	(10:16-34) The destruction of the king of Assyria; the salvation of a remnant of Israel; the dramatic deliverance of Zion.
The Glorious Hope	(9:1-7) The birth and reign of the Davidic prince brings victory, joy and peace to His people, and His reign ever extends.	(11:1-16) The perfection of the Davidic Prince, and His reign over the Gentiles And over a re-gathered Israel and Judah.

Fredrick Moriarty also reflects the general scholarly consensus on the historical setting surrounding Isaiah 7:14. He notes that there was a considerable amount of unrest in the western states of Syria. Although Moriarty notes this unrest had begun in the reign

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[67] Moyter, "Context and Content," 122.
[68] Moyter, "Context and Content," 123.
[69] Moyter, "Context and Content," 122-123.

of Jeroboam, who had died in 746 BCE,[70] he, like many other scholars, sets the events of Isaiah 7 in 734 BCE. Moriarty correctly notes that Immanuel appears between the two sons of Isaiah and "initiates a series of oracles whose climax is found in chapter 11 with its description of the qualities and responsibilities of the ideal Messianic King."[71] This messianic picture in chapter 11 has "strong eschatological overtones" and looks forward to "the rejuvenation of the House of David."[72]

Walter Kaiser provides further insightful commentary regarding Isaiah 7:14 and the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis. He points out that although this crisis climaxed in 734 BCE with the Assyria's destruction of Damascus, Judah's problems with Aram and Israel had been brewing before that. Kaiser cannot say how much earlier such trouble was brewing or how much earlier Isaiah uttered his prophecy to Ahaz, but he speculates that since the trouble began during Jotham's reign (II Kings 15:37), such a crisis could have well happened at the very beginning of Ahaz's reign, when he was still an unproven king. In fact, Kaiser speculates that "…the events that precipitated Isaiah's warnings may have come as early as 748 or 739 BCE, just prior to Tiglath-pileser's 738 BCE foray into this territory. One fact remains: this scrap did not begin with Ahaz; it had its roots in the last days of Ahaz's predecessor, King Jotham."[73] Scholars assume too quickly that Isaiah 7:13-25 was uttered shortly before Tiglath-pileser destroyed Damascus in 734 BCE, yet as Kaiser points out, since Judah was suffering aggression by Aram and Israel ever since the latter years of Jotham, Isaiah 7:13-25 could have easily been uttered as early as the beginning of Ahaz's reign (circa 742-740 BCE). As will be argued later on, this has a

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[70]Fredrick L. Moriarty, "The Emmanuel Prophecies," *CBQ* 19 (1957): 228.

[71] Moriarty, "The Emmanuel Prophecies," 230.

[72] Moriarty, "The Emmanuel Prophecies," 231.

[73] Walter Kaiser, "The Promise of Isaiah 7:14 and the Single-Meaning Hermeneutic," *EJ* 6 (Fall 1988): 66.

considerable impact on one's assessment of the chronological problems regarding the identification of Hezekiah with Immanuel.

II. 1. The View that Immanuel is Jesus

Although most scholars agree with Moyter and Kaiser's explanation of the historical and literary contexts of Isaiah 7:14, the question regarding the identity of Immanuel still receives different answers. In his commentary on Isaiah 1-12, Old Testament scholar Otto Kaiser points out that "the whole context [of Isaiah 7] demands an event which is shortly to come about."[74] Surprisingly though, there are a number of Old Testament scholars who seemingly do not share his sentiment, and choose rather to bypass any serious consideration of either the historical or literary context of Isaiah 7:14 in favor of the traditional Christian assumption that this verse is a prediction of the virgin birth of Jesus. One scholar who does this is J. Alec Moyter. Although he correctly sees that "it is impossible to separate this Immanuel from the Davidic king whose birth delivers his people (9:4-7),"[75] he nevertheless states, "Isaiah foresaw the birth of the divine son of David [i.e. Jesus] and also laid the foundation for the understanding of the unique nature of his birth [i.e. virgin birth]."[76] In contrast to Otto Kaiser's comment above, Moyter states, "It is impossible to confine the Immanuel prophecy to any long-forgotten 'fulfillment' in the time of Ahaz."[77] In other words, we cannot find the meaning of Isaiah 7:14 in it original context alone. Moriarty goes one step further and claims that Isaiah 7:14 transcends the historical situation, points ahead to the eschatological future, and finds fulfillment in Christ.

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[74] Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), 101.
[75] J. Alec Moyter, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 86.
[76] Moyter, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 86.
[77] Moyter, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 123.

Other scholars who share this assumption are Charles Lee Feinberg, J. Barton Payne, and Walter C. Kaiser. One of the reasons why Feinberg believes Isaiah 7:14 is about Christ is that he believes "we have no record of its actual fulfillment in any contemporary event [i.e. the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis]."[78] One of the reasons Payne gives as to why Isaiah 7:14 is a prediction about Christ is that since the New Testament clearly regards Isaiah 9 and 11 as predictive prophecies about Jesus, and since Isaiah 7 is intricately tied to Isaiah 9 and 11, it too must be regarded as predictive.

Since these scholars insist that Isaiah 7:14 first and foremost as a prediction about Jesus, this obviously raises a fundamental problem. If it is solely a prediction about Jesus, how would it have been understood by Ahaz, the original hearers of Isaiah's prophecy, or the original audience of Proto-Isaiah? Moyter answers this question by saying, "…the very circumstances of the communication of the prophecy required the possibility that some of its features would be misunderstood, but the narration of the 'whole story' made the final position clear and unequivocal."[79] Moriarty seemingly dismisses this question of original context outright. He notes that the attempt of many scholars to identify Immanuel with a contemporary figure of that time "usually proceeds from the principle that prophetic oracles must be determined by circumstances proper to the author's own time."[80] Payne goes so far as to criticize another scholar who argued that Isaiah 7:14 has to be understood in relation to its historical context: "His real problem is clearly his presupposition that Isaiah's prophecy had to [have meaning] for its own day."[81] Walter

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[78] Charles Lee Feinberg, "The Virgin Birth in the Old Testament and Isaiah 7:14," *BSac* 119 (1962): 252.

[79] Moyter, "Context and Content," 119-120.

[80] Moriarty, "The Immanuel Prophecies," 232.

[81] In his discussion he mentions Dewey Beegle and his article "Virgin or Young Woman?" and criticizes Beegle on the point that Beegle insisted that the prophecy must have had an immediate

Kaiser, on the other hand, even though he argues that Isaiah 7:14 is, in fact, a prediction of the birth of Christ, at least attempts to argue for an immediate application as well: "Ahaz is granted evidence of this sign in his own day, even though the full impact of all that God has in mind will not be realized until the Messiah himself is born in a unique manner in fulfillment of this passage."[82]

The problem with the views of these scholars is two-fold. First, by ignoring the literary genre of Isaiah 7 in favor of a strictly christological scheme, they end up defining Old Testament prophecy as nothing more than predictions about Christ. As was discussed in chapter one, the prophets were not soothsayers and fortune tellers. They spoke God's revealed word to their current situations; and although many of their prophecies dealt with the future consequences of the actions of Israel, those future consequences more than often came to pass in the *near* future, not the *distant* future. Scholars who unquestionably assume that Isaiah 7:14 was a prediction about some distant future event base their assumption on an essentially unbiblical understanding of prophecy.

Secondly, because they start with this assumption that Isaiah 7:14 is a prediction about the birth of Jesus, they fail to seriously consider the historical context of Isaiah 7-12, the literary context of Isaiah 7-12, or how Isaiah 7:14 fits into the greater context of Proto-Isaiah. Their consideration of these original contexts is superficial at best. Lest it be misunderstood, these scholars are essentially arguing that God inspired Isaiah to utter his prophecy, knowing full well that it would be either misunderstood, or not understood at all, by the people to whom it was originally addressed, and that only 740 years later would that prophecy make sense. Simply put, if there was no kind of fulfillment of this

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application. J. Barton Payne, "Right Questions about Isaiah 7:14," in *Living and Active Word of God* (ed. Morris Inch; Winona Lake: Eisenbraus, 1983), 76.

[82] Walter Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 160.

prophecy at all during the time of Ahaz, the original historical and literary context of Isaiah 7-12 is ultimately irrelevant. Yet if one throws out any serious consideration of the original historical and literary contexts of a given text, then all exegetical controls go out the window. Indeed, it is frightening to find that scholars like Moriarty and Payne see attempts to understand verses in their historical context as a *flaw* in exegetical work. If we are to accept their claim that there are some prophecies that transcend their historical context, on what basis then do we determine which Old Testament prophecies transcend their historical situations and which do not?

If we are to believe these scholars and their proposals that Isaiah 7:14 is simply a prediction of the birth of Jesus, we must assume that there was over a 700 year gap between the judgment of Damascus and Samaria (7:18-8:8; 10:5-15) and the birth of the Davidic prince (9:1-7; 11:1-16), and we must completely ignore the obvious literary and historical connections between 8:9-22 and 10:16-34 and chapters 36-39. Yet not only does nothing in chapters 7-12 give any remote suggestion of such an extended time span as 700 years, but the connections between chapters 7-11 and chapters 36-39 are too obvious to ignore the implications.

These scholars have simply put the cart before the horse. In their rush to defend the traditional Christian understanding of Isaiah 7:14, these scholars have short-changed Isaiah, devalued the Old Testament as having any value in and of itself, and potentially misunderstood Matthew's use of that verse in his infancy narrative. Old Testament prophecy is not just a collection of misunderstood and ambiguous predictions that only can be made sense of by the New Testament. We must understand Old Testament prophecy as God speaking his Word to His people throughout their history, within their

own historical contexts. Since it is given *within* history *to* specific people in history, God's prophetic Word must be understood within the context of that history. Granted the New Testament claims that God has brought his work to fulfillment in Christ and cites numerous prophecies from the Old Testament to show that, but to interpret the New Testament language of "fulfillment" in the way that these scholars have done, in fact, to misinterpret it. Their definition of prophecy is essentially that it is fortune-telling. They are putting Old Testament prophecy on the same level with the prophecies of Nostradamus or the very fortune-tellers of Canaan that YHWH commanded the Hebrews to kill once they settled the land. Their definition of prophecy simply does not reflect the biblical understanding of prophecy at all. If we believe that the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is God's revelation to his people so that they could understand and know him and his ways, then it simply would not make sense for Isaiah to utter a prophecy that would not be understandable to his audience. To argue otherwise simply leads to incomprehension and exegetical confusion. That is why so much of the exegetical work on Isaiah 7:14 has proven to be so unconvincing and suspect. Whenever one puts the cart before the horse, one will soon find that not only will the cart not move, but the horse will soon have a splitting headache from constantly hitting his head against the cart.

II. 2. The View that Immanuel is a General Term

A second view put forth by a handful of scholars is that the "Immanuel child" is not meant to be understood as specific child, but rather that it was meant to be understood in general terms. William McKane attempts to argue that Isaiah was prophesying that, given the imminent demise of Israel and Aram, there would be many women in Judah who were pregnant at that time who would name their child "Immanuel" as a way to

"mark this experience of deliverance and liberation."[83] Otto Kaiser, though, correctly points out that such a prophecy by Isaiah *after* Ahaz's clear display of unfaithfulness to YHWH would seem problematic. "If things had turned out thus, Ahaz would have been able to regard it as a complete confirmation of his own foreign policy."[84] Fredrick Moriarty also questions such an interpretation on the grounds that it does not fit the context: "Granting that this interpretation is grammatically possible there is nothing in the context which even remotely suggests that Isaiah had such a collectivity in mind."[85] It is by far the least popular view regarding Immanuel among scholars and has never gained any real traction in scholarly debate.

II. 3. The View that Immanuel is Isaiah's Son

Another view, put forth by Herbert Wolf and R.E. Clements, is that Isaiah 7:14 is a prophecy about the birth of Isaiah's son. Wolf believes that son is Maher-shalal-hash-baz. He asserts that "the designation of Isaiah's sons as 'signs' in 8:18 strongly implies that Immanuel was one of those signs."[86] The bulk of his argument is that the "large tablet" of 8:1 was a written marriage covenant between Isaiah and his bride to be, the prophetess, and the witnesses mentioned in 8:2 (Uriah and Zechariah) were witnesses to the marriage. Hence, the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled when Isaiah married the prophetess who then gave birth to Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Wolf asserts that the child's mother named him "Immanuel," meaning "God with us," thus emphasizing the positive aspect to Isaiah's prophecy; whereas Isaiah gave the child a name that meant "Speeding to the spoil, hurrying to the plunder," thus emphasizing the negative aspect to

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[83] McKane, "The Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14-25," 214.
[84] Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), 103.
[85] Moriarty, "The Emmanuel Prophecies," 231.
[86] Wolf, *The Immanuel Prophecy*, 450.

his prophecy.[87] Immanuel "denoted the promise that God would be there to defeat Samaria and Damascus," and Maher-shalal-hash-baz "meant that Assyria would soon carry off the wealth of those two nations—before turning to devastate Judah."[88]

Wolf claims this interpretation clarifies two traditional problems with Isaiah 7:14: (a) the meaning of עַלְמָה and (b) the Hebrew phrase הָרָה֙ וְיֹלֶ֣דֶת. Wolf argues that עַלְמָה does mean "virgin" at the time of Isaiah's prophecy, but that does not mean she was a virgin at childbirth. Wolf also argues that the phrase הָרָה֙ וְיֹלֶ֣דֶת denotes she was not pregnant at the time of Isaiah's prophecy, for he had not yet married her in Isaiah 7:14.[89]

Wolf's interpretation is worthy of consideration, yet fails to answer a number of questions. Payne, for instance, argues that there is nothing in the text to suggest that Isaiah had a second wife. He further points out that the significance of Immanuel and Maher-shalal-hash-baz is considerably different. Wolf also does not address the issue that so many other scholars have seen: that of how the Immanuel child of 7:14 seems to have royal connotations and is clearly connected to 9:6-7 and 11:1-11. Secondly, even though it is a possibility that the "large tablet" of 8:1 was a type of marriage covenant, it is by no means clear. Even if it was, and even if Maher-shalal-hash-baz was born to the prophetess after Isaiah married her, Wolf's attempt to make the connection between Maher-shalal-hash-baz and Immanuel is not strong. There is no evidence that Isaiah's first wife who bore him Shear-jashub had died and that the "prophetess" was a second wife. Even if this was the case, John Walton points out that if the woman in Isaiah 7:14 is already pregnant, then it couldn't be the same woman in Isaiah 8:3, for she is just

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[87] Wolf, *The Immanuel Prophecy*, 455.
[88] Wolf, *The Immanuel Prophecy*, 455.
[89] Wolf, *The Immanuel Prophecy*, 455-456.

conceiving. Walton also argues that the age of being able to say "daddy" or "mommy" comes before the age of being able to reject evil and choose good.[90] Although Wolf's interpretation seems at first to hold water, one quickly sees that it is based on a number of assumptions that have little or no evidence within Isaiah.

R.E. Clements, though claiming that Immanuel is Isaiah's son, believes the Immanuel child is Shear-jashub, not Maher-shalal-hash-baz.[91] His overall argument, though, is highly questionable. On one hand, he acknowledges a connection between Immanuel and Hezekiah within the Book of Isaiah. On the other hand, though, he attributes this connection to the work of later editors, and in turn argues that originally, before the editors changed Isaiah's prophecy, Immanuel was a reference to Isaiah's son, Shear-jashub.

Like most scholars, Clements sees a connection between the Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14 and the child in 9:5-6 and 11:1-11. In Clements' view, even though Isaiah 9:1-6 clearly is an accession oracle that "serves to announce the coming of a royal successor to Ahaz who, unlike this faithless king, will bring greatness to his people and the overthrow of the yoke of the foreign oppressor,"[92] and thus is clearly a reference to Hezekiah, Clements denies that this proves that the Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14 is a royal child. Clements rather asserts that a later editor "made significant additions to Isaiah 7" that were "designed to point [out] the contrast between Ahaz and his successor."[93] The result is that what was originally an oracle condemning Ahaz's lack of faith was transformed by

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[90] John H. Walton, "Isaiah 7:14: What's in a Name?" *JETS* 30 (Summer 1997): 296.
[91] R.E. Clements, "The Immanuel Prophecy of Isaiah 7:10-17 and Its Messianic Interpretation" in *Die Hebraische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte* (ed. R. Rendtorff; Germany: Neukircher Verlag, 1990), 237.
[92] Clements, "The Immanuel Prophecy," 233.
[93] Clements, "The Immanuel Prophecy," 234.

a later editor to also make it a prophecy that foretells Ahaz's faithful successor, namely Hezekiah. This editor, Clements surmises, "stood very close to the authors of the narratives of Isaiah 36-39"[94] and therefore reworked Isaiah 7:1-17 and introduced Isaiah 9:1-6 in order to portray Hezekiah "in the most favorable possible light."[95] As Clements says, "It is then this desire to emphasize the contrast between the actions of Ahaz and Hezekiah which has brought about such a major editorial reworking of Isaiah 7:1-17."[96] And again, "…once an editor felt the need to defend the reputation of the Davidic dynasty by drawing attention to the contrast between Ahaz's lack of faith and Hezekiah's victorious faith, the whole character of the Immanuel prophecy was changed."[97]

Even though Clements correctly sees that in its present form Isaiah 7:1-17 points toward the birth of Hezekiah and that the Immanuel prophecy, along with Isaiah 9:1-6 and 11:1-11, serves to not only highlight the contrasts between Ahaz and Hezekiah, but to also look forward to Hezekiah's actions in 701 BCE as recorded in Isaiah 36-39, his claim that Isaiah 7:1-17 was originally about Shear-jashub and that a later editor revised the prophecy to make it look like it was about Hezekiah is suspect. In light of Provan's falsification principle, what is the reason for Clements to doubt the legitimacy and historical reliability of the prophecy as it now stands? Before one can convincingly argue for a reconstruction of a particular biblical passage, one must first show why that passage, as presented to us in the canon of scripture, cannot be accepted as historically reliable. Clements fails to do so. His argument fails because he is attempting to do the impossible: reconstruct a convincing alternative version of the historical setting of Isaiah 7:1-17

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[94] Clements, "The Immanuel Prophecy," 236.
[95] Clements, "The Immanuel Prophecy," 236.
[96] Clements, "The Immanuel Prophecy," 236.
[97] Clements, "The Immanuel Prophecy," 237.

without any historical evidence. The window to that historical setting is given to us in the text of Isaiah 7:1-17, and unless it can be proven that what it relates to us is absolutely impossible to have happened, then we are in no position to discount its version of events. Clements' ultimate shortcoming is not that he fails to look at the historical and literary contexts of Isaiah 7:14—he certainly does. His shortcoming is rather that, after doing so, he chooses to discard the obvious context in favor of his own hypothetical reconstruction of the historical events of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis and literary setting of Proto-Isaiah.

II. 4. The View that Immanuel is Hezekiah

The traditional Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 7:14, as attested to in Justin's *Dialogues with Trypho* as well as a number of Talmudic sources,[98] that the Immanuel child is Hezekiah, has been by and large rejected by most biblical scholars for one reason: the chronology found in II Kings 16-20 seems to suggest that Hezekiah was already a young child by the time Isaiah uttered his prophecy in Isaiah 7:14. Therefore, Isaiah could have hardly prophesied about the coming birth of Hezekiah because Hezekiah would have already been born. Moriarty echoes the view of most scholars when he claims that Hezekiah could not be Immanuel because he ascended to the throne in 715 BCE and was twenty-five years old, thus placing his birth around 740 BCE, six years before 734 BCE, the year most scholars peg as being the year of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis. Clements also discounts the possibility that Immanuel could have been Hezekiah on the grounds that it would be a chronological impossibility.[99]

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[98] See Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Sanhedrin, Folios 94a, 99a.
[99] Clements, "The Immanuel Prophecy of Isaiah 7:10-17," 232.

There are two problems with the scholarly rejection of this view. First, when one looks at the chronology in II Kings, one finds that there is a ten year gap within the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah that is not accounted for. This problem will be discussed in the following chapter, but for now it is enough to point out that such scholarly rejection of this view on the basis of an admittedly suspect chronology in II Kings is, ironically, suspect in and of itself. Secondly, despite the apparent chronological problem, the immediate surrounding context of 7:14 certainly seems to point toward Hezekiah. As we have already seen, even though Clements clearly acknowledges the fact that Isaiah 7-12 presents Hezekiah as the Immanuel child, he discounts this as a later scribal revision. He is not the only scholar, though, who acknowledges the Hezekiah-Immanuel connection but then seeks for a way to discount it. Antti Laato, for example, claims Isaiah 7:14 was a prophecy about a king from the Davidic house who, unlike Ahaz, would "fulfill Yahweh's command of fidelity."[100] He notes that not only does both the LXX and IQIsa acknowledge that Immanuel is Hezekiah (Ahaz names the child), but that Rabbinical literature interprets Isaiah 7:14-17 and 9:1-6 in terms of Hezekiah but Isaiah 11:1-9 in terms of the Messiah.[101] Yet, Laato, while admitting Isaiah 7:14 points to Hezekiah and has messianic overtones,[102] argues that the Isaiah 7:13-25 was revised by later editors

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[100] Antti Laato, "Immanuel—Who is With Us?—Hezekiah or Messiah?" in *Wunschet Jerusalem Frieden* (ed. M. Augustin; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988) 315.

[101] Laato, "Immanuel—Who is With Us?" 318.

[102] We must remember that when we say "messianic," we do not automatically assume a New Testament understanding of "messiah" (i.e. Jesus, the second member of the Trinity). Strictly speaking, if a prophecy in the Old Testament refers to a future Davidic king, it is by its very nature, a "messianic" prophecy, for kings were called "messiahs," in the sense that they were anointed kings. Again, how these passages are used and understood in the New Testament is an entirely separate issue. In the Old Testament context, there is no distinction between a prophecy about a "messiah" and a prophecy about a Davidic king.

who hoped for the fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy[103] through a new royal dynastic line during the years of Sennacherib's invasion. When it became clear that all wickedness was not wiped out of Judah, that Judah did not become a refuge for the faithful remnant, and that Immanuel did not rise as king, Laato claims that "the year 701 was thus a disappointment for Isaiah. A realm of peace in Israel through Immanuel, which Isaiah so eagerly expected, never came."[104] Consequently, he speculates that Isaiah's disciples preserved Isaiah's "Immanuel program" and reinterpreted the prophecies to look forward to a future coming Davidic king.

The problem with Laato's argument is the same as that of Clements. By trying to "look behind" the text that we have, Laato is simply offering a reconstruction of historical events for which we have no evidence. Just as Clements claims that Isaiah 7:14 was originally a prophecy about Shear-jashub that was later revised into a prophecy about Hezekiah, Laato claims that Isaiah 7:14 was originally a prophecy about an entirely new royal line that was later revised into a prophecy about Hezekiah, whereas the prophecy in Isaiah 11 continued to look forward to a future Messiah.

Walter Kaiser also identifies Immanuel with Hezekiah, yet does not try to get around this by claiming it was the work of later editors. Rather, he argues the immediate referent is Hezekiah and the future referent is Jesus and claims this resolves two problems: (1) Hezekiah was not born of a virgin, and (2) the chronology in II Kings seemingly prevents Hezekiah from being Immanuel. He answers the first objection by stating that in cases of near and distant fulfillments of prophecy that "rarely does the near

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[103] By capitalizing "Immanuel" we are not suggesting that this is automatically a reference to either God or Jesus. The capitalization of "Immanuel" is simply because in Isaiah 7:14 "Immanuel" is the name given to the child, and hence is a proper name.

[104] Laato, "Immanuel—Who is With Us?" 317.

event meet most, much less all, the details and expectations that the ultimate event completes."[105] Yet one must question both the question and Kaiser's answer. Too many scholars disagree with Kaiser for anyone to believe that עַלְמָה clearly means virgin. If we take the original context seriously, we must conclude that Isaiah 7:14 is not referring to a virgin. She might have been a virgin at the time of Isaiah's prophecy, but she definitely would not have been a virgin by the time of Immanuel's birth. Furthermore, Kaiser's answer seems to contradict his own rejection of the *sensus plenioir* argument.[106] Kaiser says there is only one meaning to Isaiah 7:14, but then argues that there are two meanings to it. Nevertheless, Kaiser correctly points out that the chronology in II Kings shows a ten-year gap within the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah. Therefore, to discount Hezekiah as Immanuel, simply based on a perceived chronological impossibility, overstates the case. It is drawing a conclusion based on problematic data.

II. 5. Concluding Thoughts Regarding Past Scholarship

Given this overview of the work of many scholars on Isaiah 7:14, there are a number of observations and conclusions that can be made. First of all, as can be seen in the work of Moyter, Moriarty, Feinberg, Payne and Kaiser, there is an recurring trend among many scholars to be in such a rush to relate Isaiah 7:14 to Jesus that they inevitably neglect any serious exegetical work on Isaiah 7:14 within its original Old Testament contexts, both historical and literary. The underlying assumption of these scholars is that the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 is *first and foremost* a far off prediction of the

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[105] Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994), 161.
[106] In "The Promise of Isaiah 7:14," he states the problem that lies at the heart of Isaiah 7:14 is the question regarding how it was originally interpreted in Ahaz's day and how it relates to Matthew's use of the text. Kaiser then discusses sensus plenior, and concludes that such a multi-tiered reading of a given text is improper. He concludes his discussion of sensus plenior by saying that there must be a single meaning to Isaiah 7:14. We must attempt to understand Isaiah 7:14 within its stated historical context.

miraculous virgin birth of Jesus; therefore they display no genuine interest in understanding Isaiah 7:14 within the historical and literary settings of Isaiah itself.

Secondly, as can be seen in the work of Clements and Laato, many scholars see that the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 is intimately tied to the royal themes found within Isaiah in general, and Isaiah 9:6-7 and 11:1-11 in particular. While scholars like John Scullion and John Walton believe Immanuel is a son of Ahaz, but not necessarily Hezekiah,[107] Clements and Laato believe that in its final form the Immanuel prophecy does indeed point to Hezekiah, yet that Isaiah 7:14 was altered by later editors to make it look like it pointed to Hezekiah. What we see, therefore, with these scholars is a clear acknowledgement of the royal Davidic connection to Isaiah 7:14, but a refusal to clearly identify Immanuel with Hezekiah in its original context.

Thirdly, we also note that the fundamental objection scholars have with identifying Immanuel with Hezekiah is that the chronology of II Kings seemingly does not allow such an identification to be made—Hezekiah would have been anywhere between five to fifteen years old at the time of Isaiah's prophecy. Because of this objection, Moyter, Moriarty, Feinberg, Payne and Kaiser justify their arguments that Isaiah 7:14 is first and foremost a prediction of Jesus Christ, whereas Clements, Laato, Scullion, and Walton, though they acknowledge that the text points to Hezekiah, seek alternative interpretations of Isaiah 7:14.

Lastly, most scholars who attempt to exegete Isaiah 7:14 do, in fact, seem to have a good grasp of bits and pieces of the overall picture of Isaiah 7:14. Scholars who, in their rush to apply Isaiah 7:14 to Jesus seem to overlook the Old Testament context of Isaiah

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[107] Scullion, "An Approach to the Understanding of Isaiah 7:10-17," 288-300; Walton, "Isaiah 7:14: What's in a Name?" 289-306.

7:14, are not necessarily wrong in their claim that "what was spoken by the prophet" was, to use the New Testament term, "fulfilled" in Jesus Christ. Their exegesis falters because not only do they misunderstand just what "fulfilled" means, but they also hold an overly-simplistic view of prophecy. This over-simplification has caused many scholars to downplay the importance of understanding the original historical and literary contexts found within many Old Testament prophecies, particularly Isaiah 7:14.[108]

Scholars who disregard Hezekiah as a valid candidate for the identity of Immanuel clearly see a chronological problem in II Kings. Their exegesis falters because they automatically assume that the chronological error lies in Isaiah and not in II Kings. Scholars who claim that later editors revised Isaiah 7:14 and essentially changed its original meaning clearly see that later editors shaped and formed Isaiah into its current form. Their exegesis falters because they assume, with no evidence to substantiate their assumptions, that the later editors intentionally mischaracterized historical events to suit their own theological agendas.

The common flaw that many scholars share in their exegesis of Isaiah 7:14 is their considerable lack of faith in the text itself. Their exegesis is not so much trying to get at the meaning of the final form of the text, but rather trying to reconstruct that meaning to suit their particular preconceived notions; yet many of the assumptions and arguments made by many scholars have no textual or historical evidence. This is the very exegetical

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[108] When Matthew uses the term "fulfilled," he does not mean that the Old Testament verse in question was a *prediction* that looked forward to "coming true" with the arrival of the expected "god-man" messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, he was attempting to show that the ultimate covenant-salvation that was promised as far back as Genesis 3, when God promised that he would crush the serpent's head by means of the offspring of the woman, and reaffirmed in the covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David, was finally brought about in the person and ministry of Jesus. Because Matthew believes that Jesus is the climax and fulfillment of God's salvation that was promised throughout the Old Testament, he is free to use any Old Testament episode he wishes to help show a typological connection between the referred episode and Jesus himself. Simply put, the context of the Old Testament episode in question helps shed light on how the New Testament use of a given verse is to be understood.

trend that Provan and Long take issue with: an unhealthy suspicion of the veracity of the text before us without any substantial reason to support it. Granted, the historical narrative sections of Isaiah, as well as II Kings, are not what we in the 21st century would consider to be "historical documents."[109] Yet the problem with the scholars discussed above is that they seem to think that because the ancient writers did not write history the way we do today that they were not attempting to write real history at all. But this kind of thinking not only makes any kind of biblical historical exegesis impossible, it negates the possibility of doing any kind of history and understanding any ancient historical document at all. If we are to discount the historical veracity of the biblical texts simply because we have labeled them as "historically-based theological documents," then we will have to discount all ancient historical texts because all of them are "historically-based theological documents," in that in the recounting of their history they attempt to praise and glorify their particular national gods. Granted, there are numerous difficulties surrounding the exegesis of Isaiah 7:14 and its context. A certain amount of reconstruction of the historical context is needed to help try and understand such a problematic text. But when a scholar's historical reconstruction involves obliterating the historical context given within the text itself, it cannot be said that that scholar has accepted the text. Such a scholar is doing much more than just reconstructing a historical context in which to understand the text; he is, in fact, re-writing history, without any regard for the historical testimony of the ancient writers themselves.

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[109] They are, as most scholars agree, historically-based theological documents. In addition, given their placement in the Hebrew canon, we must also remember they are prophetic works.

III. Textual Variants of Isaiah 7:14 in the MT, DSS, and LXX

When one looks at Isaiah 7:14 itself, one finds that there are four significant textual variants that have a tremendous amount of bearing on its interpretation, not only within its original context, but also on how it eventually comes to be interpreted, both in the New Testament and in the Church Fathers. One is able to see these variants when one compares the Masoretic Text (BHS), the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QIsᵃ), and the Septuagint (Rahlfs):

MT: *BHS*	לָכֵן יִתֵּן אֲדֹנָי הוּא לָכֶם אוֹת הִנֵּה הָעַלְמָה הָרָה וְיֹלֶדֶת בֵּן וְקָרָאת שְׁמוֹ עִמָּנוּ אֵל
DSS: *4QIsᵃ*	לכן יתן יהוה הוה לכמה אות הנה העלמה הרה וילדת בן וקרא שמו עמנואל
LXX: *Rahlfs*	διὰ τοῦτο δώσει κύριος αὐτὸς ὑμῖν σημεῖον ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἕξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Εμμανουηλ

As one can see, aside from the fact that the MT names God as אֲדֹנָי whereas the DSS uses the name יהוה, the two texts agree in virtually every other detail. The questions and variants arise, though, when comparing the MT and DSS with the LXX. There are essentially four variants found within this verse:

(a) the meaning of the word עַלְמָה,

(b) the function of the word הָרָה in the phrase הָעַלְמָה הָרָה וְיֹלֶדֶת בֵּן,

(c) the identity of the person who is naming the Immanuel child, and

(d) the Immanuel child himself.

III. 1. The Meaning of the Word עַלְמָה

The first variant is one that has been the topic of endless exegetical debates between Jews and Christians for the past 2,000 years. It involves the question as to how

to translate the word עַלְמָה, as in the MT and DSS, and παρθένος, as in the LXX (and later in the NT). Simply put, what does the word עַלְמָה mean, and to whom does the עַלְמָה refer? Many scholars claim the word עַלְמָה clearly means "virgin" (a woman who has had no sexual intercourse), and therefore Isaiah 7:14 is describing a miraculous birth. Moyter states that the examination of biblical usage shows that עַלְמָה is the "only Hebrew word which *without qualification* means an unmarried woman—however marriageable she may be."[110] Payne does not think that the question, "Does עַלְמָה mean virgin?" is a right question to ask because in his opinion it obviously does: "It does, no doubt about that."[111] Kaiser claims that עַלְמָה does in fact mean virgin, and that the use of παρθένος in the LXX supports this translation because, he argues, παρθένος "has the specific meaning of 'virgin.'"[112] He also argues that there is no clear context, either in Hebrew or Ugarit, that suggests that עַלְמָה is used in reference to a married woman. Payne argues that עַלְמָה is a direct reference to the virgin Mary. He states, "If Isaiah did not mean Mary, and if there is no other known virgin mother, then Matthew erred, for it simply is not right to use a verse that is not about a virgin birth to substantiate a virgin birth."[113] What we see here is an unquestioned assumption that not only does עַלְמָה mean "virgin," but that it is direct predictive reference to Mary.[114]

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[110] Moyter, "The Interpretation of Isaiah 7:14," 125.
[111] Payne, "Right Questions about Isaiah 7:14," 78.
[112] Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 160.
[113] Payne, "Right Questions About Isaiah 7:14," 76-77.
[114] Feinberg's argument is different than those of the above scholars. He first argues that, based on the "solemnity with which the Prophet speaks of the predicted birth, not as a usual and natural event, but as something which excites his own astonishment," that the sign in Isaiah 7:13-14 must be a reference to a miraculous birth. He then argues that the עַלְמָה is a reference to Mary, the virgin mother of Christ, who "is present to the inward perception of the Prophet." Yet Feinberg offers no textual evidence for his position and simply dismisses any attempts by other scholars to identify the עַלְמָה with either Ahaz's wife, Isaiah's

The problem with the claims of these scholars is that they are patently false and show no real understanding of how language works. A brief discussion of De Sassure's semantics will serve to clarify the fundamental problem with how these scholars have chosen to go about arguing for the meaning of the word עַלְמָה. De Saussure showed that every linguistic sign is made up of a *signifier* and a *signified*. For our purposes, the word עַלְמָה is the *signifier*—the actual word that acts as an identifier of something. It is a pointer, if you will. The *signified*, therefore, corresponds to the actual concept or thing that comes to mind when we hear or read the word עַלְמָה. It is essentially the thing to which the signifier is pointing. Now there is no inherent connection between any *signifier* and its corresponding *signified*, other than the arbitrary connection of meaning that a particular society has agreed upon based upon its particular needs. Because of this, one cannot treat language as a mere classification system. Furthermore, when it comes to translating from one language to another, one would be wrong to assume that one specific word in "language A" is directly related to one specific word in "language B." There might be considerable overlap between the two languages respective words for a common object, but since the actual *meaning* attached to those respective words is determined by that particular society, we should expect to see differing nuances of meaning within each language. De Saussure gives the example of the word *boeuf* in both English and French. In English we have different words for the meat itself (beef) and the animal that is the source of that meat (cow); whereas in French, the word *boeuf* is used for both things, and the context in which that word is written or spoken determines the meaning of the word.

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wife, or some other woman at that time on the grounds that none of those would have been a miraculous occurrence. This is nothing more than circular reasoning. All he has going for him is his belief that it was miraculous. Essentially, his logic is this: "It must be miraculous because Isaiah is excited about it, and therefore it must be miraculous." Feinberg, "The Virgin Birth," 254-55.

De Saussure's findings are extremely relevant to our understanding of the word עַלְמָה. Any given linguistic sign, made up of both *signifier* and *signified*, derives its meaning from its surrounding society as well as the context and semantic field in which it is found. When we look at the use and meaning of the word עַלְמָה within the Hebrew Bible, we cannot come to such a study with the assumption that it will have a direct correlation with the word "virgin" in the English language. As John Walton has pointed out, עַלְמָה has a tremendous overlapping of semantic ranges; therefore, the argument that the word clearly means "virgin" is overly simplistic and superficial.

When one consults Brown-Driver-Briggs, one finds that עַלְמָה denotes a "young woman" who is sexually ripe, either a maid or newly married.[115] Kaiser points out that עַלְמָה, much like its Ugaritic equivalent `glmt, "does not simply correspond to the word 'virgin', but signifies a young woman without regard to whether she is married or single."[116] Moriarty echoes this sentiment, "She who conceives and bears the mysterious child is הָעַלְמָה, a term which does not necessarily imply virginity but which certainly does not exclude it."[117] The *basic* meaning, if you will, focuses on a young woman; the *nuances* to that basic meaning, though, are brought out within each separate context found in the Hebrew Bible. This word is found nine times in the Hebrew Bible.[118]

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[115] Brown, F., S. Driver and C. Briggs. "עַלְמָה." Page 761 in *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson , 1996.

[116] Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 101.

[117] Moriarty, *The Immanuel Prophecies*, 230.

[118] For a detailed summary of each occurrence, see Richard Niessen, "The Virginity of the 'almah in Isaiah 7:14," *BSac*, 137 (Ap-Je 1980): 133-150.

Verse	MT (BHS)	LXX (Rahlfs)
I Chronicles 15:20	וּזְכַרְיָה וַעֲזִיאֵל וּשְׁמִירָמוֹת וִיחִיאֵל וְעֻנִּי וֶאֱלִיאָב וּמַעֲשֵׂיָהוּ וּבְנָיָהוּ בִּנְבָלִים עַל־עֲלָמוֹת	Ζαχαριας καὶ Οζιηλ Σεμιραμωθ Ιιηλ Ωνι Ελιαβ Μασαιας Βαναιας ἐν νάβλαις ἐπὶ αλαιμωθ
Psalm 46:1	לַמְנַצֵּחַ לִבְנֵי־קֹרַח עַל־עֲלָמוֹת שִׁיר	(45:1) εἰς τὸ τέλος ὑπὲρ τῶν υἱῶν Κορε ὑπὲρ τῶν κρυφίων ψαλμός
Genesis 24:43	הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי נִצָּב עַל־עֵין הַמָּיִם וְהָיָה הָעַלְמָה הַיֹּצֵאת לִשְׁאֹב	καὶ ἔσται ἡ παρθένος ᾗ ἂν ἐγὼ εἴπω πότισόν με μικρὸν ὕδωρ ἐκ τῆς ὑδρίας σου
Exodus 2:8	וַתֹּאמֶר־לָהּ בַּת־פַּרְעֹה לֵכִי וַתֵּלֶךְ הָעַלְמָה וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־אֵם הַיָּלֶד	ἡ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῇ ἡ θυγάτηρ Φαραω πορεύου ἐλθοῦσα δὲ ἡ νεᾶνις ἐκάλεσεν τὴν μητέρα τοῦ παιδίου
Psalm 68:25 (68:26—MT)	קִדְּמוּ שָׁרִים אַחַר נֹגְנִים בְּתוֹךְ עֲלָמוֹת תּוֹפֵפוֹת	(67:26) προέφθασαν ἄρχοντες ἐχόμενοι ψαλλόντων ἐν μέσῳ νεανίδων τυμπανιστριῶν
Proverbs 30:19	דֶּרֶךְ הַנֶּשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם דֶּרֶךְ נָחָשׁ עֲלֵי צוּר דֶּרֶךְ־אֳנִיָּה בְלֶב־יָם וְדֶרֶךְ גֶּבֶר בְּעַלְמָה	ἴχνη ἀετοῦ πετομένου καὶ ὁδοὺς ὄφεως ἐπὶ πέτρας καὶ τρίβους νηὸς ποντοπορούσης καὶ ὁδοὺς ἀνδρὸς ἐν νεότητι
Solomon 1:3	לְרֵיחַ שְׁמָנֶיךָ טוֹבִים שֶׁמֶן תּוּרַק שְׁמֶךָ עַל־כֵּן עֲלָמוֹת אֲהֵבוּךָ	καὶ ὀσμὴ μύρων σου ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ ἀρώματα μύρον ἐκκενωθὲν ὄνομά σου διὰ τοῦτο νεάνιδες ἠγάπησάν σε
Solomon 6:8	שִׁשִּׁים הֵמָּה מְלָכוֹת וּשְׁמֹנִים פִּילַגְשִׁים וַעֲלָמוֹת אֵין מִסְפָּר	ἑξήκοντά εἰσιν βασίλισσαι καὶ ὀγδοήκοντα παλλακαί καὶ νεάνιδες ὧν οὐκ ἔστιν ἀριθμός
Isaiah 7:14	הִנֵּה הָעַלְמָה הָרָה וְיֹלֶדֶת בֵּן וְקָרָאת שְׁמוֹ עִמָּנוּ אֵל	ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἕξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Εμμανουηλ

Richard Niessen, in his article "The Virginity of the עַלְמָה in Isaiah 7:14," provides a detailed analysis of these nine instances. He notes that twice the term is used in reference to a musical instrument (I Chronicles 15:20; Psalm 46:1). These two instances, therefore, are not relevant to our study. Another time it is used to refer to young women playing timbrels in a musical procession (Psalm 68:25). Niessen speculates that if this psalm was part of "the procession of the Messiah into His sanctuary," then the young women playing the timbrels in the procession would "certainly not [be] harlots or

impure women, but are chaste servants of God; hence they would be virgins." He then notes that in Semitic custom, "single women generally participated in bridal processions and other festive occasions."[119] His conclusion, therefore, is that in Psalm 68 עֲלָמוֹת is in fact referring to virgins. Yet Niessen's conclusion is highly suspect for a number of reasons. First, it is based on what ultimately amounts to a guess regarding the psalm's use and historical setting in ancient Israel. Second, a messianic procession in ancient Israel would be nothing more than a procession of the king. One might agree that the king would not want harlots and impure women leading his procession, but why would God-honoring married women be shunned from such processions? In Niessen's argument, women can be either harlots or virgins; in the real world, most women are neither. Niessen's reasoning on this point not only is based on mere speculation, but it also betrays a misunderstanding put forth by many early Church Fathers that incorrectly equates virginity with holiness. In short, Niessen's argument regarding Psalm 68 is unconvincing.

Two other times the plural form of עַלְמָה is used in the Song of Solomon, presumably in reference to other unmarried young women (1:3; 6:8). In these two instances, Niessen's arguments are questionable as well, particularly his observation that in 6:8 three types of women are mentioned, queens, concubines, and עֲלָמוֹת. Niessen sees the עֲלָמוֹת here as serving as a contrast to queens, who are married, and concubines, who were essentially common-law wives, and therefore must be referring to virgins. Although it is true that "Solomon" calls his bride his "perfect one" (6:9), to assume that she is to be

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considered one of the עֲלָמוֹת is to assume too much. The fact is that עֲלָמוֹת might not be serving as a contrast to queens and concubines, but rather as a generalized term to include all other women, and therefore "Solomon" is saying that although the bride is but one of all the women in the world, nevertheless she is his "undefiled one." Simply put, there is nothing convincing in either 1:3 or 6:8 that would demand a reading of עַלְמָה as referring to a virgin.

The other four instances of עַלְמָה are found in the singular. When one looks specifically at the three instances besides Isaiah 7:14 (Genesis 24:43, Exodus 2:8, Proverbs 30:19), it becomes apparent that there are no major difference in the meaning of the word. In Genesis 24:43, Abraham's servant is telling Rebekah's brother Laban that he prayed to YHWH that the עַלְמָה who offered him a drink might be the future wife of Isaac. Yet in Genesis 24:14, when the servant actually prays this to YHWH, he uses the word נַעֲרָה (girl), thereby showing that as far as the writer of Genesis was concerned, these two words were interchangeable. Therefore in this context, Rebekah's virginity is simply assumed; עַלְמָה must be seen simply as a general term to describe a young woman and not a direct comment on her virginity. In Exodus 2:8, עַלְמָה is used to describe Moses' sister as she is sent to find a Hebrew woman (her mother) to take care of Moses. Like Genesis 24:43, the word is not a comment on Miriam's virginity. In fact, Miriam's virginity has nothing to do with the story at all. It is simply describing the fact that she was a young girl. Proverbs 30:19 contains a four-part parallel of something the writer finds too wonderful to understand, "the way of a man with an עַלְמָה being one of them. It seems very likely, as Niessen points out, that it is describing "the courtship…of youthful

love between a young man and his young girlfriend."[120] Therefore, even though her virginity is not the point of the proverb, it can be realistically presumed. What we can conclude about these instances of עַלְמָה in the singular is that the girl's virginity plays no significant role in the context of each passage; therefore it cannot be assumed that the linguistic sign עַלְמָה is emphasizing or commenting on her virginity.

In addition to these nine instances, the Hebrew Bible also contains masculine and abstract forms of עַלְמָה that, when analyzed, further show that its general semantic field points more toward youth itself, and not necessarily to virginity. Walton points out that in I Samuel 17:56 and 20:22 we the find masculine form of הָעֶלֶם, describing both David and Jonathan's servant. He observes, "In neither of these cases is the sexual chastity of the individual a viable issue."[121] Walton also notes that the abstraction of עַלְמָה is found in Job 20:11 (עֲלוּמוֹ), Job 33:25 and Psalm 89:45 (עֲלוּמָיו), and Isaiah 54:4 (עֲלוּמַיִךְ). He argues that if עַלְמָה clearly meant "virgin" then the abstraction of that noun should mean "virginity." What we find in Isaiah 54:4, though, is that it is used in reference to a rejected barren wife—clearly not a virgin.[122] He concludes his discussion on עַלְמָה by saying that "virgin" simply is not "a viable lexical choice for describing the basic meaning of the word"[123] and answers those who claim עַלְמָה means "virgin" by saying, "Someone could show me a thousand passages where 'fiancé' was used to refer to a virgin, but that would not change the meaning."[124]

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[120] Niessen, "The Virginity of the עַלְמָה," 140.
[121] Walton, "Isaiah 7:14: What's in a Name?," 292.
[122] Walton, "Isaiah 7:14: What's in a Name?," 292.
[123] Walton, "Isaiah 7:14: What's in a Name?," 292.
[124] Walton, "Isaiah 7:14: What's in a Name?," 292.

The ambiguity of עַלְמָה can be further demonstrated by quickly looking at two other Hebrew words used in connection with young women: נַעֲרָה, and בְּתוּלָה. The word נַעֲרָה is defined in Brown-Driver-Briggs simply as a "girl" or "damsel."[125] Many times it is used to describe a marriageable girl;[126] sometimes it is used in conjunction with בְּתוּלָה to denote the virginity of the girl;[127] it can be used to denote a betrothed girl,[128] a young widow,[129] a concubine,[130] a prostitute,[131] or just a general "girl."[132]

The word בְּתוּלָה on the other hand specifically stresses actual virginity. Sometimes בְּתוּלָה is used to denote a virgin living in her father's house;[133] sometimes it is used along with נַעֲרָה to stress the virginity of a young woman;[134] sometimes it is used as a description of the purified Israel (in contrast to the times when Israel is called a harlot)[135] or another purified nation like Egypt, Sidon, or Babel;[136] and sometimes it simply is used as a general term to denote virgins.[137] What we find, therefore, in the Hebrew is that the only word that seems to consistently denote actual virginity is בְּתוּלָה. When the writers of the Hebrew Bible wanted to stress the virginity of a נַעֲרָה, they used it in connection with בְּתוּלָה. Therefore, we can tentatively say that whenever virginity

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[125] BDB, 655.
[126] Gen 24:14, 28, 55-57; 34:3,12; Deut 22:15-16, 19-21, 24, 26; 1 Kgs 1:3, 4; Esth 2:4, 7-9; 12-13
[127] Judg 21:12; Deut 22:23, 28; 1 Kgs 1:2; Esth 2:2, 3
[128] Deut 22:25, 27
[129] Ruth 2:6 , 4:12
[130] Judg 19:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9
[131] Amos 2:7
[132] Gen 24:61; Exod 2:5;1Sam 25:42; Prov 9:3, 27:27, 31:15; Esth 2:9; 4:4, 16; Ruth 2:5, 8, 22-23; 3:2
[133] Gen 24:16; Exod 22:15; Lev 21:3, 14; Deut 22:19; Judg 19:24; 2 Sam13:2; Job 31:1; Isa 62:5; Jer 2:32, 31:13
[134] Deut 22:23, 28; Judg 21:12; 1 Kgs 1:2; Esth 2:3
[135] Jer 8:13; 31:4, 21; Amos 5:2; 2 Kgs 19:21; Isa 37:22; Lam 1:15; 2:13; Jer 14:17
[136] Isa 23:12; 47:1; Jer 46:11
[137] Exod 22:16; 2 Sam 13:18; Esth 2:2, 17, 19; Pss 45:15; 78:63; 148: 12; Lam 1:4, 18; 2:10, 21; 5:11; Ezek 44:22; Amos 8:13; Isa 23:4; Zech 9:17

was to be emphasized, the writers of the Hebrew Bible consistently used בְּתוּלָה, not עַלְמָה. This is not to say that עַלְמָה could *never* indicate virginity, but only that those who claim it *always* does are not basing their assertions on the biblical evidence.

One additional consideration must be made though. Some have appealed to the LXX in hopes that perhaps the Greek translation of עַלְמָה might shed light on how it was originally understood. If παρθένος, the Greek word used in the LXX in Isaiah 7:14, is unambiguous in its meaning, then that could be an indication as to how one should understand עַלְמָה. Yet when one examines how the LXX translates not only עַלְמָה, but also בְּתוּלָה and נַעֲרָה, one sees that no such clarity is forthcoming. There are essentially two words in Greek that are used interchangeably in the LXX with the three Hebrew words in question: παρθένος and νεᾶνις. In the vast majority of cases, the LXX translates בְּתוּלָה as παρθένος. Yet παρθένος is also used to translate עַלְמָה twice (Isa. 7:14, Gen. 24:43), as well as נַעֲרָה on a few occasions (Gen. 24:14, 16, 55). In fact, in Genesis 24 alone, παρθένος is used to translate *all three Hebrew words*, all of which refer to Rebekah. Furthermore, although νεᾶνις is not used to translate בְּתוּלָה, it is used to translate עַלְמָה (Ex. 2:8; Prov. 30:19) as well as נַעֲרָה (Deut. 22; Ruth 2:5; I Kings 1:4; II Kings 5:4). The interesting thing about νεᾶνις in the instances where it translates נַעֲרָה is that it is used to describe a number of different women: the young girl Miriam, an engaged woman, a newly married woman, Ruth (who was a widow at the time), Abishag the Shunammite, as well as a captive Israelite girl. In other words, it can mean *anything*. Therefore, when one considers the fact that Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion all translate עַלְמָה as

νεᾶνις,[138] one has to realize that one simply cannot force the idea of virginity onto the LXX's use of παρθένος in Isaiah 7:14. One has to agree with the TDNT that, "on purely lexical grounds it is impossible to say whether the translator is expressing true virginity when he uses παρθένος in Isaiah 7:14."[139] The only way one could reasonably assume that the word עַלְמָה in Isaiah 7:14 implied the girl's virginity would be from the overall context of the passage, and that simply cannot be done. It can neither be determined on lexical grounds alone, nor within the immediate context.

The ironic thing about this Christian-Jewish debate over this particular variant, though, is that the controversy simply does not come into view when dealing with the original Old Testament context of Isaiah. When reading Isaiah on its own terms, one thing is certain. No biblical scholar has ever suggested that either the עַלְמָה or παρθένος in Isaiah was referring at that time to an actual virgin that miraculously conceived and gave birth in the mid-eighth century BCE. Even though scholars might disagree over the identity of the עַלְמָה in Isaiah 7:14, and even though the woman might have been a virgin at the time of the prophecy, it is universally agreed that she got pregnant through the normal means of sex, and, just like every other woman in history, gave birth to a child. Although it is the view of this thesis that the עַלְמָה of Isaiah 7:14 is Ahaz's wife, it is acknowledged that the case for this cannot be made on the definition of עַלְמָה alone; one must consider its surrounding context to determine the identity of the עַלְמָה.

As one can see, not only is עַלְמָה a Hebrew word that simply describes a young woman, without specific reference to her virginity, but παρθένος is equally ambiguous,

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[138] Botterweck 2001, 11:160.
[139] Kittel 1985, 833.

and is used to translate a variety of Hebrew words. Some scholars seek to strain the meaning of עַלְמָה by saying that the word "*without qualification* means an unmarried woman—however marriageable she may be,"[140] and therefore, since unmarried young women were virgins in Hebrew society, that an עַלְמָה was for all practical purposes, a virgin. Those who say this simply overlook the fact that in Isaiah 7:14, the עַלְמָה could very well been married and already pregnant at the time of Isaiah's prophecy. Language by nature is very flexible and cannot be confined to strict dictionary definition. In today's society, "girl" could mean a little child, or a term a boyfriend calls his girlfriend, (i.e. "she's my girl"), or just a general term used when talking about full grown women. Therefore, it is best to stay with what is obvious. An עַלְמָה referred to a young woman, nothing more. It is the semantic fields attached to these word forms that make different meanings possible, depending on the literary context in which it is used. Her virginity, or lack thereof, can only be implied or determined by the surrounding context.[141]

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[140] Moyter, "Context and Content," *TB* 21 (1970): 118-125.

[141] The debate over the meaning of עַלְמָה stems from the influence of the early Church Fathers who argued that Isaiah 7:14 was a prediction of the miraculous virgin birth of Jesus. Underlying this view is a belief that if one were to admit that עַלְמָה did not mean "virgin," then that would "prove" Matthew was wrong when he said Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled in Christ. The problem with this view is it allows preconceived notions of inerrancy and inspiration as well as the interpretation of the early Church Fathers to predetermine the meaning of the word עַלְמָה and the overall meaning of Isaiah 7:14. This view says, "We already know Isaiah 7:14 is a prediction about the virgin birth of Jesus. No amount of evidence will change our mind because we have already determined that the very inerrancy and inspiration of the Bible is contingent upon the belief that Isaiah 7:14 is a prediction of the virgin birth of Jesus." Such a view cannot go unchallenged. It is absolutely clear that עַלְמָה is a sexually ambiguous term. To say otherwise is intellectually dishonest. Instead of forcing the meaning of "virgin" on the word עַלְמָה so it fits in with the view that Isaiah 7:14 is a prediction about the virgin birth of Jesus, we should reevaluate our inherited preconceptions about Isaiah 7:14 and rethink our understanding of inspiration and inerrancy. Admitting that עַלְמָה does not mean "virgin" may cause us to reevaluate our understanding of Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23, but it does not mean that we must throw belief in the Bible's inspiration and inerrancy out the window.

III. 2. The Proper Understanding of הָרָה

The second variant in Isaiah 7:14, closely related to the debate regarding עַלְמָה, involves the Hebrew word הָרָה in the phrase הָעַלְמָה הָרָה וְיֹלֶדֶת בֵּן. The question essentially is whether it should be understood as an adjective describing the *present state* of the עַלְמָה or else as a verb describing what the עַלְמָה will do in the future. The former view is put forth in both BDB and Koehler-Baumgartner,[142] yet as one can see, the form of the word and the vocalization used in BHS, makes it possible to understand it as either a verb (feminine) or an adjective. On its own, it is impossible to determine which way the word הָרָה should be understood.

When one looks at the various English translations, one finds that opinion is divided. The English Standard Version, King James Version, New American Standard Version, New International Version all translate it as a *future verb* (i.e. "will conceive"), whereas the New Jerusalem Bible, New Revised Standard Version, and the Jewish translation all translate it as a *present adjective* (i.e. "is pregnant"). When one looks at the LXX, one finds that in the LXX phrase used to translate הָרָה (ἐν γαστρὶ ἕξει) the word ἕξει can be either a future tense verb of ἔχω, or a dative singular feminine form of the noun ἕξις. As with הָרָה, ἕξει is equally ambiguous on its own and requires one to look at the other instances in the MT when the word הָרָה is used, and then see how the LXX translates it in each case. The following chart will provide the relevant information:

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[142] BDB, 248.

Verse	MT	LXX
Genesis 16:11	הִנָּךְ הָרָה וְיֹלַדְתְּ בֵּן וְקָרָאת שְׁמוֹ יִשְׁמָעֵאל	ἰδοὺ σὺ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχεις καὶ τέξῃ υἱὸν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ισμαηλ
Genesis 38:24	וְגַם הִנֵּה הָרָה לִזְנוּנִים	ἰδοὺ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχει ἐκ πορνείας
Exodus 21:22	וְנָגְפוּ אִשָּׁה הָרָה	πατάξωσιν γυναῖκα ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσαν
Judges 13:5, 7	וַיֹּאמֶר לִי הִנָּךְ הָרָה וְיֹלַדְתְּ בֵּן	καὶ εἶπέν μοι ἰδοὺ σὺ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχεις καὶ τέξῃ υἱόν
I Samuel 4:19	וְכַלָּתוֹ אֵשֶׁת־פִּינְחָס הָרָה לָלַת	καὶ νύμφη αὐτοῦ γυνὴ Φινεες συνειληφυῖα τοῦ τεκεῖν
II Samuel 11:5	וַתֹּאמֶר הָרָה אָנֹכִי	καὶ εἶπεν ἐγώ εἰμι ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχω
Isaiah 7:14	נֵה הָעַלְמָה הָרָה וְיֹלֶדֶת בֵּן	ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἕξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν
Isaiah 26:17	כְּמוֹ הָרָה תַּקְרִיב לָלֶדֶת תָּחִיל תִּזְעַק בַּחֲבָלֶיהָ	ὡς ἡ ὠδίνουσα ἐγγίζει τοῦ τεκεῖν καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ ὠδῖνι αὐτῆς ἐκέκραξεν

As one can see, there is a slight difference as to how the LXX translators translated these verses from the original Hebrew. In the two instances that are identical in the Hebrew to Isaiah 7:14 (Genesis 16:11, and Judges 13:5, 7), the LXX translators have ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχεις (second person present) instead of ἐν γαστρὶ ἕξει as found in Isaiah 7:14. The Genesis 38:24 passage uses the third person present verb, ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχει, whereas Exodus 21:22 uses a present participle (ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσαν), and II Samuel 11:5 uses the 1st person present (ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχω). I Samuel 4:19 and Isaiah 26:17 use an entirely different construction in the Greek altogether. In the relevant passages though, one can see in every case, except for Isaiah 7:14, that the LXX translators clearly used the *present tense* of the verb ἔχω. Yet in Isaiah 7:14 it is either a third declension a *future tense* of ἔχω or a noun form of ἕξις. The fact that nowhere else in the LXX is the actual phrase ἐν γαστρὶ ἕξει used is highly problematic as to the future interpretation of this verse by the Church Fathers, and for us as well. Did the LXX translators want the conception in Isaiah

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7:14 to be read as a future event, or a present fact? When taken out of context, the phrase alone does not give any indication either way. One has to read it in context of the entire passage and in relation to the other instances in the LXX where a similar phrase is used. Yet as was mentioned before, when one looks at the context of Isaiah 7 it does not matter whether the young woman was pregnant at that time, or would become pregnant in the near future. A plain reading of the text would suggest that the conception was seen as the result of the normal human function of sex. In other words, even if ἐν γαστρὶ ἕξει should be translated as "will become pregnant," it was not seen as a miraculous virgin birth. Furthermore, when one looks at the similar phrases found elsewhere in the LXX, and finds that they all are rendered as a present condition of being pregnant, one has to seriously consider that Isaiah 7:14 was meant to be read as a present reality of being pregnant as well.[143]

III. 3. The Naming of the Child

A third variant to consider is the fact that both the MT and 4QIs[a] say that it is the young woman who would name the child, whereas the LXX says that an unidentified "you" would name the child. The question, therefore, becomes, "Whom did the LXX translator have in mind when he said 'you will call his name Immanuel'?" The answer should be quite obvious. The only person Isaiah is addressing in the entire chapter is King Ahaz. Therefore, for whatever reason the LXX translator had to change the "she" to

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[143] Now those who read Isaiah 7:14 from the New Testament backwards, apart from its original Old Testament historical and literary contexts, will understand this in terms of virginity and the immaculate birth of Jesus. The issue for such a reading, though, must be, "Does the Old Testament in any way present the basic ideas for those found in the New Testament, or at least as the New Testament is interpreted in some dogmatic sense?" This is question, though, goes beyond the bounds of this thesis. For now, though, we can say that although the general ambiguity of the words עַלְמָה and הָרָה make the commonly understood New Testament interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 possible, it is not absolutely clear that such an interpretation must be understood in a solely biological sense.

a "you," it can be safely assumed that the clear referent is King Ahaz himself. So why would King Ahaz name the child? The obvious answer would be that the LXX translator saw him as the father of the child. There certainly are times in the Old Testament where the mother names the child, as well as times when the father names the child. In any case, it is a parent. So, according to the LXX, if Isaiah said "you," and the only "you" Isaiah speaks to in chapter seven is Ahaz, and it is either the father or mother who names their children, it is quite obvious that the LXX translator saw Ahaz as the father of the child Immanuel. This fact immediately brings up the possibility that Hezekiah, or at least one of Ahaz's sons, was considered to be the Immanuel child. The chronological problems surrounding the possibility of Hezekiah being the prophesied Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14 will be taken up and discussed in chapter three. For now, though, it must be acknowledged that within its immediate context, the LXX's version of Isaiah 7:14 seems to indicate that Ahaz is the father of the Immanuel child.

III. 4. *The Significance of the Name* עִמָּנוּ־אֵל

The fourth and final variant found in these versions concerns the name "Immanuel" itself. In both the MT and 4QIs[a], עִמָּנוּ־אֵל would clearly be read as "God is with us." It is more than just a name, and the Hebrew reader would see the significance and meaning of the name. What we find in the LXX though, is simply a transcribed Greek word from the Hebrew—Εμμανουηλ. The reason why this is significant to note is that, regardless of the Hebrew text the LXX translator used, be it the MT, 4QIs[a], or some other pre-masoretic text, the intended meaning of the Hebrew name "Immanuel" is lost in the Greek. "Immanuel" becomes a name, and nothing more. This fact comes into play as well when it comes to the New Testament interpretation of this verse. Matthew clearly

saw the need to articulate the significance of the name Εμμανουηλ when he added "which is translated, 'God is with us.'" Whatever Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible he and his readers were familiar with, its translation of Isaiah 7:14 was not able to convey the significance of the name "Immanuel" when Matthew applied it to Jesus. That is why he needed to add his own translational note. The very fact that Matthew chose to elaborate on the significance of the name "Immanuel" and not on the meaning of the word παρθένος should alert the reader that Matthew's focus was on the former, not the latter.

When one considers these textual variants together, one sees that they reveal a very significant change in perspective from the MT/4QIs[a] to the LXX, which will have possible indications for understanding how Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14. The four textual variants can be summed up as follows:

Masoretic Text/4QIs[a]	Septuagint
עַלְמָה	παρθένος
The עַלְמָה *is* pregnant (present fact)	The παρθένος *will become* pregnant (future) or The παρθένος *has use of the womb* (noun)
She (the עַלְמָה) will name the son	*You* (the father Ahaz) will name the son
עִמָּנוּ-אֵל (The meaning, "God is with us," clear to the Hebrew reader)	Εμμανουηλ (Greek readers would simply see this as a name, nothing more)

When read in the Masoretic Text, the meaning of the verse, without reading into the passage Christian interpretation, is quite straightforward. In response to Ahaz's lack of faith, Isaiah prophesies that YHWH will give Ahaz a sign nonetheless: the "sign" YHWH will give concerns the pregnancy of a young woman present at this encounter between Ahaz and Isaiah, possibly Ahaz's wife. Whether the sign was (a) she would

become pregnant, (b) she, being already pregnant, would give birth to a son, or (c) she would become pregnant *and* would give birth to a son, is impossible to say. The grammatical information is too ambiguous and the surrounding context does not give much help on this issue. Whatever the case may be, Isaiah prophesies that she will give birth to a son, and *she* will name him "Immanuel"—"God is with us."

The immediate context of Isaiah 7:13-25 gives further indication that this "sign" was linked in some way to the future destruction of both Aram and Ephraim by Assyria by the time Immanuel would have learned to "refuse the evil and choose the good." In any case, at this point, if there is any indication regarding the identity of the Immanuel child in 7:14 at all, the indication would point to Immanuel being the son of Ahaz, possibly Hezekiah, with the mother being either the wife or a concubine of Ahaz. This is precisely the position of this thesis, yet what we have looked at thus far is simply the first piece of the puzzle. There is more to understanding any given verse than just studying the individual words in that particular verse. Isaiah 7:14 lies within the immediate context of the larger prophetic oracle of 7:13-25, which in turn is part of the larger literary unit of Isaiah 7-12. We must now turn to the larger passages of Isaiah 7:14 (both of 7:13-25 and chapters 7-12) in order to determine whether or not our preliminary understanding of Isaiah 7:14 fits into the larger literary context.

IV. Isaiah 7:14 within the Larger Context of 7:13-25

As stated at the very beginning of this thesis, scholars agree that the confrontation between Isaiah and Ahaz in Isaiah 7, during which Isaiah uttered the prophetic oracle in which Isaiah 7:14 is found, took place at some point during the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, presumably around 735-732 BCE. The historical setting and chronological issues will be

dealt with in chapter three; but at present we will summarize the events in the narrative of Isaiah 7:1-12 that lead to the prophetic oracle of 7:13-25.[144]

We are told in 7:1 that at some point in Ahaz's reign King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah of Israel threatened to attack Jerusalem, but were unable to do so. Nevertheless, this threat was so great that we are told that Ahaz and his people were terrified (7:2). It was at this time that Isaiah, along with his son Shear-jashub, whose name means "A remnant shall return," confronted Ahaz and encouraged him not to be afraid of the threat, but rather to put his trust in YHWH. Isaiah prophesied that although Rezin and Pekah wanted to capture Jerusalem and set up the "son of Tabeel" as king, that it would not happen, and that within sixty-five years the kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) would be no more (7:3-9). Isaiah then encouraged Ahaz to ask YHWH for any sign he wished, be it "deep as Sheol or high as heaven," but Ahaz declined to do so, thus demonstrating his lack of faith in YHWH (7:10-12). Therefore, it must be seen that Isaiah's prophetic oracle of 7:13-25 was a direct response to Ahaz's demonstration of his unfaithfulness to YHWH.

Isaiah begins his oracle of 7:13-25 with a verse of sheer frustration: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also?"[145] Then, after prophesying about the sign of the Immanuel child in 7:14, Isaiah goes on to say in 7:15-17 that:

> (a) Immanuel will "eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good" (7:15);

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[144] The reason for this demarcation of Isaiah 7:13-25 as a separate oracle is two-fold: first, it not only is it a reaction of Ahaz's lack of faith in 7:1-12, but it also focuses on the birth of Immanuel. Second, Isaiah 8:1 begins a new unit, in that there is a brief narrative of Isaiah writing on a tablet and then conceiving a child with his wife (8:1-4), followed by an oracle focusing on that child, Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

[145] All Bible quotations taken from the NRSV.

(b) the land of both the enemy kings of whom Ahaz is in dread (i.e. Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel) will be deserted before Immanuel even "knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good" (7:16); and

(c) YHWH will bring upon Ahaz, his people, and his ancestral house the king of Assyria (7:17).

Then in 7:18-20, Isaiah not only prophesies that "on that day" "the fly" of Egypt and "the bee" of Assyria will come and settle in Judah, but also that "on that day" YHWH himself will use the king of Assyria (metaphorically called "a hired razor") to completely "shave" Judah. In 7:21-22 Isaiah prophesies that "on that day" everyone that is left will eat curds and honey. Then in 7:23-25 Isaiah prophesies that "on that day" the land that once was so fruitful would be a place of "briars and thorns" where cattle and sheep roam free.

There are a number of exegetical questions regarding this passage aside from those found in 7:14 that scholars have debated throughout the years. First of all, there is the question regarding "the sign" that Isaiah prophesies YHWH will give to Ahaz: should it be understood to be miraculous? Second, there is the question regarding the meaning of eating curds and honey: is it a sign of abundance or of poverty? Related to this is the question, "Is this prophecy one of judgment or of salvation?"

It must be stated that the first of these two questions is one that is born largely out of the failure to separate Old Testament concerns with New Testament concerns, and is a clear example of what happens when one reads Christological significance into an Old Testament verse without first attempting to understand that given verse on its own terms, within its original context. This question cannot be fully discussed here, for our primary concern is the Old Testament context of Isaiah 7:14. Yet we can nevertheless make a number of comments at this present time. The basic argument put forth by many of the

early Church Fathers[146] and continued by Christians throughout the past 2,000 years is that a "sign" simply had to be a miraculous event. This is simply wrong. A simple flip through a concordance will show that when one looks at all the other instances in the Old Testament that involves some sort of "sign," the vast majority of them are not miraculous at all. Some of the more well known signs in the Old Testament are the following: the rainbow in Genesis 9:12; circumcision in Genesis 17:11; Passover in Exodus 13:9; Sabbath in Exodus 31:13; Torah in Deuteronomy 11:18; the pile of stones in the Jordan River in Joshua 4:6; the death of Eli's sons in I Samuel 2:34; Ezekiel's prophetic action in Ezekiel 4:3; Isaiah's walking naked in the streets of Jerusalem for three years in Isaiah 20:3; and the return from exile in Isaiah 66:19. Granted, there are a few rare instances where the sign given is miraculous, but for the Church Fathers to claim that whenever a "sign" is mentioned, *it must be a miraculous event*, is to gravely distort its meaning. In the case of Isaiah 7:14, although the sign Isaiah initially offered Ahaz to ask for left the door open for Ahaz to ask for a miraculous sign, there is nothing in the account of the sign Isaiah actually gives in 7:14 that would indicate it was miraculous.

The second exegetical question that needs to be touched upon is the question as to whether or not a diet of curds and honey is to be taken as a sign of abundance or poverty, and by extension, whether or not this prophecy as a whole is to be taken as a sign of judgment or salvation. Opinion among scholars is divided. Some claim that this prophecy

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[146] Church Fathers who have argued that the sign had to be a miraculous event: Ireneaus: "For what great thing or what sign should have been in this, that a young woman conceiving by a man should bring forth--a thing which happens to all women that produce offspring?" ("Against Heresies," ANF: vol. 1: 453); Tertullian: ""Now a sign from God would not have been a sign unless it had been some novel and prodigious thing. Nothing of the nature of a sign can possibly come out of what is a daily occurrence, the pregnancy and child-bearing of a young woman." ("Against Marcion," ANF: vol. 3:331-332); John Chrysostom: "If she that was to give birth was not a virgin, but this happened in the way of marriage, what sort of sign would that be? For that which is a sign must be of course be beyond the course of common events, it must be strange and extraordinary; else how could it be a sign?" ("Homilies on St. Matthew," NPFP: vol. 10:32).

was initially one of salvation, and that the verses that clearly indicate judgment are later glosses. Others claim that this diet of curds and honey is the diet of an impoverished people who will be overrun by Assyria. When one looks at 7:13-25 as a whole, though, one sees elements of both salvation and judgment. On one hand, immediately after 7:15, a verse in which we are told that Immanuel will "eat curds and honey *by the time* he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good," we are told in 7:16 that "*before* the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good" that the lands of Rezin and Pekah, the two chief threats to Ahaz, will be deserted. The implication, therefore, is that by the time the Immanuel child "knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good" that his eating curds and honey will coincide with the destruction of Rezin and Pekah. This certainly equates eating curds and honey with some very good news. On the other hand, though, the mention in 7:22 that "everyone that is left in the land will eat curds and honey" is found in the middle of what is clearly a prophecy of the coming Assyrian destruction of Judah (7:18-25).

Given the fact that not only does "eating curds and honey" seem to be given two different meanings, but that Isaiah 7:13-25 itself clearly contains elements of salvation and judgment, we must live in that very tension that the text in its final form provides and attempt to interpret its meaning accordingly. Therefore, a preliminary understanding of the prophecy of 7:13-25 that was uttered in response to the situation found in 7:1-12 could be stated thus: this child, Immanuel is the "living sign" that YHWH will do as He has promised. Despite Ahaz's lack of faith, YHWH will still destroy the kingdoms of Aram and Israel by the time the child Immanuel knows how to reject the evil and choose the good; but because of Ahaz's lack of faith, YHWH will also allow Assyria to come

and wreak havoc in Judah. Nevertheless, Isaiah prophesies that YHWH will re-gather the believing remnant after His judgment has passed. Therefore, in both judgment and salvation, the House of David will know that "God is with us."

Given the fact that Isaiah is presented as having uttered this prophecy within the historical context of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, and the fact that this prophecy speaks to the events regarding the subsequent domination of Assyria of both Israel and Judah in the latter part of eighth century BCE, it is only logical to assume that the Immanuel child of Isaiah 7:14 was a reference to someone at that time. Once again, all indications within the immediate prophecy itself point toward Hezekiah as the prophesied Immanuel child. It would have been in his lifetime that all of these particulars of the prophecy would have come to pass. In addition to this initial prophecy of Isaiah 7:13-25, though, there still is the surrounding context of Isaiah 7-12 to consider. What we will now see is that this initial prophecy of Isaiah 7:13-25, of which 7:14 is a vital part, is extended and amplified in the larger context of Isaiah 7-12. Once the greater context of Isaiah 7-12 is clearly spelled out, it will become obvious that the most likely candidate for Immanuel is, in fact, Hezekiah.

V. Isaiah 7:13-25 within the Larger Context of Isaiah 7-12

When one looks at the place of Isaiah 7-12 within the entirety of Proto-Isaiah, one quickly sees that the major themes found within Isaiah 7-12 have their roots and are introduced in Isaiah 1-6, a section generally agreed upon to serve as the general introduction to Proto-Isaiah as a whole. Isaiah 1:1, by placing Isaiah within the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, gives us an indication that we are to view Proto-Isaiah (1-39) as a unit unto itself, for clearly the setting of chapters 1-39 is pre-exilic,

chapters 7-12 being set in the days of Ahaz, and chapters 36-39 being set in the days of Hezekiah. Chapters 1-5 serve as a general prologue to the entirety of Proto-Isaiah and set forth the dual themes of (a) impending judgment of Jerusalem and (b) the salvation of the surviving remnant.

After this initial prologue, chapter 6 contains the account of Isaiah's vision in the Temple, and of his prophetic commissioning to preach to the people, knowing that they will not listen, until there is complete devastation. He is told that the devastated land will be like a stump. But then there is the curious verse at the end of chapter 6 that helps launch into the three main themes found in chapters 7-12: "Even if a tenth part remain in it [Judah], it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump" (6:13). What we find here in this one verse are essentially three themes: judgment, salvation, and the holy seed: after YHWH's judgment has fallen upon Judah and Jerusalem, Isaiah prophesies that there will still be the certain hope of salvation brought about by means of the holy seed. These are the three themes we see being developed throughout chapters 7-12, the very chapters that are situated within the historical context of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis.

When one looks at Isaiah 7-12 as a whole, one sees that Isaiah seems to be pointing out that YHWH's upcoming actions within both Israel and Judah are symbolized in the three children of 7:1-8:4. Along with these children are basically three themes that run throughout these chapters: (1) the theme of the salvation of the *returning remnant* is seen in Isaiah's son, Shear-jashub ("a remnant shall return"), who emphasizes God's faithfulness to the covenant; (2) the theme of *impending judgment* is seen in Maher-shalal-hash-baz ("swift is the booty, speedy is the prey"), who emphasizes God's

judgment upon His unfaithful people; and (3) the theme of a child-king—the holy seed of 6:13, Immanuel of 7:14, the royal child of 9:6-7, and the shoot of Jesse of 11:1-2—who will be born in the midst of God's *judgment*, who will then set up God's kingdom for the *returning remnant*, and who will rule the remnant, and the nations, with justice and peace. As one will see, the first two themes are bound up in the figure of Immanuel. At this time, a brief overview of each section within Isaiah 7-12, beginning with chapter eight (given the fact that chapter seven has already been analyzed), is necessary in order to show how these three themes are woven throughout Isaiah 7-12 as a whole.

Isaiah 8:1-22

After the initial narrative section of 7:1-12 and the following Immanuel prophecy of 7:13-25, which lays out the basic three themes mentioned above, 8:1-22 contains another narrative/prophecy section that clearly focuses on the judgment of YHWH by means of the king of Assyria. Isaiah 8:1-4 tells about the birth of Isaiah's son Maher-shalal-hash-baz, whose name means "hasten for spoil, hurry for plunder," and further prophesies that before Maher-shalal-hash-baz is able to say "My father" or "My mother," that the wealth of both Damascus (the capital of Aram, of which Rezin was king) and Samaria (the capital of Israel, of which Pekah was king) would be taken away by the king of Assyria. In other words, Isaiah prophesies the destruction of Aram and Israel, just like he previously did in 7:15-17. Isaiah 8:5-10 then elaborates on what will happen concerning the king of Assyria. Isaiah, as he previously said in 7:18-25, prophesies that the king of Assyria will overflow into Judah like a mighty flood, reaching up to the neck, and outstretch its wings over Immanuel's land. Nevertheless, in 8:9-10, Isaiah prophesies that, despite this threatening flood of Assyria, that "it shall be brought to naught" and "it

will not stand, for *God is with us*." This phrase, "God is with us" is the very thing the name Immanuel means; in fact, in the Hebrew there is no difference between 7:14, 8:8 and here in 8:10. The overall thrust of 8:1-10 is clear: Assyria will destroy Aram and Israel, and Assyria will threaten to destroy Judah during the reign of Immanuel as well, but will not succeed because, according to the meaning of Immanuel's name, God is still with Judah. The child Immanuel, therefore, is both a sign of YHWH's judgment that would fall on both Israel and Judah,[147] as well as a sign of hope,[148] for the judgment will not bring a complete end to the people of YHWH. These themes of judgment, salvation, and Immanuel's reign can all be seen as relating to the historical situations of both Ahaz and Hezekiah, with the judgment of YHWH falling upon Judah because of Ahaz's unfaithfulness, and the salvation of YHWH coming to Jerusalem because of the faithfulness of Hezekiah, the prophesied Immanuel: (a) during Ahaz's reign, Aram and Israel were indeed destroyed by Assyria; (b) because of Ahaz's lack of faith in YHWH, YHWH's judgment came upon Judah and for the rest of Ahaz's reign and throughout Hezekiah's reign Assyria came to dominate Judah as well; (c) yet during the reign of Hezekiah, Jerusalem was saved from Sennacherib's armies in 701 BCE because of Hezekiah's demonstration of faith in YHWH.

Isaiah 8:11-22, directly flowing out of 8:1-10, continues with (a) YHWH exhorting Isaiah to fear Him alone, and not to be taken in by the conspiracy theories of "this people" (8:11-13), (b) the declaration that YHWH will be both a sanctuary and a stumbling stone for both houses of Israel (8:14-15), (c) Isaiah's declaration that he and

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[147] Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 103; Moyter, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 86.
[148] Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 213; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), 68.

his children (who are signs for Israel), will wait for YHWH (8:16-18), and (d) the declaration that any people who encourages the consultation of any god other than YHWH will "see only distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish, and will ultimately be thrust into darkness" (8:19-22).

Isaiah 9:1-7

In the midst of the thick darkness described in 8:22, Isaiah 9:1-7 (8:23-9:6 in MT) prophesies hope and salvation, seemingly for the lands of the northern kingdom of Israel, for it mentions Zebulun and Naphtali, lands in Galilee. Isaiah 9:2 prophesies that a light will dawn for these people (presumably Zebulun and Naphtali—Galilee) who lived in darkness. Isaiah 9:3-5 then states that "you" (presumably YHWH) will "multiply the nation," "increase its joy," "break the rod of their oppressor," and "burn the boots and bloody garments of the warriors" (presumably the oppressors). To what could this be a reference? Given the historical setting in which we find this prophecy, one must consider the possibility that this is a prophecy that expresses the hope that YHWH will indeed bring salvation and possibly reconciliation to both Judah and Israel, who both have been oppressed by Assyria.

Yet who would YHWH use to bring this salvation and reconciliation about? The answer lies in Isaiah 9:6-7, which celebrates the birth of a royal son from the house of David who will eventually become king. By his description of the child, Isaiah leaves no doubt that this child is a royal heir in the House of David—he is the anointed one, the messiah-king. This royal son, Isaiah says, will be called "wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace." Isaiah further prophesies that this child's authority as king will grow, and that there will be endless peace for the throne and

kingdom of David. He ends this section with the phrase, קִנְאַת יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה־זֹּאת,

("The zeal of YHWH of hosts will do this.")

The traditional Christian interpretation of these verses is that they are a prediction of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. Yet what we find in the traditional Jewish interpretation of these verses is that they are about Hezekiah.[149] In the Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Sanhedrin, Folio 94a, Hezekiah is referred to as "the one who has eight names," these names coming from Isaiah 9:6-7: פֶּלֶא (Wonderful), יוֹעֵץ (Counselor), גִּבּוֹר (Mighty), אֵל (Judge), עַד (Everlasting), אֲבִי (Father), שַׂר (Prince), and שָׁלוֹם (Peace).[150] Now, one might question whether or not the child here in Isaiah 9 really refers to Hezekiah. After all, Hezekiah did *not* establish David's everlasting kingdom, and Hezekiah is *not* the "Everlasting Father," or "Almighty God." Yet the Jewish interpretation of these names is that they do not describe the child himself (i.e. Hezekiah), but that they point to God Himself. I. W. Slotki interprets the Hebrew words in question as, "Wonderful in counsel is God the Mighty, the Everlasting Father, the Ruler of Peace," and explains that "The child will bear these significant names in order to recall to the people the message which they [the names] embodied."[151] The point is that the child of Isaiah 9:6-7 is the same Immanuel child of Isaiah 7:14, as well as the child of Isaiah 11:1-11.

Nevertheless, many Christians will question this interpretation on the grounds that Hezekiah's reign did not bring peace without end. A possible answer to such an objection involves challenging the traditional Christian understanding of "fulfilled prophecy." It

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[149] "The verse has been given a Christological interpretation by the Church, but modern non-Jewish exegetes agree that a contemporary person is intended. The Talmud and later Jewish commentators understood the allusion to be the son of Ahaz, viz. Hezekiah." I.W. Slotki, *Isaiah* (The Soncino Books of the Bible; Soncino Press Ltd, 1987), 44.

[150] Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Sanhedrin, Folio 94a.

[151] Slotki, *Isaiah*, 44.

goes without saying that it was extremely important that the New Testament writers emphasized Jesus' Davidic descent. The hope that one day YHWH would raise up a Messiah from the royal line of David who would set up His everlasting kingdom runs all throughout the Old Testament. The writers of the Old Testament saw YHWH at work within the actions of kings like David (making Jerusalem his capital), Solomon (building the Temple), Hezekiah (tearing down pagan altars, and being faithful to YHWH in the face of Assyria), and Josiah (his reforms). The actions of those kings brought about the salvation of God *in part*, and the Old Testament prophets prophesied about God's future Messiah who would "fulfill" what God began with these messiahs. In other words, *through* these messiahs, the prophets saw *the* Messiah. So even though Hezekiah was not seen as "Almighty God," the events of chapters 36-37, when he trusted YHWH, and Judah was spared, gave a glimpse of a future salvation yet to be fulfilled. Nevertheless, one still has to see Hezekiah as the *initial* referent here.

What we see in this passage, therefore, is the prophetic hope that YHWH would one day bring salvation to both Judah and Israel by the hand of a Davidic king. Most scholars see an obvious connection between the royal child of 9:6-7 with the Immanuel child of 7:14. And although it can be argued that Hezekiah could not possibly be the prophesied Immanuel, nor the royal child of 9:6-7 because this "eternal peace" of YHWH did not come during his reign, one only has to look forward to the accounts of Hezekiah's reign found not only in Isaiah 36-39, but also II Kings 18-20 and II Chronicles 29-32, where Hezekiah is presented as being a righteous king who brought about major religious reform, who reached out to the tribes of the shattered northern kingdom of Israel in an

attempt to bring about reconciliation, whose reputation was known among the nations, and who was king in Jerusalem when Sennacherib and his army was defeated by YHWH.

Isaiah 9:8-10:4

The scene shifts in 9:8 from focusing on the future salvation brought about by YHWH by the hand of the royal child Immanuel to a stark and straightforward prophecy of judgment upon the northern kingdom of Israel. In addition to being "devoured" by the Arameans and Philistines (9:12), this passage tells of internal strife within Israel, where "Manasseh devoured Ephraim, and Ephraim [devoured] Manasseh, and together they were against Judah" (9:21). This prophecy clearly is related to the destruction of Israel, not only ultimately by Assyria in 722 BCE, but also incrementally by its neighbors, as well as from within.

Isaiah 10:5-19

Immediately after the prophecy of judgment on Israel, 10:5-19 presents another prophecy of judgment, but this time it falls upon Assyria. In 10:5-6 we are told that YHWH Himself was the one who sent Assyria against Israel and Judah. Interestingly we find that YHWH has commanded Assyria "to take spoil and seize plunder," a phrase hauntingly similar to the name of Isaiah's son Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Clearly this child's name is symbolic of Assyria's plundering of both Israel and Judah. Yet in 10:7-11 we get a glimpse of the haughtiness and arrogance of Assyria, who does not realize that it is being used by YHWH to bring about YHWH's purposes. Because of Assyria's arrogance, Isaiah prophesies in 10:12-19 that, after YHWH has used Assyria for his purposes, that YHWH will eventually destroy Assyria for its arrogance as well. YHWH mocks Assyria for its pride, and compares Assyria to an ax that tries to magnify itself

over the one who wields it. Because of Assyria's pride, Isaiah prophesies that YHWH will "send wasting sickness among his [Assyria's] stout warriors," and that "The light of Israel will become a fire, and his holy one a flame; and it will burn and devour his thorns and briars in one day" (10:16-17). Isaiah further prophesies that Assyria's "forest and fruitful land" will be destroyed by YHWH and that "remnant of trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down" (10:18-19). This prophecy of judgment against Assyria can clearly be related to the destruction of Sennacherib's armies outside the walls of Jerusalem in 701 BCE, during the reign of Hezekiah. The description of Assyria's demise here in 10:5-19 is strangely similar to Isaiah 37:36, when we are told that the angel of YHWH struck down 185,000 Assyrians. If one understands from Josephus that it was believed that some sort of plague had hit the Assyrian camp that caused them to lift their siege of Jerusalem and return home, it becomes very probable that the "wasting disease" prophesied in the middle of this passage of chapters 7-12, of which "Immanuel" is a central part, is none other than a prophesy of the striking down of 185,000 Assyrians. This further strengthens the idea that the "Immanuel" of 7:14 and of chapters 7-12 has, as its initial referent, King Hezekiah, and looks forward to the events of chapters 36-37.

Isaiah 10:20-34

After the prophecy concerning the judgment of Assyria, Isaiah 10:20-34 prophesies the future restoration of a remnant from the house of Jacob. In 10:20 we read that the remnant "will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on YHWH, the Holy One of Israel." In 10:21-22 we read "A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with

righteousness." This repeated reference to a "remnant" recalls Isaiah's first son, Shear-jashub, and when taken within the context of everything we have seen thus far in Isaiah 7-10, the message is clear: (a) because of Israel and Judah's unfaithfulness, exemplified by the unfaithfulness of Ahaz during the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis, YHWH's righteous judgment will fall upon them both; (b) the instrument of YHWH's righteous judgment will be, ironically, another sinful and arrogant nation, Assyria, whom YHWH will exercise judgment upon once He has used Assyria to punish Israel and Judah; and (c) after "destruction is decreed"—after Israel and Judah have both suffered YHWH's judgment, and after Assyria is also punished for its arrogance—what will be left will be a remnant who will return to YHWH in truth.

Isaiah 10:24-34 continues with this theme yet reassures those in Zion not to be afraid of their oppressors, the Assyrians, for their burden will soon be lifted from their shoulders. Verses 33-34 employ the imagery of a forest, and of YHWH cutting down the tallest trees, which clearly represent the haughty and prideful. This forest imagery harkens back to Isaiah 6:13, which gives the same picture of trees being felled. And, just like in 6:13, the next section, 11:1-10, focuses on new life coming forth from destruction.

Isaiah 11:1-16

This famous section has continually been related to both the Immanuel child of Isaiah 7:14 and the royal child of Isaiah 9:1-7. In this section, though, we find a description of a shoot coming forth from the stump of Jesse—an obvious metaphor describing the coming glory of a new Davidic king in the midst of YHWH's judgment. Isaiah prophesies that YHWH's spirit will rest upon this "shoot," and it will be a spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge and the fear of YHWH

(11:1-2). He is described as being a ruler who will judge with righteousness, who will strike down the wicked, and who will be known for his faithfulness (11:3-5). Isaiah 11:6-9 portrays an idyllic picture of the future of God's entire creation, when "the earth will be full of the knowledge of YHWH as the waters cover the sea" (11:9). The mention of the "little child" leading (11:6), the "nursing child" (11:8), and the "weaned child" (11:8) all fit well into the greater context of Isaiah 7-12, in which children play such a prominent role within the prophetic oracles. Isaiah 11:10 continues by saying, "On that day the root of Jesse will stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling will be made glorious." The rest of 11:11-16 further prophesies about: (a) the restored remnant that has been scattered among the nations, particularly Assyria and Egypt, (b) Immanuel's assembling of the outcasts of Israel, (c) the end of hostilities between Israel and Judah, and (d) the subjugation of the Philistines, Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites. After the entirety of this collection of prophecies in chapters 7-11, Isaiah 12:1-6 simply serves as a final praise to YHWH for his salvation, and is a proper conclusion to the entire section of Isaiah 7-12.

The pressing question concerning Isaiah 11 of course is, "Who is the 'shoot of Jesse'?" Although clearly a seen as a Davidic messianic king, there is a certain amount of uncertainty as to who this person is. Most commentators rightly see this ultimately as a description of an idyllic future messianic age ruled by the Messiah. Yet we must also consider how this chapter might relate to Hezekiah and fit into the consistent historical picture we have seen developing throughout Isaiah 7-12. We are told that a shoot will rise up from the stump of Jesse: perhaps this could be seen as referring to Hezekiah's attempt to regain Judah's independence and glory after the humiliating reign of his father Ahaz.

We are told that this "shoot" would be a faithful ruler who would judge in righteousness and who would strike down the wicked. All of these descriptions could be seen as relating to Hezekiah throughout his reign and during Sennacherib's invasion. We are told that the "shoot" would bring about the restoration of the remnant, gather the outcasts of Israel, end hostilities between Israel and Judah, and subjugate the surrounding peoples. The overall biblical testimony found in Isaiah, II Kings, and II Chronicles all contain passages in which all of these things are attributed to Hezekiah in some way. The only thing that seemingly does not fit well into the historical situation during Hezekiah's reign is the idyllic picture of 11:6-9; yet when we consider Fee and Stuart's explanation of the prophetic perspective of chronological events,[152] this should not surprise us. Isaiah 11 simply is a prophecy about certain events during Hezekiah's reign, set against the background of the great eschatological future. Thus, Hezekiah's actions were viewed as glimpses of that future eschatological salvation of God.

VI. Final Comments

This analysis of Isaiah 7:14, its immediate context of Isaiah 7:13-25, and its larger context of Isaiah 7-12 has shown a number of things. First, the narrative and prophecies found in Isaiah 7-12 are firmly set within the historical setting of the Syro-Ephraimite Crisis and prophesy about the events that subsequently took place during the latter part of Judah in the eighth century BCE. Second, it has shown that Isaiah 7:14 is intimately connected to the other material found, first in 7:13-25, and also throughout Isaiah 7-12. Third, the three major themes found throughout Isaiah 7-12 are ones of (a) immediate

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[152] "It should be noted, of course, that some of the prophecies of the near future were set against the background of the great, eschatological future, and sometimes they seem to blend. The Bible regularly sees God's acts in temporal history in light of his overall plan for all of human history. Thus the temporal is to be seen in light of the eternal plan." Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for all Its Worth*, 182.

judgment of both Israel and Judah, (b) future salvation for the faithful remnant, and (c) the royal child-king being the one through whom YHWH will work to accomplish this. Given all of this: the historical context, the literary unity of Isaiah 7-12, and the three major themes found within Isaiah 7-12, the most logical candidate for the identity of the Immanuel child of 7:14 is none other than Hezekiah, for he was clearly the son of Ahaz who came to the throne and reigned during a time in Judah's history in which all of the events prophesied about in Isaiah 7-12 took place. We know this because of what is recorded in both II Kings 18-20 and Isaiah 36-39. This thesis will eventually argue that the larger literary structure of Proto-Isaiah shows that Isaiah 7-12 and 36-39 are set up a "literary bookends" that highlight Isaiah's prophecies in chapters 7-12 concerning Hezekiah and the fulfillment of those prophecies in chapters 36-39. Simply put, the literary structure of Proto-Isaiah confirms the identification of the Immanuel child of Isaiah 7:14 with the figure of Hezekiah. Nevertheless, there are admittedly some legitimate objections to identifying Hezekiah with the Immanuel child, most notably the chronological difficulties we encounter in II Kings. It is to these chronological difficulties that we will now turn in chapter three.