

**Isaiah Chapter 7, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes**  
**An Ancient Story of King Ahaz's Lack of Faith,**  
**and the Sign of a Child's Birth, "Immanuel," "God With Us"--**  
**a Story Relived and Embodied in the Birth of Jesus--**  
**Ahaz's Dreaded Enemies, Northern Israel and Syria, Will Disappear,**  
**But Israel Will Be Devastated by Assyria!<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>Slotki entitles **chapter 7** "Crisis of the Syro-Ephraimitish Invasion." He comments that "Isaiah brings to Ahaz a Divine message of assurance and a warning. The event described took place in the year 735-34 B.C.E." (P. 32)

Watts interprets the entirety of the **Book of Isaiah** as an ancient drama, a skillfully designed "play," similar to the Greek dramas, or plays, well known in ancient Greece, where public entertainment was taken very seriously. From **Wikipedia** (1/23/2018) we learn the following: The Greek drama was used "as a way of investigating the world they lived in, and what it meant to be human. The three genres of drama were:

1. **Comedy:** Theatrical comedy in ancient Greece is divided into three periods, Old, Middle, and New. "The most important Old Comic dramatist is Aristophanes. Born in 446 B.C.E., his works, with their pungent political satire and abundance of sexual and off-color humor dealing with defecation, urination and flatulence, and to a lesser extent vomiting and other body functions, effectively define the genre today. Aristophanes lampooned the most important personalities and institutions of his day, as can be seen, for example, in his buffoonish portrayal of Socrates in 'The Clouds,' and in his racy anti-war farce 'Lysistrata.' He was one of a large number of comic poets working in Athens in the late 5th century."
2. **Satyr Plays:** "an ancient Greek form of tragicomedy, similar in spirit to the bawdy satire of burlesque. They featured choruses of satyrs--pleasantly rural or pastoral deities in Greek mythology having certain characteristics of a horse or goat and fond of Dionysian, sensual revelry. They were based on Greek mythology, and were rife with mock drunkenness, brazen sexuality (including phallic props), pranks, sight gags, and general merriment."
3. **Tragedy:** "reached its most significant form in Athens in the 5th century B.C.E., the works of which are sometimes called Attic tragedy. Greek tragedy is widely believed to be an extension of the ancient rites carried out in honor of Dionysus, and it heavily influenced the theatre of Ancient Rome and the Renaissance. Tragic plots were most often based upon myths from the oral traditions of archaic epics. In tragic theater, however, these narratives were presented by actors. The most acclaimed Greek tragedians are Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides."

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Watts divides the entire **Book of Isaiah** into twelve acts with varying number of scenes, and holds that passages are spoken by differing actors, including Isaiah and YHWH, or sung by choruses. This view is combined with his excellent work in dealing with the Hebrew text. Few students of the **Book of Isaiah** have followed him in this overall view of the book as theatrical drama. But we think his view merits study, just as we hold that the **Book of Job** was probably written as a drama for ancient Israel.

Watts entitles **chapters 7-14** “The Gently Flowing Waters.” He comments that these chapters “are designated as the era of Ahaz by the mention of his name in **7:1** and the notice of his death in **14:28**. This act of the drama takes place for the most part in periods of crisis during [Ahaz’s] reign. The primary issue deals with the question of Jerusalem’s and the dynasty’s survival during the crucial period when Israel was losing both.” Watts divides these chapters as follows:

Scene 1, “Of Sons and Signs,” (**7:1-9:6**<sup>Heb</sup> **7**<sup>Eng</sup>), which “tells of the Syro-Ephraimite war (734 B.C.E.) and the Assyrian intervention.

Scene 2, “A Word against Jacob” (**9:7**<sup>Heb</sup> / **8**<sup>Eng</sup>-**10:23**), which “describes the siege and fall of Samaria to the Assyrians (724-721 B.C.E.)

Scene 3, “Do Not Fear, You Jerusalemites” (**10:24-12:6**) in which “Yahweh guarantees Zion’s future (720 B.C.E.).

Scene 4, “Burden: Babylon” (**13:1-14:32**), which concerns the temporarily successful revolt against the oppressor.

He comments that “Throughout, the pressure of Assyrian expansion makes itself felt...With change—God-willed change—all about, some things remain firm. Jerusalem as the place where people can go to worship Yahweh is still in place.

“The conditions for the survival of Jerusalem, of Judah, and of the Davidic house are exemplified in Ahaz. The Assyrian, not the Davidic king, has been called to political rule. Ahaz understood the political realities. He was called to adapt himself to the changing times. [Where is anything like this said in the text?] He submits to be Assyria’s loyal vassal. But in this he is also called to remain true in faith to Yahweh and His purposes. He is not perfect in these respects, as the account in **2 Kings** makes clear. But his conduct is such that his son can be crowned king in Jerusalem with great ceremony and high hope...Jeroboam’s throne [in Northern Israel] and Ben-Hadad’s throne [in Aram / Syria] had not survived. Ahaz was able to pass on his royal status to Hezekiah after a reign in relative peace.

“Scene 4 pronounces Yahweh’s judgment on the active rebellion of Merodach-Baladan in Babylon. This is not God’s will for this age, and not an example for Israel to follow.” (Pp. 78-79)

Watts comments that **7:1-9:6**<sup>Heb</sup> / **7**<sup>Eng</sup> “is a virtual tapestry of interwoven motifs. The entire section deals with ‘sons’ and ‘signs.’ ‘Sons’ appear in **7:1, 3, 6, 14; 8:3-4,**

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**18; 9:5-6<sup>Heb</sup> 6-7<sup>Eng</sup>.**” (P. 84)

He adds that **verses 1-2** “are the first direct historical narrative in [**The Book of Isaiah**]. The change in syntax [the way in which words are put together] to the use of imperfects with *waw*-consecutive in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person marks the change.

Motyer entitles **7:1-11:16** “The King and his people.” He states that “The question mark put against the doctrine of hope by **chapter 5** was erased by Isaiah’s own experience. His sin was as the sin of the people (**6:5**). If the Lord dealt with his sin, will He not deal with theirs? Hope is restored (**6:13b**). Isaiah proceeds now to work this out. First, the moment of decision has come...Secondly, membership of the people of the Lord must now be evidenced by personal decision and commitment. It is not a matter of nationality. In these chapters the doctrine of the believing remnant flowers (compare **8:9-22**). Thirdly, the dying kingship of Uzziah (**6:1**) provides the foil for the hope to come: David’s house is sinking fast but the promised King will come (**9:1-7; 11:1-16**).” (P. 80)

But we wonder, Is Isaiah concerned with “doctrines,” like a theologian debating different ideas? We think Motyer’s view of **Isaiah** in this respect at least, is anachronistic.

Motyer entitles **7:1-9:7<sup>Heb</sup> / 6<sup>Eng</sup>** “The word to Judah,” and entitles **7:1-17** “The moment of decision.” He comments on **verses 1-17** that “For Isaiah, faith in the Lord’s promises was a practical way of life for the here-and-now and it was as much a national policy as an individual exercise...For Judah the moment of decision was about to come. At this crux Isaiah confronted Ahaz.” (P. 80)

Oswalt entitles **7:1-9:7<sup>Heb</sup> / 6<sup>Eng</sup>** “Children, Signs of God’s Presence.” We think this is an excellent title for this section, as the role of children with their names plays such an important role.

He comments that “**Chapters 7-39** are united around the theme of trust. This theme is developed by contrast, the contrast between trust in the nations and trust in God. Whereas trust in the nations will lead to desolation (**chapter 34**), trust in God will lead to abundance (**chapter 35**)...

“**Chapters 7-12** provide a historical introduction to the unit. Faced with the threats of Syria and Northern Israel, Ahaz had an opportunity to trust God for deliverance. Instead he trusted Assyria, his worst enemy. The result, as Isaiah predicted, was that Assyria herself overran the land. But that could not alter God’s ultimate plan. Assyria was but a tool in His hand, and out of the destruction which she would precipitate would emerge a larger opportunity for God to demonstrate Himself trustworthy: the restoration from captivity.

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“If ever Israel is to become the servant nation, through whom God chose to manifest Himself to the world (**2:2-5; 12:4-6; 43:8-21; 60:1-3**), then the most basic truth she must learn is that God can be trusted, whereas the nations cannot. If she continues to refuse dependence upon God, while attempting to depend on the nations, then she has neither message nor hope. But if she has indeed encountered a God Who is greater than all the nations combined and Who can, in fact, be depended upon in every situation, then she has something to declare...

“This is the issue introduced in **chapter 7** and carried on through **chapter 39**: Will Israel recognize that to depend upon the nations is to lose her distinct mission to them, whereas refusal to depend upon them is to become a blessing to them? Until a person or a nation is convinced of God’s complete trustworthiness, they cannot lay aside the lust for their own security and become God’s servant.” (Pp. 193-94)

Oswalt continues: “One of the emphases which ties the segment [**7:1-9:7** <sup>Heb</sup> / **6** <sup>Eng</sup>] together is the use of children, with Shear-jashub [‘A Remnant Will Return’] in **7:3**; Immanuel [‘God With Us’] in **7:14; 8:8, (10)**; Maher-shalal-hash-baz [‘Quick-to-the-Plunder; Swift to the Spoil’] in **8:3**; Isaiah’s children in **8:18**; and the royal child in **9:5** <sup>Heb</sup> / **6** <sup>Eng</sup>. Over against the machinations of the nations stand a group of children, helpless and innocent. Yet in their innocence is a power which causes Isaiah to believe that right and justice are the great issues, not force and trickery. In this light the thought seems to move from the folly of not trusting (**7:1-8:22**) to the reason for trust (**8:23-9:6** <sup>Heb</sup> **9:1-7** <sup>Eng</sup>); strength is weakness; weakness is strength...

“The development of the thought is by continuation, that is, with each segment leading into the next. First is the occasion of the entire subdivision: the Syro-Ephraimite threat, with Ahaz’s refusal to commit himself to God (**verses 1-9, 10-12**). This results in Isaiah’s diatribe against Ahaz and the announcement of a much greater threat—Assyria (**7:13-25; 8:1-10**). From Ahaz’s point of view Syria and Ephraim constitute a major threat, but from God’s point of view they are negligible and need not occupy the king’s time.

“Following **8:10** is what appears to be wider reflection on the whole incident and its causes. There has been too much attention to secondary causes—conspiracies, and not enough attention to the first cause—God (**8:11-15**). Until a change occurs, all the attempts to find guidance and deliverance will find only darkness and despair (**verses 16-22**). But (as with **6:13**) God is not content for darkness and despair to reign. If His people will change and see His light, then they can be delivered from their enemies by a child (**8:23-9:6** <sup>Heb</sup> / **9:1-7** <sup>Eng</sup>).” (Pp. 195-6)

Ortlund entitles **7:1-9:7** “Grace—through Judgment—for Judah.” He comments that “Though King Ahaz brings Assyrian oppression upon his nation, God promises a miraculous child who will rule forever from the throne of David. In the face of human failure, the ‘zeal of [YHWH] of hosts’ alone will accomplish this.” (P. 1252)

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Alexander comments that in **chapter 7** there “begins a series of connected prophecies (**chapters 7-12**), belonging to the reign of Ahaz, and relating in general to the same great subjects, the deliverance of Judah from Syria and Israel, its subsequent subjection to Assyria and other foreign powers, the final destruction of its enemies, the advent of Messiah, and the nature of his kingdom...

“**[7:1-16]** contains a promise of deliverance from Syria and Israel, and **verses 17-25** a threatening of worse evils to be brought upon Judah by the Assyrians in whom they trusted.

“The chapter begins with a brief historical statement of the invasion of Judah by Rezin and Pekah, and of the fear which it excited, to relieve which Isaiah is commissioned to meet Ahaz in a public place, and to assure him that there is nothing more to fear from the invading powers, that their evil design cannot be accomplished, that one of them is soon to perish, and that in the mean time both are to remain without enlargement, **verses 1-9**.

“Seeing the king to be incredulous, the prophet invites him to assure himself by choosing any sign or pledge of the event, which he refuses to do, under the pretext of confidence in God, but is charged with unbelief by the Prophet, who nevertheless renews the promise of deliverance in a symbolical form, and in connection with a prophecy of the miraculous conception and nativity of Christ, both as a pledge of the event, and as a measure of the time in which it is to take place, **verses 10-16**.

“To this assurance of immediate deliverance, he adds a threatening of ulterior evils, to arise from the Assyrian protection which the king preferred to that of God, to wit, the loss of independence, the successive domination of foreign powers, the harassing and predatory occupation of the land by strangers, the removal of its people, the neglect of the tillage, and the transformation of its choicest vineyards, fields, and gardens, into wastes or pastures, **verses 17-25**.” (Pp. 155-56)

Alexander, of course, writes from a Christian standpoint; the words “Messiah” and “Christ” are not found in the passage, and Alexander has to go to great lengths in seeking to prove his view, based on its quotation in **Matthew’s** story of the birth of Jesus (pages 166-73). There can be no doubt that Matthew quotes **Isaiah 7:14** as having been fulfilled in the conception and birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary. But there is great disagreement as to whether or not this was the original meaning of the passage.

Kaiser entitles **7:1-9** “The Hour of Faith,” and comments that “The section **7:1-17** is clearly marked off from **chapter 6** by the new beginning in **verse 1** and the transition from a first-person to a third-person narrative which is connected with it...

“The account in **7:1-9** with its conclusion in **verse 9** is directed towards the reader. Thus it seems to leave unanswered the question how king Ahaz reacted to the

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Divine message. The narrator of **7:10-17** sought to supply this lack by using the instance of the rejection of the sign as an example of the failure of the house of David and drew the consequences of this along the lines of **verse 9b**...

“Chronologically it belongs to the beginning of the so-called Syro-Ephraimite war of the years 734-732 B.C.E., about which we are informed by Assyrian accounts and above all by **2 Kings 16:5ff.; 2 Chronicles 28:5ff.**” (Pp. 136-37)

Kaiser adds that “The reader would know that because Jerusalem was encircled by the combined armies of king Rezin of Aram-Damascus and king Pekah of Israel, and had lost Judah’s only port at Elath on the Gulf of Akabah, king Ahaz resolved to offer his submission to the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser and to purchase his intervention in the war by a large amount of tribute...

“The narrator rightly recognized that this action contained within it the germ of the downfall of the kingdom of Judah, since in future [times] the house of David was no longer able to escape permanent vassalship, and paid for the attempt to shake off the yoke of the neo-Babylonian empire, imposed on it instead of that of Assyria, with the loss of the throne and the downfall of the kingdom, thus bringing disaster to the people...

“Had the kings of the house of David trusted only in their God instead of involving themselves in political activity, the dynasty would have endured, in accordance with the promise given to it by the prophet Nathan. Compare **2 Samuel 7:16**,

And your house and your kingdom will be made sure to long-lasting time before  
you;  
your throne will be established to long-lasting time!

“Had Yahweh used the prophet Isaiah to tell king Hezekiah, who had hoped for His help, not to fear, and prophesied that the Assyrian army would go away (**2 Kings 19:6-7**), He would certainly also have made use of Isaiah to warn Ahaz against what was to prove such a disastrous step, namely of submitting to the king of Assyria. So the unknown narrator told his story in complete confidence that he was telling his people the truth about the real background to the downfall of the kingdom.” (Pp. 145-46)

Kaiser comments on **verses 1-3** that “As the house of David and the people lost heart at the news of the advance of the Aramaean army into the neighboring hills of Ephraim, and feared for their existence like trees shaking before the storm, Yahweh sent the prophet with his ominously named son Shear-yashubh, ‘only a remnant will return,’ to meet the king. He was to meet him at the very place where a good thirty years later the Assyrian general presented his demands for capitulation...

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“The request directed by Yahweh to the prophet that he should bring his son Shear-yashubh with him, which is not explained further, suggested to the reader that Yahweh can see the outcome of the encounter, and is aware of the consequences for the people and the dynasty: only a remnant will escape the final catastrophe to the kingdom...Thus the sign of the son is directed more, and in any case ultimately, to the reader than to the king.” (P. 146)

Slotki states that in **Isaiah 7** “Isaiah brings to Ahaz a Divine message of assurance and a warning. The event took place in the year 735-4 B.C.E. **Verses 1-3** contain an “Introduction to the message.” (P. 32)

<sup>2</sup>It is important that the student learns the background of the historical situation in the time of Ahaz, and for that purpose should study **2 Kings 14-16** and **2 Chronicles 28**.

Oswalt states, “What is unique to Hebrew prophecy is that it is revelation in the specific context of history, as here. It is not mystical or metaphysical, for those are merely speculative. Instead, history becomes the vehicle for a revelation which may thus be experienced and confirmed. To be sure, the event is not the sum total of the revelation. But the revelation is rooted in and grows out of history.” (P. 196)

In **Isaiah 7**, the Judean king Ahaz is warned not to fear the Aramean / Syrian and Israelite alliance. The invasion by the Aramean King Rezin and the northern Israelite King Pekah probably occurred in 735-34 B.C.E. These two kings were trying to force Ahaz of Judah to join in an alliance with them to oppose Assyria, but Ahaz was attempting to form a separate alliance with Assyria against these two enemy kingdoms to the north. Isaiah used his efforts to keep Ahaz from being afraid of the two northern kingdoms, and at the same time to refuse to form an alliance with the Assyrians, trusting solely in YHWH's power to deliver Judah from its enemies.

Oswalt comments that “The situation abounds with ironies: it was probably the encroachment of the Assyrian empire that prompted Syria and Israel to unite and to try to force Judah into a defensive coalition with them...Assyria hardly needed to be urged and paid a great sum to do what she had been planning to do all along.

“Furthermore, the real threat to Judah’s independence was not Syria and Israel, but Assyria, whom Ahaz was inviting into the affairs of the region. Yet Ahaz could not see the long-range issues. He could only see the short range, and he was to pay the full price for his short-sightedness.

“This decision to appeal to Assyria had spiritual implications as well as political ones, for Assyria’s ‘help’ could only be procured through a covenant with her. Such a covenant would involve the recognition of the Assyrian Gods and an admission of their Lordship. This is probably the significance of Ahaz’s journey to Damascus and the

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עֲלֵה רֶזִין מֶלֶךְ־אַרָם  
וּפֶקַח בֶּן־רִמְלִיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל  
יְרוּשָׁלַם לְמַלְחָמָה עֲלֵיהָ  
וְלֹא יָכֹל לְהִלָּחֵם עֲלֵיהָ:

And it happened<sup>3</sup> in (the) days of Ahaz, son of Yotham, son of Uzziyahu, King of Judah,<sup>4</sup>  
Rezin,<sup>5</sup> King of Aram, and Pekah, son of Remalyahu,<sup>6</sup> King of Israel,<sup>7</sup> went up

<sup>2</sup>(...continued)

redesign of the temple altar after a Syrian plan (**2 Kings 16:10-16; 2 Chronicles 28:22-24**). It is in this light that Isaiah's challenge to trust God becomes especially pointed for Ahaz. He must either commit himself to Assyria and, in effect, deny God, or he must commit himself to God and leave Assyria in Divine hands. We know which he chose, and all because of an attack which was doomed before it began!

<sup>3</sup>The opening word in **chapter 7**, וַיְהִי, "and it happened," occurs some 816 times in the **Hebrew Bible**. It seems a strange way to begin a document, וַיְהִי, wayehi (translated in the Greek by καὶ ἐγένετο, kai egeneto). But it is most probable that this was an idiom in Hebrew, something akin to the English "Once upon a time," as a form for beginning a story or writing. For example, the following books in the **Hebrew Bible** begin with this phrase: **Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, Esther, Ezekiel** and **Jonah**.

<sup>4</sup>Ortlund says that the time meant was "about 735 B.C.E." (P. 1252)

<sup>5</sup>Watts notes that רֶזִין means something like 'a spring.' But [Rahlf's] has "Raasson," and Assyrian sources suggest a reading of רֶזִין or רֶזִין meaning 'well-pleasing.'" (P. 85)

<sup>6</sup>Watts notes that where our Hebrew text spells the name רִמְלִיָּהוּ, Remalyahu, 1QIs<sup>a</sup> spells the name רִמְלִיָּה, Romalyah, here and in **verses 5** and **9**, but in **verse 4** spells the name רִמְלִיָּה, Remalyah. **Rahlf's** has Romeliou in **verses 1, 5** and **9**, omitting the name in **verse 4**.

<sup>7</sup>Gray comments that Rezin "was king of Damascus as early as 738, for he is mentioned by Tiglath-pileser in his annals of that year; but Pekah's accession must be placed later, for the king of Israel who paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser in 738 was

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(to) Jerusalem, for the war against it,<sup>8</sup>

and it (the enemy alliance) was not able<sup>9</sup> to make war (successfully) against it.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>(...continued)

Menahem, and between Menahem and Pekah intervened the reign of Pekahiah.” (P. 113)

<sup>8</sup>**English Standard Version Study Bible** has a map on p. 1253 detailing Syria and Israel’s attack on Judah. Its caption states, “As the Assyrian Empire expanded westward, Syria and Israel sought to compel Judah and the other nearby states to form an anti-Assyrian alliance. Judah refused, leading Syria, Israel, and perhaps Edom and Philistia to attack Judah (**2 Kings 15:29-37; 2 Chronicles 28:1-19**). Isaiah assured Ahaz that he needed only trust in God, Who would call upon Assyria to deal with Syria and Israel.”

<sup>9</sup>1QIs<sup>a</sup>, along with the Greek, Syriac and Latin Vulgate translations all read the plural verb יִכְלוּ, “they were (not) able,” an obvious correction of our Hebrew text which has the singular יָכַל, “he was not able.” Perhaps the Hebrew author was looking at the two kings acting in unison, as one person.

<sup>10</sup>In the parallel passage **1 Kings 16:5**, the sentence ends with “and they were not able to fight” with no stated object of the fighting. Slotki comments that “The city was indeed blockaded...but could not be taken.” (P. 32)

This passage takes us back into the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., in the years approximately 735 / 734 B.C.E., when the combined armies of Northern Israel and Aram / Syria invaded Judah to their south, and advanced all the way to Jerusalem, but were unable to conquer the city. These two nations had attempted unsuccessfully to get Judah to join their alliance, in an effort to stand against their mutual enemy to the east, Assyria, whose armies were threatening to conquer the countries to their west, which would include Syria and Northern Israel and Judah. Now they were trying to do by force what they had not been able to achieve through diplomacy. Compare the story as told in **2 Kings 16:5-9** especially **verse 5**, where this last phrase also occurs, but without the preposition עָלֶיהָ, “against it.” See also **2 Chronicles 28:5-21**, for the same story, told from a much more critical standpoint with reference to Ahaz.

Gray states that “The meaning of [the story in] **Kings** is clear: Rezin and Pekah reached Jerusalem and invested [surrounded] it, but were unable to proceed to actual assaults on the city: no sooner was the investment complete than the besiegers were called away. The meaning of **Isaiah** is the same, though it is more awkwardly expressed...The speedy withdrawal from Jerusalem may be attributed to news having reached the besiegers that the Assyrians were advancing westwards.” (P. 113)

Slotki comments on **verse 1** that “The apparently unnecessary genealogy is in fact an explanation why God has shown consideration to a wicked king like Ahaz. It

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7.2<sup>11</sup> וַיִּגְדַּר לְבַיִת דָּוִד לֵאמֹר

נָחָה אֶרֶם עַל-אֶפְרַיִם

וַיִּנֶּע לְבָבוֹ וּלְבַב עַמּוֹ

כְּנוֹעַ עֲצִי-יָעַר מִפְּנֵי-רֹחַ:

And it was declared to (the) house of David,<sup>12</sup> saying,

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<sup>10</sup>(...continued)

states in effect that, though he is unworthy of Divine help, the merit of his fathers secures that aid for him.” (P. 32)

<sup>11</sup>Gray entitles **verses 2-16** “Isaiah’s interview with Ahaz. ‘Immanuel.’”

He comments that “At a time when news has reached Jerusalem of the union of the Syrians with the Ephraimites at two or three days distance from Jerusalem, and the court and people are in great alarm, Isaiah is commanded by Yahweh to take with him his son Shear-yashubh, whose name signified ‘A Remnant shall return,’ and to meet Ahaz outside the city in the ‘Fuller’s Field Road.’ He is to exhort the king to keep calm, and to assure him that Syria and Ephraim possess no power to do Judah serious mischief, or to carry out their plan of taking Jerusalem and overthrowing the Davidic dynasty in favor of an outsider (probably a Syrian)...

“Lack of trust in Yahweh...would surely, lead to Judah’s undoing. In a further appeal, Ahaz is offered any sign (of Yahweh’s sufficiency) that he likes to choose, but he declines the offer. Thereupon Isaiah announces that Yahweh nevertheless will (hereafter) give a sign of His Own choosing...

“Isaiah goes on to predict (**verse 16**) that within two or three years Ephraim and Syria will be a land of ruins...

“In this passage much is obscure, but two things are clear: Isaiah’s contemptuous disbelief in the power of the allied armies of Syria and Israel, and his profound belief in Yahweh. In both respects he differs from king and people, who fear the foe and have no sustaining confidence in Yahweh.” (P. 115)

<sup>12</sup>Oswalt comments that “The phrase *house of David* is an expression for the king and his courtiers much like ‘the White House’ is for the president of the United States and his staff. But there may also be a hint of irony in its use here (as in **verse 13**). It is *David’s* house which is terrified. How are the mighty fallen!” (P. 198)

Alexander states that the phrase means “the court, the royal family, of Judah.” (P. 157)

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Aram rested / settled down<sup>13</sup> upon Ephraim!<sup>14</sup>

And his (Ahaz's) heart quivered, and his people's (the kingdom of Judah's) heart,

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<sup>12</sup>(...continued)

Ortlund comments that "In God's covenant with David [Ahaz's] forefather, Ahaz has clear warrant for confidence in God's protective care (compare **2 Samuel 7:8-17; Psalm 89:3-4, 19-34**)." (P. 1252)

Motyer comments that "Ahaz is the 'house of David,' and what he now does will be decisive for the future of the dynasty." (P. 81)

Slotki observes that "The king's name is not mentioned. A wicked man, declares a Rabbinic tradition, does not deserve the honor of being named." (P. 32)

<sup>13</sup>The verb here, נָחַח, **nachah**, means "rested," or "settled down." It is translated by **Rahfs** as συνεφώνησεν, "they agreed." Oswalt translates by "lodged," and comments that "So the Hebrew says literally 'Aram has settled down upon Ephraim,' a usage not paralleled elsewhere in the **Old Testament**. But the sense is evidently of united action." (P. 192)

Watts notes that the verb "should be understood here in the sense of 'occupied.'" (P. 86)

We take it to mean that Aram and Ephraim (Northern Israel) have joined forces against Judah, with Aram in the "driver's seat," having taken control of their joint action—thus the singular verb instead of the plural.

Oswalt holds that what is referred to here is "a successful campaign against outlying parts of Judah. Ahaz had been defeated by both Syria and Israel, perhaps separately, and had suffered great losses (**2 Chronicles 28:5-8**). Now, if not before, the two armies are acting in concert and moving against Jerusalem. The result is the almost total immobilization of the will depicted by the prophet in the figure of leaves shaken in the wind." (P. 198)

Motyer comments that "The ten-year-old alliance would not as such constitute news or a cause of panic, but intelligence reports of large-scale troop movements in Israel ('the place is swarming with them') would and did. Another invasion was impending before which king and people panicked." (P. 81)

<sup>14</sup>Slotki says concerning Isaiah's use of the name Ephraim for Northern Israel, that "The Kingdom of Israel consisting of the Ten Tribes was so named on account of its first king, Jeroboam, who was an Ephraimite." (P. 33)

like trees of a forest waver before a wind.<sup>15</sup>

7.3<sup>16</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ

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<sup>15</sup>Gray sums up **verse 2** by saying, “News comes to the court in Jerusalem that the plans of Syria and Ephraim (**verse 5**) for attacking Jerusalem and overthrowing the Davidic dynasty (**verses 5, 6**) are now taking practical and menacing effect. The entire might of Syria has settled for the moment in the country of its allies, the Ephraimites; the Syrian army has covered more than half the distance between Damascus and Jerusalem, and is within two or three days’ march of its goal. King and people quail [fear, wanting to flee] at the news, like trees ending before the wind...”

“The substitution of an alien for the reigning king (**verse 6**) would involve loss of place and power for the entire *house* or entourage (compare, for example, **2 Samuel 9**)...of the king. They therefore, and not Ahaz alone, are described as recipients of the news.” (Pp. 115-16)

Ortlund notes that “The weakness of national character is revealed.” (P. 1242)

What a metaphor this is! The heart of the king Ahaz, and the hearts of his people Judah (the house of David, or the people of Judah), were shaking, wavering, like the leaves of trees in the wind.

Has that ever happened to you? For example in a time of economic recession, with threats of a worldwide depression, or in a time when your country was apparently being defeated by an enemy? It isn’t that Ahaz and his people are cowards—it is that they are deeply uncertain; their faith has been shaken. As a result, they don’t know what to do—and they are afraid that everything they hold dear is about to be taken away from them by enemy armies.

When such things occur, we reel with that same kind of uncertainty and fear—our homes and our futures look like they may be wiped out—and we don’t know what steps to take, or what to do. We lie awake at night, we can’t sleep, the future we have planned is slipping away from us, and we are afraid. Can you identify with that? Is this ancient story still relevant today? Does not such a reaction to historical events reveal a lack of faith in God?

<sup>16</sup>Gray comments on **verses 3-9** that “Yahweh commands Isaiah to interview Ahaz outside the city, and to assure him that he has no cause for fear; for the plans of the allied powers will be frustrated.” (P. 116)

Watts entitles this section “Keep Calm and Steady.” He comments that “The episode is a clear unit. It narrates God’s instructions to Isaiah and Isaiah’s word given in obedience to the instruction...”

“The use of the prophetic narrative at this point in the [**Book of Isaiah**] gives the work its first specific historical foundation. By naming the prophet, his son, and the

(continued...)

צֵא־נָא לִקְרֹאת אֲחִיז  
 אֶתְּהָ וּשְׂאֵר יִשׁוּב בְּנֶךְ  
 אֶל־קִצֵּה תַעֲלֵת הַבְּרֵכָה הָעֲלִיּוֹנָה  
 אֶל־מִסְלַת שְׂדֵה כּוֹבֵס:

And YHWH said<sup>17</sup> to Isaiah,<sup>18</sup>  
 Go now to meet Ahaz,  
 you and Shear Yashubh<sup>19</sup> your son,

<sup>16</sup>(...continued)

king; giving the exact location of the meeting; and by describing the historical circumstances, the earthly historical setting is unequivocally presented. God's decisions communicated to 'heavens and earth' in **chapter 1** and experienced in the heavenly King's court by the prophet in **chapter 6** are communicated to historical earthly rulers to influence political decisions at a very specific time." (P. 90)

<sup>17</sup>Watts notes that the opening verb of this sentence, וַיֹּאמֶר, "and He said..." "places the narrative in the setting and time just described" i.e., in **verses 1-2**. (P. 89)

<sup>18</sup>Watts observes that "This is the first appearance of the prophet by name, except in the superscriptions, **1:1** and **2:1**. Isaiah receives Divine instruction to confront Ahaz with a personal message from Yahweh in the classic tradition of prophetic narrative in the **Old Testament**." (P. 90)

<sup>19</sup>The name "Shear-Yashubh" means "A Remnant Shall Return."

Slotki holds that this means a remnant shall return "to the true worship of God."

We think the name implies that Judah will go into captivity, and that only a remnant of the captured people will return to their former home.

Gray states that the name "is at once a warning and a promise: a large part of the whole will perish and not return, but the remnant will return and be saved...The larger part of 'the whole house of Israel,' the northern kingdom, will certainly perish; but the remnant, Judah, may return to Yahweh and be saved...In any case we must assume that Isaiah takes his son, whose name was a sign...because he knows that King Ahaz when he sees the boy will recall his name and its significance." (Pp. 116-17)

Yes, but Isaiah takes along his son because of YHWH's command, not because of his wanting to influence Ahaz by so doing.

(continued...)

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<sup>19</sup>(...continued)

Kaiser translates by “Only a remnant will return,” but there is no “only” in the name. He comments that “the name of the son points beyond the apparently open situation in which a decision is to be made, presupposed by **verse 9b**, to a time in which only a remnant of the people remains...[Kaiser, believing that this material in **chapter 7** was written following the fall of Judah to Babylon, holds that this sign-name] suggests that in fact the dynasty had already fallen; in turn that would mean that the narrative is concerned with answering the twofold question why the chosen dynasty had left the stage of history, involving the people in a catastrophe from which only a remnant escaped as the sole basis for the future and what was the hope of the survivors...

“The people who had been conquered and robbed of their statehood had had the weapons taken out of their hand. In themselves they had no possibility of protecting themselves against the supremacy of the world-empire to whom they had fallen prey. They could not but be still, externally remain passive and inwardly trust in the help of the God Who in the defeat of the people had proved to be the One taking vengeance on unbelief.” (Pp. 140-41)

We wonder why Kaiser holds this view—is it because he does not believe in the possibility of predictive prophecy, which the strange name of Isaiah’s son exemplifies?

Oswalt comments on the phrase Shear-yashubh, that “Isaiah was commanded to take his son with him as he went out to meet Ahaz. The son’s name means ‘a remnant will return’ [and for a prophet to give his son such a name, and take him with him in such an important visit was bound to have implications that would not be missed by Ahaz]. Evidently that name was to have significance for Ahaz, but it is never specified what that significance was...[Are] the implications of the name...positive or negative? Did Isaiah mean to emphasize that although there would be destruction, that destruction would not be total? Or did he mean to say that the coming destruction would be so devastating as to leave but a remnant?...

“The child was named before this event, suggesting that already, probably out of his experience in the temple, Isaiah foresaw a destruction which would leave but a remnant...The emphatic position of ‘remnant’(*Shear*) in the name suggests that ‘only a remnant’ is intended. Thus the essential message of the name is negative, but it is not unremittingly so. This ambiguity is precisely in keeping with Isaiah’s overall message as it is contained in the present **book**. It is neither judgment only or salvation only.” (P. 199)

“But what would the name have suggested to Ahaz? If it is true that Ahaz had already suffered defeat at the hands of Syria and Israel, then it is entirely possible that he now dreaded total annihilation. To that fear Isaiah’s son’s name says, ‘No, there will be a remnant of Judah (and the house of David) preserved from destruction. You may believe that the promised threat is bootless.’ (P. 200)

(continued...)

to (the) end of the water-course of the upper pool,<sup>20</sup>  
to (the) highway (to) washer's field.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>(...continued)

Ortlund likewise notes that this unusual name “suggests both judgment (God’s people will be reduced to a remnant) and grace (that remnant will return).” (P. 1252) Compare **Isaiah 10:20-22**,

- 20 And it will happen on that day,  
a remnant of Israel will not be added again;  
and (the) house of Jacob’s escaped remnant (synonym)  
(will not) support itself upon its slayer.
- 21 A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob,  
to El Gibbor / Supreme God a Mighty Man.
- 22 Because if your people, Israel, shall be  
like sand of the sea,  
a remnant will return in it...

Motyer states that Isaiah’s son “Shear-Yashubh was thus an ‘acted oracle,’ a visual aid bringing home the word of God that much more clearly.” (P. 81)

Watts observes that “The practice of naming a child as a prophetic symbol is also documented in **Hosea 1:6, 9** and **Isaiah 8:3**. He is already old enough to accompany his father and is a witness to Isaiah’s participation in prophecy for some time. The name may be viewed positively or negatively: ‘*only* a remnant shall return,’ or ‘*at least* a remnant shall return.’ It may assure a physical return from battle or captivity, or it may be understood to imply ‘repentance’ as in ‘returning to God.’ The theme is important in the [**Book**] of **Isaiah**. It appeared in **6:12-13**. It will appear again in **10:20-23** and is a fundamental presupposition for **chapters 40-66**.” (Pp. 90-91)

<sup>20</sup>Slotki comments that the “upper pool” is “identified by many...with Birket el-Mamilla, about half a mile to the west of Jerusalem.” (P. 33)

“Mamilla Pool is one of several ancient reservoirs that supplied water to inhabitants of the Old City of Jerusalem. It is located outside the walls of the Old City, about 700 yards northwest of the Jaffa Gate, and is connected by an underground channel to Hezekiah’s Pool in the Christian Quarter of the Old City (**Wikipedia**, 7/8/2014).

<sup>21</sup>Watts translates by “the Washermen’s Field.” He states that “*The highway of the Washermen’s Field* is the same place mentioned in **Isaiah 36:2 / 2 Kings 18:17** outside the walls where the Assyrian officer stood to shout his message to the city...

“The building of the *conduit of the upper pool* was undoubtedly part of military preparations to maintain supplies of water for the siege that was expected...The king’s presence there reflected his concern for the city’s military posture at that critical

(continued...)

<sup>21</sup>(...continued)  
 juncture.” (Pp. 91-92)

Oswalt comments that “Without water a city could not hope to endure a siege for more than a few days. The location of this pool is unknown. It has been variously located on the north, west, and south where pools are known to have existed. M. Burrows places it at the confluence of the Kidron and Tyropoean valleys [near the location of the pool of Siloam]. This would accord well with what is known of the location of the Fuller’s Field and would be appropriate for the Rabshaqeh (**36:2**), who had come up from Lachish in the south[west].” (P. 199)

Alexander states that “These now [in 1875] obscure locations [it is still true in 2014]...is an incidental proof of authenticity, which no later writer would or could have forged [an overstatement; writers of fiction both can and do make similar statements!]. The Upper Pool, which has been placed by different writers upon almost every side of Jerusalem, is identified by Robinson and Smith [Edward Robinson, 1794-1863, widely known for his work in Palestinian archaeology] with a large tank at the head of the Valley of Hinnom...

“The Fuller’s Field was of course without [outside] the city, and the highway or causeway mentioned may have led either to it or along it, so as to divide it from the aqueduct...

“The command to take his son with him might be regarded merely as an incidental circumstance, but for the fact that the name Shear-yashubh is significant, and as we may suppose it to have been already known, and the people were familiar with the practice of conveying instruction in this form, the very sight of the child would perhaps suggest a prophecy, or recall one previously uttered, or at least prepare the mind for one to come.” (Pp. 158-59)

<sup>22</sup>Watts comments on **verse 4** that “The message is one of encouragement, of support for the king and his policy...

“It is plain that Ahaz maintained a policy of loyalty to Assyria, while his enemies tried to force his participation in a rebellion against Assyria. God’s message through Isaiah urges him to remain firm in this resolve.” (P. 92)

But there is far more than just encouragement in the message, and we see no indication of God’s urging Ahaz to continue to pursue his loyalty to Assyria.

As Gray puts it, “Isaiah is to say to Ahaz: *See to it that you keep quiet*, free from agitation, not like trees trembling in the wind (**verse 2**); have no fear of Syria and Ephraim, who, worn out with their previous internecine warfare, have little power of mischief left, but are like the *stumps of fire brands* now *smouldering* before they finally grow cold and harmless. Smoke, not fire, is all that the latest news means...Isaiah

(continued...)



הַשְׁמֵר וְהַשְׁקֵט  
 אֶל-תִּירָא  
 וּלְבַבְךָ אֶל-יְיָ  
 מִזְשֵׁי זַנְבוֹת הָאוֹדִים הָעֲשֵׂנִים הָאֵלֹהִים

<sup>22</sup>(...continued)

condemns two things in Ahaz: his fear, for it is needless; his faith in material

resources—here typified by a secure water supply in time of siege; the only faith that will secure the real solidity of the state is faith in Yahweh (**verse 9**)...

“The point of view is essentially the same years later, and expressed in part by the same terms.” (P. 118) See:

**Isaiah 30:15-16,**

- 15 Because in this way my Lord YHWH, Set-apart One of Israel, spoke:  
 In returning and rest / quietness you (plural) will be saved / delivered;  
 in being quiet and in trust will be your strength;  
 and you were not willing.
- 16 And you said, No—because upon horse(s) we will flee;  
 for this reason you will flee,  
 and (you said), Upon a swift (horse) we will ride;  
 for this reason your pursuers will be swift(er)!

We add that it seems that Ahaz’s faith in material resources included his dependence on Assyria, just as this later passage is forbidding reliance upon horses. What do you think? Do you agree with Watts at this point?

Watts defends his position by stating that “The message is often seen as an attempt to dissuade Ahaz from calling for the Assyrians. This interpretation comes from the words of **2 Kings** and **2 Chronicles** which accuse Ahaz of asking the Assyrians for help. But there is no reference to this possibility in **Isaiah**. Here the issue is: shall Ahaz give in to to Rezin’s planned conspiracy to cooperate against Assyria or remain firm in his policy of cooperation with the Assyrian? Isaiah’s word urges him not to fear the invaders. The conspiracy will not succeed. They will not survive.” (P. 93)

We think Isaiah’s word to Ahaz is much broader than this—it is, Don’t fear the invaders, and don’t fear Assyria or any other power. Fear and trust YHWH alone. Do you think Isaiah’s advice is contrary to that of **2 Kings** and **2 Chronicles**? Where in **Isaiah** is there anything said concerning Ahaz’s cooperating with Assyria?

בְּחָרִי-אֶף רָצִין וְאָרַם וּבֶן-רִמְלִיהוּ:

And you shall say to him,

Be guarded, and show quietness;<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Watts translates by “take hold of yourself and be calm.” (P. 89).

Motyer says this statement means “Be careful to do nothing.” He comments that “Ahaz was under pressure from his advisers to play the astute politician by allying himself with Assyria against the threat of the northern powers (**2 Kings 16:7-9**). But Isaiah’s word was equally astute: Aram and Ephraim were indeed spent forces, *smouldering stubs*. Their combined might was as nothing compared to Assyria and they would soon be stamped out and no longer a threat. Beyond that, the issue was not one of politics but one of faith. If only Ahaz could be persuaded to do nothing, to keep clear of compromising alliances, the Lord could be trusted to keep His promises to David and to deal with the Assyrian threat (as indeed He ultimately did; see **37:36-38**). The issue is as clear-cut as that: will Ahaz seek salvation by works (politics, alliances) or by simple trust in Divine promises?” (Pp. 81-82)

Motyer makes the whole matter clear-cut and simple. Just trust in Divine promises, and do nothing—no politics, no alliances. But in fact, refusing to enter into alliances is a political move; and the business of the city (that what ‘politics’ is) / state / nation has to be taken care of.

Kaiser comments that “Here the Divine cooperation which manifests itself as such in the outcome of the battle has become the sole working of God which man has to go along with passively, by trusting Him.” (P. 142) Compare:

### **Deuteronomy 1:29-30,**

- 29 And I said to you people, you shall not fear,  
and you shall not be afraid of them!  
30 YHWH your God is the One going / walking before you;  
He will fight for you,  
according to everything which He did with you in Egypt, in your eyes.

### **2 Chronicles 20:15, 20, 22-24,**

- 15 And he (Yehaziel) said, Pay attention / listen, all Judah,  
and inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the King, Jehoshaphat:  
In this way YHWH spoke to you people,  
You shall not be afraid, and you shall not be dismayed,  
from before this great horde;  
because the battle is not yours,  
but belongs to God!

(continued...)

do not be afraid;

and your heart shall not be timid<sup>24</sup>

because of these two stumps of smoking fire-sticks—<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>(...continued)

- 20 And they arose early in the morning, and they went forth to (the) Teqoa wilderness;  
and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and he said,  
Hear / listen to me Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem:  
believe / trust in the YHWH your God, and you will be made firm;  
believe in your prophets, and you will be caused to thrive!
- 22 And at (the) time they began with a ringing-cry and praise,  
YHWH gave / sent those lying in wait  
against children of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir,  
the ones coming to Judah,  
and they were struck / killed.
- 23 And (the) children of Ammon and Moab stood against Mount Seir's inhabitants,  
to ban / exterminate and to destroy;  
and when they finished against Seir's inhabitants,  
they helped, each one against his neighbor, for destruction.
- 24 And Judah came upon the watch-tower, to the wilderness,  
and they turned towards the horde and look at them—  
corpses, falling to the ground—  
and there was no escapee!

Kaiser states that “As long as **Isaiah 7** was seen as a narrative which originally... had been set down by the prophet Isaiah himself...the encounter between Ahaz and Isaiah by the fuller's field had to be seen as the moment of birth for the **Old Testament** concept of faith.” But Kaiser holds that instead, this story is the creation of a post-exilic author, who is dependent upon the teaching of the Deuteronomistic school where in fact the idea originated. Kaiser continues: “The present narrative does not come from the prophet Isaiah but is heavily influenced by Deuteronomistic theology, and presumably belongs only to the late sixth or early fifth century B.C.E.” (Pp. 142-43)

So Kaiser holds, but we see no real indications that this is the case, other than the desire to explain the text apart from any real predictive prophecy. Perhaps a post-exilic member of the “Isaiah school” edited the text, but we think it is impossible to date the entire text to such a later date, making it all no more than a “legend” created around Ahaz to explain what had caused the annihilation of Judah by Babylon.

<sup>24</sup>Watts translates by “as for your heart, do not soften (it).” (P. 89).

<sup>25</sup>Oswalt comments that “With a biting metaphor Isaiah shows Ahaz that he has nothing to fear from the kings of Israel and Syria. They are merely the smoking ends of sticks where a bonfire has been. The fire is gone and these are all that remain. It may

(continued...)

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<sup>25</sup>(...continued)

have been that Tiglath-pileser was already on the march and they would soon be called home to their own defense. But in any case, their tenure as forces in the affairs of the region was to be of very short duration. The glory of Ephraim and Syria was already gone and what remained of them was but the smoking ends of what had once been...

“What the two kings contemplated was not merely a punitive raid to bring Ahaz into line. Rather, it was a war of annexation, the conclusion of which would see a puppet king ruling the territory. Nevertheless, Ahaz need not panic or take heroic measures for defense. The same kind of words were addressed to Joshua when he faced the impossible task of succeeding Moses and leading the conquest of Canaan...See:

**Deuteronomy 31:7,**

And Moses called to Joshua, and he said to him in (the) eyes of all Israel:  
Be strong, and be stout,  
because you (singular) will come with this people  
into the land which YHWH swore to their fathers to give to them.  
And you shall cause them to inherit it!

**Joshua 1:6-9,** where YHWH speaks directly to Joshua:

- 6 Be strong, and be stout!  
Because you will cause this the people to inherit  
the land which I swore to their fathers to give to them.
- 7 Only, be strong, and be exceedingly stout,  
to keep to do according to all the teachings  
which Moses My servant commanded you;  
you shall not turn aside from them to the right or to the left,  
in order that you may be successful in every place where you will go.
- 8 This scroll of the teaching shall not depart from your mouth;  
and you shall meditate on it by day and by night,  
so that you will keep to do according to all that is written in it.  
Because then you will prosper in your way,  
and then you will be successful.
- 9 Have I not commanded you?  
Be strong and be stout--  
you shall not be frightened, and you shall not be dismayed!  
Because YHWH your God (is) with you,  
in every (place) where you will go!

“In that case (Joshua’s) as well as this one (Ahaz’s), the potential source of courage and confidence was in the awareness that whereas our understanding and strength are limited, the One Who is with us is limitless both in understanding and power. Thus, the outcome is not in the enemies’ hands; it is in the hands of God,

(continued...)

at the burning<sup>26</sup> anger of Rezin, and Aram, and Remalyahu's son.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>(...continued)

Whom we know and love. Such a realization, while not guaranteeing a favorable outcome, still takes the dread from it, with the result that we may be at our best.” (P. 200)

We wonder why Oswalt writes this last sentence. It is apparently his attempt to keep from giving too high of expectations to readers, who could assume that whenever they put their trust in God, they are certain of victory. Long experience has taught **Bible** believers that such military success is not always certain—in spite of the fact that some biblical passages such as **Psalm 91** teach it.

And as we study this material, we again realize that for the **Bible**, while YHWH is the Savior God, Who is working out His purposes of salvation, He is also the Judge, Who constantly visits humanity with judgment and punishment, with the harsh trials that humanity experiences, even when they have experienced His visitation in blessing.

Again we warn, Beware of putting God in a box, of claiming that If we do this, God will have to do that. God doesn't fit into our theological conclusions box. God is free, to act or not act, when and where He wills.

Alexander comments on this description of Ahaz's enemies as no more than “smoking fire-brands,” means that “the danger is over, that the fire is nearly quenched, that the enemies, who lately seemed like flaming firebrands of war, are now mere smoking ends of firebrands...The smoking remnant of a firebrand implies previous flame, if not a conflagration. This confirms the conclusion...that Judah had already been ravaged, and that the narrative in **Kings** and **Chronicles** are perfectly consistent and relate to the same subject...The hot fire of their anger was now turned to smoke and almost quenched.” (P. 159)

Ortlund notes on **verse 4** that “Defiance in the face of evil is called for by the faithfulness of God.” (P. 1252)

Yes—but wisdom teaches (we are thinking of **Ecclesiastes 3**) that there is a time for defiance, and there is also a time for compliance, for refusing to defy. Ahaz's defiance and inaction is in the face of an evil that is largely quenched, and no longer to be feared. But when Babylon had overcome Judah and Jerusalem, and carried them away into captivity, Jeremiah urged the people to cease the defiance, and instead to build homes and plant gardens, to get married and have children and grandchildren, and to pray for the welfare of Babylon, their captor, assuring them that Babylon's welfare would also mean their welfare—see **Jeremiah 29:1-7**.

What do you think? Have you been taught so rigid a system of religious ethics that the situation, the time and the circumstances do not matter—only obedience to one all-encompassing commandment, come hell or high water?

7.5<sup>28</sup> יֵעַן כִּי־יֵעֵץ עָלֶיךָ אָרֶם רָעָה  
אֲפָרִים וּבֶן־רִמְלִיָּהוּ לְאִמֹּר:

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<sup>26</sup>Where our Hebrew text reads הַעֲשׂוֹנִים, “the burning ones,” an adjective, 1QIs<sup>a</sup> reads a participle, הַעֲשׂוֹנִים, “the ones burning,” with no difference in meaning.

<sup>27</sup>Alexander comments that “The assurance, by which Ahaz is encouraged, is that the danger is over, that the fire is nearly quenched, that the enemies, who lately seemed like flaming firebrands of war, are now mere smoking ends of firebrands; he is therefore exhorted to be quiet and confide in the Divine protection.” (P. 159)

Yes, in such a situation as that, Isaiah’s advice is good advice; but in other, greatly different situations, following Isaiah’s advice to Ahaz could easily lead to national destruction and terrible evil. What do you think?

Slotki comments on Isaiah’s use of the phrase “son of Remaliah” instead of his name Pekah, that “Isaiah is too contemptuous of the usurper to utter his name.” (P. 33)

At the end of **verse 4**, **Rahlfs** has the interpolated sentence “for when My wrath’s anger shall happen, again I will heal.”

<sup>28</sup>Gray comments on **verses 5-6** that “The plan of the allies, which has alarmed Ahaz, but appears to Isaiah certain of frustration (**verse 7**), is to take Jerusalem by storm and then dethrone Ahaz, overturn the house of David, and set up as king of Judah a creature of their own, called contemptuously not by his own name, but merely *the son of Tabeel*. If [the Greek translation] preserves the correct pronunciation, Ταβηλ, the name (compare **Ezra 4:7**) of the father is Aramaic and the man, presumably, an Aramaean.” (P. 118)

Motyer comments on **verses 5-6** that “Such non-entities are the men concerned that Isaiah feigns not to be able to recall their names and refers to them as *the son of Remaliah* and *the son of Tabeel*. This may be irony but certainly it prompts Ahaz to think in dynastic terms. If Pekah is the son of Remaliah, whose son is Ahaz? Ultimately, the son of David, the occupant of a throne with Divine validation, resting on Divine promises. *The son of Tabeel* is otherwise unknown, but he signifies the extra element of threat now imposed: to bring the dynasty of David to an end. Human purposes thus challenge Divine promises.” (P. 82)

Slotki states that the phrase “son of Tabeel” is “probably a Syrian or Ephraimitish adventurer. Some...hold that Rezin is intended.” (P. 33)

Because Aram / Syria<sup>29</sup> plotted evil against you,  
(along with) Ephraim and Rimalyahu's son, saying,

7.6 נַעֲלָה בִּיהוּדָה׃

וְנִקְיָצְנָהּ  
וְנִבְקַעְנָהּ אֵלֵינוּ׃  
וְנִמְלִיךְ מֶלֶךְ בְּתוֹכָהּ׃  
אֵת בֶּן־טַבְּאֵל׃

We will go up against Judah;  
and we will terrorize her,  
and we will break her open for ourselves;  
and we will cause a king to reign in its midst—  
Tabhal's son!<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>**Rahifs'** translation of **verse 5** is: “and the son of the Aram / Syria and the son of the Romeliou, because they deliberated an evil counsel concerning you, saying,” omitting the mention of Aram / Syria at this point in the text. Somewhat differently from the Hebrew text, it names the two conspirators at the beginning of the verse. The Greek text makes no mention of Ephraim in this verse.

<sup>30</sup>The Greek, Syriac and Latin Vulgate translations reflect the name טַבְּאֵל as spelled with אֵל at the end rather than אַל, the difference being between something like “Good, Not.” or “Good for Nothing,” and “Good, God.” We understand this to be the name of someone that Aram and Ephraim had proposed to make king over Judah, following their overthrow of Ahaz.

As Oswalt states, it is “the announced intent of the enemy to bring the dynasty to an end by putting a tributary of theirs, a man named Tabeel, on the throne of Judah.” (P. 198)

Ortlund describes this person as “the puppet ruler, meant to replace Ahaz, son of David.” (P. 1252)

Alexander states that “this familiar reference *en passant* [“in passing”] to the names of persons now forgotten, as if familiar to contemporary readers, is a strong incidental proof of authenticity.” (P. 161)

(continued...)

<sup>30</sup>(...continued)

Perhaps, but we need no such “proofs” of authenticity—since the entire **Book of Isaiah** is witness to its authenticity, rooted deeply and securely in Israel’s history! This is not fictional, “made up” material, even if later editors have “touched it up,” or “updated” it, believing it to be a living, ever renewed message, making it applicable to later historical situations. What do you think?

Alexander comments that here, in **verse 6**, “the invaders themselves are now introduced as holding counsel or addressing one another...at the time when their plan was first concerted...[**2 Chronicles 21:17** shows that] the reference to Jerusalem is required by this history, according to which they did succeed in their attack upon the kingdom, but were foiled in their main design of conquering the royal city.” (P. 160)

Kaiser comments that “The fact that the purpose of the enemies is to deprive the Davidic dynasty of its throne is enough to cause Yahweh to annihilate the hostile kingdoms shows that the house of David is under His special protection. It is His chosen dynasty.” (P. 140)

<sup>31</sup>Gray comments on **verses 7-9** that “Over against the fears of Ahaz and the plans of Syria and Ephraim is now set the sentence of Yahweh. The evil plan (רַעְיָהּ, **verse 5**) will not be carried out. Rezin is head of Damascus, Damascus capital of Syria, Pekah head of Samaria, and Samaria capital of Ephraim, and they will never be anything more; not to them belongs, or ever will belong, the headship of Judah. So far as they are concerned, Judah is safe...

“But its ultimate safety and continuance rest on its relation to Yahweh. It is not really threatened by the evil plans of its foes; it is not rendered safe because their plans are foiled. Safety will be secured by a practical and personal belief in and understanding of Yahweh, which will lead to a quiet confidence in His sufficiency...and to righteousness of life...But if you believe not, you shall not be established.” (P. 119)  
See:

**Isaiah 7:4,**

And you shall say to him, Be guarded, and show quietness;  
do not be afraid; and your heart shall not be timid  
because of these two stumps of smoking fire-sticks—  
at the burning anger of Rezin, and Aram, and Remalyahu’s son.

**Isaiah 30:15-16,** (see footnote 22);

**2 Chronicles 20:20b,** where king Jehoshaphat is quoted:

(continued...)



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<sup>31</sup>(...continued)

And he said, Listen to me, Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem:  
Believe / place confidence in the YHWH your God,  
and you will be made firm / confident;  
believe / place confidence in your spokespersons / prophets,  
and you will be successful / caused to thrive!

**Isaiah 28:16,**

Therefore in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:  
Look—He founded in Zion a stone,  
a stone of testing,  
a precious cornerstone,  
a foundation of a foundation--  
the one believing / trusting will not be in haste!

**Genesis 15:6,**

And he was placing confidence in the YHWH,  
and He considered it for him a right-relationship.

Gray observes that “This passage [**Isaiah 7:9b**] or **Genesis 15:6** is the earliest extant containing the expression ‘to believe.’” (P. 119)

Oswalt comments on **verses 7-9** that “The two kings have arrogantly announced their plan; now the King, the Sovereign (**verse 6**; compare **6:18**) announces His plan... Again, the point is one of perspective. If there is no One Who sits above the earth... then we are at the mercy of the whims of men. But if there is such a One, then we need not fear what men can do to us.” See:

**Isaiah 40:22, 26-28,**

22 The One Who sits above the earth’s horizon,  
and its inhabitants (are) like the locusts;  
the One Who stretches out heavens like the curtain,  
and spreads them like the tent for dwelling.  
26 Lift up your eyes (to the) height, and see—  
Who created these?  
The One Who brings forth by number their army--  
to all of them by name He calls;  
from abundance of strengths, and might of power,  
not one was lacking.  
27 For what (reason) will you say, Jacob,  
and will you speak, Israel, (saying)  
My way was hidden from YHWH,  
and from my God, my justice passes over!

(continued...)

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<sup>31</sup>(...continued)

28 Did you not know?  
Or did you not hear?  
God of long-lasting-time, YHWH–  
(the) One Creating the earth’s ends,  
He will not be weary, and will not be tired--  
there is no searching of His understanding!

Oswalt continues: “Rezin’s scope of action is merely Ephraim. But God’s scope is the world. If Ahaz can believe that, his whole perspective will be altered, and he and his house will be truly established.” (P. 201)

Ortlund comments on **verses 7-9** that “Human threats are to be dismissed and Divine promises firmly trusted.” (P. 1252)

Do you think America was wise to refuse to listen to Hitler’s threats in his **Mein Kampf**, simply dismissing his announced program? We say, you will be wise to listen to human threats, but at the same time to firmly trust Divine promises—but without thinking that your understanding of those promises enables you to know exactly what God will do.

Do you think America should have followed Isaiah’s advice to Ahaz, and done nothing, especially to have refused to enter into alliances with Great Britain and Russia in the war to stop Hitler’s Third Reich and Hirohito’s Japan? Do you think Isaiah’s advice to Ahaz in the face of the Syrian Northern Israel threat is the same advice that is to be given to all future rulers in every situation—to be quiet, do nothing, enter into no alliances—refuse to join the United Nations, or enter into trade alliances with other nations?

We think that such a conclusion is a biblicism that is untenable in many situations, and that it is wisdom to enter into alliances with nations that want peace, and to join alliances to fight against despotic dictators such as Hitler, Stalin, Chairman Mao, ISIS, etc.

Motyer comments on **verse 7** that “We hear the plans of man [in **verse 6**]; now we hear the word of אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה (‘my Lord YHWH’]. Compare:

**Proverbs 16:1,**

To a human being belongs arrangement of heart;  
and from YHWH—answer of a tongue.

**Proverbs 16:33,**

(continued...)

לֹא תִקְוּם וְלֹא תִהְיֶה:

In this way my Lord YHWH<sup>32</sup> spoke:

It will not stand, and it will not happen!<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>(...continued)

Into the (fold of a garment at the) chest the lot is thrown;  
and its every decision (is) from YHWH.

“This emphasis on the sheer greatness of the Lord eases the pathway to faith, makes faith a practical policy in the hard realities of life—and also leaves unbelief without excuse.” (P. 82)

Do you think that Isaiah’s advice to Ahaz should be the basis for all future political leaders, whatever their situation? We hold that Isaiah’s advice was the Divine answer in his situation, and that in all future situations, those who place faith in God should be listening and praying for Divine guidance as to what they should do, not by “proof-texting” from **Isaiah** or elsewhere in the **Bible** (for example in **Matthew 5:38-48**, as pacifists often do), but in terms of the present guidance of the Spirit, in the light of facts, and the entire biblical message, including the teaching of **Ecclesiastes 3** that there is a time for every possible reaction, including a time for hatred, war and killing.

Motyer’s reference to **Proverbs 16:33** leaves the impression that the believer should just “roll the dice,” or “consult the urim and thummim,” and let that be considered the Divine decision. We think it much better to examine the situation carefully, then make a decision in the light of the entire **Bible’s** teaching, accompanied with prayer and the counsel of God-fearing friends. What do you think? Had you rather opt for an easy answer to such difficult questions?

<sup>32</sup>The Divine name YHWH, pointed יהוה, some 518 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, is here and elsewhere (some 315 times) pointed / spelled יהוה, as the Masoretes want the reader to pronounce the former spelling “Adonay,” “My Lord,” and the latter pointing / spelling “Elohim,” in their effort to keep the Divine name from being pronounced (the word-count is taken from **Brown-Driver-Briggs**).

Where our Hebrew text has יהוה אֱלֹהֵי, “My Lord YHWH,” **Rahlf’s** has “Lord Sabaoth,” transliterating the Hebrew noun found elsewhere accompanying יהוה צבאות “YHWH of Armies.”

<sup>33</sup>Oswalt comments that “God announces that the coalition’s violent plan will never occur. How Isaiah knew this is not particularly important. Some who wish to maintain a naturalistic world-view would argue that the prophet understood world events

(continued...)

<sup>33</sup>(...continued)

better than Ahaz and his court, but it is hardly likely that Isaiah’s intelligence system, humanly speaking, was better than the king’s. On the other hand, his intelligence of the character of the world’s Lord was obviously superior to the king’s, and that is what made the difference.” (P. 201)

Those who have spent long years in study of Israel’s prophets—**Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah**, etc.—come away from that study with the conviction that indeed Israel’s prophets had keen, penetrating insight into world events and political realities, enabling them to speak demanding truth in difficult, seemingly impossible situations, including not only critical judgment upon Israel and her neighbors, but also vibrant hope for the future.

How did they accomplish that? We believe that it was through their openness to the Divine reality and word, their listening in on Heaven’s advice, combined with their willingness to boldly proclaim the message they were given. That does not mean that they never made mistakes, or betrayed human weakness, or that they “knew everything.” But their overall message had and has a power that is amazing, a message that the world still desperately needs to hear—a message that is embodied and fulfilled in the life, ministry and teaching of Jesus Christ, a message that was similarly spoken in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Martin Luther King Jr.

<sup>34</sup>Alexander comments on **verses 8-9** that “The plans of the enemy cannot be accomplished, because God has decreed that while the kingdoms of Syria and Israel continue to exist, they shall remain without enlargement, or at least without the addition of Jerusalem or Judah to their territories...The order of ideas is that Syria shall remain as it is, and as for Ephraim it is soon to be destroyed, but while it does last, it shall remain as it is likewise; Pekah shall never reign in any other capital, nor Samaria be the capital of any other kingdom.” (P. 161)

We think Alexander is right in this interpretation, but Isaiah’s statement is rather strangely worded.

Motyer comments that in these verses, “Isaiah turns to supportive argument. Doubtless in speech Isaiah elaborated his meaning, but he left on record only this highly aphoristic [concise] utterance, leaving us to read between the lines.” Motyer analyzes Isaiah’s statement s follows:

A<sup>1</sup> The head of Aram is Damascus

B<sup>1</sup> And the head of Damascus is Rezin

C<sup>1</sup> And within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered, no longer a people

A<sup>1</sup> And the head of Ephraim is Samaria

B<sup>2</sup> And the head of Samaria is Remalayah’s son

C<sup>2</sup> If you do not stand by faith, indeed you will not stand at all

(continued...)

וְרֹאשׁ דַּמָּשֶׁק רֶזֶן  
וּבְעוֹד שְׁשִׁים וְחֲמֵשׁ שָׁנָה  
יִחַת אֶפְרַיִם מֵעַם:

Because Aram's (Syria's) head is Damascus,  
and Damascus' head is Rezin;  
and within sixty and five year(s),  
Ephraim will be shattered as a people.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup>(...continued)

“In this perfectly balanced utterance, the A and B lines refer to the confederate powers, their capitals (A) and their kings (B). The C lines balance the coming dissolution of Ephraim with the possible dissolution of Judah. The general message of warning is plain: Ephraim chose the path of human collective security by its alliance with Aram and thus sealed its doom. It would, therefore, cease to be a nation (C<sup>1</sup>). To reject the way of faith for the collective security of an alliance with Assyria would likewise spell the end for Judah (C<sup>2</sup>)...”

“But what Isaiah left unsaid must have shouted as loudly to Ahaz as what he says: The head of Judah is Jerusalem, and the head of Jerusalem is David’s son. Here was a situation of Divine strength and a kingship sustained by Divine promises. Hence the call to faith and the warning that to abandon faith is to lose all.” (P. 82)

Slotki states that “The underlying thought seems to be that Reziin and Pekah might well be the sovereigns of their respective countries and capitals (which by the way, the prophet asserts, will not endure very long), but never will they achieve the conquest of Judah or Jerusalem which will ever enjoy the merciful protection of God.” (P. 34)

This is true of Rezin and Pekah, but we must not forget the conquering of Judah and Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 587 / 86 B.C.E., and the destruction of Jerusalem and its Herodian temple in 70 C.E. The fact that neither Ephraim nor Rezin would conquer Judah and Jerusalem did not mean that Jerusalem would never be conquered!

<sup>35</sup>Gray holds, along with others, that the phrase “and within sixty and five year(s)” is “an annotation by a later writer...The phrase spoils a sentence by intruding into the middle of it...”

“It could afford Ahaz little assurance that the present peril was unreal, to know that long after he was dead Ephraim would be destroyed [but he would still have the

(continued...)

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<sup>35</sup>(...continued)

prophetic assurance that the two threatening powers would not be successful against his kingdom]...

“The writer of the note refers to some event in the history of Ephraim that occurred 65 years after 735 B.C.E., i.e. in 670-669 B.C.E....Since there is no obvious reason why a late annotator should invent the number 65, it is probable that the gloss is the note of a seventh century scribe, and records some deportation of the inhabitants of Ephraim by Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal.” (Pp. 119-20)

Alexander comments that “The invasion [of Northern Israel] by Tiglathpileser, and the deportation by Shalmaneser are included, but the term of sixty-five years is assigned, because with it expired every possible pretension of the ten tribes to be reckoned as a state or nation, though the real downfall of the government had happened many years before.” (Pp. 162-63)

Motyer states that “On the supposition that the *sixty-five years* is the period 735-670 B.C.E., the reference is to the fact that in 671 Esarhaddon imported foreign settlers into the area of the former northern kingdom (compare **2 Kings 17:24; 2 Chronicles 33:11; Ezra 4:20**). At that point those deported after the fall of Samaria (722 B.C.E.) were bereft of a land to return to and thus finally ceased as a sovereign people.” (Pp. 82-3)

Slotki comments that the statement as been “calculated from the time of the earthquake in the reign of Uzziah, when the prophet announced that Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land.” Compare a parallel situation in the **Book of Amos**:

**Amos 1:1,**

Words of Amos, who was among the sheep-herders from Tekoa,  
which he saw concerning Israel in (the) days of Uzziah, king of Judah,  
and in (the) days of Jeroboam, son of Joash, king of Israel,  
two years before the earthquake.

**Amos 7:17,**

Therefore, in this way YHWH has spoken:  
Your wife will be a prostitute in the city,  
and your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword!  
And your land will be divided up by the measuring-line;  
and you, you will die in an unclean land!  
And Israel will surely go into captivity, from upon its land!

(continued...)

7.9 וְרֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם שָׁמְרוֹן

וְרֹאשׁ שָׁמְרוֹן בֶּן־רַמְלֵיָהוּ

אִם לֹא תֵאֱמִינוּ

כִּי לֹא תֵאֱמָנוּ:

And Ephraim's head is Samaria,

and Samaria's head is Remalyahu's son;<sup>36</sup>

if you people will not stand firm / have confidence / believe,

then you people will not be made firm / be established!<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>(...continued)

Exact dating of the earthquake is difficult, but it probably occurred somewhere around 750 to 760 B.C.E. Sixty-five years later would be around 715 to 720 B.C.E. According to Edwin Thiele, Ahaz's reign ended in 715 B.C.E.

<sup>36</sup>Kaiser comments that the Divine language of **verses 8-9a** "points in deliberately obscure but nevertheless comprehensible oracular style to the downfall of the hostile capitals and their kings and thus of the kingdoms they represent." (P. 140)

We take **verses 8-9a** to mean that the entire coalition that is being formed to attack Ahaz is purely human throughout. The highest it goes is to the earthly cities of Damascus and Samaria; it does not reach the heavenly Zion (as Jerusalem at its best does). Its leaders and people are all too human, and within a life-span, 65 years, the imposing coalition will no longer exist. Don't be afraid of humans!

When you hear the threats of the modern Islamic jihadists such as the leader of ISIS, do you tremble in fear? We say that like a Hitler, or a Stalin, or a Chairman Mao, they will have their murderous day—and we may be among their victims—but their day is greatly limited; they will soon be gone, and God's kingdom will reign forever! Tremble in thankful awe before God, your Creator and Redeemer, and refuse to tremble in fear before human dictators / terrorists!

But at the same time, we add, be prepared to defend against their attacks, which God may well use as a test of your faith and courage!

What do you think? Do you agree with Oliver Cromwell's advice to his troops, "Put your trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry"?

<sup>37</sup>Oswalt notes that "The prophet uses a wordplay here, since 'believe' is a hiphil of אָמַן and 'be established' is a niphil of the same root. The root idea is 'to be firm,'

(continued...)

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<sup>37</sup>(...continued)

so the wordplay could be brought out by some such translation as ‘unless you hold firm (in faith) you will not be made firm (in life) [or, we may suggest, ‘Unless you believe, you will not be made believable’].’ Security is not found in alliances, but in faith...

“As early as the exodus the **Bible** has Moses challenging the people to believe in God, and this same word, the hiphil of אָמַן is used of the Israelites’ response to God after the Red Sea crossing (**Exodus 14:31**). In fact, from the very beginning of God’s revelation, the issue had been: will human beings believe what God says? It was not new with Isaiah.” (P. 193) See:

**Exodus 14:31,**

And Israel saw the great hand with which YHWH acted against Egypt / (the)  
Egyptians.

And the people feared / revered YHWH,  
and they believed / placed trust in the YHWH,  
and in Moses, His servant.

**2 Chronicles 20:20,**

And they arose early in the morning, and they went out to Tekoa wilderness.  
And when they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and he said,  
Listen to me, Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem:  
Believe / place trust in the YHWH your God  
and you will be made firm / supported;  
believe / place trust in His spokespersons,  
and be caused to thrive!

Oswalt adds that “The final statement in this verse sums up the whole issue. Unless Ahaz comes to the point where he can believe in God’s sovereignty to the extent of entrusting himself and his nation to God, he is doomed to live in the shaky, panicky condition he now experiences (**verse 2**). He need not enter into the terribly risky covenant with Assyria, if he will but take firm hold of the covenant which God offers. Assyria will not offer the security Ahaz wishes. Only through trusting in the present and ultimate veracity of God is any real security possible.” (P. 202)

Translations of the last two lines of **verse 9** vary:

**King James**, “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.”

**Tanakh**, “If you will not believe, for you cannot be trusted...” (What does this mean?)

**New Revised Standard**, “If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all.”

**New International**, similar.

**New Jerusalem**, “If you will not take your stand on me you will not stand firm.”

**Rahifs**, “and if you (plural) do not believe, neither will you understand.”

(continued...)



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<sup>37</sup>(...continued)

**Alexander**, “if you do not believe (it is) because you (plural) are not to be established.”

**English Standard Version**, “If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.”

**Watts**, “If you (plural) do not firm up, you (plural) will not be confirmed.”

Watts observes that “Whereas the address in **verse 4** was singular, here it is plural. Perhaps *you* [plural] includes the court and the government that makes the policy.” (P. 93)

Ortlund comments that “The southern kingdom still has an opportunity to hold fast to God, but the faith must be firm...Unbelief in God destabilizes everything for Ahaz.” (P. 1252)

Motyer states, “Faith is the central reality of the Lord’s people, not just their distinctiveness but their ground of existence. No faith, no people...In the light of **6:9-13**, this is the point of no return; to fail to respond now by trusting the Lord’s promises is to bring about the final heart-hardening.” (P. 83)

Kaiser holds that “The narrator is convinced that for its earthly fulfilment [of the chosen dynasty’s purpose] in the long run the Divine election requires that the elect [the chosen people] should be preserved and that the answer to the promise given to them should take the form of a trust in which they place themselves completely in the hand of God.” He refers to Martin Luther’s comment that “Only faith authenticates and has a solid foundation. The promise happens in vain if not accompanied by faith.” (P. 140)

He adds that “The promise of the enduring house in **2 Samuel 7:16** [see footnote 1] gave the narrator the right to make the prophet announce to his king in the name of the God of promise the conditions on which it would endure and so demonstrate to him that the existence of his house was at stake in the political decision that he was making. If the dynasty then came to an end, it was only because it did not show the trust that was required of it, but involved itself in political ploys and thus forfeited the support of the God in Whose promise it was rooted...

“The “if you do not believe, you will not endure’ changes the lesson of the history of the downfall of the dynasty, interpreted in faith, into an admonition to the king who had led his house down a political road which ended in its downfall and the decimation of the people. But whereas the history of the kingdom of David seemed to have been completed and its kingdom finally gone, the narrator leaves his story open at the end with an admonition to the reader. The reader is asked whether he is willing to trust God and endure or whether he will refuse to have faith in God’s gracious future as is asked of him and similarly fail. Thus the narrator shows his people that it is up to them to decide for or against faith, whether God will open up His history with the remnant of the people, which seems to have come to an end. Or whether they will be those with whom it comes completely to an end.

(continued...)

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<sup>37</sup>(...continued)

“Strongly as the narrative comes home to a modern reader, and down the ages shows its power as the Divine word which seeks to gain man’s trust in God as the Master of the future which stands darkly before him, it does need a final reference to its not unchallengeable interpretation of trust in God as pure passivity...

“Certainly God is the last ground and the last goal of the trust put in Him. But as basic trust, this has the task of protecting men from the threat of nothingness which rises up from within them, as well as from that which comes upon them from the outside. However, that does not relieve them of the need to act carefully in this world, nor does it relieve politicians who hold political responsibility of the necessity of making political decisions...

“Freed from anxiety, the action of the believer should be both more human and at the same time more appropriate to the situation than that of the unbeliever. Only where people are deprived of all possibilities and where destiny reduces them to inevitable passivity, as in the house of death, may he comfort himself with the thought that his trust in God’s never-ending [presence] is what is required of him, and that that is enough.” (Pp. 147-48)

While we disagree with Kaiser’s transforming **Isaiah 7** into a post-exilic creation by a later unknown writer, we agree with his emphasis on what the story is saying to the modern reader (who, we believe, will see the story as originating in the time of Isaiah and Ahaz). It is a call to trust in God for the ultimate outcome of history—just as the believer trusts in the time of death, when there is nothing more he or she can do. But while life remains, that trust in God’s presence will not mean doing nothing. The believer will continue to go to the doctor, to take his medicines, etc., as he trusts in God. To be quiet and wait is in fact doing something—it is failing to take advantage of God-given resources for healing.

And the fact is, that the believer, trusting in God, and in prayer listening for His voice, will be told the appropriate steps to take—or not to take—whether to take up arms against a murderous dictator like Hitler as Dietrich Bonhoeffer did, or whether to declare neutrality, and let quenched fire-brands run their course. Throughout the biblical story, there are times when the people of God are called by God to be quiet and wait, but there are other times when they are called by God to take up arms and enter into battle—as is seen so clearly in the stories of Moses, Joshua, the Judges, and King David. Do you agree?

Watts again states his view concerning Ahaz’s dependence on Assyria, as he explains the meaning of **verses 3-9**: “Yahweh sent Isaiah to Ahaz with a message to encourage him to continue his policy of refusing to join Aram and Israel in rebellion against their Assyrian liege-lord [a title taken from the Middle Ages; ‘Homage’ was the ceremony in which a feudal tenant or vassal pledged reverence and submission to his feudal lord, receiving in exchange the symbolic title to his new position (investiture). It was a symbolic acknowledgment to the lord that the vassal was, literally, ‘his man.’ The

(continued...)

<sup>37</sup>(...continued)

oath known as ‘fealty’ implied lesser obligations than did ‘homage.’ One could swear ‘fealty’ to many different overlords with respect to different land holdings, but ‘homage could only be performed to a single liege, as one could not be ‘his man,’ i.e., committed to military service, to more than one ‘liege lord.’” (**Wikipedia**, 7/11/2014)]” (P. 93)

“The Arameans and Israelites could hardly expect to storm the walls of Jerusalem [how does Watts know this? It seems apparent to us that was their intention in attacking Jerusalem, from which they retreated upon hearing of the approach of Assyrians]. But they did hope to force Ahaz to abdicate, making way for a ruler more amenable to collaborations in their resistance to Assyria. Isaiah shows that Yahweh supports Ahaz and his policy of peaceful acceptance of Assyrian hegemony [influence / control].” This is the meaning of the entire [**Book of Isaiah**]...

“Since Yahweh’s decisions, made in the reign of Uzziah (compare **1:2-2:4**), the Davidic king is no longer destined to be Yahweh’s means of ruling the nations. Ahaz’s policy is the realistic application of this insight.” (P. 93)

We wonder, how relevant is it to take a custom from the Middle Ages, and read it back into an ancient history (8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.)?

And we ask, Where does Isaiah show that YHWH supports Ahaz and his policy of peaceful acceptance of Assyrian hegemony? We think it shows YHWH’s disapproval of the Aramean / Israelite coalition and their plan, but does not go beyond this to approve of Ahaz’s calling upon Assyria for support.

We think the **Book of Isaiah** as a whole envisions YHWH’s ruling the nations through the Davidic king, Messiah in the new Jerusalem, rather than the Davidic king no longer being destined as ruler. What do you think?

<sup>38</sup>Oswalt entitles **7:10-8:10** “God Is With Us.” He entitles **7:10-17** “The Sign of Immanuel.”

He comments on **7:10-17** that “In this paragraph the prophet puts Ahaz to the test. Although he invites Ahaz to test God, it is really the king himself who is being tested. Will he in fact respond to the words of **verse 9b** by believing God and becoming established, or will he instead reject such belief? Undoubtedly, as an Israelite king he had given lip service to the idea, but now he must act upon it or deny it...

“Isaiah challenges him to seek evidence that the exclusive trust he is recommending is indeed viable. But Ahaz does not want such evidence. Why? Apparently it is because his mind is already made up. He is going to trust his and his nation’s fate to Assyria, and he does not want some (trumped-up?) evidence that such

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<sup>38</sup>(...continued)

a drastic decision is unwarranted. Any sign provided by Isaiah could only be an embarrassment to him, so he attempts to avoid the dilemma by an appeal to piety...

“But why should Ahaz hand himself over to the tender mercies of his ultimate enemy, a far worse threat than Syria or Ephraim? Once abandon a heartfelt conviction that God does truly care for us and is intimately involved with us, once abandon His perspective for our own, then suddenly decisions which are utterly foolish viewed from His perspective become intelligent and wise. When we cannot trust God, it suddenly makes good sense to trust our worst enemy...

“Isaiah’s message to the unbelieving house of David is that what they have rejected as foolish—reliance upon God’s care and presence—is ultimate wisdom, while *their* wisdom—that Assyria can be trusted to look out for Judah’s interests—is errant nonsense. ‘God is with us’ means that God’s word will be kept, Syria and Israel’s attack will not succeed, but it also means that He must let Judah see for a certainty that no one else—most of all Assyria—is with them. For this reason the prophecy of Immanuel is both good and bad, joy and sorrow.” (Pp. 203-04)

Motyer comments on **verses 10-17** that “Isaiah’s second message to Ahaz is:

- First            an attempt to move Ahaz to faith (**verses 10-12**).
- Second        following the failure of this, a denunciation of Ahaz as a traitor to his people’s most treasured hopes (**verses 13-15**).
- Third          a forecast of a calamity greater than the schism of the ten northern tribes (**verses 16-17**)." (P. 83)

Ortlund comments on **verses 10-17** that “The basic issue in **chapter 7** is that Ahaz and the Lord (speaking through Isaiah) have completely different views concerning the threat from the coalition of Syria and Ephraim. Though Ahaz is the heir of David’s throne, he has put his firm faith (**verse 9**) in the king of Assyria and he has given gold from the temple to the Assyrians, to induce them to attack Syria (**2 Kings 16:1-9**). Thus Ahaz placed his hope for salvation in human power rather than in the Lord. But Isaiah calls for Ahaz and all of Jerusalem to put their firm faith in a far more reliable ally: ‘the Lord Himself’ (**Isaiah 7:14**)." (P. 1254)

Ortlund goes on to state that “Christian interpretation of this passage requires doing justice to the meaning of Isaiah’s words both

- (1) as they were first addressed to Ahaz, and then
- (2) as these same prophetic words are used [some 700 years] later by **Matthew** with respect to the birth of Jesus the Messiah (**Matthew 1:21-23**)." (P. 1254)

We agree. It is a fault of some Christian interpretation of **Isaiah 7** that it does not do justice to its original meaning, simply jumping to **Matthew’s** quotation of the passage, assuming that Ahaz was being told that Jesus Christ was coming—700 years

(continued...)

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<sup>38</sup>(...continued)

later. But the fact is, Isaiah's message had an application to Ahaz's situation, that would be fulfilled within a few years.

Ortlund adds that "Christian interpretation follows **Matthew** in applying the **verse [14]** to the birth of Jesus. However, some aspects of Isaiah's prophecy also relate to the significance of the sign for Isaiah's own day. This being the case, a number of questions are raised:

To whose family does the virgin belong, and how should her marital status be understood?

What is the precise significance of the child's name ['Immanuel,' 'God With Us']? Is it a personal name, or should it be understood as a title?

Most importantly, does the fulfillment of this sign belong to Isaiah's own day, or does it rather point (even in his day) to a much more distant and complete fulfillment?

Christians have typically answered these questions in one of two ways.

"Some hold that the sign has a *single fulfillment*—that is, the sign points originally and solely to the birth of Jesus as the 'ultimate' Messiah...

"Those who see in this sign a more immediate application to Ahaz and his times usually argue that the prophecy has a *double fulfillment*—that is, both an immediate fulfillment in Isaiah's day and a long-term fulfillment in the birth of the Messiah... They argue that the prophet's own interpretation of the sign in **7:16-17** applies it directly to Ahaz's own day...

"It should be observed that the understanding of the text in no way diminishes **Matthew's** affirmation of the supernatural conception and virgin birth of Jesus... Even if the prophecy does include an immediate application to the time of Ahaz, however, the prophecy cannot have been fulfilled completely by the birth of someone like Maher-shalal-hash-baz (**Isaiah 8:1, 3**) or by Hezekiah, as some have suggested, since **9:6** prophesies the birth of a son whose name will be 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'—a statement that could apply only to the Davidic Messiah...

"On this understanding then, the prophecy of **7:14** foretells the birth of Immanuel, which was fulfilled partially in Isaiah's time but fully and finally in the person of Jesus Christ." (Pp. 1254-55)

We agree with Ortlund. What do you think?

(continued...)

And YHWH<sup>39</sup> added speaking to Ahaz, saying:<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>(...continued)

Kaiser states the narrative of **Isaiah 7:10-17** “has a special significance for the Christian Church, so that the section is one of the most important not just of the **Book of Isaiah** but of the whole of the **Old Testament**. The confessions formulated by the early church still keep echoing the saying about the Virgin Birth of Jesus, recorded in **Matthew 1:18-25** as the fulfillment of **Isaiah 7:14**. However, anyone who expects there to be any agreement as to this meaning for the story in academic interpretation will be immediately disappointed at the quite incalculable and constantly growing mass of literature, with its different and mutually exclusive attempts at interpretation...

“Thus there is already a dispute as to whether **7:10-17** originally went with **7:1-9**, or whether it is a secondary unit...In addition there is the problem of the literary unity of the narrative itself...[and] the dispute over the meaning of...הַעֵלְמוֹת, [the] marriageable girl, young woman...and the questions who [she] is and who the Immanuel is and what the sign in fact consists of.” (Pp. 152-53)

Kaiser adds that ‘In terms of content, **7:10-17** seems to be about the failure of the king in an hour which is fateful for the further history of his house and of his people ...With **verse 17** we have the negative result of the task imposed on the prophet and its consequences, a catastrophe going beyond the rebellion of the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel from the house of David (compare **1 Kings 11:29-30**).’ (P. 153)

Gray comments on **verses 10-13** that “Isaiah offers, and Ahaz provokes his indignation by refusing, a sign.” He states that in **verses 10-12**, “Isaiah offers then and there to Ahaz any sign he may like to demand, in Heaven above or Sheol below, in proof that Yahweh determines what shall come to pass, and that it is His present will that Jerusalem shall suffer nothing from the advancing armies of Ephraim and Syria, but that these armies will within a short time retire and leave Judah unmolested.” (Pp. 120-21)

<sup>39</sup>Where our Hebrew text reads יהוה, the Aramaic Targum reads “Isaiah.” The speech that follows does appear to be Isaiah’s words, but the Hebrew text oftentimes describes the prophet’s words as YHWH’s words.

Watts notes that “The change makes sense, but the unanimous testimony of the Massoretic Text and Versions demands respect.” (P. 96)

Motyer states that “When *the Lord spoke to Ahaz* the human messenger was forgotten and only the voice of ‘the Sovereign’ was heard (compare **verse 7**). This is the reality of the verbal inspiration of the prophets.” (P. 83)

We say, It was a Divine message, spoken by a human being—exactly what we hope and pray happens in our modern world, when ministers speak a message from

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<sup>39</sup>(...continued)

God in their pulpits all across the world, as they come from their prayer-filled study of the **Bible** to speak to the hearts of their people.

What is the difference between an Isaiah, or a Jeremiah, and the modern minister who has the promise of Divine inspiration from Jesus Christ (**John 14:18-26**)? Granted, those to whom Jesus is depicted as speaking those words in the first century had been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry, and had heard directly from his mouth. But we today have their eye- and ear-witness testimony, and the same Spirit of truth to guide us.

Or do you hold the view that Divine inspiration ended with the death of those original disciples of Jesus?

We believe that the gift of the Spirit is just as real today as it was in the days of Saul, or of Isaiah, or of those original disciples of Jesus. I myself have experienced the presence and guidance of the Spirit, especially in times of crisis, imparting the right words to speak, and actions to take. I have felt the Spirit's presence in my study, as I sought guidance for what to say in sermons, funerals, classes, etc. It meant that I found courage to stand boldly in the face of great personal loss and danger. It never meant that I thought I knew everything, or had all the answers; but looking back on a long life of Christian ministry, I can say unequivocally, Yes, it is true. God's Spirit is truly with us, and will guide us!

What do you say? What is your experience when seeking or experiencing or not experiencing the presence of the Spirit?

<sup>40</sup>Oswalt comments that **verse 10** gives the reader "a good example of the prophetic self-understanding. The prophet does not speak for himself and he does not merely speak as bidden. Rather, when he speaks, God speaks. Yet this is not a kind of possession where the prophet is a helpless tool in a Divinely manipulative hand, nor is there any evidence that it is the result of 'capturing' God through a mechanical application of ritual or drugs..."

"Rather, it is the clear-eyed recognition that the Transcendent can relate to the finite in such a way that neither the Transcendent is contained nor the finite violated. Neither God nor Isaiah has become other than [Himself / himself] in the process, yet there has been such a community of thought and desire between the two personalities that Isaiah's words are God's. This relation is the foundation of a doctrine of revelation ...Isaiah did not claim to speak *about* God, he claimed to speak *for* God." (P. 204)

Yes, but he speaks for YHWH the truths that he has seen in visions—enigmatic visions—visions that are far less than "face-to-face conversation"—see **Numbers 12:6-8**, and see Paul's use of this passage in **Numbers** in **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**, where he acknowledges that his knowledge and prophesying are always "partial" and "enigmatic,"

(continued...)

7.11<sup>41</sup> שְׁאַל-לְךָ אֹת מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

הַעֲמִק שְׁאַלָה

אוּ תִגְבַּהּ לְמַעַלָּה:

Ask for yourself a sign<sup>42</sup> from YHWH your God,<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>(...continued)

i.e., “seen through a mirror darkly.” Yes, the prophet is speaking for YHWH, but he is not Moses, and his words are not without enigma, puzzle.

Alexander comments that this additional saying of YHWH “was naturally called forth by the incredulity which some suppose to have been betrayed by the king’s silence...or his looks.” (P. 164)

<sup>41</sup>Oswalt comments on **verse 11** that “Ahaz is now challenged to give God a chance to prove His trustworthiness. Although our faith is not to be in the signs, nevertheless God has, throughout all the ages, given His people evidence by which their faith might be strengthened.

<sup>42</sup>Alexander comments that “A *sign* is not necessarily a miracle, nor necessarily a prophecy, but a sensible pledge of the truth of something else, whether present, past, or future; sometimes consisting in a miracle...but sometimes in a mere prediction...and sometimes only in a symbol, especially a symbolical name or action...The sign here offered is a proof of Isaiah’s Divine legation [‘mission’], which Ahaz seemed to doubt.” (Pp. 164-65)

Gray comments that “Here Isaiah first offers Ahaz a miraculous sign to take place at the present moment in proof that things will happen as he has said. But (**verse 12**) Ahaz declines the offer, asserting that he is unwilling to tempt Yahweh by making Him prove His power (compare **Exodus 17:7** [‘...they tested YHWH by saying, Is YHWH among us or not?’]). Isaiah is not deceived by this show of piety, but interprets the king’s refusal of a sign as an indication of his unwillingness to accept the guidance of Yahweh, and his determination to pursue his own policy...

“Yahweh insists that whether Ahaz and his court will it or not, a sign they shall have, not now but after the event, which will recall the correctness of the prophet’s prediction, and refer the relief from the siege not to the human efforts of Ahaz, but to the will of Yahweh. This sign will be not of Ahaz’s, but of Yahweh’s choosing.” (Pp. 121-22)

<sup>43</sup>Alexander states that “The phrase *your God* is emphatic and intended to remind Ahaz of his official relation to Jehovah, and as it were to afford him a last opportunity of profiting by the connection.” (P. 165)

(continued...)



making (it) deep, ask!<sup>44</sup>

Or making (it) high to (the) heights!<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>(...continued)

Motyer likewise states that “The reference to *the Lord your God* shows that Isaiah is appealing to Ahaz in this light [seeking a sign as an expression of believing commitment]. The opportunity remains open to affirm faith and to act as a believer.” (P. 83)

<sup>44</sup>Where our Hebrew text has שְׁאַל־הָ, which evidently means “please ask it,” the Greek translations of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotian all read εἰς ᾗδην, “(making it deep) into hades / grave / underworld,” reflecting a Hebrew text with שְׁאַל־הָ, “to sheol.” The original, unpointed Hebrew text, which had almost no vowels, could be read either way. **Rahlfs** has “ask for yourself a sign...into depth or into height.”

<sup>45</sup>Oswalt notes that “The verbs הַעֲמִיךְ and הַגְבִּיהַּ may be imperatives or infinitives in the hiphil stem. שְׁאַל־הָ may be an emphatic imperative, ‘Ask!’ or more probably a locative of ‘sheol’ [see the preceding footnote]...In that case, taking the verbs as infinitives, a literal rendering would be: ‘Ask...making deep to sheol, making high to the heights.’” (P. 202)

He comments that “It is commonly assumed among commentators that the references to the depths and the heights necessarily mean that Isaiah was calling on Ahaz to ask for a miraculous sign. But that does not necessarily follow. All the prophet is saying is that there is no limit on what Ahaz may ask...

“This God Who speaks through Isaiah, Who offers to put Himself at Ahaz’s command, is not some strange and unknown Deity. He is the One Who has bound Himself to Israel, and even more particularly, to the house of David, in covenant love... He is personally known to Ahaz, His Own anointed. Why should Ahaz prevent his own God from demonstrating His love for him?” (P. 205)

Motyer states that “The Lord is ready to ‘stop at nothing,’ *whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights*, for the sake of the Davidic king and the chosen city... The magnitude of the offer (as we might say, ‘to move heaven and earth’) highlights the seriousness of the crisis and also the importance the Lord attaches to the exercise of faith.” (P. 83)

Kaiser comments that “The offer of a sign mentions the heights of heaven as the upper limit and the depths of the underworld, *Sheol*, as the lower limit, thus giving the king the whole world to choose from for his sign....

“The antitypical character of the scene emerges from the parallel in the **Book of Kings: 2 Kings 20:8ff.**: the believing king Hezekiah ventured to ask the prophet for a

(continued...)

7.12 וַיֹּאמֶר אַחָז

לֹא-אֶשְׂאֵל

וְלֹא-אֶנְסֶה אֶת־יְהוָה:

And Ahaz said,  
I will not ask,  
and I will not make test of YHWH!<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>(...continued)

miraculous sign to confirm the promise which had been given to him in his personal distress, and he received it; however, the faithless king Ahaz rejected the sign offered him by the prophet at Yahweh's command, and thus manifested his resolve to obtain human safeguards for himself and his house...

“Such an attitude is quite understandable in the Judaism of the Persian period... Behind it lies the hope of post-exilic Judaism that Yahweh has not ended His saving action with Israel in the catastrophe of 587, and will free His people from slavery by a great change in the world situation.” (Pp. 166-67)

We wonder why Kaiser does not refer to **Isaiah 38**, where the story of Hezekiah's sign and healing is told, in the opposite chronological order of that which Kaiser proposes.

<sup>46</sup>Alexander comments that “Some regard this as a contemptuous irony, implying a belief that God would not be able to perform His promise...or a disbelief in the existence of a personal God...It is better...to understand the words as a hypocritical excuse for not obeying the command, with obvious allusion to the prohibition in **Deuteronomy 6:16**, ‘You people shall not test YHWH your God, just like you tested Him at the Massah / Place of Testing / Trying!’

“His refusal probably arose...from his predilection for [the service] of other Gods, perhaps combined with a belief that in this case human aid would be sufficient and a Divine intervention superfluous; to which may be added a specific expectation of assistance from Assyria.” See **2 Kings 16:7-9**. (P. 165)

Oswalt states “But it is all in vain. Ahaz's mind is made up, his options shut off. He has already concluded that his only hope is alliance with Assyria. He may even have persuaded himself that this was God's way out of the crisis...

“He made a choice which indicated his skill at diplomacy and quick thinking. To a casual onlooker he made it appear that he did not have a problem of too little faith,

(continued...)

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<sup>46</sup>(...continued)

but rather was possessed of such a deep faith that he did not want to ask for evidence.”  
(P. 206)

See in the **New Testament**:

**Matthew 4:7,**

The Jesus said to him (the slanderer / accuser),  
Again it has been written,  
You shall not test thoroughly (the) Lord, your God!

**Luke 4:12,** almost identical, reporting that Jesus refused to put God to the test as suggested by the slanderer;

**Hebrews 3:8-10a,**

8 Do not harden your hearts as in the provocation,  
according to the day of the testing / temptation in the wilderness,  
9 where your fathers tested / tempted in / with testing / proving  
and saw My works  
10 (for) forty years....

**Matthew 16:4a,**

An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign;  
and no sign will be given to it, except the sign of Jonah.

**Mark 8:12,**

And sighing deeply in His spirit He (Jesus) says,  
Why does this generation seek a sign?  
Truly I say to you (plural), No sign will be given to this generation!

Oswalt continues: “But a testing of God which grows from faith and, out of faith, dares to rest its weight upon God; that testing God invites.” See:

**2 Kings 20:8-11,**

8 And Hezekiah said to Isaiah,  
What sign (is there) that YHWH will heal me,  
and I will go up on the third day (to) YHWH’s house / temple?  
9 And Isaiah said, This (is) the sign to you from YHWH,  
that YHWH will do the word / thing which you said:

(continued...)

<sup>46</sup>(...continued)

(shall) the shadow go (forward) ten steps,  
or (shall) it return ten steps?

- 10 And Hezekiah said,  
It was a trifling thing—for the shadow to stretch out ten steps;  
No—but let it return backwards ten steps!
- 11 And Isaiah the spokesperson cried out to YHWH,  
and He caused the shadow on the steps to return,  
by which it went down on (the) steps of Ahaz backwards,  
ten steps!

### Malachi 3:10,

Bring the whole ten-percent (offering) to the treasure house,  
and let there be food in My house / temple!  
And examine / try Me, please, by this, said YHWH of Armies,  
whether I will not open for you people (the) windows of the heavens,  
and will empty for you blessings until there is no more need!

Oswalt continues, “It is obviously not belief which prompts Ahaz’s statement. If it were, he would not have continued with the plans for an alliance with Assyria. Rather, it is unbelief which gives rise to his announcement, an unbelief profound enough that it will not even permit evidence that it is wrong.” (P. 206)

Motyer states that “Ahaz refuses to put the Lord to the test and thereby shrouds his unwillingness to face the spiritual realities of the situation in a veil of piety...There is indeed a sin of ‘testing God’...But to refuse a proffered sign is proof that one does not want to believe. Pious though his words sound, Ahaz by using them demonstrated himself to be the wilfully unbelieving man—and since he would not believe, he could not continue. This was the moment of decision...Unbelief is the unforgivable sin.” (P. 83)

But surely this is over-statement! What person of faith has never had a moment of unbelief? When Jesus is depicted as crying out to God, My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?, was that not a moment of unbelief? How will you explain it? Did not all of Jesus’ closest disciples draw back and run away in Jesus’ hour of trial? Was that unforgivable?

<sup>47</sup>Oswalt comments on **verses 13-17** that “Both Delitzsch and G. A. Smith see Ahaz’s rejection in **verse 12** as the turning point in the fortunes of the house of David. That resolute act of unfaith signaled an abandonment of God by the dynasty and opened the door for its eventual destruction. It is this which, in their view, provides the setting for the Immanuel [‘God With Us’] prophecy...

“Although Ahaz, through his distrust of God, has brought the strictly human dynasty to an end, God is still with David and Judah, as finally evidenced in the Divine-

(continued...)

הַמַּעַט מִכֶּם הַלְאֹת אֲנָשִׁים

כִּי תִלְאוּ גַם אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי:

And he (Isaiah) said, Listen now, House of David!<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>(...continued)

human Messiah, Immanuel...

“The human house of David is finally without hope; it has tried God’s patience too far. From this point on, however long it should take for that human dynasty to come to complete collapse, the only hope is in God’s eventual miraculous provision. Against this view, it must be admitted that, apart from the appearance of the Immanuel prophecy, nothing in the immediate context requires the reader to see Ahaz’s choice as the radical turning point in the dynasty’s fortunes.” (P. 206)

Alexander comments on **verse 13** that “At first Ahaz seemed to doubt only the authority and Divine legation of the Prophet; but his refusal to accept the offered attestation was an insult to God Himself, and is therefore indignantly rebuked by the Prophet.” (Pp. 165-66)

Gray states, “Let Ahaz and his courtiers know that it is not only men, prophets like and including himself, whose patience they exhaust: they weary out...Yahweh Himself.” (P. 122)

Kaiser comments that “While in **verse 11** [Isaiah] had described Yahweh to Ahaz as ‘your God,’ he now explicitly stresses that He is ‘my God,’ thus indicating that in rejecting the offer of a sign Ahaz has made his decision, refused the trust that is required, and brought about the break. So there can no longer be any talk of the future permanence of the dynasty, but only of its fall.” (P. 168)

But in fact, Isaiah continues to talk about the long-lasting future of the Davidic dynasty, in his continuing depiction of the coming Davidic Messiah—see **Isaiah 9:5-6**<sup>Heb</sup> / **6-7**<sup>Eng</sup> and **11:1-10**. Of course, Kaiser will place both of these passages in the late post-exilic times, just as he has done this prediction in **chapter 7**. If the interpreter is going to rewrite / redate the document he is seeking to comment on, truly all things are possible!

<sup>48</sup>Slotki comments on **verse 13** that “Isaiah turns away from the king in indignation and addresses the court or the members of the royal family present.” (P. 34)

Motyer states that “The failure of the house of David is wider than Ahaz. From the beginning it has failed to live up to its Divine remit [forgiveness, imparted so generously to king David]. It has produced neither the perfect king nor the golden age

(continued...)

<sup>48</sup>(...continued)

but rather the reverse. A whole history of human inadequacy suddenly passes before Isaiah's eyes. With the change from *your God* of **verse 10** to *my God* here, Isaiah signals the new, disastrous turn of events. As Kaiser put it: 'The only way we can have God is by relying on Him and using Him. For the only way it is possible to accord God's Deity to Him is by using Him and risking one's life upon God's word by trusting His promises and obeying the revelation of His will.'" (P. 84)

Watts observes that "Ahaz had been addressed in the singular (**verses 10-12**). When the formal address turns to 'O House of David' (**verse 13**) the plural is used. The appellation [act of calling by name] gives the entire passage royal (i.e., Messianic) significance." (P. 97)

Watts adds that "The prophet's mission to the king has indicated God's approval of Ahaz's action and offers support for his policies." (**Ibid.**) We agree that Isaiah's / YHWH's words indicate Divine approval of Ahaz's resistance to Syria and Ephraim, but see no indication that such approval reaches beyond that, to approve of Ahaz's appeal to Assyria for help.

<sup>49</sup>Alexander states that the Hebrew הִלְאוֹת [hiphil infinitive, 'to make weary'] is not to regard as weak or impotent...but to try or exhaust the patience of another [here, of people]. The plural form of the address [implies] members of his family and court were, in the Prophet's view, already implicated in his unbelief." (P. 166)

Watts states that "the word לָאָהַר 'to weary,' 'to wear out,' is used here about the king. It is a keyword in **Isaiah**...It means that someone has had enough of his opponent's argument. He will accept it no more. [**Rahfs**] however, has translated this by 'occasion strife' ['offer a struggle, fight']..."

"In what sense has Ahaz 'wearied' or 'occasioned strife' for men?...Undoubtedly many of his subjects expected from him a vigorous new policy to rescue the country from its difficulties. This has not happened. He has neither rallied his country to a vigorous counter-offensive, nor launched a diplomatic move to join his foes in rebellion against Assyria. It is understandable that this has 'wearied' many and 'occasioned strife' among his subjects.

"Isaiah's role was to strengthen his resolve to continue his present policy of neutrality and appeasement toward Assyria [but where is anything said concerning appeasement toward Assyria?]. He distanced himself from the religious confirmation which would have strengthened his hand. Isaiah's word for Ahaz is 'wearying' (לָאָהַר). Both **Kings** and **Chronicles** find stronger condemnation for the king [indeed! They condemn Ahaz for looking to Assyria for help! Evidently Watts thinks he knows more

(continued...)

so that you people will also make my God<sup>50</sup> weary?<sup>51</sup>

7.14<sup>52</sup> לִכְנֹן יִתֵּן אֲדֹנָי הוּא לְכֶם אֹת

הִנֵּה הָעֵלְמָה הָרָה וְיִלְדֵת בֵּן

וְקִרְאתָ שְׁמוֹ עִמָּנוּ אֵל:

Therefore my Lord, He will give to you people, a sign.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>(...continued)

about the 8<sup>th</sup> century history of Israel and Assyria than did the authors of **Kings-Chronicles!**.” (P. 97)

<sup>50</sup>Oswalt comments that “The change from ‘your God’ in **verse 11** is ominous. Isaiah seems to be saying that Ahaz has rejected the God Who would have supported and established him. No longer can the prophet speak of ‘your God,’ now it is only [אֱלֹהֵי] ‘my God,’ Who is evidently foreign to Ahaz (see **1 Samuel 15:26-30** for a similar experience in Saul’s life)...[Ahaz] has alienated himself and his house from God. The whole verse seems to be pregnant with threat.” (P. 209)

<sup>51</sup>Oswalt comments on **verse 13** that “Both men and God are worn out from trying to get the Davidides [the royal family] to act in faith in this crisis.” (P. 209)

<sup>52</sup>Watts comments on **verses 14-16** that “The ‘sign’ is revealed anyway. A young woman who is apparently present or contemporary, but not yet married (i.e., a virgin) will in due course bear a child and call his name *Immanuel* meaning God-(is)-With-Us. By the time the child is old enough to make decisions, the land of the two opposing kings will be devastated...

”The sign is simple. It has to do with a period by which time the present crisis will no longer be acute or relevant. This is parallel to the statement of **verse 8b** but indicates a much shorter period. The shorter period accords with history. Tiglath-Pileser’s reactions to Rezin and the son of Remaliah came in 733 B.C.E. when he reduced most of Israel to the status of an Assyrian province.” (P. 97)

<sup>53</sup>Slotki states that “according to some...the *sign* given by Isaiah was not the birth, but the striking and symbolic name of the child, which would spontaneously be given to him, by his mother.” (P. 35)

Gray observes that “It has been repeatedly argued by Christian scholars from Justin Martyr downwards that the sign which Yahweh Himself is to choose and give must be a miracle...But the argument rests on a misconception of what the term אֹת, *sign*, necessarily implies, and of the purpose of the particular sign here contemplated...

(continued...)

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<sup>53</sup>(...continued)

Neither the term **תִּינֵן**, sign, nor the circumstances compel us to seek a miracle in the event predicted...Within a few months at most, and perhaps immediately, a child (or children) now in the womb will be receiving the name *Immanuel, God is with us.*” (Pp. 123-24)

Alexander comments on **verse 14** that “The king having refused to ask for a sign, the Prophet gives him one, by renewing the promise of deliverance (**verses 8, 9**), and connecting it with the birth of a child, whose significant name is made a symbol of the Divine interposition, and his progress measure of the subsequent events...

“All interpreters appear to be agreed that these three verses contain a threatening of destruction to the enemies of Judah, if not a direct promise of deliverance, and that this event is connected, in some way, with the birth of a child, as the *sign* or pledge of its certain occurrence. But what child is meant, or who is the Immanuel [‘God With Us’] here predicted?” (P. 166)

Alexander begins his extensive treatment of the passage, referring mainly to 19<sup>th</sup> century German scholars who adapted three main views of the passage:

1. The only birth and infancy referred to in these verses are the birth and infancy of a child born...in the ordinary course of nature, and in the days of Isaiah himself.
2. The prophecy relates to two distinct births and two different children, that is, to a child born in the days of Isaiah and to the birth some 700 years later of the Messiah.
3. The prophecy applies directly and exclusively to the Messiah, as the only child whose birth is here predicted, and his growth made the measure of the subsequent events.

Alexander rejects the first view, holding that the Prophet speaks of the predicted birth, not as a usual and natural event, but as something which excites his own astonishment [we see no expression of ‘excited astonishment’ in the passage]. He refers to the later passage in **Isaiah 9:5-6**, where a description of a promised child is made, that is wholly inapplicable to any ordinary human child [we think it is clearly the prediction of a coming Messiah], and then adds a reference to **Micah 5:2**, which predicts a ruler to be born in Bethlehem *whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting* [we too understand this as a prediction of a coming Messiah]...

He states that the balance of probabilities is decidedly that Isaiah’s words had reference to a miraculous conception and nativity, and the **Gospel of Matthew’s** claim that this very verse was fulfilled by the birth of Jesus rules out any other possibility than that Isaiah was predicting the birth of Jesus Christ. But the noun Messiah does not appear in this passage, let alone the name Jesus Christ.

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<sup>53</sup>(...continued)

But Alexander admits, the question still arises, how the birth of Christ, if here predicted, is to be connected with the promise made to Ahaz.

View 2 answers this question by holding that two distinct births and two different children are being predicted by Isaiah: that of Shear-yashubh [but obviously, Shear-yashubh had already been born, and was accompanying Isaiah as he met with Ahaz], Isaiah's son, and Jesus Christ, the Son of God by the virgin Mary.

Alexander concludes that the choice lies between views 2 and 3. Either the Prophet, while he foretells the birth of Christ, foretells that of another child, during whose infancy the promised deliverance shall be experienced, or simply foretells the birth of Christ. But, Alexander insists, there is no ground for doubt that the Church has been right in regarding this passage as an explicit prediction of the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus Christ.

Oswalt, whose view is different from that of Alexander, likewise states that "If Ahaz will not ask for a sign, God in His sovereignty will give one in any case...It [is a sign that] confirms Isaiah's earlier promise (**verses 4-9**), but it also confirms the foolishness of not trusting that promise...

"Largely because **7:14** is directly quoted (via the [Greek translation]) in **Matthew 1:23** as support for our Lord's virgin birth, this passage has attracted immense interest. Probably the greatest single focus of attention has been upon the translation of [the Hebrew] **עַלְמָה**, (**almah**, 'young woman' with arguments for and against the [Greek's] translation **παρθένος**, **parthenos**, 'virgin'...

"But only slightly less absorbing has been the attempt to identify the child Immanuel...Some suggest he is a son of Ahaz, others the son of Isaiah. Yet others suggest that no one in particular was intended. Instead, the prophet was saying that many children born within a few months of this encounter would be named Immanuel because of the coming withdrawal of Syria and Israel...

"But the traditional understanding [that Isaiah is predicting the birth of Jesus Christ by the virgin Mary] is not without problems either, for it has tended to ignore the bearing of the sign upon Ahaz's own situation...The text gives every reason to believe that a single child is intended in all these verses. Furthermore, to separate **verses 16** and **17** from **verses 14** and **15** destroys the contexts of both sets of statements...

"Many conservative commentators and scholars have opted for a 'double-fulfillment' theory. While still maintaining that the primary reference was to Christ, they have understood that the sign was fulfilled in a secondary way during Ahaz's lifetime [So also with Jesus' prophecy of the end times when the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 is evidently telescoped with events at the end of history (**Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21**)]...The enigmatic nature of the prophecy argues against the idea that the

(continued...)

Look—the young woman / virgin--<sup>54</sup> pregnant;

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<sup>53</sup>(...continued)

primary fulfillment was intended to occur in Ahaz's time, then to be ingeniously applied later to Christ. But to suppose that the sign did not occur in any sense until 725 years after the fact flies in the face of the plain sense of the text.

“A final problem raised by this passage is its ambiguous nature. Does it prophesy weal [well-being] or woe? Those who say it foretells blessing (as might be expected from the nature of the name Immanuel) are forced to discard or reinterpret **verse 17** along with **verses 18-25**...On the other hand, those who say it prophesies destruction frequently wish to delete or alter **verse 16**...

“The presence of a transcendent and holy God with us may well mean weal and woe together. To the extent that we are dependent upon Him, His presence results in blessing; but to the extent that we refuse to depend upon Him, His presence is an embarrassment and a curse. Both realities are implicit in His presence.” (Pp. 206-09)

We are thankful to Oswalt for this excellent statement!

The Christian commentator Watts concludes that “The view that the child to be born is a royal heir, and that his mother belongs to the King's household, does justice to the evidence, fits the context, and provides the potential of messianic intention that is needed...[Within the larger context of YHWH's promises to David and his descendants] Immanuel will be the King's son and the [young woman] is Ahaz's wife...The Queen [הַעֲלָמָה] is either pregnant or soon will be. She will bear a son, potential heir to all the promises to David. She will name him Immanuel. The sign is specifically a birth (the assurance of an heir to the throne) and a name (the assurance of God's faithfulness to His promise to be 'with' the sons of David...

“The survival of the royal house of Judah in the day when Tiglath-Pileser unleashed his armies in Palestine is nothing short of miraculous. That the very king who eschewed military might and the attempt to save his kingdom from Rezin and the son of Remaliah by force [does Isaiah's story depict this? We think it depicts Ahaz as preparing for military defense against the attack of the northern allies] would outlive both of them and place his son on the throne of the still-intact little kingdom was indeed a miracle. What would have been seen impossible by human measures was well within the power of God Who delighted to exalt the meek and lowly but was at pains to humble the proud and ambitious (**2:11-18**). The sign implied all of this for the Davidic dynasty under Ahaz.” (Pp. 99, 101-2)

What do you think? Do you think Watts is not truly a Christian because of his taking this view?

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<sup>54</sup>The definite Hebrew noun is **הַעַלְמָה**, which means “the young woman.” **Rahlf**s translates by ἡ παρθένος, “the virgin.” Later Greek translators, Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotian all translate by νεανίς, “young woman,” “girl,” sometimes used of young married women.

The Jewish interpreter, Slotki, states that the noun **עַלְמָה**, **almah**, means “an adolescent woman, one of marriageable age. The contention that the word must necessarily connote ‘virgin’ is unwarranted. The Hebrew for ‘virgin’ is **בְּתוּלָה**, **bethulah**, though *almah* too sometimes bears this meaning...

“It is difficult to say with certainty who was *the young woman* referred to. Chronological considerations exclude the mother of Hezekiah [one of Ahaz’s wives] and the fact that the birth (or the name) of the child was to serve as a *sign* to convince Ahaz of the certain fulfilment of the prophecy rules out the Christological interpretation that the young woman and son are identical with persons who lived 700 years later. The wife of Isaiah, a wife of king Ahaz [other than the mother of Hezekiah], a woman of the Royal family, or any woman in Judah may have been the young woman of the text.” (P. 35)

Oswalt notes that the presence of the definite article “the” “may indicate a definite woman known to Ahaz or to Isaiah or to both...” (P. 211)

We find the noun with the definite article only two times elsewhere in the **Hebrew Bible** at:

**Genesis 24:43** (Abraham’s servant relates how he prayed for “the young woman” to come to the well);

**Exodus 2:8** (Miriam, Mosheh’s older sister, the young woman, is sent by Pharaoh’s daughter to get a nurse-maid for the baby Moses);

**Brown-Driver-Briggs** states that the noun means a young woman who is ripe sexually, whether unmarried or newly married.

C. Dohmen, in his article on the noun in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament** XI, pp. 154-63, concludes that the most probable meaning of **עַלְמָה** is an “alien woman” and interprets **Isaiah 7** to mean that “a non-Israelite is expecting a child by King Ahaz, and is to give it the programmatic name of Immanuel [we see no evidence for this conclusion]...”

“For the Davidic dynasty, this spells continuity and discontinuity at the same time. The dynasty will not continue linearly but will be given a new beginning by God...In the course of [the] reinterpretation of the prophetic oracle [which Dohmen sees within the

(continued...)

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<sup>54</sup>(...continued)

context], the sign described in **7:14** becomes a symbol, and Immanuel becomes a savior figure expected in the future. In the post-exilic period **Isaiah 7:14** was interpreted messianically in this sense.” (Pp. 161-62)

Oswalt comments that “It is not possible to be dogmatic as to why Isaiah used the ambiguous **עַלְמָה**, (**almah** [‘maiden’] here instead of the unambiguous **בְּתוּלָה** [**bethulah**, ‘virgin’]. Nor is it clear what meaning should be assigned to **עַלְמָה**, (**almah** [‘maiden’]. Typically, the meaning given is ‘a young woman of marriageable age,’ with the clear implication that the conception is a natural one...

“However, conservative scholars have frequently pointed out that the word is never used of a married woman in the **Old Testament**. So they have argued that the word denotes a sexually mature, but unmarried, young woman...Such an understanding has the significant virtue of explaining the origin of the [Greek] παρθένος, ‘virgin’... Unless **עַלְמָה**, (**almah** had overtones of virginity about it, the [Greek] translation is inexplicable.

“But if Isaiah wished to stress the virginity of the mother here, why did he not use **בְּתוּלָה**, **bethulah**, ‘virgin’?...The conclusion to which we are driven is that while the prophet did not want to stress the virginity, neither did he wish to leave it aside... Possibly, then, it is the dual focus of the oracle that explains the use of **עַלְמָה**, (**almah** [‘maiden’] here...

“In the short term, the virgin conception does not seem to have had primary importance. Rather, the significance is that a child conceived at that moment would still be immature when the two threatening nations would have been destroyed (**verses 16, 22**)...

“On the other hand, the very two-sidedness of the sign in Ahaz’s time demanded something more. Yes, the disappearance of Syria and Ephraim could be seen as evidence that God was with them. But what of Assyria, foolishly trusted and soon to turn on its hapless client? Was God with them still in that?...No child born to a young woman in Ahaz’s day is proof of God’s presence in all times...So Ahaz’s sign must be rooted in its own time to have significance for that time, but it also must extend beyond that time and into a much more universal mode if its radical truth is to be any more than a vain hope. For such a twofold task **עַלְמָה**, (**almah** [‘maiden’] is admirably suited.” (Pp. 210-11)

We are inclined to agree with Oswalt at this point. Obviously the prediction concerning the child born to the young woman points to a child born shortly after Isaiah’s statement. But the prediction of a child with even greater significance

(continued...)

and giving birth (to) a son;<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>(...continued)

continues to be brought up in Isaiah's preaching, long after the birth of this child, becoming in **Isaiah 9** and **11** the hoped-for Messiah of the future. We believe that it is this messianic hope that began in **Isaiah 7**, and that is further elaborated on in **chapters 9** and **11** that **Matthew** has reference to in its story of the conception and birth of Jesus.

It is to be remembered that **Rahlfs** translates by ἡ παρθένος, "the virgin," and the Latin Vulgate has *virgo*, "a virgin" (without the definite article). But other Greek translations than **Rahlfs**, those of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotian, translate by νεῦνις, "a young woman."

Kaiser holds that "One cannot infer more than that the passage is about the pregnancy of a woman with her first child. The citation of **Isaiah 7:14** in **Matthew 1:18ff.** Is based on the one hand on the presupposition that the **Old Testament** is a prophecy of Christ and that therefore some details about His life can be found in it, and on the other hand on the conception which grew up in the Hellenistic world, out of earlier religious notions, of the Divine conception of a child which comes about without the agency of a human father and in the end conveys simply that 'a certain person was given to the world by God.' In fact this conviction forms the foundation of the existence and the proclamation of the Christian church." (P. 155)

This is, of course, gross overstatement. The foundation of the Christian proclamation as told in the **Book of Acts**, does not mention **Isaiah 7** or the virgin-birth, and it was not until some 30-40 years after the founding of the Church and the proclamation of its message, when the **Gospels of Matthew** and **Luke** were written, that the virgin-birth came into Christian teaching.

Ackerman has a "special note" which includes the fact that the Latin Vulgate's translation *Ecce virgo* ("Behold the virgin") became central "in the medieval veneration of Mary, with Isaiah lauded as the prophet of the annunciation." (P. 968)

It is very important for the student of the **Book of Isaiah** to take this discussion seriously, and attempt to give a thorough answer to the many questions raised by these different views!

<sup>55</sup>As pointed / spelled by the Masoretes, הַרְבָּה is a feminine adjective meaning "pregnant." It is followed by a feminine singular present participle, יֹלְדָהּ, "is giving birth." The two lines together are:

Look, the young woman–pregnant,  
and giving birth to a son.

(continued...)

and she will call his name<sup>56</sup> Immanuel / With Us--God!<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>(...continued)

Compare the following similar passages from the **Hebrew Bible**:

**Genesis 16:11** where YHWH's messenger tells Hagar,

Look at you--pregnant;  
and you will give birth to a son.

(Here, instead of the present participle of **Isaiah 7:14**, the imperfect / future verb is used. But in an unpointed text, there is no distinction between the two texts.)

**Genesis 38:24**, where Judah is told,

Tamar your daughter-in-law has prostituted herself,  
and also look--pregnant by prostitutions!

**Judges 13:5**, where Samson's mother is told,

Look at you--pregnant; \  
and you will give birth to a son." **13:7**, same.

(Here again, in an unpointed text, the phrase cannot be distinguished from that of **Isaiah 7:14**.)

Alexander agrees with this, stating that  $\text{הָרָגָה}$  is not a verb or participle [as some scholars claimed], but a feminine adjective, signifying *pregnant*, and here connected with an active participle, to denote that the object is described as present to the Prophet's view." (P. 172)

He adds that "The future form adopted by the [Greek translation, 'she will conceive and will give birth'] is retained in the **New Testament**, because the words are there considered simply as a prophecy; but in order to exhibit the full force which they have in their original connection, the present form must be restored." (P. 172)

<sup>56</sup>Oswalt notes that "Most of the Greek versions and a number of medieval Hebrew manuscripts read 'You [masculine singular] shall call his name' [1QIs<sup>a</sup> reads the verb as a 2 person masculine plural] (p. 202), and comments that "The custom of the mother's naming her child is not uncommon in the **Old Testament** (compare **Genesis 4:1, 25; 29:31-30:13, 17-24; 35:18; Judges 13:24; 1 Samuel 1:20; 4:21**)..."

He adds that "This emphasis upon the mother and the corresponding de-emphasis of the father's role cannot help but be suggestive in the shaping of the ultimate understanding of the sign. No man sired by a human father could be the embodiment of 'God with us.'" (P. 212)

(continued...)

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<sup>56</sup>(...continued)

Here again, we need to take warning concerning putting God in a box, saying dogmatically what God can and cannot do. As the **Book of Job** teaches so emphatically, God is free to do as He pleases, when and where, and with whomever or whatever He pleases, even if it seems terribly wrong, or out of character, or impossible, to human beings. He is not subject to human theological conclusions, even if those conclusions are rooted in biblical statements. God could embody Himself in a human sired by a human father if He so chose, regardless of Oswalt's view that such would be impossible.

Oswalt adds that "In contrast with Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz, both of whom are treated in a straightforward manner as Isaiah's sons, there is an aura of mystery about the Immanuel figure...His father is not identified at all and his mother only generally [but, is 'the maiden' 'general'?]. He [Immanuel] is touched upon only briefly, but then appears again suddenly in **8:8** as possessor of the land and yet again in **8:10** by means of a wordplay...

"The enigmatic nature of the references makes it extremely difficult to identify the child of Ahaz's time. In the context of the house of David and being spoken of as owner of the land, it is tempting to think of a newly conceived crown prince. The recognition that *curds and honey* represent food of royalty in some Mesopotamian texts lends further credence to the idea, as does the thought that through Hezekiah God was able to demonstrate His faithful presence...

"However, that Hezekiah was twenty-five years old at his accession in 516 (**2 Kings 18:2**) means that he was born in 741, at least six years before these events... Finally, **verse 22** makes it very plain that curds and honey are not intended as symbols of royalty but of the generally depopulated nature of the region...

"Perhaps the most attractive option is that Immanuel and Maher-shalal-hash-baz were one and the same. If this were so, this passage would form a more poetic statement of the child's identity, pointing to the ultimate Immanuel, whereas **8:1-4** would constitute a more prosaic account and be limited merely to the person of Maher-shalal-hash-baz. The references to the conception and birth in **8:3** lend support to the connection, as does the reference to Immanuel in **8:10**, shortly after the discussion of Isaiah's son." (Pp. 212-13)

Again we ask, What do you think? If you thought the messages of Isaiah were clear and concise, easily understood, does all of these differing views change your mind? Would you now be more inclined to view Isaiah's messages as originating in visions, or dreams, and being "enigmatic" / "puzzling" in nature?

<sup>57</sup>Translations of **verse 14** vary:

**King James**, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

(continued...)

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<sup>57</sup>(...continued)

**Tanakh**, “Assuredly, my Lord will give you a sign of His own accord! Look, the young woman is with child and about to give birth to a son. Let her name him Immanuel.”

**New Revised Standard**, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.”

**New International**, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

**New Jerusalem**, “The Lord will give you a sign in any case: It is this: the young woman is with child and will give birth to a son whom she will call Immanuel.”

**Rahlfs**, διὰ τοῦτο δώσει κύριος αὐτὸς ὑμῖν σημεῖον ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουηλ, “Because of this Lord will give to you people a sign: look—the virgin will hold / conceive in womb, and will bear / give birth to a son, and you (singular) will call the name of his Emmanuel / God (Is) With Us.”

**Oswalt**, “Therefore, the Sovereign, he will give you a sign. Behold, a maiden shall conceive and bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel.”  
(We think that the Greek translation with its future tense “will hold / conceive in womb” has been followed by **King James**, **New International** and **Oswalt**, while **Tanakh**, **New Revised Standard** and **New Jerusalem** have followed the Hebrew text.)

Jewish interpreters insist that this prophecy was intended for its 8th century B.C.E. context, and had to do with the birth of a baby boy who, before he was older than two or three years, would symbolize YHWH God's presence in destructive judgment! We think this is correct, and agree with the Jewish criticism of typical Christian interpretation of this passage.

But we also believe that the prediction can be validly used in relationship to the birth of Jesus--in a symbolical, typical way, that sees God as acting in the story of Jesus just as he formerly acted in the days of Isaiah and Ahaz, with the birth of these children with unusual names.

**Matthew's Gospel** especially sees Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's history—not only in the sense of exact, literal predictions being fulfilled, but in the sense of his reliving and embodying Israel's history in his birth, life, ministry and sacrificial death.

Matthew would say, we think, Yes the text of **Isaiah** has to do with a baby boy born in the time of Ahaz, and of course the enemy who is described as overwhelming Israel and coming "even to the neck" of Judah before that baby was two or three years old was none other than the King of Assyria in the time of Isaiah.

But nonetheless, that ancient story from Israel's past has numerous relationships to, and reverberations in, the birth and life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth! There, a young woman gave birth to an ordinary child who was symbolic of YHWH's message;

(continued...)



7.15<sup>58</sup> חֲמָאָה וּדְבַשׁ יֹאכֵל

לְדַעְתּוֹ מֵאוֹס בְּרַע וּבְחֹר בְּטוֹב:

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<sup>57</sup>(...continued)

here, in Jesus, a true virgin gave miraculous birth to the Messiah, a marvelous reenactment and enlargement upon and fulfillment of that ancient story!

What do you think?

<sup>58</sup>Oswalt comments on **verses 15-17** that “The two-edged nature of the Immanuel sign comes to the fore in these verses. Many scholars have been unwilling to accept the two-sidedness and have tried to make the material all positive...while others wish to make it all negative...But all of them must resort to textual emendation to make their case...

“The reality of God’s presence with His people can portend joy and sorrow at the same time, depending upon the people’s character...By depending on himself rather than God, Ahaz has unleashed a whirlwind which will not be content to devour his troublesome northern neighbors. Led by the God he has disdained, it will come sweeping over him and his nation as well.” (P. 213)

Do you agree with Oswalt that God’s presence is “two-edged,” that is, both positive and negative, both saving and judging? Do you sense that biblical theologians are prone to emphasize the one and de-emphasize the other?

And do you think God’s judgment can result in salvation? If you and I come honestly into the presence of God, to listen for His voice and His will, it will certainly point out our failures and our sins—we will be like Isaiah was when he saw YHWH in the temple. We will be astounded! But the Divine vision, rather than condemning us, will forgive us, and commission us!

Ortlund states that “These verses indicate that the Syro-Ephraimite threat will soon pass; it will not last longer than the time it takes for a boy (possibly in the sense of ‘any boy’) to reach an age when he can *refuse the evil and choose the good*. In fact, Syria did fall to Assyria in 732 B.C.E. and Israel fell in 722 B.C.E. But the agent of deliverance--the king of Assyria--was a worse disaster for Judah...Ahaz’s unbelief doomed the Davidic dynasty to loss of sovereignty under foreign domination. Now God must restore the throne of David and save the world.” (P. 1255)

Slotki comments on **verse 15** that it is “A parenthesis describing the primitive conditions of life in which Immanuel will spend his youth (compare **verse 22**).” (P. 35)

Curdled milk and honey he will eat,<sup>59</sup>

to learn / as he learns to reject the evil, and to choose the good.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Slotki states concerning the phrase, *curds and honey shall he eat*, that “The land having been laid waste by the invading armies, all agriculture will cease and survivors will be entirely dependent for their food on the wild honey in the fields and the produce of the flocks which will be short of pasture in the grasslands of the forsaken farms.” (P. 35)

Motyer likewise comments that “*Curds and honey* was, according to **verses 21-22**, the food of poverty. Some, misled by a superficial resemblance to ‘a land flowing with milk and honey,’ interpret it as the food of plenty. [But here it signifies] the monotonous diet of hard times...The Divine child is to be born into the poverty of his people.” (P. 86)

Motyer’s comment is misleading in calling the child “Divine.” The child to be born within a few years is not “Divine,” but bears a symbolic name which signifies that “God is with us” in judgment.

Kaiser states: “That cream and honey are described in **7:22** as the food of those who survive the catastrophe need not be an announcement of a time of distress; it indicates a time of blessing. Therefore we are compelled to understand **verse 15a** as an indication that the boy Immanuel will grow up in a time of salvation. The trust in God’s support presupposed by his birth, namely that the boy will grow up under the protection of his God and that God will continue to be with him, will be justified in his life...The Immanuel prophecy is the forecast of...coming salvation.” (P. 161)

We think that this is overstatement. We see nothing in the context that “compels” the understanding of “cream and honey” as indicating a time of salvation. Rather, the phrase is ambiguous, and can be taken either in terms of a time of poverty, or of a time of plenty, as becomes obvious from the differing interpretations. Kaiser is, we think, being too dogmatic. But again, the very fact that such different understandings can be given to Isaiah’s language, demonstrates the “enigmatic” nature of biblical prophecy.

<sup>60</sup>Translations of **verse 15** vary:

**King James**, “Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.”

**Tanakh**, “(By the time he learns to reject the bad and choose the good, people will be feeding on curds and honey.)”

**New Revised Standard**, “He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good.”

**New International**, “He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right.”

(continued...)

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<sup>60</sup>(...continued)

**New Jerusalem**, “On curds and honey will he feed until he knows how to refuse the bad and choose the good.”

**Rahfs**, βούτυρον καὶ μέλι φάγεται πρὶν ἢ γνῶναι αὐτὸν ἢ προελέσθαι πονηρὰ ἐκλέξεται τὸ ἀγαθόν “Butter and honey he will eat before his knowing either to choose bad things (or) to pick out the good.”

**Oswalt**, “Curds and honey he will eat before he knows how to reject evil and choose good.”

These translations leave us wondering as to the meaning of the verse. Oswalt comments that the phrase “*before he knows how to reject evil and choose good*” has been interpreted in two ways.

Some believe it refers to moral discrimination (as in **Genesis 2:17; 3:5; Deuteronomy 1:39; 1 Kings 3:9; Isaiah 5:20**) and, in that light, suggest an elapsed time of twelve to twenty years...

Others point to **8:4**, where it is said that Isaiah’s son will not be able to speak clearly before Damascus and Samaria are plundered, and argue that this is the correct interpretation of good and evil here: distinguishing between what is helpful and what is harmful...

“Either idea would fit here. Within three years Damascus had been destroyed and [Northern] Israel had ceased to exist. On balance, given the evident connection of the phrase with moral discernment at several points, and given a lack of clear evidence to the contrary, the best interpretation seems to be that by the time the child has reached an age of official accountability, both of the threatening powers will have ceased to exist.” (P. 214)

See the first two lines of the next **verse (16)** which makes interpretation of **verse 15** clearer. We think that there is no way that this statement can be understood in terms of Jesus Christ. “Immanuel” has to be a child born at the time the incident occurred, and before his reaching adult-hood, both Northern Israel and Aram / Syria would have been overwhelmed by the Assyrians.

Slotki states that “The prophet seems to indicate that the time of the invasion will precede Immanuel’s attainment of the age of discretion when he has the ability to discriminate.” (P. 35)

Alexander states that “the simple sense of the prediction is that the desolation of Judah, caused by the invasion of Rezin and Pekah, should be only temporary. This idea is symbolically expressed by making the new-born child subsist during his infancy on curds and honey, instead of the ordinary food of an agricultural population. This is clearly the meaning of the same expression in **verse 22** [where] the words are

(continued...)

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<sup>60</sup>(...continued)

descriptive only of such abundance as arises from a sparse population and neglected tillage...

“That this desolation should be temporary, is expressed by representing it as coextensive with the early childhood of the person mentioned...The essential idea is that the desolation should not last until a child then born could reach maturity, and probably not longer than his first few years...Nothing short of the strongest exegetical necessity could justify the reference of this verse to Shearyashubh...or to any other subject than the one referred to in the verse preceding, namely, Immanuel, the child whose birth the Prophet there describes as just at hand, and whose infancy he here describes as passed in the midst of surrounding desolation.” (Pp. 173-74)

Motyer comments that “Within three years Damascus had fallen to Assyria, and thirteen years later Samaria was taken. The implication, however, is that Immanuel’s birth is imminent, and surely Isaiah’s hearers would have understood it in this way; that some girl, at present [an unmarried but marriageable young woman], would marry and in due course bear Immanuel...

“Just as the full significance of the name *Immanuel* is found by relating **verse 14** to other references within the unity of **chapters 7-11**, so the date of his birth in **verse 16** should take note of what the section as a whole says on this point. This reveals a tension between the immediate and the remote...

“On the one hand, it seems Immanuel will be born within the immediate threat (**7:14-16; 10:27-11:1**) and on the other, that he will be born in the undated future, for before his birth Judah and Israel will be scattered and need regathering (**8:11-22; 11:12-13**)...

“These events must lie beyond the Assyrian times, for Isaiah knew that Judah would not suffer its coming exile (**6:11-12**) at Assyrian hands (**10:27-34; 29:1-8; 31:4-9; 38:6**). Specifically, the birth of the royal child is scheduled for ‘the future,’ ‘the afterwards’ (**9:1<sup>Heb</sup> / 8:23<sup>Eng</sup>**). Isaiah does nothing to resolve this tension between immediacy and remoteness. As for Ahaz, he was jeopardizing the Messianic hope resident in the house of David. Because of his unbelief the promised Messiah would be born into poverty, heir to a meaningless throne in a conquered land...

“Every next king in David’s line was the focus of a longing that he would be the Messiah, and every actual king was guardian of that longing inasmuch as he might be the Messiah’s father...

“From the time of Ahaz there never was again a ‘house of David’ in the true sense but only a line of puppet, pretend-kings [but this is overstatement--Hezekiah and Josiah were real kings, devoutly related to YHWH!] under alien domination until, at the exile, even they disappeared into the sand of history never to re-emerge...

(continued...)

<sup>60</sup>(...continued)

“The name of the overlord power would change, from Assyria to Babylon to Persia to Greece and finally to Rome, before Immanuel would be born, but when he was born it was to share the poverty of his people, to inherit a non-existent throne and to feel the full weight of the oppressor. The blame for all this rested on Ahaz and his failure to believe the Lord’s word [but only on Ahaz? What about the unbelieving king Manasseh?]. The promise awaited its time but the threat was immediate.” (Pp. 86-7)

However we evaluate Motyer’s view, and his attempt to depict Immanuel as more than just a child born in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., we observe that Motyer has forced a great deal into the text, and has denigrated faithful kings like Hezekiah and Josiah, claiming that they were not truly of the house of David.

What do you think?

<sup>61</sup>Kaiser interprets the text in a way similar to that of Motyer. He comments that **verse 16** “asserts that land previously worked and inhabited will be abandoned. This simply means that a violent catastrophe will precede the time of salvation...So a catastrophe coming upon the kingdom of Judah is to be followed by another catastrophe, and then the time of salvation...”

“The actual location of such a prophecy, which looks beyond a future second judgment to a time of salvation, is to be found after, rather than before, the catastrophe of 587 [the Babylonian invasion of Judah and Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar]...Thus it is clear that the Immanuel verses leave the situation of Ahaz far behind ...(and) point to the future of the people of God...”

“In this sense Immanuel is in fact the representative of the people of the holy remnant who survive the eschatological catastrophe...Here the faithless house of David, represented by Ahaz and deposed from rule in the catastrophe of 587, is contrasted with the new royal house of the time of salvation, whose mother will trust in Yahweh by giving her son the name Immanuel, God with us, full of trust despite the clouds of the last catastrophe which is to befall Israel in its history, and who will not be put to shame in this trust.” (Pp. 162-63)

But is this truly the case? Do the verses about Immanuel “leave the situation of Ahaz far behind,” “pointing to the future of the people of God”? Do they predict any catastrophe beyond an invasion by the Assyrians? Do they predict a “new royal house of the time of salvation”? We think not.

Kaiser states that “this is clear,” but we think it involves a number of suppositions that are far from clear, turning the passage that speaks of something to come in a few years into one that speaks of something far distant.

(continued...)

מֵאֵס בְּרַע וּבָחַר בְּטוֹב

תִּעֲזֹב הָאָדָמָה

אֲשֶׁר אֶתָּה קִיִּץ

מִפְּנֵי שְׁנֵי מַלְכֵיהָ:

Because before the youth will know

to reject the evil and to choose the good,<sup>62</sup>

the ground will be left desolate,

that which you dread sickeningly,<sup>63</sup>

from before its two kings!<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>(...continued)

And it seems obvious that anyone studying the Hebrew text, and observing the various ways in which its words have been understood, will have to admit the “enigmatic” nature of the text, which leads to so much confusion among its interpreters. What do you think?

<sup>62</sup>We understand these first two lines of **verse 16** as the answer to the questions raised concerning the meaning of **verse 15**. Isaiah is talking about “moral discrimination,” the coming of age of the promised child. Before the little boy reaches that stage in life, knowing how to refuse evil and choose good, the lands of Aram / Syria and Northern Israel will be deserted. Destruction is coming upon Ahaz’s enemy coalition, and coming rapidly!

<sup>63</sup>Motyer observes that the qal participle here, קִיִּץ, [“you are loathing / abhorring”] “you dread sickeningly,” from the root קִיִּץ “is used of paranoiac, sick fear, mortal terror.” (P. 87)

<sup>64</sup>The last three lines of **verse 16** are given varying translations, due to its rather odd wording in Hebrew:

**King James**, “the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.”

**Tanakh**, “the ground whose two kings you dread shall be abandoned.”

**New Revised Standard**, “the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.”

**New International**, “the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.”

**New Jerusalem**, “the lands whose two kings are frightening you will be deserted.”

(continued...)

<sup>64</sup>(...continued)

**Rahfs** καὶ καταλειφθήσεται ἡ γῆ ἣν σὺ φοβῆ ἀπὸ προσώπου τῶν δύο βασιλέων, literally, “and it will be left behind, the land which you fear from face of / before the two kings.”

**Oswalt**, “the territory whose two kings you dread will be desolate.”

We suspect that **King James** (and our translation) are correct from the standpoint of the Hebrew, but that the other translations are correct from the standpoint of making sense. Ahaz would hardly hate or dread the ground of Northern Israel and Syria—it is the actions of their two kings that cause Ahaz to be in dread. It is what they are doing that he hates.

**Verses 15** and **16** make it abundantly clear that the promised child of the young woman / virgin of **7:14** is not a child to be born far out in the future, i.e., the Messiah, but one to be born before the fall of Damascus and Samaria in the time of Isaiah and King Ahaz of Judah.

Alexander comments that “The desolation shall be temporary... *The land* here meant is Syria and Israel, spoken of as one because confederate against Judah. The wasting of these kingdoms and the deportation of their people by Tiglath-pileser (**2 Kings 15:29; 16:9**), is here predicted, which of course implies the previous deliverance of Judah and brief duration of its own calamity...

“The true connection of the verses has been well explained...that Judah shall lie waste for a short time, and only for a short time, for before that short time is expired, its invaders shall themselves be invaded and destroyed.” (Pp. 174-75)

<sup>65</sup>Gray states that **verses 17-25** are “a prophecy, or a collection of prophetic fragments, predicting ruin and especially depopulation.” (P. 136)

Yes, indeed. And the verses sound more like a description of what Isaiah foresees (in vision) as happening to Syria and Northern Israel, but the statement of the text, “upon your (Ahaz’s) father’s house,” means Judah, which is depicted as suffering wholesale invasion by Assyria.

Gray comments on **verses 18-19** that “Under the figure of swarming and ferocious insects the writer predicts that Yahweh is about to bring on Judah (**verse 17**) an overwhelming invasion. If his verses have reached us in their original form, he expected invasion from both Assyria and Egypt.” (P. 137)

But Gray holds that the statement concerning Egypt (‘the fly that is at the end of the streams of Egypt’) is a later gloss / addition, and “Elsewhere Isaiah feared alliance with (**chapters 29-30**) not invasion from, Egypt...Isaiah was predicting here, as elsewhere, an Assyrian invasion.” (P. 138)

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<sup>65</sup>(...continued)

Watts entitles **verses 17-25** “Yahweh Is Bringing Critical Times—the Assyrian Era.” He comments that the phrase “In that day (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא) is a fixed prophetic formula introducing an oracle concerning the coming of judgment...It often is related to “the Day of Yahweh” and is an eschatological formula. Here the oracles are related to an historical event: the invasion of the Assyrians.” (P. 106) See the phrase in **verses 18-19, 20, 21-22** and **23-25**.

He says that the announcement in **verse 17** “contains three important elements:

- First           the source of the event is Yahweh. In the announcement Ahaz is not blamed (as he is in **2 Kings 16:7-9; 2 Chronicles 28:16-26**)...
- Second        the events are significant for the young king himself...for his people...and for the Davidic dynasty...
- Third          the Assyrian crisis will be more decisive and bring more change for Jerusalem / Judah than any event since Jeroboam led the civil war that divided the kingdom after Solomon’s death.

“This is a key verse for understanding the [**Book of Isaiah**]. It calls for fifth-century Jews [Watts holds that the **Book of Isaiah** was written in post-exilic times, specifically in the fifth century] to recognize the Assyrian invasions of the eighth century (not 587 B.C.E. the date of the Babylonian invasion and captivity of Judah) as the watershed in God’s history.” (P. 106)

That is, Watts understands this material as having been written for post-exilic Jews to enable them to understand the real cause of their nation’s fall to Babylon—it was not Babylon, but the earlier subjection to Assyria that had led to this tragic outcome in Judah’s history.

Both Watts and Kaiser, think they can re-write Israel’s history in a much more adequate way than **Kings-Chronicles**, and can date large sections of the **Book of Isaiah** in post-exilic times. We do not think their attempts at this are successful, while admitting that disciples of Isaiah in post-exilic times may have edited the **Book of Isaiah**, making slight additions or corrections—but nothing as wholesale as these two scholars presume.

Watts quotes Herbert Donner in **Israelite and Judean History** (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977, p. 416) as depicting Assyria as, “an empire of a completely new type, an incomparable power structure which determined the destinies of the Ancient Near East for almost half a millennium,” and states that “God created that watershed. Its results were His planned intention. Ahaz had to learn to live with that. Jews of the fifth century also had to adjust their thinking to God’s reality.

(continued...)



וְעַל-עַמֶּךָ וְעַל-בֵּית אָבִיךָ  
 יָמִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-בָאוּ לְמִיּוֹם סוּר-אֶפְרַיִם מֵעַל יְהוּדָה  
 אֵת מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר:

YHWH<sup>66</sup> will bring upon you

and upon your people and upon your father's house,

days which did not come since (the) day of Ephraim's turning away from Judah—<sup>67</sup>

Assyria's king!<sup>68</sup>

<sup>65</sup>(...continued)

“*The King of Assyria* puts a name on what has until now been a mysterious, unnamed force (compare **5:26-30**). Hosea had named Assyria in prophecies of fifteen to twenty years before this (**Hosea 7:11; 8:9; 9:3; 10:6; 11:12**) while Amos had cited Assyrian victories at Calneh, Hamath, and Gath (**Amos 6:2**). God's use of the Assyrian will be discussed in **10:5-16** and **24-26**; assurance of an end to the Assyrian's dominance will come in **14:24-25**.” (Pp. 106-07)

Watts agrees with Donner that Assyria was “an empire of a completely new type,” being used by YHWH to teach Israel to re-think and re-interpret its role as a nation, and he views the “Davidic House” as having come to an end with Ahaz. But Assyria appears to us as simply another of the great city-states that appear constantly throughout ancient history—not an empire of a completely new type. And we do not see Ahaz being depicted as the last king of the House of David. What do you think?

<sup>66</sup>Where our Hebrew text has YHWH, **Rahlfs** has “the God.”

<sup>67</sup>Slotki comments that “The rebellion of the Ten Tribes under Jeroboam against the house of David was the greatest disaster in the history of Judah.” (P. 36)

<sup>68</sup>Alexander comments on **verse 17** that “Again addressing Ahaz, [Isaiah] assures him that although he shall escape the present danger, God will inflict worse evils on himself and his successors, by means of those very allies whose assistance he is now seeking...declaring the days threatened to be worse than any which had come upon Judah since the revolt of the ten tribes, here called Ephraim, from the largest and most powerful tribe, that to which Jeroboam belonged, and within which the chief towns of the kingdom were situated...”

“According to [a number of scholars], the *king of Assyria* may here include the kings of Babylon, to whom the title is applied in **2 Kings 23:29**, if not in **Nehemiah**

(continued...)

<sup>68</sup>(...continued)

**9:32**, as it is to the kings of Persia in **Ezra 6:22**, considered as successors to the Assyrian power, in accordance with which usage, Herodotus calls Babylon a city of Assyria...

“The days here threatened were to be worse, not simply with respect to individual suffering or temporary difficulties of the state itself, but to the loss of its independence, its transition to a servile state, from which it was never permanently freed, the domination of Assyria being soon succeeded by that of Egypt, and this by that of Babylon, Persia, Syria, and Rome, the last ending only in the downfall of the state, and that general dispersion of the people which continues to this day [1875].” (Pp. 175-76)

Oswalt states that “**Verses 14-16** had perhaps lulled [King Ahaz] into complacency. Even if he had done the wrong thing, it was going to turn out all right. Good days would come. But with devastating suddenness Isaiah lets him know that good days will not come. What is coming upon Jerusalem is the awful thunder of war-chariots. Whatever a man trusts in place of God will one day turn to devour him.” (P. 214)

Motyer comments that “Seeking help from Assyria, [Ahaz] had in fact taken a tiger by the tail. The result was not the security which faith could have brought but unparalleled disaster...Isaiah’s brilliant irony: Assyria the national savior turned executioner!” (Pp. 87-88)

Motyer doesn’t say this, but the historical fact is that Assyria was not the “executioner” of Judah and Jerusalem—rather, as things turned out, it was Babylon that became the executioner. Isaiah foresaw the execution coming, but misnamed the executioner!

This will hardly be admitted by those who view the prophets as possessing clear, exact foresight, and who, because of their Divine calling could speak nothing but the truth, nothing but the facts! But the biblical view of the prophets, as expressed in **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**, is that the foresight / vision of the prophets was cloudy, filled with enigma and puzzling; their knowledge was partial rather than full. If we acknowledge this biblical teaching, we will not have to overlook or excuse such a mis-naming as Isaiah commits here!

Slotki comments on **verse 17** that “The threat to Judah is not, as Ahaz feared, that of the two neighboring allies, Pekah and Rezin, but the all-powerful king of Assyria sent by the Lord of Hosts to execute punishment for the unbelief and Godlessness of Ahaz.” (P. 36)

<sup>69</sup>Motyer entitles **7:18-8:8**: “The judgment.” He comments that “The way of faith had been rejected. The king of Assyria has been adjudged a greater security than the Lord and His promises. What now follows has the inevitability of biblical logic: the

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<sup>69</sup>(...continued)

alternatives to the way of salvation are always ways of destruction; those who hate wisdom love death. See **Proverbs 8:36**,

And one sinning with / against Me (Wisdom)  
(is) wronging his innermost-being!  
All those hating me—  
they loved death!

“This mosaic of oracles follows the [following program]: the emptying and decay of the countryside, poverty, the elimination of the northern powers (Aram and Israel) and Judah submerged under the Assyrian flood. The catastrophe is total. Ahaz may have had every political skill, logic, the harvested results of diplomatic experience—all ‘the facts of the real world’--but when the people of God operate by ‘what stands to reason’ rather than what proceeds from faith, when they seek safety in the resources, policies and powers of the world—the king of Assyria instead of ‘the King, the Lord Almighty’ (**6:5**)—the things they trust guarantee their calamity. The dominating theme is Assyria (**7:18**) and its king (**7:20; 8:4, 7**). This was the power and the person on whom Ahaz trusted; this was the power and person of destruction...

[but, of course, the final destruction of Judah and Jerusalem was to be Babylon, not Assyria and its king! See the preceding footnote.]

“Four sections introduced by *In that day* (**7:18, 20, 21 23**), followed by two sections introduced by *The Lord said* and *The Lord spoke* (**8:1, 5**), fall topically into three pairs:

1. The completeness of the conquest (**verses 18-20**)...
2. The results of the conquest (**verses 21-25**)...
3. The course of the conquest (**8:1-8**)...

“With his customary literary skill Isaiah has woven all this material into a compelling unity.” (P. 88)

But the passage Motyer refers to, **Proverbs 8:36**, is not talking about the “word of God,” but rather, of Wisdom, the kind of wisdom that is planted in all of nature and that guides the rulers of the earth. Motyer’s view pits that wisdom against the word of God, and we think that is a crucial mistake. We say, By all means learn what stands to reason, but at the same time, listen for the word of God. Wisdom would have told Ahaz that Syria and Northern Israel were “two stumps of smoking fire-sticks,” and that his fear of them was baseless. But wisdom would also tell him that to trust in Assyria, without counting the cost, and departing from faith in YHWH, was likewise mistaken. We say, Listen to the voice of wisdom, but keep your faith in God! What do you say?

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<sup>69</sup>(...continued)

Oswalt comments on **verses 18-25** that “the function of these verses is to spell out in more detail the veiled threat of **verse 17**. This section answers the question ‘How will the coming days be unlike any since the division of the nation?’ The answer is a grim one. The armies of their enemies will blanket the land like swarms of bees or flies. The Judeans will be disgraced in defeat. The countryside will be so depopulated that there will be no one to eat the produce of the few remaining animals or to cultivate the once-fertile hills. The land will return to wilderness...

“Had Ahaz been able to believe that God is indeed present with His people, it need not have been so. But because he trusted something less than God, that object of trust now becomes the instrument of the very devastation he dreaded.” (Pp. 215-16)

He comments on **verses 18-19** that “In **5:26** Isaiah depicted God as whistling for the nations to come and devastate his land. Now he specifies which nations those are. They are Assyria from the north and Egypt from the south...

“Throughout its history Israel has been caught between the civilizations of the Nile and Mesopotamian valleys, each of them desiring the Levantine region for its access to the other culture. [‘The Levant today consists of Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Northern Cyprus, Syria, Palestine, and part of southern Turkey. Precise definitions have varied over time, and the term originally had a broader and less well-defined usage. The Levant has been described as the ‘crossroads of western Asia, the eastern Mediterranean and northeast Africa.’ **Wikipedia**, 4/19/2014]...

“But the prophet sees these great political and military movements not as the work of imperialistically minded powers, but as events which occur at the command of the one God Who accomplishes His saving work in history. Assyria and Egypt are insects trained to swarm at their Master’s command. Now that command is issued and they come...

“The two insects and the two lands form a parallel pair by which Isaiah can depict the swarming, suffocating, inescapable aspects of the enemy armies. They will be everywhere, even in the most inaccessible places where the inhabitants were wont to hide from their invaders. The nature of the land offers many such hiding places: caves in the sides of steep wadis, towering crags such as Masada on the shore of the Dead Sea, and wilderness such as the wilderness of Judea southeast of Jerusalem. But none of these is of any use against an enemy as ubiquitous as bees or flies.” (P. 218)

Ortlund says that in **verses 18-25**, “Isaiah sets forth the devastating national consequences of foreign invasion, marked fourfold by the phrase in that day (**verses 18, 20, 21, 23**).” (P. 1255)

(continued...)

יִשְׂרָק יְהוָה לְזָבוּב  
 אֲשֶׁר בְּקֶצֶה יְאֲרֵי מִצְרַיִם  
 וּלְדַבּוּרָה  
 אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשׁוּרִים:

And it will happen in that day,  
 YHWH will whistle for the fly  
 which is in (the) end of Egypt's canals,<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup>(...continued)

Kaiser entitles **verses 18-25** “The Great Devastation,” and states that it envisages “a consistent historical sequence:

- first to be found in **verses 18, 19**, predicts in metaphorical language the complete occupation of the land by an enemy attack;
- second consisting only of **verse 20**, no longer envisages the enemy coming from Mesopotamia [but the text names ‘the king of Assyria!], and announces the depopulation of the land in no less metaphorical language
- third in **verses 23-25**, envisages the consequences for the cultivated land.” (P. 174)

Slotki states concerning **verses 18-19** that “Egypt and Assyria, striving for the mastery of Asia, will clash in the buffer State of Judah, subjecting it to redoubled blows from the north and south.” (P. 36)

<sup>70</sup>The phrase אֲשֶׁר בְּקֶצֶה יְאֲרֵי מִצְרַיִם, “which is in (the) end of Egypt’s canals,” is given varying translations:

**King James**, “that *is* in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt”;  
**Tanakh**, “at the ends of the water channels of Egypt”;  
**New Revised Standard**, “that is at the sources of the streams of Egypt”;  
**New International**, “from the distant streams of Egypt”; **New Jerusalem**, same, but substitutes “mosquitoes” for “flies” before the phrase.

Motyer comments that “The word *streams* (plural of יְאֵר) is a semi-technical term for the Nile. The plural is the river with its system of irrigation canals. The phrase, (literally) ‘at the extremity of the Nile-system,’ refers to the whole land of Egypt. That

(continued...)

and for the bee<sup>71</sup>  
which (is) in Assyria's land;<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>(...continued)

Egypt, the first and mortal foe of God's people, should ever be considered as a means of safety proves that when people cease to believe in the Lord they will believe anything!" (P. 89)

Here again, Motyer goes to extremes. Egypt became, in the time of Joseph, a place of refuge for Israel from devastating famine in the land of Canaan. Later, when a new king arose in Egypt who didn't know the history of Joseph and the Israelites, the Israelites were made slaves, and when they were led out of Egypt by Moses, they were in fact Israel's "mortal foe."

But that doesn't mean they had always been, and always would be Israel's enemy. See **Isaiah 19:18-25** where Isaiah predicts the coming of a day when Egyptians will swear allegiance to YHWH of Armies, Who will save them, making Himself known to them and accepting their sacrificial worship. In that day, Isaiah states, Assyria, Egypt and Israel will be united with YHWH's blessing.\

Motyer seems to be saying that his religious belief is not only right, but that any other belief is a matter of "believing anything." We have had the experience of attempting to discuss religious beliefs with others, to find that when we disagree with them, they accuse us of "not believing anything!", which sounds much like Motyer's statement here—and which is just as unreasonable.

This passage, **Isaiah 7:18**, says nothing about Egypt being considered a means of safety to YHWH's people. Isaiah is warning Judah / Jerusalem that Egypt will be the source of destructive enemies ("flies") who will be Divinely sent in judgment upon their land.

<sup>71</sup>Gray states that there are "a number of ancient testimonies to the custom of summoning bees by various noises, such as the clanging of brass instruments...of which the most pertinent, if it is not merely deduced from the biblical passages, is Cyril of Alexandria's comment on this verse: 'Bee-keepers are accustomed to whistle (συρίζειν as **Rahlfs** translates here) to the bees, and so entice them out of their hives to the flowers and herbs, or get them in from the fields and make them stop at home.'" (P. 138) Cyril wrote extensive commentaries on **Isaiah 1-50**.

See "Beekeeping History" on the Internet, which states that "Some ancient documents suggest that the Egyptians were able to 'call' their bees by hissing or whistling." (7/9/2014)

<sup>72</sup>Oswalt observes that rather than thinking of a specific threat emerging from Egypt in the time of Ahaz, "It is more likely that Isaiah is speaking generally,

(continued...)

7.19<sup>73</sup> וּבָאוּ וְנָחָו כָּל־ם

בְּנַחְלֵי הַבְּתוֹת וּבְנִקְיֵי הַסְּלָעִים

וּבְכֹל הַנְּעֻצִים וּבְכֹל הַנְּהַלְלִים:

And they will come and they will rest, all of them,

in the precipices of the wadis and in the clefts of the rocks,

and in all the thorn-bushes, and in all the pastures.<sup>74</sup>

7.20<sup>75</sup> בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִגְלַח אֶרְצִי

<sup>72</sup>(...continued)

demonstrating Judah's vulnerability to powerful enemies on either hand apart from God's protection." (P. 216) The imminent threat is from Assyria, not from Egypt.

<sup>73</sup>Alexander comments on **verse 19** that "Carrying out the figures of the preceding verse, the Prophet, instead of simply saying that the land shall be infested by foreigners, represents it as completely filled with bees and flies, who are described as settling upon all the places commonly frequented by such insects...The words seem naturally to express the general notion of a country overrun, infested, filled with foreigners and enemies, not only by military occupation but in other ways." (P. 178)

Gray similarly states that here "the figure is maintained: the invading insects settle in such places as they are wont to settle in, where they can find food and shelter; but there is also probably an implicit resolution of the figure; the Jews will find no escape from the Assyrians even in inaccessible wadis and in clefts of the rocks." (Pp. 138-39)

<sup>74</sup>The last phrase in **verse 19**, וּבְכֹל הַנְּהַלְלִים, which we have translated by "and in all the pastures," occurs only here and its meaning is uncertain. **Rahlf**s has "and in every tree." The Aramaic targum has "fine houses," while the Latin Vulgate has "holes."

Translations vary from "and upon all bushes," to "and in all the watering places," to "and on all the pastures," to "and at all the water holes," to "and all the water-points."

Motyer comments that "No place is too far or too unwelcoming to deter the swarm." (P. 89)

We are reminded of the plagues sent on ancient Egypt, including frogs, gnats, flies and locusts—all of which are said to have filled the land in **Exodus 8-10**.

<sup>75</sup>Gray comments on **verse 20** that it contains "A new figure of devastation and depopulation: here, whatever may be the case in **verse 18**, Yahweh's agent (compare

(continued...)

בְּתַעַר הַשְּׂכִירָה בְּעִבְרֵי נְהַר

בְּמִלְךְ אַשּׁוּר

אֶת־הָרֹאשׁ וְשַׁעַר הַרְגְּלִים

וְגַם אֶת־הַזְּקָן תִּסְפֶּה:

In that day, my Lord will shave

with the razor hired<sup>76</sup> in regions across (the) Euphrates,<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>(...continued)

**Isaiah 10:5** [‘Assyria, the rod of My anger’]...is Assyria only...[Here, Judah is personified] as a man who is to be subjected to the extreme ignominy of being shorn of his hair from head to foot.” (P. 139)

Oswalt states that in this verse “Isaiah stresses again that the coming attack by Assyria will not be at her own volition. She will be but an agent of the Sovereign, a tool in His hand. This concept was fundamental to Israel’s survival as the people of God. If they should ever come to believe the prevailing view that the Gods of the conquered people had been defeated by the Gods of the victors, then their faith was lost. But if they could believe that in all things their God was Sovereign and that His ultimate purpose was good, then they could survive any shock that would come to them.” (P. 217)

Alexander states that “Had the Prophet...represented the invaders as *locusts*, he would probably have gone on to describe them as devouring the land; but having chosen bees and flies as the emblem he proceeds to express the idea of their spoliations by a different figure, that of a body closely shorn or shaven by a razor under the control of God and in His service.” (Pp. 178-79)

Ortlund says that “Isaiah foresees his nation scraped down to bare essentials, to their disgrace, by the very *razor* they *hired* to save them from humiliation.” (P. 1255)

<sup>76</sup>**Rahlf**s translates by “with the razor, the great and drunken one.” The Greek translator has evidently confused the Hebrew שְׂכִירָה, “hired,” with the Hebrew שִׁכְרָה, “drunken.”

Alexander comments that “Instead of *hired* (μεμισθωμένω), the Alexandrian Manuscript...reads drunken (μεμεθυσμένω), which is also the version of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion.” (P. 179)

(continued...)



with Assyria's king—

the head and pubic hair,<sup>78</sup>  
and also the beard will be swept away.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>(...continued)

Slotki states that this “hiring” is “probably an allusion to the gold and silver wherewith Ahaz had hired the king of Assyria to come to his aid (compare **2 Kings 16:7ff.**)” (P. 36)

<sup>77</sup>Oswalt comments on the phrase *hired from beyond the River* that it “is probably an ironic comment upon Ahaz’s alliance with Assyria. He had hired Assyria from beyond the Euphrates to attack his enemies. But that same razor, in God’s hands, would turn upon him shortly...

“Ahaz may well have sought to keep his covenant with Tiglath-pileser secret. If so, Isaiah here shocks Ahaz with his evident knowledge of the affair for the reference to the *king of Assyria* would be unnecessary unless the agreement between the two kings were in the background.” (P. 217)

<sup>78</sup>The noun here is a dual noun, **הַרְגְּלַיִם**, literally “the two legs.”

Oswalt notes that the phrase “*the hair of the legs* may with ‘head’ express totality as in our ‘top to bottom,’ but it may also refer to the pubic hair, as ‘legs’ can sometimes act as a euphemism for the genitalia.” (P. 215)

See **Exodus 4:25**, **Isaiah 6:2**, the seraphs cover their “feet” with their wings; **Ezekiel 16:25**, the rebellious daughter / wife Jerusalem “spread wide her feet” to every passer-by.

Kaiser comments that “The...saying makes Yahweh into a barber whom he hires” (p. 175), but this is misleading. The depiction is of YHWH as a barber Who hires a razor, the king of Assyria to shave off the hair of those living in Syria / Palestine.

<sup>79</sup>Oswalt holds that this “shaving” “may be a reference to the way in which captives were treated, but more probably it is a figurative expression of the disgrace which comes to a defeated nation. The figure here is one of complete humiliation: *all* the hair on the body is shorn off, even to that badge of respect, the beard. Humanly speaking, Judah will have no honor left.” (P. 217)

Alexander comments that “As Ahaz had profaned and robbed God’s house to hire a foreign razor, with which Israel and Syria might be shaven, so God would make use of that self-same razor to shave Judah, i.e. to remove the population, or its wealth, or both...representing the spoiling of Judah by foreign invaders and intruders as the shaving of the hair from the whole body.” (P. 179)

(continued...)

7.21<sup>80</sup> וְהָיָה בַיּוֹם הַהוּא

וְחָיָה אִישׁ עֹגֵלֶת בְּקָר

וּשְׂתֵי-צֹאן:

And it will happen in that day,  
a man will keep alive a heifer (of the) herd,

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<sup>79</sup>(...continued)

Slotki observes that this “shaving” symbolizes “ruthless pillage, devastation and degradation. The beard in the Orient was a mark of dignity.” (P. 36)

<sup>80</sup>Slotki says that **verses 21-25** are a depiction of “the deplorable condition of the land after the invader had left his mark upon it.” (P. 37)

He says concerning **verses 21-22** that “Agricultural activity ceased, primitive conditions have returned, and the survivors of the storm and strife live precariously on the produce of their flocks.” (P. 37)

Watts likewise states that in these two verses there is a picture of “a reduction of living to a minimal nourishment of a herder culture. This is a reduction from the city life of commerce that Judah has known.” (P. 107)

Oswalt comments that “Although some commentators, following the lead of the (Aramaic) Targum, have tried to make these verses speak of the blessedness of the remnant, it is clear that the main theme of this utterance along with the following is of the depopulation of the land so that it reverts from a crop-growing to a herding region in which there will be so few people that a minimum of animals will produce more than enough food.” (P. 217)

Alexander states that “In consequence of these spoliations [or, ‘shavings’], the condition of the country will be wholly changed. The population left shall not be agricultural but pastoral. Instead of living on the fruits of the soil, they shall subsist upon spontaneous products, such as milk and honey, which shall be abundant because the people will be few and the uncultivated grounds extensive.” (P. 180)

Ortlund comments on **verse 21** that “The population of God’s people is so diminished that it takes only a few animals to produce more than enough food for the remnant.” (P. 1255)

And Slotki says, “There will be no corn, wine or oil, which normally provided a diet for the masses.” (P. 37)

and two sheep.<sup>81</sup>

7.22 וְהָיָה מְרֵב עֲשׂוֹת חֶלֶב

יֹאכֵל חֲמָאָה  
כִּי־חֲמָאָה וְדָבֶשׁ

יֹאכֵל כָּל־הַנּוֹתָר בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ:

And it will happen because of its great production<sup>82</sup> of milk,

he will eat curdled-milk;

because curdled-milk and honey

everyone that remains in the midst of the land will eat.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Oswalt comments that “The exact significance of a man’s owning a heifer and two goats or sheep is debatable. Those favoring a positive view point out that many a poor man in the Near East today would feel rich with a heifer and two goats. In the light of the context, however, it seems more likely that it is being said that a man will be able to save only these from the debacle. The use of the verb *keep alive* (or ‘preserve’) also seems to support this view. Of greater significance is that the milk which a heifer, not a cow in her prime, and a couple of goats will produce will be enough so that it will have to be curdled to keep it. Because of the paucity of inhabitants, the same situation will hold true across the land...

“In the light of **verse 15**, it is evident that Isaiah is thinking of this condition as existing in the near future, as it certainly did in Northern Israel by 721, but also in Judah as a result of the various Assyrian campaigns between this time and 701...

“Although Ahaz, through his policies dictated by human wisdom, will have plunged the land to disaster, nonetheless God is still with His people, and the survivors of Ahaz’s act, few though they be, will be provided for.” (P. 218)

<sup>82</sup>Slotki states that “The scanty products will have to suffice for the depleted population, the mention of *abundance* (our ‘great production’) being ironical.” (P. 37)

Probably...but it is difficult to be certain whether or not a written text is ironical. We cannot see the author’s face, his smile, a wink, etc.

<sup>83</sup>Alexander comments that such a diet “is here mentioned neither as a delicacy nor as plain and ordinary food, but as a kind of diet independent of the cultivation of the earth, and therefore implying a neglect of tillage and a pastoral mode of life, as well as an unusual extent of pasturage, which may have reference...not only to the milk, but to the honey...

(continued...)

<sup>83</sup>(...continued)

“Even the abundance thus asserted of the promised land is not fertility, but the abundance of spontaneous products, not dependent upon tillage; and that after Israel was possessed of Canaan, and had become an agricultural people, the natural emblem of abundance would no longer be *milk and honey*, but *corn and wine*, or *flesh and fruits*, so that the prospect of subsisting on the first two, if it did not suggest the idea of personal privation, would suggest that of general desolation, or at least that of interrupted or suspended cultivation.” (Pp. 180-81)

Motyer states that “The idea of *abundance* from only a young cow and two goats may be ironical [compare Slotki’s comment in footnote 82]. It may, however, actually point to high productive capacity resulting from free-range pasturage.” (P. 89)

<sup>84</sup>Oswalt comments on **verses 23-25** that “In continuing to deal with the effects of depopulation, Isaiah now turns to its impact upon tillable land. In fact, he says, it will revert to wilderness. Even the finest vineyard, stocked with the most costly plants [the prophet may be speaking hyperbolically, since a shekel would be an exorbitant price for a single vine], will shortly become briars and thorns. The only thing it will be fit for will be hunting (**verse 24**). To go there without protection would be to fall prey to wild animals that would have reestablished themselves in its thickets.” (P. 218)

Watts states that “The verses picture a loss of horticulture. The once carefully terraced slopes of vineyards and flat fields of grain will be lost to the wild. *Thorns*, weeds, and *briers* have gained control of land once carefully and fruitfully cultivated. Now only the herders take their cattle, sheep, and goats there. War’s devastation will remove all signs of culture and prosperity that once made Canaan a ‘land of milk and honey.’” (P. 107)

How strange then, that Isaiah uses “milk and honey” as a description of the diet of the devastated country! And how can Watts say that “all signs of culture” are gone, when milk and honey are signs of an earlier “herder” culture?

Motyer states concerning these three verses that “The picture of the devastated vineyard is reminiscent of **5:5-6** (note the telling repetition of *briers and thorns*, an exclusively Isaianic usage). Each verse speaks of an unprofitable, hostile landscape: of money spent, but all for nothing (**verse 23**); of how where once beasts were carefully excluded, now men are the intruders and must go armed (**verse 24**)...They may as well turn the cattle loose and let the sheep trample!...

“It is not difficult to feel with this poor remaining population. They were deprived of dignity (**verse 20**), reduced to hardship (**verse 21**), and suffered loss of all they had ever saved for (**verse 23**) or toiled for (**verses 24-25**)—and all because faith and obedience had given place to unbelief and worldly wisdom.” (P. 90)

(continued...)

יְהִיָּה כָּל-מָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה-שָׁם אֵלֶּף גֶּפֶן

בְּאֵלֶּף כֶּסֶף

לְשִׁמִּיר וְלִשְׂתֵּי יִהְיֶה:

And it will happen on that day,  
every place where there would be a thousand vines,  
worth<sup>85</sup> a thousand pieces-of-silver,  
will be for the thorn(s) and for the thorn-bushes!<sup>86</sup>

7.24 בַּחֲצִיִּים וּבִקְשֵׁת יִבּוֹא שִׁמָּה

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<sup>84</sup>(...continued)

Alexander states concerning **verse 23** that “Having described the desolation of the country indirectly, by saying what the food of the inhabitants should be, the Prophet now describes it more directly, by predicting the growth of thorns and briars even in spots which had been sedulously cultivated, for example the most valuable vineyards.” (P. 181)

<sup>85</sup>English translations of the phrase בְּאֵלֶּף כֶּסֶף, literally “in / with a thousand shekel(s),” is commonly translated into English by “worth a thousand shekels / pieces of silver.”

Alexander comments that “Calvin supposes the *thousand...shekels* to be mentioned as a very low price, and understands the verse to mean that every place planted with a thousand vines should, in these days of desolation, be sold for only so much, on account of the thorns and briars which had overrun them. All other writers seem to confine the threatening to the thorns and briars, and to regard בְּאֵלֶּף כֶּסֶף. [‘in / with a thousand silver(s)’] as a part of the description of a valuable vineyard, though they differ on the question whether this was the price for which the vineyard might be sold, or its annual rent...[Another thinks] the price mentioned in the text was probably a high one even for a valuable vineyard.” (Pp. 181-82)

Slotki holds that “This was a very high price in Isaiah’s days when the purchasing power of money was incomparably greater than in our day.” (P. 37)

We take the thousand shekel(s) as referring to the former worth of a very valuable vineyard, which following the desolation of the land is no longer of any value, but becomes a place overgrown with thorns and briars. What do you think?

<sup>86</sup>Kaiser comments that “Land which would not fetch the greatest price imaginable, because of the grapes growing on it...will be used as pasture.” (P. 176)

כִּי־שֹׁמֵר וְשִׂית תִּהְיֶה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ:

With the arrows and with the bow, he / one will come there,  
because thorn(s) and thorn-bushes will be (in) all the land.<sup>87</sup>

7.25<sup>88</sup> וְכָל הַהֲרִים אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּעֲדָר יַעֲדֲרוּן

לְאֶתְבוֹא שָׁמָּה

יִרְאֶת שֹׁמֵר וְשִׂית

וְהָיָה לְמַשְׁלַח שׁוֹר

וְלְמַרְמָס שָׁה:

And all the mountains which with the hoe are hoed,  
you (singular) will not go there—  
(for) fear of thorn(s) and thorn-bushes.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Alexander comments on **verse 24** that “So complete shall be the desolation of these once favored spots, that men shall pass through them armed, as they would through a wilderness.” (P. 182)

Or, perhaps it means that the formerly valuable and protected vineyards have become a place where armed hunters go, looking for game.

Slotki thinks the carrying of weapons is meant “to protect oneself against highwaymen and wild beasts haunting such desolate and unfrequented places.” (P. 37)

<sup>88</sup>Oswalt comments on **verse 25** that it “may be a conscious allusion to the song of the vineyard in **5:1-7**. The mention of the hillsides, the briars and thorns, and the trampling of the animals supports such a suggestion. The fertile hillsides, once carefully terraced and worked, are now abandoned to the briars and thorns, fit only for the pasturage of the animals.” (P. 218)

<sup>89</sup>Translations of these first three lines of **verse 25** vary:

**King James**, “And *on* all hills that shall be digged with the mattock, there shall not come thither the fear of briars and thorns”;

**Tanakh**, “But the perils of thornbush and thistle shall not spread to any of the hills that could only be tilled with a hoe”;

**New Revised Standard**, “and as for all the hills that used to be hoed with a hoe, you will not go there for fear of briars and thorns”;

(continued...)

And it will become (a place) for sending forth cattle  
and a place for tramping sheep.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>(...continued)

**New International**, “As for all the hills once cultivated by the hoe, you will no longer go there for fear of the briars and thorns”;

**New Jerusalem**, “No more will you venture on any hillside formerly under the hoe for fear of the brambles and thorn-bushes”;

**Rahlf**, καὶ πᾶν ὄρος ἀροτριώμενον ἀροτριαθήσεται καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐπέλθῃ ἐκεῖ φόβος  
“and every mountain being plowed will certainly be plowed, and there shall not come there fear.”

**Oswalt**, “On all the hills which were once digged with a hoe, no one will go for fear of briars and thorn bushes.”

Alexander comments on **verse 25** that “Not only the fields, not only the vineyards, shall be overrun with thorns and briars, but the very hills, so laboriously cultivated with the hand, shall be given up to like desolation...The reference is probably to the hills of Judea, anciently cultivated to the very top, by means of terraces that still exist...Even the most carefully-cultivated portions of the land should not escape the threatened desolation...”

“The verse continues and completes the description of the general desolation, as manifested first by the people’s living upon milk and honey, then by the growth of thorns and briars in the choicest vineyards and the terraced hills, and by the conversion of these carefully-tilled spots into dangerous...hunting-grounds, and pastures.” (Pp. 182-83)

<sup>90</sup>Kaiser comments that “Because the whole land will then be covered with thistles and thorns (compare also **5:6**), people will only venture out into what once were vineyards after taking certain safety precautions against the wild animals living there... Indeed, for fear of the thorns and thistles, whose spikes are so hard and sharp that they will go through our modern footwear...people will not even venture out on to the once-cultivated slopes of the hills.” (Pp. 176-77)

Slotki states that the former cultivated fields will be of use for the free and undisturbed grazing of sheep. “The briars and thorns that keep away human beings are no deterrent to oxen and sheep.” (P. 37)

Watts explains the overall meaning of **7:17-25** by stating that “Having called Ahaz to turn his attention away from Aram and Ephraim, Isaiah points to Assyria. The Assyrian is coming. He is being sent by Yahweh. And his coming will precipitate the greatest crisis that the people of Judah and the Davidic dynasty have experienced since the division of the Kingdom two hundred years before under Rehoboam. So the Assyrian crisis is seen as a personal problem for Ahaz, a constitutional problem for Judah, and an issue of survival for the dynasty. It must be seen as a turning point in history...”

(continued...)

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<sup>90</sup>(...continued)

“Now God was moving to terminate an era and the form of His people’s existence as an independent political unit. The Assyrian is the means to be used to bring about this change. This theme will control the **Book’s** message from **chapters 7** through **chapter 39**.

“As Isaiah speaks, Judah has already been devastated by the raids of Rezin and Pekah. Now he announces that Assyria will come and its presence will postpone restoration of the land for a long time. Assyria’s presence will be ubiquitous and pervasive (**verses 18-19**). It will strip the land (**verse 20**). It will reduce the standard of living to a survival limit (**verses 21-22**). And it will cause the land to lie fallow, uncultivated, and barren (**verses 23-25**).

“The chapter has called attention away from the petty internecine quarrels and battles among the little states of the Ancient Near East which had dominated virtually all of Israel’s history from its separation from Judah to this time. A new reality was emerging on a much larger scale. Their history would be dominated from this point on by the great empires. They were genuinely unusual ‘days’: a watershed in history.

“The prophetic announcement stresses that this is God’s doing. The king and the people are urged to look for God’s intention and direction in the troubled times to come. Ahaz, whatever his faults, by his more passive acceptance [is Ahaz’s calling and paying for Assyria’s help only ‘passive acceptance’?] of his vassal’s status under Assyria, fit this pattern. Hezekiah in his zeal to put things right for God through reform and rebellion was doomed from the beginning. He was blind to the signals from Heaven that the Lord was not in it.

“The [**Book of Isaiah**] is much closer to wisdom’s verdict: ‘There is a time for everything...a time to plant and a time to uproot’ (**Ecclesiastes 3:1-2**)...It suggests that God’s will for His people cannot be achieved by simply ‘going by the book,’ not by imitating Joshua or David, or Solomon or Jehoshaphat. One must look and listen, know and understand, to catch the change of signals that come from God. [We certainly agree with this!]

“The program that called for God’s people in His land (even in its adapted monarchical form) had failed by the middle of the eighth century. What remained was to clean up the details and launch a new program. Hezekiah, Josiah, and all who like them insisted on ‘playing David and Joshua’ simply got in the way and hindered God’s reform. The [**Book of Isaiah**] suggests that God proposed to use the empires in the revised program: first, Assyria in demolishing the old; then Persia (Cyrus) in rebuilding the new.

“The [**Book of Isaiah**] sees a continuing but different role for ‘Israel / Jacob’ as God’s Servant in the new age [Yes!]. But Israel feels she is too old to change jobs and change roles. She feels it is unfair for God to expect her to fit into a new plan of

(continued...)



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<sup>90</sup>(...continued)

organization. He ought to adapt His plan to her old role. The [**Book of Isaiah**] also sees a central role for Zion, but a vastly different one. No longer a symbol of rule and power, she is a place of pilgrimage, known for God's presence there. Her experience makes her a fitting 'Suffering Servant' to demonstrate God's new plan. But she, too, resists having her role redefined.

"The announcement that the Lord will bring Assyria against Judah (**verse 17**) is addressed to Ahaz (singular). The future is announced as the worst crisis for His people and for His dynasty since the division of the kingdom at the death of Solomon. The crisis is being deliberately brought on by Yahweh. When the king of Assyria appears Ahaz should understand this as God's doing.

"The announcement is supported by a series of oracles beginning 'in that Day'...

The first point is that Yahweh is bringing a period of disaster on Judah more terrible than any since the division of the kingdom...It will be a period of pure disaster and destruction...Although the kingdom continues it will always be only a vassal kingdom, paying tribute, enduring subordination...

"The first oracle envisions armies summoned from central Africa and from the upper Euphrates swarming over the Judean hills and valleys...By 738 B.C.E. most of the states of northern Palestine and Syria, including Israel, were paying regular tribute to Assyria...The prophetic word now deals with the coming of the Assyrians. One needed no prophet to know that Assyrian armies would appear in due time to deal with the insurrection. The prophecy distinctively interprets the Assyrian's coming." (Pp. 107-110)

In our evaluation of Watts' commentary, we have stated that he reads far too much into **chapter 7**; but his overall view of the **Book of Isaiah** is, we think, very important and oftentimes compelling. What do you think?

