

ISA 7:14: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

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Not many would contest the statement that Isa 7:14 is one of the most significant passages in the discussion of the NT use of the OT or of the issue of the hermeneutics of prophecy and fulfillment. It could also be considered a major test case for the question of the extent to which hermeneutics needs to be subordinated to exegesis or exegesis to hermeneutics.

In evangelical commentaries and articles on the passage, exegesis is typically brought into subordination to hermeneutical considerations.¹ So, for instance, if the commentator's hermeneutical stance would oblige him to see Matthew's use of Isa 7:14 as having a determinative effect on the interpretation of Isaiah, then exegesis is certain to find in the passage a reference to Jesus that was fully intended by Isaiah. I would like to spend my time first subjecting the passage before us to an exegetical analysis. Then we will use the results of exegesis to make some hermeneutical observations.

I. CONTEXT

The context of the oracle is clearly the Syro-Ephraimite war. Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Samaria, for undisclosed reasons, are in the process of besieging Jerusalem. Ahaz has been warned by the Lord in the first part of the chapter to trust in him for deliverance rather than to request Assyrian assistance. Should Ahaz fail to follow this advice, the Davidic dynasty's existence would be threatened (as the use of the plurals in v 9 indicates). Between vv 9 and 10 there is a gap of time of unknown length. While it is possible that v 10 is another oracle given at the same time, the way that it is introduced would argue for its being at a later time. I would like to suggest that it comes some weeks later after Ahaz has already made his decision and summoned Assyria, but that is only speculation.²

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¹E.g. J. B. Payne, "Right Questions about Isaiah 7:14," in *The Living and Active Word of God* (ed. M. Inch and R. Youngblood; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983) 75-84; C. F. Feinberg, "The Virgin Birth in the Old Testament and Isaiah 7:14," *BSac* 119 (1968) 251-258. See also the conclusion of E. Hindson, *Isaiah's Immanuel* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978) 86-87.

²This suggestion is also made by J. T. Willis in *ResQ* 21 (1978) 3-5, esp. n. 6. Other commentators likewise support that this oracle is at a different time: J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (Waco: Word, 1985) 96; J. J. Scullion, "An Approach to the Understanding of Isaiah 7:10-17," *JBL* 87 (1968) 289; R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 85-86—though Clements believes that Ahaz has not yet sent for Assyria. Likewise some commentators believe that the oracle makes the best sense if it is given in the same context as the previous one: J. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 204; J. Ridderbos, *Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985) 84; J. Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953 reprint) 164; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968).

Whatever the timing, Isaiah's oracle beginning in v 13 comes after Ahaz has refused to accept the offer of asking for a sign to demonstrate the Lord's willingness to provide security for Jerusalem. In keeping with our speculation, Ahaz' reluctance to make such a request would certainly be understandable if he had already sent to Tiglath-Pileser. The range that is offered to Ahaz in v 12 ("Make it as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven") has often been interpreted as indicating that Ahaz was to ask for a supernatural sign.³ While the language certainly makes supernatural signs fair game, it is all-inclusive in that it allows that any sign of any sort would be acceptable (a typical use of merism).⁴

The oracle itself is addressed in v 13 to the house of David. There are some who have felt that this therefore requires that the sign and oracle must address the destiny of the Davidic dynasty by discussing a future heir to the throne. While this direction is possible, it is by no means the only option. The Davidic house may also refer to the current administration. In Jer 21:11-12, the house of David is equated with the household of the king that comprises his administration. In Isa 22:22 it is clear that the steward is also of the house of David. Even earlier in Isaiah 7, v 2 defines the house of David as Ahaz and his people. The oracle that begins in v 13 should therefore be seen as being addressed to the entire Davidic house that makes up Ahaz' administration rather than as an oracle that pertains merely to Ahaz, or to Davidic kings throughout history. It is not just Ahaz' presence on the throne that is jeopardized; it is the Davidic dynasty itself and its ability to retain a viable succession to the throne in the current crisis.⁵

II. TRANSLATION OF V 14

The *NASB* translates: "Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel." The *NIV* offers stylistic but not substantive variations. The first question concerns their rendering by the future "will be with child." The Hebrew word used in the text is *hārā* and is by analysis not a verb but an adjective, here functioning as a predicate adjective in a verbless clause. Verbless clauses in Hebrew are typically rendered into present or past tenses, the choice to be determined by the tense of the surrounding finite verbs.⁶ The only verb that can be called in to help in this context is the active participle, rendered future by the *NASB*: "and bear a son." In reality, however, the Hebrew participle properly rendered conveys action now in progress or about to begin.⁷ This gives the verbless clause a present context.

³A. and J. Martin, *Isaiah: The Glory of the Messiah* (Chicago: Moody, 1983) 54; F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973 reprint) 214; Payne, "Right Questions" 80; Feinberg, "Virgin Birth" 253.

⁴Oswalt, *Isaiah* 205, Leupold, *Exposition* 154, and Clements, *Isaiah* 87, are examples of those who support this interpretation.

⁵Cf. e.g. Ridderbos, *Isaiah* 85, for support of this.

⁶GKC 141f.

⁷GKC 116a.

The results of this grammatical analysis are not new or controversial.⁸ The resulting translation, leaving *'almâ* untranslated for the moment, should be: "Behold, an *'almâ* is pregnant and is about to bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel."⁹

Two other passages in the OT also use the adjective *hârâ* in verbless clauses: Gen 16:10 (Hagar) and Judg 13:3 (Samson's mother). In both of these cases, however, the following verb for giving birth is a *wâw*-consecutive perfect rather than the active participle found in Isaiah 7. Thus these other two passages are set in a future context, and it is not necessary that those women be seen as already pregnant. Had Isaiah 7 intended a future conception and birth, we would have expected that same grammatical sequence.

III. 'ALMÂ

Certainly the translation of this word has served as the crux of the passage and a source of controversy long before the *RSV* went public with its nonconformity in 1952 and brought on a flurry of Bible burnings by conservatives. Indeed, the problem goes back at least to the second century A.D. when Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion all use *neanis* rather than *parthenos* in translating Isaiah into Greek for their Jewish audiences. Here I find nothing but nagging questions with regard to how the issue has been handled in conservative circles.

On a very superficial level, if the word clearly means "virgin" we might wonder why the *NASB* has felt no compulsion to translate *'almâ* as "virgin" in any of the other occurrences of the word in the OT. This discrepancy certainly takes much force out of the argument that the term means "virgin."

Probing further, however, we note that the question of linguistic method is just as disturbing. Time and again we see the argument that none of the other six occurrences of the feminine singular or plural noun can demonstrate that

⁸Conservative commentators such as E. J. Young, *Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 285 n. 33, Alexander, *Prophecies* 166, 172, and Hindson, *Isaiah's Immanuel* 34, all agree on these details but in the end seek to circumvent them. Most frequently this is accomplished by suggesting that *hinnêh* ("behold") is always used by Isaiah for a future occurrence (Delitzsch, *Isaiah* 216). Young goes so far as to maintain that "behold" is "employed in Scripture to announce a birth of unusual importance and significance" (*Isaiah* 284). Young's treatment of the oracle as a vision (*ibid.*, pp. 286–291) is likewise an attempt to work around the Hebrew. Clements (*Isaiah* 87) oddly refers to *hârâ* as a perfect, and W. Holladay, *Isaiah: Scroll of a Prophetic Heritage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 70, just as oddly identifies it as a participle. O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) 157, claims that if the woman was being presented as already pregnant the adjective would need the definite article. That is the case, however, only if the adjective was intended to be attributive ("the pregnant woman"). The adjective does not need the agreeing definite article when it is serving as predicate adjective (GKC 126i). The word order here of subject (definite noun) followed by predicate (indefinite adjective) is unusual for verbless clauses. By rule the sequence is predicate-subject in a clause of classification in which the predicate is indefinite relative to the subject (F. Andersen, *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch* [Nashville, 1970] 42). With the word order that we have here, one would expect a circumstantial relationship (*ibid.*, p. 43). There are, however, exceptions to this rule (*ibid.*, p. 44).

⁹Willis in *ResQ* 21 (1978) 14.

the word does not mean "virgin."¹⁰ From a linguistic standpoint this is a very weak argument. The overlapping of semantic ranges is a complex linguistic matter and cannot be treated so superficially. The approach identified above is clearly deductive: It starts by assuming that "virgin" is the necessary translation and then claims that that cannot be disproved. That is not a sound way to conduct lexical analysis.

While it is true that limited data often require deductive processes, what is more disturbing in this case is the amount of data that has been left out of that deductive process. Why is it never mentioned that there are two masculine occurrences of this noun (*'elem*)? In 1 Sam 17:56 David is described as an *'elem*, and the same term is applied to Jonathan's servant in 20:22. In neither of these cases is the sexual chastity of the individual a viable issue. Furthermore the abstraction of the noun occurs in four passages (Job 20:11; 33:25; Ps 89:45; Isa 54:4). If the word meant "virgin," we would expect its abstraction to mean "virginity." Yet in Isa 54:4 it is used to describe a rejected barren wife.

These occurrences over and over again rule out "virgin" as a viable lexical choice for describing the basic meaning of the word. On the other hand there is no question that an *'almâ* can at times be a virgin. This is just semantic overlapping. In English a fiancée is often also a virgin (though the percent of semantic overlapping of these two words is in sad decline). That does not mean that the word "fiancée" means "virgin." Someone could show me a thousand passages where "fiancée" was used to refer to a virgin, but that would not change the meaning.

Working from all of the noun occurrences of the root *'lm*, the common denominator that eventually emerges is "adolescence." This accounts for those passages that use the word in contexts of male virility, but it is largely indicative of a general age designation. It can also have connotations in the social realm (still under guardianship of parents) or in the sexual realm (perhaps a female who has not yet brought forth a child, to account for the occurrence in Isa 54:4).¹¹

Comparison to Hebrew synonyms is also helpful. In Genesis 24 Rebekah is called a *bêtûlâ* (v 16), another word often connected with virginity, but that does not require *'almâ* (v 43) to mean "virgin." The fact that she is a virgin does not require that every word used to describe her mean "virgin." As a matter of fact, v 43 occurs in the repetition of the servant's story. In the first telling of the story, in place of *'almâ* he used the word *na'ârâ* ("young girl"). Whether *bêtûlâ* is properly rendered "virgin" is beside the point.¹² There is no linguistic logic that supports that rendering for *'almâ*.

The Ugaritic material has often been referred to in this matter because of its use of *ġlmt*, a cognate to *'almâ*. The two confirmed occurrences of this noun

¹⁰E.g. Hindson, *Isaiah's Immanuel* 39; Young, *Isaiah* 287; Feinberg, "Virgin Birth" 256-257; J. G. Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965 reprint) 288; see also Payne, "Right Questions" 78, for typical reasoning.

¹¹Willis in *ResQ* 21 (1978) 11-12; Kaiser, *Isaiah* 155; KB 709. Cf. also G. Wenham, "Betulah, 'A Girl of Marriageable Age,'" *VT* 22 (1972) 326-348.

¹²See the discussion in Young, *Isaiah* 288; Oswalt, *Isaiah* 210. Cf. *TDOT*, 2. 338-343.

in the Ugaritic material indeed are helpful. In Keret 128 ii 21–22 the term is used parallel to *'att* (“wife”). In the hymn to Nikkal (*UT* 77:7) the text reads: *hl ḡlmt tld bn* (“Behold, an *'almâ* will bring forth a son”). This certainly serves to suggest that the event is not a miraculous occurrence.¹³

Finally, the LXX rendering of *'almâ* by *parthenos* has often been considered proof that the meaning “virgin” is valid.¹⁴ In response to this it must first of all be pointed out that *parthenos* itself does not always mean “virgin” in classical Greek, although all of its NT occurrences have that meaning.¹⁵ Therefore the LXX is not necessarily betraying an interpretation as virgin by choosing this term. Second, Gleason Archer very convincingly demonstrated in a paper delivered at the ETS national meetings in Dallas in 1983 that the LXX translator of the book of Isaiah consistently showed a tendency to be imprecise in his choice of Greek terms to represent the Hebrew.¹⁶ Often a vaguely suitable term was chosen when a much more acceptable and precise term was available. This could well be the explanation of the use of *parthenos* here. While some may find these explanations of *parthenos* unsatisfactory, it is illegitimate to use the LXX translation to override clear lexical material in the Hebrew text. Isa 54:4 demonstrates that an *'almâ* could be married and barren. Certainly an *'almâ* could also at times be a virgin. At best the LXX would indicate an interpretational preference rather than a linguistic necessity.

The upshot of all of this is the conclusion that there is no defensible linguistic logic for suggesting the meaning “virgin” for the Hebrew *'almâ*. Exegetical methods lead us to the meaning “youth” or adolescent.” It is only hermeneutical considerations, or should we say theological considerations, that would demand that the issue be pushed further than linguistic analysis could support.

IV. THE SIGN

There are two major questions that typically arise with regard to the sign mentioned in Isa 7:14: (1) Was the sign miraculous? (2) What was the sign? I would add a third question that I believe helps to answer the other two: What was the function of the sign?

Initially the questions pose problems in that the Hebrew term used for “sign”—*'ôṭ*—is a quite general term and can be employed in many different ways. Progress on the issue may be made, however, when we begin to seek out contexts with similarity to Isaiah 7. Very simply, we have a context where a prophecy of judgment has been given (here against Pekah and Rezin) and a

¹³For discussion of the Ugaritic material see J. J. Scullion, *JBL* 87 (1968) 292–293; H. M. Wolf, “A Solution to the Immanuel Prophecy in Isaiah 7:14–8:22,” *JBL* 91 (1972) 449–456.

¹⁴E.g. Hindson, *Isaiah's Immanuel* 67–68.

¹⁵LSJ 1339b. Cf. *TDNT*, 5. 826–837; R. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1979) 148 n. 45; Kaiser, *Isaiah* 155.

¹⁶G. L. Archer, “A Reassessment of the Value of the Septuagint Version of Isaiah for the Purpose of Textual Criticism.”

sign has been offered by God to the beneficiary of that judgment (Ahaz' administration). Where else do we find prophecies of judgment accompanied by a sign offered to the beneficiary by God? I am aware of four contexts that share somewhat similar circumstances that I will now briefly present.

1. *Exod 3:12*. Here we have not only a prophecy of judgment against the oppressive Egyptians but a prophecy of fulfilled covenant promises to Moses and the enslaved Israelites. The sign is offered by the Lord to the prophet Moses in this case, who is also the leader of the people and therefore the beneficiary. The sign is that after they are delivered from Egypt they will come to Sinai to serve God.

2. *1 Sam 2:34*. This is a prophecy of judgment against the house of Eli pronounced by an anonymous man of God. The judgment is that Eli's line will be full of those who die early. Here rather than being offered to the beneficiary it is offered to the condemned, though it should be noted that the same message is given through Samuel in the next chapter, and he is as close to a beneficiary as we can get. The sign is that both sons of Eli will be killed on the same day.

3. *Jer 44:29-30*. In this context the prophecy of judgment is against the Israelites who have gone down into Egypt contrary to God's advice, taking Jeremiah with them. The pronounced judgment is that God is going to punish them for going down into Egypt, no more specifics given. The sign here is offered again to the condemned rather than to the beneficiary, and it is that Pharaoh Hophra (Apries), perhaps the royal protector and benefactor of the defecting Israelites, is going to be killed.

4. *2 Kgs 19:29*. This is the closest parallel in detail to *Isa 7:14* and is particularly significant since it also involves the same general time period and the same prophet. This is a prophecy of judgment against Sennacherib in response to his arrogance and the siege of Jerusalem. It predicts his failure. The sign is offered to the beneficiary, Hezekiah, by the Lord through Isaiah. The sign concerns the sources of Israelite food supplies of the next three years, showing increasing ability to grow their own crops and enjoy their produce—clear evidence that Sennacherib's rampaging armies would not be present.

Now a few comments about these signs are in order. First of all, it should be obvious that none of these signs are in themselves miraculous in nature. Worshiping at Sinai, the death of Phineas and Hophni, the death of Pharaoh Hophra, and the planting of crops are all very natural things, though certainly God's intervention was involved in getting to the point where they happened. The nature of the sign itself is not supernatural.

The function of the sign, then, cannot be to provide a supernatural display of some sort so that everyone will be in awe of God's power. Rather, a definite pattern can be seen in the way that these signs function. With the possible exception of the Jeremiah context, for which too little information is available, the sign serves as an indicator that the fulfillment is under way. In Exodus 3 worshiping at Sinai is an indicator that the people have escaped Egypt and are on their way to the promised land. In 1 Samuel it is the first occurrence of a

phenomenon that will, according to the prophecy, become commonplace: Eli's own two sons are cut off in the prime of life. In 2 Kings it is a sign that Sennacherib has indeed been unsuccessful and that the further judgment will indeed proceed as predicted. In each case the sign serves as a down payment of sorts. The long-term prophecy has been vouchsafed by the deposit that is represented in the sign. The sign is not always the judgment itself. In 1 Samuel it is, but in 2 Kings it is not. Rather, in 2 Kings the sign is something that incidentally accompanies the carrying out of the judgment.

Coming back to Isa 7:14, then, we do not expect the sign to be something miraculous or supernatural. This does not mean that it is impossible for it to be so, but our other contexts have led us to expect something else. We need not think in terms of a miraculous conception or birth. Rather, based on the parallel contexts, we expect a sign that will be an indicator that the prophecy of judgment against Pekah and Rezin has begun. We have already seen in the discussion of the translation of this verse that the pregnant status of the young woman is merely a statement of fact, and of course it is only logical to expect that someone who is pregnant will be giving birth to a child. It is new information that the child will be a son, but what arguably could be considered the bottom line of the statement of the sign is that this son will be named Immanuel, "God with us." I am suggesting, therefore, that all evidence points to the naming of the child as the sign.¹⁷ It should be pointed out that this is also in line with the way that Isaiah's children function as signs. Shear-Jashub and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz are signs by their names only.

There is precedent in the OT for the naming of a child as a reflection of a current political situation. Perhaps the most well-known example is the naming of Ichabod in 1 Sam 4:19–22. The statement that the sign is making here in Isaiah 7 is that the beginning of God's action against Pekah and Rezin is not far off, though it is going to be sixty-five years or so before it is complete (7:8). But the young woman who is now pregnant, by the time she gives birth (that is, within a matter of months), will have reason to make very positive statements about God's care for them. The siege will be lifted, and she will be able to affirm in the naming of her child that God is indeed with them. This is not the judgment in itself but is indicative that the judgment has begun, for the lifting of the siege came in reaction to the approach of the Assyrian armies. It is the nature of the sign as derived from similar contexts that helps us to determine the function of the sign, which in turn helps us to identify the particular sign in Isa 7:14.

V. IDENTITY OF WOMAN AND CHILD

It has become quite common in evangelical circles to identify the woman of 7:14 with the prophetess, Isaiah's wife, in 8:3,¹⁸ but I find this identification

¹⁷Willis in *ResQ* 21 (1978) 9–11 independently came to much the same explanation of sign as presented above. The interpretation of the naming as the sign is not new; cf. e.g. Clements, *Isaiah* 86.

¹⁸This view was held by Rashi and Ibn Ezra and is not common among modern-day critical scholars; cf. e.g. Clements, *Isaiah* 86; N. K. Gottwald, "Immanuel as the Prophet's Son," *VT* 8 (1958) 36 ff. The most complete treatment of it by a conservative scholar is Wolf, "Solution." It is accepted by many conservative scholars; cf. e.g. Oswalt, *Isaiah* 213.

difficult on two counts. First of all, if my translation of 7:14 is accepted as the most viable one linguistically, we face the difficulty that in 7:14 the woman is already pregnant, whereas in 8:3 Isaiah's wife is just conceiving. A second difficulty is that in chap. 7 the judgment is going to come about before the child knows to reject evil and choose good. In chap. 8 the judgment is going to come before the boy can say "Daddy" or "Mommy." Now I cannot tell you exactly what age the prophet has in mind for when a child is old enough to reject evil and choose good. But I am the father of two preschoolers, and I can tell you that saying "Daddy" and "Mommy" comes long before that time. I therefore conclude that since Immanuel is ready to learn about rejecting evil and choosing good when the judgment comes, and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz is just learning to say "Daddy" and "Mommy" when the same judgment is coming, they must be different boys and of different ages.¹⁹

If the woman in chap. 7 is not the prophetess of chap. 8, who is she? I would agree that the text, through the use of the definite article with *'almâ*, leads us to believe that she was someone known to Ahaz. Cant 6:8 indicates that the harem of the king had a category of women in the class of *'âlâmôt*, for they are named with the queens and concubines. My speculation is that Isaiah is verifying that the *'almâ* of Ahaz' harem, which he suspects to be pregnant, actually is. Furthermore she will bear a son and, by the time she does, hope will characterize the political climate rather than despair. So the name of the woman would be unknown to us. It is unlikely that Ahaz had so many *'âlâmôt* that many would be concurrently pregnant. I would suspect that it would be the bearing of a child that may serve to move someone from the *'âlâmôt* section of the harem to the concubine section. Be that as it may, the woman would be well known around the palace and would probably be the object of public curiosity. If the sign is the naming, the actual identity of the child in this time context would be insignificant. It need not be a crown prince or anyone who is to play a later role, for the child himself is not the sign.

With regard to the occurrences of the name Immanuel in 8:8, 10, the first is significant for the shift from the hope that was asserted in the giving of the name to the judgment that will also come to Judah because of Ahaz' foolish disbelief.²⁰ The occurrence in v 10 completes the turnaround in that the most logical party to be speaking the words of vv 9–10 is the Assyrian ruler, claim-

¹⁹Clements, *Isaiah* 94, explains the difference as reducing the time until the judgment will come. It is also noticed by Payne, "Right Questions" 79, that the children are of different ages. I find it more likely that Isa 8:1–2 describes the inscribing of a cylinder seal with the child's name rather than a marriage ceremony. The *gillâyôn* occurs elsewhere only in 3:23 as a piece of jewelry, and cylinder seals were often worn as amulets. This lexical identification must remain at present speculative in that I cannot find any word in West Semitic for the cylinder seal. The fact that it is inscribed and that the name is preceded by the preposition *lâmed* (common for names on seals; cf. Watts, *Isaiah* 112) would lend circumstantial support. This also explains the presence of witnesses, for a seal was a legal document. For a different explanation of all of these details see Wolf, "Solution" 451–452.

²⁰A number of commentators have felt that the reference to Judah as Immanuel's land in v 8 required Immanuel to be the sovereign or owner of the land (cf. Oswalt, *Isaiah* 212; Ridderbos, *Isaiah* 94; Alexander, *Prophecies* 188; Hindson, *Isaiah's Immanuel* 58; Young, *Isaiah* 307; Payne, "Right Questions" 75). I simply do not see how this could be considered mandatory. America is my land, but I hardly own it or rule it. Cf. Clements, *Isaiah* 97, in support of this alternative.

ing—as Sennacherib later will—that the God of Israel is in actuality using the Assyrian armies as a tool of punishment against the Israelites.²¹ So the name Immanuel represents a glimmer of hope in 7:14, a cry of despair in 8:8, and a gloating claim by the enemy in 8:10.

VI. SUMMARY OF INTERPRETATION

According to the interpretation presented here, then, Ahaz' stubborn disbelief brings the response of a sign that is connected with the prophecy of judgment that has been pronounced against Pekah and Rezin. That sign is that by the time the pregnant 'almâ from Ahaz' harem gives birth to her son the political climate will be such that she will give him a name of hope. So the pronounced judgment is coming soon. Unfortunately Judah will not be unaffected by the judgment of these two nations. This interpretation was arrived at by sound exegetical method and, intentionally, in ignorance of the NT usage of the passage.²²

VII. THE PROBLEM

The very fact that the NT usage of the passage would lead us to be suspicious of the results of sound exegesis on the OT text is the cause of our problem. It is of course just that: our problem. It does not appear to be a problem to the text, and it is certainly not a problem to its divine author. An interesting question, however, is whether it would be a problem to its human authors—here, the OT author (Isaiah). What did he know? When did he know it? Does he fully or partially anticipate Matthew's use? It is in this direction that I would like to pursue the issue of the NT use of the OT. Instead of asking whether the NT authors had a right to do what they did, or whether there is a legitimate connection between the OT and NT contexts, or worrying about *sensus plenior* or double fulfillments, or to what extent theology should influence exegesis, I feel that there is something to be discovered by examining what was expected of prophetic literature. From that vantage point we will then return to the other questions.

It is convenient and not accidental that I chose as a sample passage one that hinges around the giving of a name and the meaning of that name. I have come to the conclusion that it is in the study of names that we are provided with a very useful and informative paradigm for the understanding of the expectations surrounding a prophetic pronouncement.

²¹The treatment of vv 9–10 as suddenly turning to future hope for Judah has come about, I suspect, due to a lack of alternatives. One would certainly not expect such a caveat by Isaiah at this particular point in the text. The context would favor a continuation of statements of judgment against Judah, and I see nothing that would preclude this section being viewed as a speech by the arrogant Assyrians.

²²There is no question here about the factuality of the virgin birth or about the existence of supernatural predictive prophecy. I heartily affirm and presuppose both. The fact that the virgin birth occurred does not of course require that every passage discuss it. Whether it is the subject of discussion must be determined by exegesis.

VIII. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NAMES IN THE OT

In Gen 25:26 it is reported that at the birth of Jacob he was holding on to his brother Esau's heel (*'āqēb*) and so was named Jacob (*ya'āqōb*). The name *ya'āqōb* is one of the most common West Semitic names of the ancient Near East²³ and is a verbal form, not a noun. The common West Semitic meaning of the verb is "to be near." Though the name does not mean "heel," the noun "heel" uses the same three radicals as the verb and therefore would bring this common name to mind. As someone "hairy" might appropriately be named "Harry" in our society, it is wordplay that is responsible for an *'āqēb*-grabbing boy to named *ya'āqōb*.

Now this name was given in a specific context with a specific connection in mind. But from what may be deduced from the treatment of some names in the OT, this was just a start. While some names, particularly those of the theophoric type, may have been given without thought to the meaning or with only vague affirmations in mind, this was not always the case. It is attested both in Hittite and Akkadian texts that a name would at times be chosen based on a particular circumstance connected with the birth of the child or based on some aspect of the child's appearance, character or destiny.²⁴ The name was thought to become intertwined with the destiny of the individual to whom it was given, with at times almost a cause-and-effect relationship existing. Somehow, it was thought, the person's life and accomplishments would demonstrate in unknown ways the appropriateness of the name that had been given.²⁵

We see Esau giving his opinion of the appropriateness of Jacob's name in Gen 27:36. There, after learning that Jacob had deceived his father and so gained the blessing intended for Esau, Esau states that *ya'āqōb* is a name appropriately given, for Jacob has now cheated him twice. The verb he uses for Jacob's deceptive activity is fairly obscure, but again he uses the radicals of Jacob's name. The name Jacob does not mean "cheater" any more than it meant "heel." As before, a wordplay is being used—but this time a different wordplay.

At this point in Genesis 27 we might expect Isaac to protest strongly to Esau's statements about Jacob's name. After all, Isaac was there when Jacob was named and had a major part in the giving of it. He should correct Esau and set him straight about the proper interpretation of Jacob's name. Of course no such thing happens. What Esau was doing with Jacob's name was considered totally legitimate, and Isaac probably sat there sadly nodding his head in agreement.

In the giving of names it was expected that the appropriateness of the name would be demonstrated throughout the lifetime of the person. Despite that firm expectation it was impossible to anticipate precisely or even generally how that appropriateness might show itself. Nevertheless it was believed that it was

²³T. L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974) 43.

²⁴These are criteria identified in the Hittite mythological texts. Cf. H. Hoffner, "Birth and Name-Giving in the Hittite Texts," *JNES* 27 (1968) 198–203.

²⁵The factuality of this is largely uncontested, but OT evidence is not easy to find. Certainly passages such as Genesis 49 give us an indication of the significance that could be attached to names.

simply in the nature of names that such connections had validity and legitimacy.

IX. PROPHECY AND NAMES

I believe that this understanding of names provides a paradigm for understanding the perspective of Israelites on prophecies. Being pronouncements from a sovereign God, prophecies were considered to have a sort of cause-and-effect relationship with history. Prophecies that were intended to warn or promise concerning future events were seen in some ways as being determinative factors in those events' coming to pass. So it was that to prophesy doom, defeat or exile could easily be considered an act of treason.²⁶

Like names, I would suggest that the prophetic word, whether of a predictive nature or not, was expected to have an appropriateness that would only be unfolded as history took place. Hindsight was an important element in recognizing any particular appropriateness. While even the prophet expected such unfolding, I must emphasize two caveats. (1) As with names, the prophet could not begin to anticipate specifically or even generally what form the appropriateness would take. That was not part of his revelation. The expectation came as a matter of course because this was a divine word. The specific anticipation could only come through revelation. (2) Therefore whatever appropriatenesses may develop, they should not be considered part of the original author's intention. He expects such things to happen, but they are not part of the meaning that he has any awareness of in his particular revelation passed on to his particular generation. So the meaning "cheater" was not anticipated by Isaac, nor was it in any sense part of his intended meaning of the name Jacob.

Hosea, for instance, would not necessarily view Matthew's use of the phrase "out of Egypt I have called my son" (Hos 11:1) as bad method or as a violation of his authorial integrity or as a corruption of God's revealed word. Matthew—by inspiration, we would insist—has identified an appropriateness to Hosea's statement of the sort that Hosea, or any Israelite, would have expected to eventually be recognizable. He would have no problem with the statement that Matthew makes. On the other hand, I would argue, we have no reason to seek in Hosea some sense in which he intended the meaning or connection that Matthew suggests. His revelation need not have included any such meaning. He need not have anticipated that meaning or significance.

Likewise there is no need for us to take Matthew to task for faulty methodology. The anticipation of future appropriateness on the part of the OT prophets was in and of itself sufficient to grant legitimacy to the statements of Christ and the apostles. Though the OT prophets had no additional revelation into what future meanings might develop from their statements, we should not be surprised that they eagerly desired to look into these things. They anticipated developments that they could never dream of.

X. APPLICATION OF "APPROPRIATENESS" MODEL TO ISA 7:14

If the exegetical analysis presented earlier is correct, then Isaiah's intention would have been to give a sign that would indicate that the pronounced judg-

²⁶Amos 7:10; Jeremiah 26.

ment on Pekah and Rezin had begun. The naming of a child with a name of hope, "God With Us," would be just such an indicator. While Isaiah had that particular intention that reflected the level of meaning of which he was aware, he would have expected that the statement might eventually take on other appropriateness. When Matthew, endowed with inspiration and benefiting from hindsight, presents the details of the birth of Jesus, he cannot but notice how strikingly appropriate Isaiah's words are to these details. It certainly did not escape his notice that *parthenos* was used to describe the woman, though I think that even Matthew would have believed that Isaiah would be astounded at the way that his prophetic words were proving appropriate. An actual virgin giving birth? Incredible! Isaiah would never have dared anticipate such a thing outside the revelatory process.

But certainly just as significant to Matthew, if not more so, is the meaning of the name Immanuel. Exegesis gives us no clue that Isaiah had been aware that he was speaking of the Messiah.²⁷ The child's name merely expressed the hope that accompanied God's deliverance. The deliverance in the eighth century was not coming through that child.

Here is where the name paradigm and prophecy dovetail together, for here the new appropriateness given to the name is part and parcel of the newly recognized appropriateness of the prophetic word. In Jesus, God is with us in the flesh and is the means by which we are delivered ("He will save the people from their sins," Matt 1:21). How appropriate that name is for Jesus—in ways that were never anticipated!

XI. THIS MODEL'S ANSWERS TO THE HERMENEUTICAL QUESTIONS

At this point I want to go back to the basic hermeneutical questions in order to delineate how this model answers them.

1. *What did Isaiah know?* This can be determined by what is evident in the context rather than by needing to take into account the statements of Matthew. Whatever Isaiah knew about the meaning of his prophecy he knew either because of the situation in front of him that the prophecy addressed or by revelation. I see nothing in Scripture that indicates that the prophets regularly received additional revelation to explain future significances of the messages given to them. Rather, the general tone of the prophets is that if revelation has been given there is some compulsion to deliver it (e.g., Amos 3:8). We are told in 1 Pet 1:10–12 that the prophets were diligently seeking the meaning of some of these things. Therefore all that we can say that Isaiah knew was what is divulged to us in the passage. We cannot assume special knowledge or revelation beyond that, and there is no need to.

2. *Does Isaiah fully or partially anticipate Matthew's use?* This has already been addressed. He is not able to anticipate anything particular, for the poten-

²⁷I am unconvinced by the arguments of those who think that Isaiah is knowingly speaking of Immanuel in Isaiah 9; cf. e.g. Hindson, *Isaiah's Immanuel* 59; Payne, "Right Questions" 75–76; Leupold, *Exposition* 158.

tial for identified appropriateness is too broad. The important element here is that he does expect other appropriate situations to arise and would therefore not in any sense object to Matthew's use, though I do not believe he could own it as his own intention.

3. *Did Matthew use acceptable and repeatable hermeneutical methods?* Certainly I would say they were acceptable to the Israelites, but I must qualify that when addressing our present-day situation. Identification of appropriateness is a subjective process. However, the simple fact that a conclusion is arrived at subjectively does not make that conclusion wrong. The question with any subjective conclusion is this: Why should I believe it? In current exegetical theory and within our contemporary hermeneutical systems, I would believe something or accept a conclusion because it is provable. There is a necessity for evidence, preferably of the objective sort.

We are certainly capable of reproducing the hermeneutics of Matthew. But what would be the guarantee that our results would be credible, acceptable or authoritative? Authority is attributed to Matthew's statements not because of their objectivity but because he is inspired. We believe his subjective conclusions because of his endowment. That does not give us the right to make subjective conclusions and force them on others.

4. *Is there always a connection between the OT intention and the NT use?* Objections have been raised in the past that if the meaning assigned to an OT passage by a NT author is not the actual meaning in the mind of the OT writer, then the doctrine of inerrancy is in jeopardy.²⁸ In some cases the response to this concern has been an attempt to demonstrate in every case that the OT writer meant or implied or in some other way intended what the NT writer attested.²⁹ Others have been satisfied to identify a looser compatibility between two apparently different meanings.³⁰ In the name model presented above, the relatedness of the two contexts becomes a moot point. The criteria by which a NT author identified appropriateness in an OT text for his current situation may have varied, but in each case the appropriateness is based on a perceived relatedness at least in some superficial way (e.g. wordplay). If the name model is accurate, no OT author would be inclined to object to a particular appropriateness of his words identified by another. Isaac had no objection to Esau's commentary on Jacob's name, because the fact of Jacob's treachery was right in front of him. The OT authors would likewise concede the legitimacy of the identified appropriateness insofar as it was borne out by the facts that were laid out before them. Such identification on the part of the NT authors, then,

²⁸Cf. e.g. the comments by S. L. Johnson, *The Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 41, 50–51, etc.; cf. also Payne, "Right Questions" 76–77.

²⁹This is a concern of W. Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), and in a different way also for Johnson, *Old Testament*.

³⁰This approach is typical of those who seek a *sensus plenior* as discussed by D. Moo, "The Problem of Sensus Plenior," in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and J. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 201–211.

is neither right nor wrong. Rather, it represents the perception of the NT writer and therefore cannot possibly put inerrancy in jeopardy.

5. *Pēšer and midrash, meaning versus significance, sensus plenior and double fulfillment.* How are the various controversies of contemporary hermeneutics affected by the name model? Most of the models that we work with today are attempts on one level or other to reconcile the NT usage of the OT context to an acceptable framework concerning the authority of the Biblical text. For the ETS, that means trying to reconcile NT usage to the issues of inerrancy.

As I have formulated it in my mind, the issue of inerrancy as it concerns the NT use of the OT revolves around the question of allowable meaning. That is, to what extent can the meaning that the NT has indicated for the OT passage be justified as an allowable meaning of the OT passage? Most discussions and models focus on what criteria might be acceptable to identify an allowable meaning.

Some would suggest that the meaning indicated by the NT authors is allowable only if the OT authors intended that meaning.³¹ The difficulty that they face is that such intention can rarely be exegetically supported. Frequently this leads to suggestion of a double fulfillment in which there is a contemporary intention that can be identified exegetically and a far-off fulfillment that is assumed to have been intended because of the NT usage.

A second group will settle for the NT meaning as allowable if it was one that was divinely intended even though the human author of the OT knew nothing of it.³² Many who believe in a *sensus plenior* will fit into this category. The difficulty here is that one must assume that God is engaging in a large program of subtle and sophisticated double entendre. Many find it difficult to think that God was deliberately concealing a portion of the inspired message to unveil it at a later date.

A third group maintains that an indicated meaning is allowable insofar as it uses the acceptable methods of first-century hermeneutics (*pēšer* and *midrash*).³³

Recently a fourth group has taken shape that justifies allowability on the basis of the meaning within the larger canon. Some in this group would emphasize that the NT usage therefore reflects the significance of the OT passage rather than exegetical meaning.³⁴

Appeal is made not to a meaning of the divine author that somehow is deliberately concealed from the human author in the process of inspiration—a *sensus occul-*

³¹D. Bock, "Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New," *BSac* (1985) 209–223, 306–319, has provided a helpful summary of the various evangelical approaches to hermeneutics. He identifies Kaiser, *Uses*, as a primary contemporary example of this approach.

³²Bock, "Evangelicals" 212–215, would consider Johnson, *Old Testament*, as a good example of this approach.

³³R. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

³⁴For interesting parallels in thought reached independently see R. E. Clements, *Old Testament Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978) 146–154.

tus—but to the meaning of the text itself that takes on deeper significance as God's plan unfolds—a *sensus praegnans*. To be sure, God knows, as he inspires the human authors to write, what the ultimate meaning of their words will be; but it is not as if he has deliberately created a double entendre or hidden a meaning in the words that can only be uncovered through a special revelation. The "added meaning" that the text takes on is the product of the ultimate canonical shape—though, to be sure, often clearly perceived only on a revelatory basis.³⁶

In the name model that I have presented here, it does not matter what technique or method the NT author is using. Certainly we would expect to see some degree of *pēšer* and midrash since they were popular methods of the time. On the other hand, there are instances of everything from strict exegesis to casual wordplay. All of these are perfectly acceptable because validity is not determined by the method that was used. The prophetic word had power, and the apostles had "the real thing" before their eyes. They were using the OT to try to prove that Jesus was "the real thing," but they were doing it deductively. They were demonstrating how the activities of Jesus coincided with what the prophetic word said. Their evidences have not stood the test of time because of their inherent objective viability but because of who Christ was. The OT authors, I suspect, would not have inveighed against the Qumran interpreters for their methods. It is rather the failure of the Teacher of Righteousness as the eschatological Messiah that negated their interpretation of the OT. I would not doubt that Rabbi Akiba had some of the same kinds of evidences in support of his messianic candidate, Simeon bar Koseba. But time also passed judgment on the accuracy of those.

In the name model, then, the meaning attributed to the OT by the NT authors is allowable because of (1) the expectations of the prophets, (2) the versatility of the divine word, and (3) the person of Jesus.

XII. IN SEARCH OF EXEGESIS

If our formulation of doctrine demands something exegesis cannot deliver, rather than adjusting our exegesis we ought to think about reformulating our doctrine. Is that not what Biblical authority is all about? This is not to say that we abandon a theological tenet because of one ambiguous problem text. But, for instance in the issue at hand, if our perception of inerrancy is that it demands the interrelationship of meaning in passages where the NT uses the OT, yet we find numerous cases where sound exegesis does not provide such an interrelationship, how should we proceed? If we adjust our exegesis to conform to our perceived doctrinal need we are undercutting Biblical authority on the exegetical, objective level to supposedly support Biblical authority on the level of what we have formulated as the demands of inerrancy. This is not robbing Peter to pay Paul, it is robbing Peter to pay Peter—and charging interest. We have done Biblical authority no favors. The loss exceeds the gain. If inerrancy is true—and I believe it is—it will uphold Biblical authority most particularly on the exegetical level. We must merely consider ways to reformulate the doc-

³⁶Moo, "Problem" 206.

trine without diluting it, so that our demands of it conform to exegetical results.

Exegesis cannot be the handmaiden of eschatology, nor of apologetics, nor of theology, nor of the hermeneutical systems contrived to sustain these endeavors, important though they be. And certainly sound exegesis must never be compromised by constituency demands, needs for higher enrollment, fear of being labeled "liberal," or the need to have a book or translation appear acceptable to a conservative audience.

Another potential threat to sound exegesis is in the psychological arena. Are we at times hesitant to accept a convincing new interpretation of a passage because we would then have to admit to ourselves that we had been teaching our students an incorrect interpretation of that passage for the past generation? If we have been teaching something dogmatically for many years we may find it difficult to reverse our opinion—even in light of seemingly sound exegesis.

The solution to this is to teach method rather than answers, how to think instead of what to think. The measure of success of a professor or a school is not in the number of clones that are produced. Rather, it is the extent to which students develop a competent scholarly independence. None of us ought to be considered the source of our students' interpretations. It is exegesis that produces interpretation. If we lead our students to be able to draw their own conclusions from the textual data, we need not feel guilty in future years about following the exegesis of the text wherever it leads. Traditions, personal as well as corporate, often exercise a strong hold on us. We need to be open to re-evaluating them constantly to ascertain that they are providing an exegetically viable and Biblical foundation.

"The Calfpath" by Sam Walter Foss is a poem that I have found helpful for reminding me of this:

One day, through the primeval wood,
A calf walked home, as good calves should;
But made a trail all bent askew,
A crooked trail as all calves do.

Since then two hundred years have fled
And, I infer, the calf is dead.
But still he left behind his trail,
And thereby hangs my moral tale.

The trail was taken up next day
By a lone dog that passed that way;
And then a wise bellwether sheep
Pursued the trail o'er vale and steep,
And drew the flock behind him, too,
As good bellwethers always do.

And from that day, o'er hill and glade,
Through those old woods a path was made;
And many men wound in and out,
And dodged, and turned, and bent about
And uttered words of righteous wrath
Because 'twas such a crooked path.
But still they followed—do not laugh—

The first migrations of that calf,
 And through this winding wood-way stalked,
 Because he wobbled when he walked.

This forest path became a lane,
 That bent, and turned, and turned again;
 This crooked lane became a road,
 Where many a poor horse with his load
 Toiled on beneath the burning sun,
 And traveled some three miles in one.
 And thus a century and a half
 They trod the footsteps of that calf.

The years passed on in swiftmess fleet,
 The road became a village street;
 And this, before men were aware,
 A city's crowded thoroughfare;
 And soon the central street was this
 Of a renowned metropolis;
 And men two centuries and a half
 Trod in the footsteps of that calf.

Each day a hundred thousand rout
 Followed the zigzag calf about;
 And o'er his crooked journey went
 The traffic of a continent.
 A hundred thousand men were led
 By one calf near three centuries dead.
 They followed still his crooked way,
 And lost one hundred years a day;
 For thus such reverence is lent
 To well-established precedent.

A moral lesson this might teach,
 Were I ordained and called to preach;
 For men are prone to go it blind
 Along the calppaths of the mind,
 And work away from sun to sun
 To do what other men have done.
 They follow in the beaten track,
 And out and in, and forth and back,
 And still their devious course pursue,
 To keep the path that others do.

But how the wise old wood-gods laugh,
 Who saw the first primeval calf!
 Ah! many things this tale might teach—
 But I am not ordained to preach.

We theoretically take our stand as evangelicals on the Bible's authority and claim to live or die, if need be, standing firm in that conviction. Let us not allow

overly strident theological formulations, unnecessarily restrictive hermeneutics, popular opinion, economic factors, Biblically unfounded traditions or psychological barriers weaken our resolve or cause us to rationalize our pursuit of sound exegesis.