IDENTIFICATION OF IMMANUEL IN THE CONTEXT
OF ISAIAH 7:14

Zainal Sibagariang
Manogang Simanjuntak
STFT SURYA NUSANTARA

Abstract

For many scholars the identification of Immanuel and his mother in Isaiah 7:14 had been a dispute for a long time. For Christian the verse Isaiah 7:14 is one of the most popular items in the foretold the future conception and birth of a child by a virgin, the “fulfillment” of which is described in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke with the accounts of Mary’s conceiving a child of the Holy Spirit and giving birth to Jesus. However many scholar questioned refute Christian’ application of this verse. The prophet Isaiah’s use of the term עַלְמָ֗ה (‘almah) and עִמָּ֥נוּאֵֽל (‘imanu’el ) in 7:14 would pose a problem. To whom Isaiah’s Immanuel and his mother intended? What is the correct interpretation of the the Immanuel and his mother of this verse contextually? This research primarily uses the inductive method to arrive at answers. Through theological reflection the following steps will be taken: firstly, the background of great controversy and analysis of the word אוֹת (‘ot), עַלְמָ֗ה (‘almah), הָרָה (harah), and עִמָּ֥נוּאֵֽל (‘imanu’el ) in its lexical-grammatical, structural, contextual aspects. From the literary context studying and historical context of the Isaiah one must accept that this prophecy has a double meaning. Firstly is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah time and secondly the eschatological fulfillment. The text cannot be understood only from Isaiah 7:14 only, but should be explored into broader text in order to be able to interpret this prophecy correctly.

Keywords: almah, immanuel, virgin

INTRODUCTION
Many studies have been done dealing with Isaiah 7:14 to answer this problematic text. The phrase, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” or in Hebrew, וְיֹלֶדֶת בֵּן וְקָרָ֥את שְׁמ֖וֹ עִמָּ֥וֹ אֵֽל (Isa 7:14 WTT) has evoked a long dispute among scholars. To whom is the Immanuel and his mother meant or here predicted? In this limited paper, it is impossible to discuss all the opinions, however, in short it could be said there are three major interpretations have been given to this difficult text. The various answers to this question may be all reduced into three fundamental hypotheses.

The first hypothesis is that the only birth and infancy referred to in this verse are the birth and infancy of a child born (supposed to be born) in the ordinary course of nature, and in the days of Isaiah himself. The unessential variations, of which this hypothesis is susceptible, have reference chiefly to the question what particular child is intended. The second is by supposing that the prophecy relates to two distinct births and two different children. The first supposes one child to be mentioned in ver.14, and another in ver.16. The third is that proposes to effect this by applying all three verses directly and exclusively to the messiah, as the only child whose birth is there predicted and his growth made the measure of the subsequent events.1

The most reasons why there are so many disputes and different interpretations of this verse because the difficulties of the meaning of the words and also different ways to approach this biblical text. Then, the question comes: what did Isaiah mean in and to whom the child is predicted in 7:14, when he said “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel”?

In order to reach the purpose of this study that is to answer the statement of the problem exegetically, the following steps will be done: 1) to study historical context of Isaiah 7:14; 2) To do grammatical and syntactical analysis of Isaiah 7:14; 3) to draw some conclusions and applications.

Historical Background

---

The seventh chapter in the Book of Isaiah is begun by describing the military crisis that was confronting King Ahaz of the Kingdom of Judah. Around the year 732 B.C.E., the House of David was facing imminent destruction at the hands of two warring kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom of Israel, led by King Pekah (פֶּקַח) and the Kingdom of Syria (Aram), led by King Rezin (רְצִין). “And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it” (Isa 7:1).

The historical setting of this text begins after King Jotham’s death as his son Ahaz feels the threat of the conquest from Judah neighbour Syria and Ephraim. Ahaz was distressed because Pekah, the king of Israel or the Northern kingdom and brother in blood, chose to align himself with the pagan king Rezin of Syria in threatening siege against the Holy city of Jerusalem. Rezin of Syria (Damascus) persuaded or coerced Pekah, the ruler of the kingdom of Samaria, to ally with him an attack on Jerusalem with the purpose of forcing Ahaz to join their anti-Assyrian coalition.

King Ahaz is terrified of impending invasion but God sent Isaiah with comforting word that the northern coalition will not succeed to overthrow Ahaz (Isa 7:2-3, 7-9). Ahaz was known as ungodly king—the most ungodly king to the date in the history of Judah. He was not a believer at all. He offered his own children as human sacrifices and built a pagan altar in the temple area. He was a man who had been deliberately disobedient to God. Only such a man could reject the promise of help from God that was about to be extended to him.

Although Ahaz himself was a wicked king, the Lord had no intention of allowing the dynasty of David to become extinct (see Gen. 49:10; 2 Sam. 7:12, 13). Fearing the invasion of

---


4Ibid


his neighbors, Ahaz was inclined to call on the aid of the Assyrian conqueror, Tiglath-pileser. With this as the background, Isaiah tried to encourage all Judah, not be discouraged of the threatening of Rezin and Pekah who aligned themselves to siege the Holy city of Jerusalem. Therefore Isaiah was sent to the king to inform him of the Lord’s purpose to preserve Judah and to defeat its invaders.

LITERATUR RIVIEW

A brief look at Isaiah 7:14

Isaiah 7:13-25 has been chosen for exegesis because it presents one of the most difficult text in the Bible. In doing literary analysis we need to understand the background of book, such as: the author, the addressees, the date, and the purpose. The author of this book is clearly stated in the prologue of the letter; he is the prophet Isaiah. To whom it was addressed is to Ahaz (735–715 B.C.) particularly and to all Judah generally. It is important to note that the words “to you” Heb. לָכֶם of verse 14 is in plural form instead of singular particle (preposition suffix 2nd person masculine plural). One can infer that, from studying the text shows the recipients of this sign was not Ahaz alone for all Judah.

---

7 The SDA Bible Commentary, v.4 (Washington D.C., Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976) P.16
8 Isaiah 7:3
9 Bible Works 8, accessed Mei 12, 2012. As to commentators interpretations of the meaning
## Variants Translation of Isaiah 7:14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>KJV</strong></td>
<td><em>Isaiah 7:14</em> Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NAS</strong></td>
<td><em>Isaiah 7:14</em> &quot;Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RSV</strong></td>
<td><em>Isaiah 7:14</em> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LXE</strong></td>
<td><em>Isaiah 7:14</em> Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Emmanuel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Syntactical connection of תּוֹת (‘ot), עַלְמָה (‘almah), הָרָה (harah), and עִמָּנָאֵל (‘imanu’el) within the context

1. **Studying biblical use of תּוֹת (‘ot)**

   In Biblical the Hebrew word תּוֹת refers to something addressed to the senses to attest the existence of divine power. Often extraordinary events were given as a sign to assure faith or to demonstrate authority. Many opinions have been expressed as to the significance of the "sign" in this passage. Here are some various of the תּוֹת applications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrew Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>תּוֹת</td>
<td>A sign to determine times</td>
<td>Genesis 1:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An emblem, an insignia</td>
<td>Numbers 2:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sign</td>
<td>Isaiah 7:14; 38 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An example</td>
<td>Isaiah 19:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A marvelous deeds</td>
<td>Isaiah 44:25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. The study of word עַלְמָ֗ה (almah)

The meaning of עַלְמָ֗ה (almah) has been an endless debates between Jews and Christian. It deals with the question how to translate עַלְמָ֗ה (almah) as in Masoretic Text and LXX. What does עַלְמָ֗ה (almah) mean and to whom עַלְמָ֗ה (almah) refer? According to BDB., עַלְמָ֗ה denotes to a "young women" who sexually ripe, either a maid or newly married. And according to Benjamin Davidson this word means a maiden, virgin, marriageable but not married. Eventhough the meaning of 'almah has been much debated, but all agree that it at least means a girl or young woman above the age of childhood who has arrived at sexual maturity. Many scholar said that it is learly mean "virgin" as LXX used παρθένος for עַלְמָ֗ה in Isaiah 7:14. One of the scholar who stand for this was Kaiser. He believed that עַלְמָ֗ה means virgin and the use of in LXX suppot this translation because παρθένος has a specific meaning of virgin. However when one study the words of עַלְמָ֗ה, the meaning will be various. There are nine times word of עַלְמָ֗ה Appers in Old Testament.

**Variant of עַלְמָ֗ה (almah) in OT.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>MT WTT</th>
<th>LXX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Genesis 24:43 | התורה את כל עטיה עלין מכלים ותעבור ברכתה | 24:43 יִדְוּי אֶרֶץ וְהָאָרֶץ תִּקְרָּא אֶלֶּה הַמַּקְרֵּשׁ תֵּקָּר אֶלֶּהַמַּקְרֵּשׁ עַל בָּרְכֵּּה הוֹדַעְתָּ לָּהַתּוֹ הַיַּהַתּוֹ מַלְאֵכָּה שְׁלֹשֵּׁת וְלָלֶּהַמַּקְרֵּשׁ עַל בָּרְכֵּּה הוֹדַעְתָּ לָּהַתּוֹ הַיַּהַתּוֹ מַלְאֵכָּה שְׁלֹשֵּׁת וְלָלֶּּהַמַּקְרֵּשׁ עַל בָּרְכֵּּה הוֹדַעְתָּ לָּהַתּוֹ הַיַּהַתּוֹ מַלְאֵכָּה שְׁלֹשֵּׁת וְלָלֶּּהַמַּקְרֵּשׁ עַל בָּרְכֵּּה הוֹדַעְתָּ לָּהַתּוֹ הַיַּהַתּוֹ מַלְאֵכָּה שְׁלֹשֵּׁת וְלָלֶּּהַמַּקְרֵּשׁ עַל בָּרְכֵּּה הוֹדַעְתָּ לָּהַתּוֹ הַיַּהַתּוֹ מַלְאֵכָּה שְׁלֹשֵּׁת וְלָלֶּּהַמַּקְרֵּשׁ עַל בָּרְכֵּּה הוֹדַעְתָּ לָּהַתּוֹ הַיַּהַתּוֹ מַלְאֵכָּה שְׁלֹשֵּׁת WTT)
| Exodus 2:8 | הַאֲמַרְרָהָהּ בְּכָל הַכְּלָלָהּ שֶׁלֹּא הֶלְךָּ וְהָלְכָּהּ | ַּיָּּהַזְּרַגְּרָהָהּ בְּכָל הַכְּלָלָהּ שֶׁלֹּא הֶלְךָּ וְהָלְכָּהּ | הַיָּּהַזְּרַגְּרָהָהּ בְּכָל הַכְּלָלָהּ שֶׁלֹּא הֶלְךָּ וְהָלְכָּהּ | הַיָּּהַזְּרַגְּרָהָהּ בְּכָל הַכְּלָלָהּ שֶׁלֹּא הֶלְךָּ וְהָלְכָּהּ | הַיָּּהַזְּרַגְּרָהָהּ בְּכָל הַכְּלָלָהּ שֶׁלֹּא הֶלְךָּ וְהָלְכָּהּ | הַיָּּהַזְּרַגְּרָהָהּ בְּכָל הַכְּלָלָהּ שֶׁלֹּא הֶלְךָּ וְהָלְכָּהּ | HEBW (Gen 24:43 WTT) | LXX | HEBW (Gen 24:43 LXT) | HEBW (Gen 24:43 LXT) |

---


12 Kaiser, the Messiah in Old Testament p. 160.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Textual Representation</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Chronicles 15:20</td>
<td>(1Ch 15:20 WTT)</td>
<td>Ζαχαριας και Οζιηλ Σεμιραμωθ Ιιηλ Ωνι Ελιαβ Μασαιας Βαναιας</td>
<td>εις το τελος υπερ των υιων Κορε υπερ των κρυφων ψαλμος</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalm 46:1</td>
<td>(Psa 46:1 WTT)</td>
<td>εις το τελος λειψανοι και οδους όφειος</td>
<td>προεφθασαν αρχοντες εχόμενοι παλαιες επι νεανιδον τημπανιστριων</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalm 68:26</td>
<td>(Psa 68:26 WTT)</td>
<td>Ιξην άετου πετομένου και οδους όφειος επι πέτρας και τρίβους νησος ποντοποροσης και οδους ανδρος εν νεότητι</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proverbs 30:19</td>
<td>(Pro 30:19 WTT)</td>
<td>Ιξην άετου πετομένου και οδους όφειος επι πέτρας και τρίβους νησος ποντοποροσης και οδους ανδρος εν νεότητι</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon 1:3</td>
<td>(Sol 1:3 WTT)</td>
<td>και οδη μυρον σου υπερ παντα τα άρωμα μυρον εκκενωθην ονυμα σου δια τοτο νεανιδες ηγαπησαν σε</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon 6:8</td>
<td>(Sol 6:8 WTT)</td>
<td>εξηκοντα εισιν βασιλισσαι και ογδοηκοντα παλλακαι και νεανιδες ων ουκ έστιν αριθμος</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 7:14</td>
<td>( Isa 7:14 WTT)</td>
<td>δια τοτο δωσει κυριος αυτος υμιν σημειον ιδου η παρθενος εν γαστρι έξει και τεξετα υιον και καλεσει το ονομα αυτου Εμμανουηλ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So the question is, who is the עַלְמָ֗ה in this text? One can the basic meaning of עַלְמָ֗ה was young woman, damsel or maiden, who may or may not have been a virgin. From this, some has identified the woman as Isaiah’s wife\textsuperscript{13}. However for this case, one can not identified her by the definition alone. One must consider the surrounding immediate text.

3. The biblical studies of word הָרָה (harah)

The closer word to עַלְמָ֗ה was הָרָה (harah), in phrase and the meaning of this word has been debated also for along time. The debate is focused on, is the word הָרָה should be understood as an adjective which describe עַלְמָ֗ה at present time or as a verb that describes what the עַלְמָ֗ה will do in the future. The word הָרָה appears in the Old Testament on 16 occasions – once as a verb in a metaphoric form that speaks of conceiving an idea, and 11 times as an adjective that describes a pregnant woman. According to the Hebrew grammar, if the term הָרָה (harah), were a verb, then it would have to be the 3rd-person, singular, masculine, past tense conjugation of the root verb הָרָה. Consequently, when the term הָרָה (harah), is used in onnection with a female, then that female is the noun in the sentence, the term הָרָה (harah), is the adjective that describes the noun.

The contextual usage of harah makes it difficult to interpret this phrase in the future tense. The future would only be valid if the participle were used with hineh. However, the ordinary participial form would be horah. The form harah is neither a verb nor a participle, but a feminine adjective connected with an active participle ("bearing") and denotes that the scene is present to the prophet's view. This usage is similar then to the annunciation of the Angel of the Lord to Hagar in the wilderness: "Behold! thou art pregnant and wilt bear a son." (Gen. 16:12).

4. The biblical study of word הַיִּמְעָנֵאיל (‘imanu’el)

When one consider these text, how LXX translate the הַיִּמְעָנֵאיל (‘imanu’el) in different ways. The form of הַיִּמְעָנֵאיל itself is noun proper no gender no number no state. Then the question is, to whom did Isaiah mean the “Immanuel” when he conveyed his message.

To whom did Isaiah have in mind when he conveyed the message? The Hebrew word of עִמָּ֥נוּאֵֽל ('imanu’el) is appeared in OT only three times. It appears in Isa 7:14; 8:8 and 8:10.

The succeeding verses give the time frame of local fulfillment of this sign. From The immediate context of Isaiah 7:13-25, they give a further indication in some way to the future of destruction of Samaria and Syria. "For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings (Isa 7:16). The child clearly would be born in the time of Ahaz. In any case at this point, if there is any indication regarding the identity of the Immanuel child in Isaiah 7:14 at all, the indication will point to Immanuel being the son of Ahaz.\(^\text{14}\)

One of the interpretation sees Isaiah’s son as the child is its close historical proximity to the events surrounding 7:14. Maher-Shalal-Hash-Bez is born only one chapter later when Isaiah sleeps with his wife based on a word from the Lord (Isaiah 8:1-2), and would have thus been old enough to fulfill Isaiah’s prediction in 7:15. However, one weakness of the Maher-Shalal-Hash-Bez interpretation is, again, the word “almah” would probably not have been the best word to denote the prophetess of Isaiah 8:2, Isaiah’s wife. Nevertheless, whether Isaiah 7:14’s literal and historical meaning referred to Maher-Shalal-Hash-Bez or some other unknown child in that historical context is irrelevant.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In chapter passage, looking at the text of Isaiah’s message to his Ahaz and Judah, Isaiah gave the sign to Ahaz to give him a sign that God would not leave Israel event though the king did not obey God. In broader text of chapter 7-12 the antecedent of the phrase broadly speaks about the fulfillment of this prophecy, we can see that the Immanuel is refer to Hezekiah than to

\(^\text{14}\)Richard M. Davidson, The Messianic Hope in Isaiah 7:14 and the Volume of Immanuel (Isaiah 7-12) 01

Isaiah’s son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Bez. However the prophecy in Isa 7:14 of a child called Immanuel does not appear to be a simple prophecy in its entirety by the child in 8:3-4. This kind of prophecy is often offered to as typology, which is related to the “near view/far view” phenomenon which mean that this has an eschatological prophecy.

From the literary context studying and historical context of the Isaiah one must accept that this prophecy has a double meaning. Firstly is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah time and secondly the eschatological fulfillment. The text cannot be understood only from Isaiah 7:14 only, but should be explored into broader text in order to be able to interpret this prophecy correctly.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bible Works 8.


