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Isaiah 7:10-25: The Climax of the Messianic Expectation

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ABSTRACT:

Is there a man called Messiah who was promised by God? Did he come? Or will he come? Isaiah gave the most straightforward prophecy — Isaiah 7:10-25 — about him. Since then, a lot of efforts have been made to figure out “Who is he?” However, to acknowledge Jesus as the only fulfillment of the messianic expectation, a possibly correct interpretation is not enough. One also needs a leap of faith.

Isaiah 7:10-25

The Climax of the Messianic Expectation

by Father Thông K. Trần

INTRODUCTION

One of the main themes of the New Testament and Christian theology is the recognition of Jesus as the fulfillment of the messianic promise. In fact, Jesus often applied the title Son of Man to Himself, a general reference to the Messiah. In the Emmaus narrative, He even indirectly explained to His two disciples that He is the Messiah (Luke 24:25-27).¹ The first homily of Peter was also built upon this notion (Acts 2:14-36).

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- 1 All biblical quotations in this essay are from the translation of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, found at “Books of the Bible,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, <https://bible.usccb.org/bible>.



Judaism, however, refuses this connection. For them, the Messiah has a very different mission—more political and nationalistic—than what the Christians profess.

Some may find such a description surprising, especially the Catholics who only know a few prophetic messages announced in liturgical readings and the explanations in the Church's tradition. For them, it is clear that all prophecies in the Old Testament refer to Jesus. Nevertheless, with the advent of the historical-critical approach, the messianic character of these prophetic passages has become less obvious. There are many potential Messiahs and little can be sure about Jesus' messianic characteristics.

In this paper, the Emmanuel prophecy in Isaiah 7:10-25 will be taken into consideration as the climax of the Jewish messianic expectation. Put differently, how is Isaiah 7:10-25 distinct among other messianic prophecies? First, does the passage prove and strengthen the transition from a Promised One—announced in the Torah and other pre-Davidic texts—to an ideal Savior of David's line (2 Samuel 7:11-16; 1 Chronicles 17:10-14)? Second, does the passage narrow the messianic domain by providing more information about his birth: his mother was still young (עלֵצָה-*alma*) and, perhaps, a virgin? Third, does the passage play an intermediary role, but a “high” intermediary, in the manifold understandings of the Messiah: his mission is less political and nationalistic (Maccabean and then late Judaic influence) because his reign is worldwide (Psalm 45); his nature is not merely human (Mosaic portrayal) or merely divine (Daniel's eschatological description), but somehow both human (Emmanu-) and divine (-El)? The task will be carried out through an investigation into the Jewish Bible concerning messianic belief, and then, the prophecy itself in its political, literary, and theological context. The main purpose of the paper is to deepen understanding of the text in regards to messianic imagery as well as to strengthen Christian belief by positing out that, although there are many possible Messiahs, Jesus is the most possible One, the promised Savior, a conclusion of both faith and reason, not of reason alone.

MESSIANIC EXPECTATION IN HEBREW SCRIPTURE

The messianic expectation is a fundamental Judaic conception that became one of the most important dogmatic elements of Christianity. However, it is also the breaking point of these two religions because Judaism does not accept that the messianic hope was fulfilled in Jesus, whose Messianic identity is professed by Christianity. The former sees the Messiah as a national, ethnic, political, and material figure while the latter holds more to His universal, cosmopolitan, ethical, and spiritual role. Gershom Scholem notes, “Any discussion of the problems relating to Messianism is a delicate matter, for it is here that the essential conflict between Judaism and Christianity has developed and continues to exist.”²

Paradoxically, none of the passages in which the term Messiah appears in the Old Testament can be employed messianically while messianic understanding is implied in many passages where the term Messiah is not used.³ The term itself, in fact, has scant and inconsistent use in early Jewish texts. It is also absent in many important texts, canonical as well as non-canonical. With thirty-eight occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, it denotes one invested with power and leadership, but never an eschatological figure. It even refers to a murdered high priest in Daniel 9:25f. Generally speaking, “messiah” was hardly a focal and evocative image for ancient Judaism.⁴ Even so, based on the claims of the New Testament, especially in Matthew’s Gospel, one can say that the messianic expectation was present in the Jewish tradition and connected closely with the Davidic kingship, especially with the title Emmanuel.

2 Gershom Scholem, “Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism,” in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 1, quoted in Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs, ed., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1.

3 Franz Hesse, “Chrio, etc.,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol 9, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 504.

4 William Scott Green, “Introduction: Messiah in Judaism: Rethinking the Question,” in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, ed. Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 2–3.

However, it is hard to say how important this belief was to the majority of the Jews, and in what category—political, nationalistic, or spiritual—they expected it to be. In the Torah, there are several allusions to a figure who would do extraordinary things in coherence with God’s will: Genesis 3:15, “regarded as the oldest messianic prophecy,”⁵ refers to the offspring of the woman, who will strike at the serpent’s head; Genesis 49:10 speaks about a ruler of Judah’s lineage, from whom “the scepter shall never depart”; Numbers 24:17 predicts the rise of a star, a scepter who will conquer other nations.⁶ Among the many references throughout the Torah to the Messiah, the announcement to Moses concerning a future prophet like him seems to be more direct, important, and detailed (Deuteronomy 18:15-18), even though it is a more prophet-like Messiah, not a king-like one.

Prior to the period of classical prophecy, David, Solomon, and even Saul could have been thought of by their contemporaries as messianic figures. These first kings had many achievements, political as well as religious. In the book of Samuel, “a messianic ideal is set forth in the persons of Saul and David, though it is also made clear that both leaders fail in their performance.”⁷ Solomon was depicted as the most politically successful king alongside his richness, thanks to the wisdom he had asked from God, although that wisdom could not protect the king from committing idolatry at his old age. Solomon could be the first candidate of the promise in 2 Samuel 7:11-16 and 1 Chronicles 17:10-14 but his failure in keeping faithful to God turned the promise in a specific direction.

In fact, the prophecy of Nathan is a very important landmark in the development of messianic prophecy as it narrows the expectation to the Davidic lineage: the Messiah is to be the descendant of David. David himself, according to Steinmann’s argument, understood Nathan’s words in this way, that is, “God had made him the promise that he would be the

5 Sigmund Mowinckel, *He that Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism*, trans. G. W. Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 11.

6 See detailed explanation in Sigmund Mowinckel, *He that Cometh*, 11–13.

7 Greg Goswell, “The Lord’s Anointed in the Books of Samuel,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 82, no. 2 (2020): 241.

ancestor of the promised man to come.”⁸ Some of the royal psalms, which are often understood to be messianic, explicitly connect the Messiah with David. The clearest case is Psalm 132:17-18: “There I will make a horn sprout for David; I will set a lamp for my anointed. His foes I will clothe with shame, but on him his crown shall shine.”

Nevertheless, the most clear messianic prophecies are to be found in prophetic books.⁹ In most cases, the Messiah is depicted as a future leader, most likely belonging to the Davidic line, who will be pleasing to God. He may appear as a redeemer, or a king, or even a [suffering] servant of YHWH (Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 40:4-11; 52:13-53:12). His mission varies from text to text. Sometimes he takes a political role or militant leadership. In other cases, he might appear as a spiritual leader and his kingdom is of an eschatological period. Although all these elements vary in theme, they represent a tradition of a future hope in a person promised by God.

THE EMMANUEL IN ISAIAH 7:10-25 IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MESSIANIC PROPHECY

The first thing to be considered is the historical context because the prophecy resulted from a concrete situation in which political calculations and tactics were interwoven with religious responsibilities and belief. At the time when the prophecy was announced, the young king Ahaz was facing a dilemma. He could choose to join the coalition formed by Aram and Israel in order to resist the expansion of Assyria or he could choose to depend on Assyria, which meant that he would have to face the other two kings. 2 Kings 16 reveals Ahaz’s choice: he asked for help from Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, accepted political dependence (2 Kings 16:7), and potentially some religious adaptations (2 Kings 16:10-18). In return, Judah continued to exist while Aram and Israel were destroyed in 732 (2 Kings 16:9) and 722/721 B.C. (2 Kings 17:6), respectively. The result indicates that, at least in the short term, Ahaz was politically successful even though his religious policy was a failure.

8 Andrew E. Steinmann, “What Did David Understand about the Promises in the Davidic Covenant?” *Bibliotheca sacra* 171, no. 681 (2014): 29.

9 A detailed list of Messianic prophecies are provided by Sigmund Mowinckel, *He that Cometh*, 16.

He refused to ask for a sign as God suggested, not because of a pious reason, that is, “I will not tempt the Lord!” (Isaiah 7:12) but, on the contrary, Ahaz already had in mind another plan which, according to his discernment, was better. He did not want to follow instructions which might come from the Lord, yet he desired to maintain religious support for his reign, hence such a hypocritical answer. Knowing Ahaz’s mind, God still gave a sign but it was no longer a favor for the king but, by contrast, a condemnation (Isaiah 7:13): the time of “God with us—Emmanuel” would slip away from the king’s control. Firstly, it was no longer “your God—אֱלֹהֵיכֶם” (Isaiah 7:10) but “my God—אֱלֹהֵי” (Isaiah 7:14), an indication of separation between God and Ahaz—God is no longer on his side. Secondly, it was not Ahaz in the favor of the prophecy, but the whole house of David. The private conversation became a public proclamation in verses 13-14 (מְכַמֵּ, and וְאֶלֶת, and תְּכַלְּ all signify plural meaning) but Ahaz would be addressed privately again in verse 16. Thirdly, it was not Ahaz who would evoke this mysterious term either, but a woman (Isaiah 7:14)—Brown observed that “the same Hebrew consonants permit us to render, thou (Ahaz) shall call, thou (תַּמְלֵעַ) shall call, she shall call, or she is about to call.”¹⁰ However, the context seems to favor the link to the woman rather than Ahaz.

At that point, Ahaz became a mere secondary beneficiary of the prophecy. He was safe from the attack of Aram and Israel but a vassal kingdom of Assyria, certainly with some consequent duties. His life ended in peace (2 Kings 16:19) but he was held in very low regard by Jewish tradition as an evil king. Can this historical fact be considered a fulfillment of the prophecy: “the land of those two kings whom you dread shall be deserted” (Isaiah 7:16)? If this is the case, then king Hezekiah, Ahaz’s son, could be the predicted Emmanuel. Charles Brown, using Ahaz and Isaiah’s view and relying on the content of the text, comes to this conclusion.¹¹ In fact, king Hezekiah was praised as a good king who “did what was right in the Lord’s sight” (2 Kings 18:3). There were even two miraculous events that happened to Hezekiah. The first was the divine

10 Charles Brown, “Exegesis of Isaiah VII. 10-17,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 9, no. 1 (1890): 121.

11 Charles Brown, “Exegesis of Isaiah VII. 10-17,” 127.

liberation from Sennacherib, king of Assyria (Isaiah 36:1-37:37; 2 Kings 18:13-19:36). In this event, Hezekiah held an attitude completely opposite to his father Ahaz: he prayed and trusted in God instead of military and political tactics. The second was the healing from his mortal illness, again a result of Hezekiah's humility before God (Isaiah 38:1-22; 2 Kings 20:1-11). Hezekiah even asked for a sign from God, a reminder of his father's hypocritical refusal. In both cases, the miracles happened as a confirmation of the assertion "the Lord was with him" (2 Kings 18:7)—a semantic connection with the title Emmanuel, "God be with us."

However, Hezekiah could not be the Messiah. In Isaiah 39 (also 2 Kings 20:12-19), he showed all precious things in Judah to the messengers from Babylon, perhaps as a demonstration of his strength and glory. This was not pleasing to God, then who sentenced him and Judah to be deported. Sehoon Jang compares this narrative with that of Ahaz and comes to three assertions. First, the narrative shows that "the Babylonian exile would be the ultimate result of Hezekiah's displaying his resources to the Babylonian ambassadors."¹² Second, Hezekiah was a contrast with his father Ahaz in many ways, but was also a striking contrast with Emmanuel because he appeared "not to be able to distinguish fully between good and evil, as Emmanuel is able to do."¹³ Third, Hezekiah was a success but became a failure.¹⁴ This conclusion seems to be in agreement with the rejection of Ahaz in the prophecy; there is not a direct connection between him and his son Hezekiah, and Emmanuel.

The recognition of Hezekiah as the Emmanuel also faces a chronological problem: according to 2 King 16:2 and 18:2, Ahaz would have been only about ten years old when his son, that is, Hezekiah, was begotten—Brown had to make some delicate modifications to solve this.¹⁵ In addition, Oswalt argues that chronologically, Hezekiah was born six years before the prophecy and it would be unreasonable if Isaiah talked about

12 Sehoon Jang, "Is Hezekiah a Success or a Failure? The Literary Function of Isaiah's Prediction at the End of the Royal Narratives in the Book of Isaiah," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 42, no. 1 (2017): 131.

13 Sehoon Jang, "Is Hezekiah a Success or a Failure?" 133.

14 Sehoon Jang, "Is Hezekiah a Success or a Failure?" 135.

15 Charles Brown, "Exegesis of Isaiah VII. 10-17," 126-27.

him as if he had not been born. Based on the fact that “the child will be born in a certain time frame, and its specific existence in that time frame is intrinsic to the function of the sign,” Oswalt sees that “the most attractive option is that Emmanuel and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (the son of Isaiah) were one and the same.”¹⁶ This possibility is supported by some scholars, such as Blenkinsopp, especially when they tend to understand that the child’s mother is just a young woman, not necessarily a virgin.¹⁷ However, if it is the case that the son of Isaiah was Emmanuel, “it is difficult to comprehend how Isaiah conceived of the land as belonging to his son (Isaiah 8:8).”¹⁸

The two most likely candidates do not seem to befit the prophecy. One may ask: “Is there anything else which can help identify the child?” In fact, there are at least two elements which can help answer this question: the identification of his mother and the political context of his reign.

In the prophecy, only the mother of the child is mentioned using a very general term with a definite article, הַמְּלֵאָה—*ha-alma*. *Alma* in general refers to a young woman.¹⁹ However, when it was translated into Greek, the meaning changed. The Septuagint renders the term as ἡ παρθένος, which emphasizes virginity.²⁰ This special meaning was adopted by Matthew to imply the virgin birth of Jesus and since then, it has been debated among scholars. Some argue that *alma* by no means emphasizes the virginity of the mother of the Emmanuel—although it “may be applied to a virgin, it does not refer to her purity, but only to her age.”²¹ Especially, *alma*—taken to mean virgin—does not seem to fit well with

16 John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 212.

17 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (NewHaven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 233.

18 Charles Brown, “Exegesis of Isaiah VII. 10-17,” 125.

19 Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003), 840.

20 Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva Miller, Vol. 4: *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker’s Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 301.

21 Charles Brown, “Exegesis of Isaiah VII. 10-17,” 122.

a birth without male intervention, a real scandal.²² To address a virgin specifically and precisely, another word, that is, *bethulah*-הַלְלוּתָה, must be used.²³ This manner of interpretation tends to see the realization of the prophecy happening in the close future, that is, in the reign of Ahaz. On the contrary, in case that *alma* is understood as a virgin—“the word is never used of a married woman” in the biblical texts nor in the Ras Shamra texts²⁴—and the generic usage of the definite article הַ focuses particular attention upon the subject introduced without referring to a known person (Isaiah did not know the woman beforehand),²⁵ the prophecy would likely refer to a less predictable moment in the future.

The political and social context of the prophecy also affects the interpretation. On the one hand, the prophecy is still connected with Ahaz's situation, either as an aid or a warning, to help him overcome his difficulties. Therefore, the child was likely born in his reign. On the other hand, the indications and consequences of the prophecy are very direct. “Curds and honey”, which could be understood either as the royal food or as “the only diet available to those who are left after the devastation of the land,”²⁶ serve as an implication to a child of the royal family in the conflicting years of Ahaz's reign. The next indication is the fall of two nations, Aram and Samaria, which happened during the reign of Ahaz. Finally, all the announcements of the day of the fulfillment of the prophecy (Isaiah 7:17-25) were completed some years later, either by Assyria or Babylon. Put differently, this prophecy is not eschatological but rather implies an imminent occurrence, either before or after the exile to Babylon.

22 Nathan Lovell, “Immanuel in Imperial Context: Isaiah, God, and History,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 32, no. 2 (2022): 137.

23 Charles Lee Feinberg, “The Virgin Birth in the Old Testament and Isaiah 7:14,” *Bibliotheca sacra* 119, no. 475 (Jul - Sep 1962): 255.

24 Edward Young, “The Immanuel Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14-16,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 16, no. 1 (Nov 1953): 36.

25 Edward Young, “The Immanuel Prophecy Isaiah 7:14-16,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 15, no. 2 (May 1953): 117-118.

26 “Isaiah,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed November 22, 2022, <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/#29007015-1>.

OTHER POSSIBLE CANDIDATES OF THE MESSIANIC EXPECTATION

Interestingly, the more detailed the prophecy is, the more possibilities it can lead to. In Jewish history, apart from the unsuccessful realization of the prophecy in king Hezekiah, there might be moments when people thought that they saw the time of the Emmanuel. Jeremiah the prophet gave a candidate, King Zedekiah. Even though he “had appeared in a quieter period of Judah’s history,” he was not listed “among the kings denounced for oppression and injustice” in Jeremiah’s oracles against the royal house (Jeremiah 22:1-23:6).²⁷ On the contrary, “by a play on words, Jeremiah may have found in the name of Zedekiah (which in Hebrew means ‘YHWH is my righteousness’) the suggestion that the messianic king of the future would have a similar royal name: ‘YHWH is our righteousness’ (Jeremiah 33:16).”²⁸

Emmanuel could also be Zerubbabel, the first governor of Judah after the exile (Haggai 1:1; 2:2, 21) and the grandson of King Jehoiachin, who was a “snatched-off signet ring” (Jeremiah 22:24) as punishment by God. Conversely, Zerubbabel was chosen by God as a new signet ring (Haggai 2:23) to represent the Lord.²⁹ In fact, Zerubbabel was recognized by both Haggai and Zechariah as the coming Messiah³⁰—the Lord is with him (Haggai 2:4), and before him the great mountain would become a plain (Zechariah 4:7)—who would liberate Israel from the Persians and revive the Davidic kingship. Curiously, even before Zerubbabel could complete and dedicate the temple to which he “laid the foundations” (Zechariah 4:9), his name completely disappeared from biblical records.

The only exception is in the Maccabean texts which, among the latest of the Old Testament, do not mention Davidic kingship. They focus on the reign of the Hasmonaeen dynasty, “God’s instrument for bringing permanent victory to the Jews”, because “God’s election of David’s

27 Bernhard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: From the Galilee to the Crown Heights (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3–4.

28 Bernhard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 385–386.

29 “Haggai,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed November 22, 2022, <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/haggai/2>.

30 Sigmund Mowinckel, *He that Cometh*, 155.

dynasty might not be permanent.”³¹ Interestingly, the “Praise of Simon” (1 Maccabees 14:5-15) paraphrases some messianic prophecies in the Old Testament—the author “uses at 14:8 the words of Leviticus 26:4, Ezekiel 34:27, and Zechariah 8:12; at 14:9 the words of Zechariah 8:4; and at 14:12 the words of Micah 4:4 and Zechariah 3:10”—and applies them to Simon.³² However, Jonathan Goldstein also argues that the author of 1 Maccabees “may have echoed the prophecies, but more likely he avoided doing so” and concludes that “the evidence seems to show that important Jewish sects of the second and early first centuries B.C.E. [...] did not believe in the coming of a Davidic Messiah.”³³

The Maccabean period gave rise to a stronger movement which portrayed the Messiah as more political and nationalistic. Whether he belongs to David’s line or not, he must act like the Maccabeans had done, that is, to take political and military leadership. Harris Lenowitz, with this assertion, “wherever Judaism has been, its messiahs have arisen,” provides a list of figures who, explicitly or implicitly, claimed themselves the Messiahs since Jesus’ time.³⁴ Certainly, none of these candidates could successfully realize the mission of the Messiah because “they are dead and their deaths are the proof of their failure. They failed to achieve cosmic redemption; they have failed to guide their followers through the apocalypse to youth, wealth, and eternal life.”³⁵

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MESSIAH-EMMANUEL PROPHECY

The Messiah-Emmanuel prophecy is attractive and important for scholars. Its messianic content is detailed enough for making suggestions, hence a number of possibilities of messianic candidates. Yet its instructions

31 Jonathan Goldstein, “How the Authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees Treated the ‘Messianic’ Promises,” in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*, ed. Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 75.

32 Sigmund Mowinckel, *He that Cometh*, 284. See also Jonathan Goldstein, “How the Authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees Treated the ‘Messianic’ Promises,” 77.

33 Jonathan Goldstein, “How the Authors of 1 and 2 Maccabees Treated the ‘Messianic’ Promises,” 77, 88.

34 Harris Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs, from the Galilee to the Crown Heights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3-4.

35 Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to the Crown Heights*, 4.

are so obscure, especially the term *alma*, that no final conclusion could be proved. Barnes insists, “Perhaps there is no prophecy in the Old Testament on which more has been written, and which has produced more perplexity among commentators than this. And after all, it still remains, in many respects, very obscure.”³⁶

Theologically, the Emmanuel prophecy stands at the climax of development of messianic prophecy. It has some similarities to that of Nathan, the beginning of the Davidic messianic expectation. Both of them were announced directly to kings, who had committed serious sins beforehand, in the royal context. Both of them referred to a specific figure and could be interpreted either in the short term—Solomon son of David and Hezekiah son of Ahaz—or in the long term—any descendants of David’s line could possibly be the Messiah. This could even carry eschatological meaning. However, Isaiah’s prophecy is not a simple repetition of the promise to David. On the contrary, by adding the title Emmanuel, it leads to the expectation into a new reality—the Promised One is not only a mere human being, but somehow El-God. This prophecy confirms the promise to David and makes it more detailed. For this reason, Isaiah’s prophecy serves as the connection between the Mosaic messianic expectation—a mere human figure who would carry out God’s plan—and a more heavenly understanding with the title Emmanuel, that is, an extremely special “representative” of God. Furthermore, with the reference to a young woman—rather, a young unmarried woman or even a virgin—the prophecy leads to an understanding beyond human plane; it is not a usual birth. This unusual birth somehow predicts a “supernatural” mission, not merely heavenly as in Daniel, nor merely political and militant as in the Maccabean texts. In other words, any messianic prophecies must be realized within the frame created by this Messiah-Emmanuel prophecy, otherwise, their Messiahs would not be real Messiahs.

36 Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament, Isaiah I*, 148, quoted in Feinberg, “The Virgin Birth in the Old Testament and Isaiah 7:14,” 251; see also “Barnes’ Notes on the Whole Bible: Isaiah 7,” StudyLight.org, accessed December 4, 2022, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/bnb/isaiah-7.html#verse-1>.

THE NEED OF A THEOLOGICAL LEAP

The Emmanuel prophecy became extremely important for early Christianity for two reasons. First, a mere human or heavenly being cannot fit the theology of the Incarnation—only Jesus was El-God among men. For this reason, the Messiah’s mission would not be merely political, or militant, or eschatological, and could not be evaluated using earthly standards. Second, it differs from other prophecies in mentioning the female element in the birth of the Messiah. If it had not been a virgin birth, what would have prevented any person to be the Messiah—who is not to be born of a woman in a normal conception? In fact, all possible Messiahs, including Jesus, failed to achieve the supposed destiny of the Messiah. However, if *alma* is a virgin, Jesus is unique and only He could be the Messiah.

Nevertheless, this conclusion cannot persuade all people intellectually. Given knowledge concerning the historical facts and the composition of the text, modern readers have reason to question the genuineness of this interpretation. Therefore, after all this knowledge, one still needs a “theological leap” based on his or her faith to travel through merely historical and logical arguments and accept that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Messianic expectation.



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