

Who is the Child of Isaiah 7:14?

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The virgin birth of Christ is one of the great miracles of the Bible. It is a distinctive doctrine of Christianity. You read about it in the opening chapter of the New Testament—Matthew chapter 1. There we find that this unique sign goes all the way back to Isaiah over 700 years before it happened.

The Bible says, “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins’” (Matt. 1:18-21).

There is no doubt that the New Testament teaches the virgin conception and birth of Christ. Skeptics, atheists, Jews, Muslims, deists and higher critics ridicule this belief. But we’re not trying to *prove* that Jesus was born of a virgin in this discussion. This is a lesson for Christians. In this discussion we’re focusing on the *meaning* of the next words in Matthew’s account:

“So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us’” (Matt. 1:22-23).

The prophet who wrote these words was Isaiah. The verse is Isaiah 7:14—“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

If the record had ended there, interpreting these words would be much simpler. But it doesn’t. Isaiah continues with words that Christians have debated for almost two thousand years: “Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. 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” (Isaiah 7:15-16).

Why do these verses talk about what “He” will eat? Why does Isaiah say that before “He” knows to refuse evil and choose good, two kings will be dethroned? And to whom is Isaiah speaking when he says “the land that **you** dread”? What is the connection between verse 14 which is about a virgin having a child and verses 15-16 which talk about something that was to happen in the time of Isaiah?

Is this a case of double or dual fulfillment of prophecy? That is the topic of this lesson.

The book of Isaiah is a remarkable book of prophecy. It is full of rich and diverse prophecies. It predicts the fall of Babylon, Moab, Syria, and other Gentile nations. It predicts the captivity of the Jews in Babylon and their return from captivity over 200 years before it happened. It prophesies of the Messiah and His kingdom the church.

The Jews were looking to idols for help in Isaiah’s day. The prophets and priests of these false gods claimed to be able to foretell the future. In the book of Isaiah God shows that He is the Creator and no other God can compare to Him. One of the things that God can do which idols cannot is to tell the future.

That is the backdrop to Isaiah 7.

Ahaz is the king of Judah at this time. He is the one Isaiah is talking to in this famous passage. Ahaz was an evil king. The best commentary you can read on the historical background of Ahaz and the other two kings in Isaiah 7 is II Kings 15 and 16. Those two kings were Pekah in Israel and Rezin in Syria. They had joined forces to fight against Judah where Ahaz was king.

That is what we read as Isaiah 7 begins: “Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to make war against it, but could not prevail against it” (v. 1).

This terrified Ahaz. Verse 2 says, “And it was told to the house of David, saying, ‘Syria’s forces are deployed in Ephraim.’ So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.”

God sent Isaiah to meet with Ahaz in the midst of this national crisis. Verse 3 says, “Then the Lord said to Isaiah, ‘Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Jashub your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller’s Field’” (v. 3). Isaiah’s son was named Shear-Jashub. This is from two Hebrew words: *she-ar* which means a remnant and *yashub*, from *shub* which means to return. Thus Shear-Jashub means a remnant shall return! His name pointed to the return of the Jews to Jerusalem which, again, was 200 years in the future! God displayed His foreknowledge in this book even in the smallest of ways—while He was retelling the past, describing the present, and foretelling other events even farther in the future—all in perfect detail!

God through Isaiah told Ahaz that his enemies would not succeed: “Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and the son of Remaliah. Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying, ‘Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabeal’--thus says the Lord God: ‘It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, so that it will not be a people. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah’s son. If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established’” (vv. 4-9).

God assured Ahaz that Judah would be safe from these evil men. He told Ahaz not to be afraid of these two kings. But God didn’t make this promise because Ahaz was a righteous man in trouble. He did it for the nation of Judah—first for the remnant of the faithful Jews and ultimately to bring the Messiah into the world through that nation.

In verse 10 God said, “Moreover the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying, ‘Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.’ But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!’”

God is not making a kind offer to a good man. He is challenging an evil king in a tone of reproof. The next verse makes that clear. Isaiah said, “Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?” (v. 13).

The sign of verse 14 was given to the “house of David” which is the nation of Judah over whom Ahaz is king. Many commentators try to make a major point about this. They stress that the sign was given to the house of David, not just to Ahaz. And that is true. But, as we will see, that makes the case I am setting forth even stronger.

Ahaz is not sincere when he says he won’t dare to test God. He had been testing and provoking God all along! He served idols and looked to them for guidance instead of trusting God. He took gold and silver from the temple and hired the Assyrians to protect him from his

enemies instead of relying on the Lord. He was just being hypocritical and telling a prophet of God what he thought Isaiah wanted to hear.

The word *sign* does not settle anything one way or the other about the question of dual fulfillment. It is from the Hebrew word *oth*. It can mean a miraculous sign as in Exodus 4:17 when God told Moses to take his rod with which he would do signs or great miracles.

But it can also mean a non-miraculous sign: circumcision was a sign (*oth*) of the covenant between God and His chosen people (Gen. 17:11); the twelve stones the Israelites placed in the Jordan were a memorial (*oth*) for future generations (Josh 4:6); the rainbow to this day is a sign that God will not destroy the earth again with water (Gen. 9:12-13).

The more important question is: a sign of what? In the context, a sign that God would protect the nation of Judah from Israel and Syria! That is what God promised in verses 4-9 and again in verses 15-16. Notice verses through 16:

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. 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.”

Since the sign in verse 14 is in the middle of these verses about the preservation of Judah, that sign must be connected in some sense to that promise in the days of Isaiah.

Now let’s look more closely at verse 14. There are three lexical questions we need to address:

1. Should this be translated “a virgin” or “the virgin”?
2. What is the meaning of the Hebrew word for virgin? (עַלְמָה)
3. Is the word *Immanuel* an exclusive word for deity?

As to the first question, some translations, especially older English versions have “a virgin” while others give “the virgin.” The reason some have “a” and others have “the” is because of a difference in how to translate the Hebrew definite article *he* which is joined with *almah*, virgin in most English translations. The definite article should be translated “the” in many cases, but not always. For instance, the Bible says “a young man” came to Moses in Numbers 11:27. Here the definite article *he* is used, but “a” young man suits the context better than “the” young man. The definite article *he* is used in II Samuel 17:17 where “a female servant” is mentioned.

The fact is that there is no universal rule for how to translate the Hebrew definite article *he*. It’s simply a matter of context.

We see the same difference in translation in the Matthew 1:23 where this verse is quoted. Some say “a virgin” while others say “the virgin.” Here we have the same issue that we encounter in Hebrew. The Greek definite article (which happens to be pronounced *he*, a feminine form of the article) is used before the word *parthenos*, the word for virgin. But, just as we saw in Hebrew, there is no one way of translating the Greek article before nouns.

One point to remember is that there was no *indefinite article* in Hebrew or Greek. There is no word for “a” or “an” in either language. So again the only guide is whatever light the context gives.

In regard to the question of double fulfillment, this means a case can’t be made on the use of the definite article in Isaiah 7:14. The use of the article is a commonly misunderstood aspect of Hebrew and Greek grammar.

But even if a person could make a definitive case for the translation “the” virgin instead of “a” virgin, that still wouldn’t resolve the issue because of some aspects of Isaiah 7:14 we will look at shortly.

Question two takes us more to the heart of the issue. What does the Hebrew word *almah* mean?

Let’s begin with Hebrew lexicons:

- “Young woman (ripe sexually; maid or newly married)...” (Brown-Driver-Briggs’ *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 761).
- “Marriageable girl, young woman” (Koehler and Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testament Libros*, p. 709).
- “Girl of marriageable age...used of a youthful spouse recently married, Isa. 7:14...The notion of unspotted virginity is not that which the word conveys, for which the proper word is *bethulah* see Cant. 6:8...”—*Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, p. 634, Samuel Tregelles, trans.

At the end of this definition, the translator (Tregelles) disagreed with Gesenius and put a note at the end of Gesenius’ comments. He said there is nothing in what Gesenius said that would give us any ground for translating *almah* in Isaiah 7:14 in any way other than a *virgin*. He pointed out that the Jewish translators of the Septuagint used the word *parthenos* in Isaiah 7:14, which means virgin. He observed that those translators were certainly not trying to prove the virgin birth of Christ. He states, “The absolute authority of the New Testament, is, however, quite sufficient to settle the question to a Christian.” He was talking about Matthew 1:23. In other words, he said that the Hebrew word *almah* is not as definite as the Greek word *parthenos*. And he was right.

These are observations from studied men. But they looked at the same contexts you and I have. You can study each usage of the word and decide for yourself whether *almah* means a young woman or a virgin. So let’s look at how the word *almah* is used in the Old Testament. This word is only found a few times, so this will not take long.

- Genesis 24:43—“Behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass that when the virgin (*almah*) comes out to draw water...” That virgin was Rebekah, the future wife of Isaac. We know she was a virgin because earlier verse 16 says she was “a virgin; no man had known her.” The word “virgin” in verse 16 is the Hebrew word *bethulah*. It most often means a virgin (however, in Joel 1:8 it means a married woman because that verse talks about “the husband of her youth”). So it is the context, not the word *almah* itself, that indicates it means a virgin in verse 43.
- Exodus 2:8— “So the maiden (*almah*) went and called the child's mother.” This maiden (*almah*) was Miriam the sister of Moses.
- Proverbs 30:18-19—“There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a virgin (*almah*).” Other translations say “a maid” or young woman. Is this verse about true marital love between a man and his bride to be? Or does it describe the sinful way a man acts toward a young woman who has caught his eye? Since most of the examples in the context describe the writer’s amazement at sinful ways, it seems that he is talking about how irrational and foolish a man can act toward a woman. But that woman would not

necessarily be a virgin. So here is a case where *almah* could be a young woman in general, not specifically a virgin. That is, in *this* verse.

- Psalm 68:25—"The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; among them were the maidens (*alamoth*) playing timbrels." The KJV and ASV have "damsels."
- Song of Solomon 1:3—"Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is ointment poured forth; Therefore the virgins (*alamoth*) love you."
- Song of Solomon 6:8—"There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and virgins (*alamoth*) without number." Since this is in the context of marital love, it is at least possible that these were young married women, not virgins.

These verses should at least cause us to be careful about making bold claims that the Hebrew word *almah* must mean a virgin wherever it is used. Have you ever had a discussion on Isaiah 7:14 with an orthodox Jewish rabbi? I have. It's not as simple as just quoting Matthew 1 because he won't accept that anyway.

To make a complete case for the virgin birth of Christ, we would have to establish the inspiration of the New Testament, which can be done. That is why I believe *almah* in Isaiah 7:14 should be translated virgin—because Matthew 1:23 identifies it as a virgin. I am simply saying that proving this meaning from the Hebrew alone without Matthew 1 is much harder if it can be done at all.

The word *parthenos* in Greek is more definitive. It means a virgin, not a young woman in general whether she is a virgin or not. That is the word the Holy Spirit used to translate *almah* in Isaiah 7:14.

The third question concerns the application of the word Immanuel. As Matthew by inspiration tells us, this word means "God with us." The meaning is clear, but what is the application? It means God with us—but with us in what way? Does it mean God being with us personally? Does it mean God being with us providentially? Again, only the context can decide.

It does not always mean God being with His people personally like Jesus was with the Jews—in the flesh, that is. This same Hebrew word is used twice in the next chapter of Isaiah. In Isaiah 8:8 the prophet said that the Assyrians "will pass through Judah, He will overflow and pass over, He will reach up to the neck; And the stretching out of his wings will fill the breadth of Your land, O Immanuel." Immanuel here refers to Judah. God was with them. As chapter 10 shows, God used the Assyrians to chasten the land of Judah, but He did not allow them to conquer the Jews. In fact, chapter 10 says that the proud Assyrians were about to meet their doom.

This is the encouragement that Isaiah 8 talks about. Notice Isaiah 8:10: "Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; Speak the word, but it will not stand, For God is with us." The words "God is with us" are from the same Hebrew word translated Immanuel earlier. God was with His people by preserving them and protecting them with His mighty hand, not by being present with them directly.

Immanuel refers to the child of Isaiah 7:14 but it also means the nation of Judah in Isaiah 8:8 and 10. Jesus was "with us" as deity. We know that because of what the Bible says about Him, not merely from this title.

Immanuel comes from the Hebrew word *im* which means *with*. In this form it is *immanu* which means *with us*. The word *el* at the end means God. The word Immanuel by itself doesn't mean someone is deity; we've already seen that in Isaiah 8. It was common for Jews to give their

children names with the word for God (*el*) in it. Elihu means He is God. Elijah means Jehovah is God. Eliab means God is father.

Now that we have laid a foundation by a study of these words, we are ready to move on to verses 15-16. This is the transition that many have failed to examine. Many articles spend a great deal of time on verse 14 but say very little about the verses that follow.

Let's read verse 14 again with verses 15-16: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. 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."

Verse 14 says this virgin will bear a son. Verse 15 says "He"—*the same Son of verse 14*—will eat curds and honey (verse 22 says that Jews left in the land after the Assyrians invaded would eat curds and honey). Verse 15 talks about the childhood stage of the son's life—the time before "He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good." This is what many call the age of accountability, the age of discretion or the age of discrimination.

Verse 16 puts this period of the child's life into the time frame of the current crisis in Judah: before this child—*the same son the virgin bears in verse 14*—knows to refuse the evil and choose the good, both of the kings you are afraid of will fall. Those two kings are Pekah and Rezin.

That is what the entire context is about. These two kings had invaded Judah and Ahaz was afraid. God sent Isaiah to tell Ahaz that Judah would stand and these two kings would fall—not in the distant future, but soon. God said He would give a sign that this would happen: a virgin will bear a son. That by itself was not the sign to Ahaz and the nation of Judah. How could it be?

The son she bore would grow as kids do, but the kings of these two nations that caused all the trouble would fall before this son reached the age of accountability. That was *the sign to Ahaz and the "house of David"* that God would preserve the nation of Judah despite the threat of Syria and Israel and despite the sin of Ahaz himself.

If the Son of verse 14 is the same Son in verse 16, then the sign of the child born to the virgin had to mean something to Ahaz. There is no way to separate the Son in verse 14 from the Son in verse 16.

These two kings died a short time after Isaiah spoke these words. The Assyrians killed Rezin two years later and Pekah was assassinated. The Bible does not say the child would reach the age of discretion *just* before this happened. It just says these two kings would fall before the child reached that age—how long before, Isaiah doesn't say.

The passage we are looking at must have some reference to these events in Isaiah's day. The time frame is measured by the growth of the child born to the virgin. That was the sign.

Some say this is not consistent with a sign from God. Why would God bother to give a sign to a wicked king and an evil nation? But that is not of unheard of in Scripture. Moses did miraculous signs before Pharaoh and the Egyptians who never accepted the God who gave them (Exodus chapters 4-10). Jesus did many signs and wonders before people who never accepted them or Him (John 12:37). God certainly gave a sign to Belshazzar in Daniel 5 that didn't help him.

How do those who deny that Isaiah 7:14 has reference to a child born in Isaiah's day deal with the force of the context? Some say that Isaiah "saw" as it were that fact that the Messiah would mature from birth to the point where He could choose right from wrong and uses that

growth period *in Jesus' life* to say the Pekah and Rezin would be removed in that timeframe. Edward J. Young, for instance, in his commentary on Isaiah says that when Isaiah says "Behold" he is saying "I see" this virgin who is with child. Young then states, "This seeing of the virgin is not with the physical eyes, but in vision. In vision, then, the prophet beholds the virgin with child."

That is an assumption. There is no way to prove this view. Young assumed that Isaiah "saw" this "in vision." The Bible does not say this, and the facts do not imply this conclusion. This is a strained interpretation, and the reason for it is an overreaction to liberal thinking in his time. We'll talk about that more in a few minutes.

Furthermore, the idea that Isaiah saw "in vision" this period in Jesus' life is a concession. It implies that verse 14 is tied to verse 16!

But then Young says verses 15-16 should be connected with the verses that follow! But those verses are about the Assyrians invading Judah. That view creates grammatical and contextual chaos. The child in verse 14 is the same child that is described in verses 15-16. The sign is about Judah being spared from these two kings. It is not about the invasion of the Assyrians.

Isaiah 7:14-16, then, does have reference to events in the time of the prophet. How then can Matthew cite the words of verse 14 and say they were *fulfilled* in the virgin birth of Christ?

Let's go back one chapter in Isaiah to look at a similar example. In Isaiah 6:9-10 God told Isaiah, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed." Who are these people? There is no doubt that they are the Jews in Isaiah's time.

Yet look at how this passage is cited in the New Testament. Jesus was speaking of the hardened Jews of His day when He told His disciples: "And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them'" (Matt. 13:14-15). Matthew calls this a "prophecy" of Isaiah in the sense of a revelation given by God to him.

Who were the people who hardened their hearts? The Jews Isaiah preached to or the Jews Jesus preached to? If we say Isaiah 6 is *only* about God's people in Isaiah, then how were these words "fulfilled" in Matthew 13? And if the words *only* apply to the Jews in the New Testament, then why did God apply them to the Jews in Isaiah's time? Obviously, the Bible applies these words to both groups. The key is that the words in Isaiah are more of a type than a prophecy in the usual sense of the word. The Jews in Isaiah's day represented beforehand their evil descendants in Jesus' time. The words God said to Isaiah in Isaiah 6:9-10 were typical, a foreshadow, a pre-representation of the Jews in the New Testament who truly "filled up the measure" of their fathers in the Old Testament (Matt. 23:32).

Another case is Hosea 11:1—"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son." That clearly refers to God calling His son, the Hebrew people, out of Egyptian bondage by Moses. Hosea 11:1 refers to a past event—an event that happened well over 700 years before Hosea. Hosea 11:1 at the time did not reveal anything about the future.

Yet Matthew quoted these words about a past event and said they were fulfilled when Jesus came back from Egypt in Matthew 2:13-15. Verse 15 says Joseph, Mary and Jesus stayed

in Egypt “until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son.’”

The words of Hosea 11:1 must be typical—a type which in this case is a *statement*—a saying that described a past event, a saying that prefigured a New Testament fulfillment.

There are different kinds of types in the Old Testament. We usually think of a type as being a thing or person or activity in the Old Testament that foreshadowed the fulfillment of that type in the New Testament. We call those fulfillments *antitypes*. A clear example is I Peter 3:20-21. Peter taught that Noah and his family being saved in the ark from the flood was a type in the sense that baptism in water which saves us is the “antitype.” The Passover lamb was a figure of Jesus’ death on the cross (John 1:29; I Pet. 1:19). The holy place in the tabernacle was a type of the church and the holy of holies was a figure of heaven. Hebrews 9 discusses this; in fact, the book of Hebrews is like a textbook on the study of Old Testament types.

But a statement, a saying, a set of words can also be a type. We can call it a typical statement, a typological saying, or a type in words. The statement itself prefigures something in the future. “Out of Egypt I have called My Son” *referred* to God calling the Israelites out of bondage, and that saying *typified and was fulfilled* in His only begotten Son coming out of Egypt in Matthew 2.

Jeremiah 31:15 is another example. “Thus says the Lord: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.’” There is no doubt that this verse describes the sorrows of the Jews in Babylonian captivity. Their land had been destroyed. Many of their relatives had been killed. These Jews had been removed from their homes to a strange land where they would be kept for 70 years. Their grief is symbolized in this verse. Rachel, the wife of Jacob, the mother of the Israelite people, is pictured as weeping and mourning for the great calamity that was happening to the Jews.

That saying in Jeremiah was fulfilled when Herod had all the male children from two and under slaughtered in Matthew 2:16-18: “Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.’”

Here again we have the same issue: Does “Rachel weeping” refer to the Jewish people in Babylonian captivity, to the families of the children who were massacred in Bethlehem, or to both?

“Rachel weeping” in Jeremiah 31:15 *refers to* the Jewish people in Babylonian captivity; it was *fulfilled in* the tears shed for these children in the time of Jesus. This verse in Jeremiah is not a pure prophecy in the sense of a straight prediction. It is better to call it a type—not a type consisting of people or a place, but a typical expression of grief. Those words had reference to the tragedy in Babylon; they found fulfillment in the atrocity in Bethlehem.

Now let’s summarize what we’ve seen in these passages.

In Jeremiah 31:15, the words “Rachel weeping” described the *present situation* in Babylon. That saying represented *something in the future* also—the sorrow in Bethlehem. There was one reference to the current situation in Jeremiah’s day and one fulfillment in Jesus’ day.

In Isaiah 6:9-10, God tells Isaiah *what will happen in the near future* in Judah. Those words *prefigured and were fulfilled* in the Jews of Jesus’ time. Again, there was one reference in

Isaiah's day and one fulfillment in the New Testament—the generation of Jews living at that time. Just because the Jews in Isaiah's day hardened their hearts soon after doesn't mean this passage was a predictive prophecy that was fulfilled in them. Paul told the sorcerer in Acts 13 that he would become blind for a time; this happened immediately (v. 11). That was about the future. But was it a prophecy or a simple statement of fact?

In Hosea 11:1, the prophet makes a statement *about something in the past*—the Exodus. That statement was a type of *something in the future*—the Son of God returning from Egypt. We certainly can't say Hosea 11:1 is a case of double fulfillment. It refers to something in the past! There is one reference and one fulfillment.

These are cases of the same typology in Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." The reference in the type is to a young woman who married, had a child, and before that child reached the age of accountability, the two kings who threatened Judah would be killed. That is how this was a sign to Ahaz.

Does this mean the young woman conceived miraculously like Mary—without knowing a man? No. This does not mean that there was a virgin conception and a virgin birth of a child in Isaiah's day. There is only one who was born without natural procreation between a male and a female. That was Jesus Christ. He was conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35).

Remember that the type and the antitype are different in some respects; they are not and cannot be the same in every detail. The ark was a type of baptism, but the two are very different. The brazen serpent and the purpose it served were different from the death of Jesus on the cross. The type was for physical healing and the antitype was for spiritual healing (John 3:14).

In the same way, the child born in Isaiah's day was born through natural means, but the antitype which is Christ was born through miraculous means.

The child born in Isaiah's day was called *Immanuel* because God was with the nation to preserve it physically. The Son of God was "God with us" because He was God manifested in the flesh (John 1:14; I Tim. 3:16). So we shouldn't think it is strange that the type in this case was natural and the antitype is miraculous.

Also, the purpose of the sign was different. To Ahaz the sign was not that a virgin would give birth to a son, but that the two kings he feared would be taken out of the way before that child reached the age of discretion. In Jesus the antitype, the sign given to Joseph and Mary proved that Jesus was the Son of God.

But this raises a question: Isaiah 7:14 doesn't mention marriage. It just says this virgin would conceive and bear a son.

This is a simple case of the Bible condensing the elements of a story. The Bible obviously doesn't give every step in the process. Sometimes it says a man "knew" his wife, that is, had sexual relations with her, and she conceived. Genesis 4:1 says, "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived, and bare Cain." The next verse just says, "Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel." The sexual aspect is implied.

In the same way, both marriage and the sexual relations that follow are implied in the typical aspect of Isaiah 7:14. You could call this a synecdoche where a part stands for the whole.

There are other cases of similar types in the Old Testament. David wrote of a "familiar friend" who betrayed him (Psa. 41:9). This appears to have been Ahithophel his counsellor. That passage was fulfilled in Judas Iscariot (John 13:18). II Samuel 7:12-14 is a reference to Solomon that is fulfilled in the antitype who is Christ the King. David speaks of his persecution in Psalm 22 which is fulfilled in the sufferings of Christ on the cross. Psalm 16 is cited and explained by

Peter in Acts 2; it is a blend of prophecy and type. There are many varieties of prophecies and types. We must not over-generalize our definitions of these words and expect every instance to fit that mold.

This is one of the reasons why there has been so much controversy over Isaiah 7:14. Many arguments could have been avoided if more time had been given to explaining some of these other passages, especially Matthew 2. And, there would have been less debate over Isaiah 7:14 if Bible students had given more consideration to verses 15 and 16.

This is not “double fulfillment” or “dual fulfillment” of prophecy. It is not a case of a “partial fulfillment” and a “complete fulfillment.” It is an instance of typology.

In typology, there is one *reference*. That is what the type *is*. There is one *fulfillment*. That is what the type *represented*. When we read about types in the New Testament, we find them having one antitype, not two or three. The Passover lamb, for instance, referred to *one* thing—a literal animal; there is only *one fulfillment* of this type—the antitype, Jesus the Lamb of God. Isaiah 7:14 refers to one thing as a type. It is fulfilled in one thing as an antitype. The fulfillment of a type or a prophecy means a culmination, a completion, a termination.

The idea of double fulfillment is not valid. If there can be two fulfillments of a prophecy, then why not three? Ten? Twenty? Some are willing to accept this implication. They go beyond the concept of “double fulfillment” and call it “multiple fulfillment.”

This method of interpretation is common both in Catholic and Protestant theology. Catholics use it to justify doctrines and practices which they know are not clearly authorized in Scripture. The *Catholic Catechism* claims that Scripture has a literal meaning and an allegorical meaning which only the Magisterium of the Catholic Church can confirm (Sections 115-119).

The ark of the covenant, for example, was not to be touched (Num. 4). Some Catholics say this represents the perpetual virginity of Mary; because she carried the Son of God in her womb, she was never to be touched sexually. Of course, that is nothing but sheer imagination.

Protestants who believe in an earthly millennial reign of Christ depend heavily on dual or multiple fulfillment. If you remind them that Matthew 24:6 “You shall hear of wars and rumors of wars” and Matthew 24:21 “For then shall be great tribulation” refer in the context to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and that Jesus said all that would happen in that generation in verse 34, premillennial preachers just reply, “Haven’t you heard of double fulfillment of prophecy?”

The Bible is like a ball of clay in their hands. They can make it appear to mean whatever they believe. How many times in the past two thousand years have preachers used the Bible to say the end was near but it did not happen? The idea of dual or multiple fulfillment buys time and is a convenient excuse when their predictions are wrong. They can always say, “Yes, the verses we used weren’t fulfilled like we thought. But prophecy has many fulfillments and these events were just one stage in the final scheme.”

That is not what we see in the prophecies and types of the Bible. It is an abuse of what we find in Isaiah 7:14 and the other passages we have examined.

There is a question that we need to briefly mention about Isaiah 7:14. Is the son of Isaiah 7:14 the son of Isaiah mentioned in chapter 8? The record says, “Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, “Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz; for before the child shall have knowledge to cry ‘My father’ and ‘My mother,’ the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria” (Isaiah 8:3-4).

The name and growth of this child symbolized the end to the crisis Judah was facing from Israel and Syria. *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz* is from four Hebrew words which mean the prey is

speedy or the booty is swift. This would happen when “the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria” (v. 4). The Assyrians would put down both Israel and Syria so that they would no longer be a threat to the land of Judah. And God gave a time frame for when this would happen. It would be “before the child” —Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz—“shall have knowledge to cry 'My father' and 'My mother.'”

Isaiah 7:14 says these two nations would lose their king before Immanuel knew good from evil. Isaiah 8:4 says the Assyrians would put down both Israel and Syria before Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz was old enough to say father and mother. Could the son of Isaiah 7:14 be the child in Isaiah 8:4?

A problem is that Isaiah had a son already. That would mean he was married—or that he had been married and his wife died. He could have had Shear-Jashub by his first wife and then married the prophetess by whom he had the child in chapter 8. Albert Barnes in his commentary proposed that as the solution to the question. We can’t prove or disprove this view, but it is a possibility.

But we don’t have to know the exact identity of the child in Isaiah 7:14 to know the meaning and purpose of this passage.

We have stressed that Isaiah has many different kinds of prophecies and types. In chapter 9 there is a straight prediction of the Messiah without any typology. “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever” (Isaiah 9:6-7). This can only refer to Jesus. The titles “Mighty God” and “Everlasting Father” describe no other king.

Now let’s look at this issue from a brief historical perspective. There has been a great deal of criticism of this view of Isaiah 7:14. To understand why, we have to go back to the 1900s and especially to the last half of that century. The 1800s saw the rise of theological liberalism. That movement was based on anti-supernaturalism. It denied the inspiration of the Bible and the deity of Jesus Christ and rejected miracles in the Bible.

The fundamentalist movement which took hold in the late 1800s and gained attention in the early 1900s was a response to the liberal viewpoint. It defended foundational teaching of the Bible on five topics in particular: the divine inspiration of the Bible, the deity of Christ, the atoning death of Jesus on the cross, the bodily resurrection of Christ and second coming of Jesus, and—the virgin birth of Christ.

This was a time of theological war. A series of articles written against the liberal movement was published between 1910 and 1915 called *The Fundamentals* which was edited by R.A. Torrey and others. These articles have been reprinted in book form called by the same name.

One of those articles was written by James Orr, the editor of the later *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, on the subject of the virgin birth. It begins by saying, “It is well known that the last half century has been marked by a determined assault upon the truth of the virgin birth of Christ.”

In 1930 Princeton professor J. Gresham Machen wrote his classic book *The Virgin Birth of Christ*. It was an expose of the liberal view of this subject and a defense of the virgin birth of Jesus in the Bible. Interestingly, he suggested that it is possible that Isaiah 7:14 has a typical aspect (1985 Baker edition, pp. 292-293).

I remember talking to a preacher who had attended a seminary in the mid-1900s. He said he was in a class where the teacher was discussing the virgin birth of Christ. That teacher asked the class of over forty students if they really believed Jesus was born of a virgin. Now this was a school that trained ministers. Out of that class of over forty people, the preacher who told me the story said he was the only one in the class that said yes.

The liberal movement also brought a change in the interpretation of biblical prophecies like Isaiah 7:14. These modernists said Isaiah was not prophesying of Jesus at all; he was only describing the situation in the time of Ahaz. This was a major shift in thinking. Protestant churches from the beginning had held that Isaiah foretold the virgin birth of Christ.

The Revised Standard Version of 1952 added fuel to the flame by translating *almah* in Isaiah 7:14 “young woman” instead of *virgin*. This caused a backlash of criticism.

Because the battle between fundamentalism and liberalism was so intense, conservatives became more and more cautious, and rightly so. These modernists were determined to undermine Christianity. That is why many conservatives worked so hard to keep this liberalism from spreading.

But in fighting any extreme it is easy and in fact common to go to the other extreme. How many times has the pendulum swung from one extreme to the other in the history of religion?

This happened with the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14, especially in the last half of the 1900s. Some preachers were so guarded against the danger of liberalism that they overreacted. When anyone suggested that Isaiah 7:14 had meaning in the time of Isaiah, they labeled that view a liberal doctrine. They immediately connected that idea with the liberal movement that began in the 1800s. Some argued that this interpretation is a denial of prophecy. Some said it is a compromise with Jewish belief. Others even said it is a denial of the deity of Christ!

Whenever we overreact to a controversy, we misunderstand and misapply the Scriptures. That always stifles our learning. In the case of Isaiah 7:14, it hinders us from seeing the historical context of Isaiah. It blinds us to the rich diversity of prophecies and types in Isaiah and throughout the Old Testament. It blocks our mind when we attempt to explain sections like Matthew chapter 2. It stunts our ability to understand and respond to postmodern interpretation. It keeps us from seeing how and why many preachers today use double fulfillment to try to predict the second coming of Christ. This is why we need to study the Scriptures with a level head and sound reasoning.

I realize we have opened doors to areas we don't have time to pursue. But the beauty of Bible study is that you can investigate these questions for the rest of your life.