Isaiah 7:12–16 — Cutting Down the Davidic Tree:
Pivotal Point in the Israelite Monarchy

Peter J. Gentry

Isaiah 7:12–16 — Cutting Down the Davidic Tree: Pivotal Point in the Israelite Monarchy

PETER J. GENTRY

*Peter J. Gentry is Donald L. Williams Professor of Old Testament Interpretation
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*

Abstract: The focus of this brief study is the *contribution* and *role* played by Isaiah 7 within the plot structure of the Old Testament as a single, unified, literary work—as a whole. The main thesis is that the brief conversation recorded between Ahaz and Isaiah is *a pivotal point* in the narrative plot-structure of the *Old Testament* that causes the tree of the Davidic dynasty to be cut down.

Key Words: almah, virgin, Immanuel, Davidic Covenant, Isaiah 7

Introduction

Debates have raged over Isaiah 7:14 for over two thousand years. Does the word *'almâ* necessarily mean "young virgin" or may it mean "young woman?" Is the prophecy a direct prediction of the birth of Jesus or typological? If the former, how can it be a sign for Ahaz? If the young woman is from the time of Ahaz, then how does it work as a prediction of Jesus? While many readers may and ought to require further detail on grammatical and lexical positions adopted herein on key points to be fully persuaded,[1] the focus of this brief study is nevertheless on the *contribution* and *role* played by Isaiah 7 within the plot structure of the Old Testament as a single, unified, literary work—as a whole. The main thesis is that the brief conversation recorded between Ahaz and Isaiah is *a pivotal point* in the narrative plot-structure of the *Old Testament* that causes the tree of the Davidic dynasty to be cut down. In the Old Testament, kings and kingdoms are portrayed as stately trees.[2] The Assyrians are pictured as lofty trees in Isaiah 10:33-34. In Isaiah 11:1, however, we come to the first reference of the stump of Jesse. This employs an identical metaphor to show that the kingdom of the House of David is a tree cut down; all that remains is a stump. This

---

1. Full discussion of all details is given in an essay to be published in a forthcoming FS by B&H Academic.

2. See William R. Osborne, "Trees and Kings: A Comparative Analysis of Tree Imagery in Israel's Prophetic Tradition and the Ancient Near East," Ph.D. diss. Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, ٢٠١٥.

is a critical moment, indeed, for the role of the Davidic Covenant in the plotline of Scripture. It is the pivotal point in the Israelite Monarchy.

The Context and Historical Setting

The Exile and Promised Return from Exile

We all know that Israel, disloyal and faithless, broke the Mosaic Covenant inaugurated at Sinai and supplemented in Deuteronomy, and that *exile* was the final judgement for their covenant violation (Deut 28). Christians, however, frequently fail to grasp properly two things about the Exile and also the Return from Exile.

First, the exile was *not a singular event* that occurred at one particular moment in the history of Israel. It was a *process* of gradual loss. The most northern tribal territories were the first to be lost. Later on, the Northern Kingdom suffered significant destruction in the attack by Tiglath-Pileser III in 732 BC, but was not conquered and exiled until 722 BC. Then, in 701 BC Sennacherib came and attacked the Southern Kingdom of Judah and boasted that he had conquered 46 cities in Judah and had Hezekiah in Jerusalem shut up like a bird in a cage. Jerusalem was all that was left and yet God gave her three more chances to turn back to Him. The first captives were taken in 605 / 604 BC. Then the city was conquered in 597 by the Babylonians, and Nebuchadnezzar II set up a puppet king named Zedekiah. This king was murdered ten years later, so that Nebuchadnezzar came back in 586 and burned and razed the city to the ground. The following illustration charts, at least partially, the *process* of exile:

1 Kgs 9:10-14	Towns in Galilee given to Phoenician King (20)
1 Kgs 15:20	Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah, Chinnereth, Naphtali
2 Kgs 12:17	Hazael of Aram captures Gath
2 Kgs 15:29	732 Tiglath-Pileser III attacks Northern Kingdom
2 Kgs 17:5-6	722 Fall of Samaria (Northern Kingdom) to Shalmaneser
2 Kgs 18:13-18	701 Sennacherib attacks Judah
Daniel 1:1	605 Nebuchadnezzar II conquers Jerusalem
2 Kgs 24:10-16	597 Nebuchadnezzar II conquers Jerusalem
2 Kgs 25:1-21	586 Nebuchadnezzar II conquers Jerusalem

Second, the *return from exile* occurs in two stages. This is clear from both statements in the text and also from the literary structure of Isaiah 40 – 55.[3] First there is physical exile in Babylon, and then they return from exile in Babylon in roughly 70 years (Jeremiah 25:7-14). Secondly, there is spiritual exile caused by their

---

3. See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 437.

idolatry and social injustice so that the covenant relationship with God is completely broken. As the vision in Daniel 9 makes clear, the return from spiritual exile will take much longer, i.e. seventy sevens, and not just seventy years. Daniel 9:24 is focused on dealing with rebellion and sin and restoring everlasting righteousness. Daniel must understand that a physical return from Babylon does not adequately deal with the need for circumcision of the heart and proper restoration of the covenant relationship. Zechariah shows that this return from exile and restoration entails the forgiveness of sins, the rebuilding of the temple, the renewing of the covenant and the physical return of Yahweh in person to dwell amidst his people as king. Only when we understand this will we grasp that some of Isaiah's visions apply to the physical return, and some apply to the spiritual return. Moreover, there is no chronological arrangement, so that events to be fulfilled in the distant future are *set side by side* with those to be fulfilled in the near future.[4]

Outline of Isaiah 7:1-25

I.	The Threat to the Davidic House	7:1-9
	A. Conspiracy Against the Davidic House	1-2
	B. Response of the Prophet	3-6
	C. The Conspiracy Will Fail	7-9
II.	The Immanuel Sign	7:10-25
	A. Birth of Immanuel / Difficult Future	10-17
	B. Invasion of Egyptians and Assyrians	18-20
	C. Famine in Judah	21-22
	D. Desolation in Judah	23-25

The Book of Isaiah is divided into seven sections that treat the theme of the transformation of Zion: how we get from a *corrupt* Jerusalem in the *old* creation to a *restored* Zion in the *new* creation. The first section is 1:1 – 2:4 and the second is from 2:5 – 4:6. Chapter 5 begins the third segment developing the topic of idolatry and social injustice resulting first in judgement and later in restoration. The judgement will come in the form of exile, first by the Assyrians, and then by the Babylonians.

---

4. For examples, see Peter J. Gentry, "The Literary Macrostructures of the Book of Isaiah and Authorial Intent," in *Bind up the Testimony: Explorations in the Genesis of the Book of Isaiah* edited by Daniel I. Block and Richard L. Schultz (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2015), 227-254.

Exposition of the Text

The Threat to the Davidic House (7:1-9)

A brief outline of Assyrian History shows in external terms, the threat to the Davidic House in Judah and Jerusalem:

Outline of Assyrian History

1. The Rise of Assyria	1741 – 1274
2. The Middle Assyrian Empire	1273 – 1076
3. The Late Assyrian Empire #1	883 – 824
4. Interval of Decline	782 – 745
5. The Late Assyrian Empire #2	744 – 612

The death of King Uzziah in 740 BC corresponds roughly with the rise of the Late Assyrian Empire in Phase Two and explains the time of trouble experienced by Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah as kings of Judah.

It is the year 734 BC. These events are described and detailed in 2 Kings 15:32-16:16. In a period of resurgence Assyria was growing in power and in international influence. Under Tiglath-Pileser III, who is called Pul in the Bible, Assyria began to advance first to the west and then south into Palestine. The country of Aram, later known as Syria, with its capital in Damascus, put pressure on the Northern Kingdom of Israel to form an alliance to meet the advancing power of Assyria. The Northern Kingdom of Israel is called Ephraim in vv. 2, 5, and 9 probably because Jeroboam I, the first king, was from the tribe of Ephraim and also because Ephraim was one of the largest and leading tribes. By this time, the territory of the Northern Kingdom had been greatly reduced in size so that it may not have been much larger than the territory of Ephraim. The capital of (Northern) Israel was the city of Samaria and the capital of Aram was Damascus. Syria and Ephraim wanted to expand their anti-Assyrian alliance to include Judah, but King Jotham, Ahaz's father, refused to join them. So they decided to team up against Judah and plotted to lay siege against Jerusalem, depose Ahaz and install a puppet king, called the son of Tabeel, in his place. This action would have brought about a dramatic and inglorious end to the Davidic dynasty. Then what of the covenant God made with David in 2 Samuel 7 guaranteeing an everlasting dynasty, kingdom, and throne?

Naturally this prospect is a frightening one for King Ahaz and the people of Judah. Verse 2 provides a vivid picture: their hearts are shaking just like the forest trees waving before a strong wind. Ahaz is probably torn between two fears. First, he is panic-stricken at the thought of being attacked by Syria and Israel. A much greater fear, however, is the prospect of being attacked by the King of Assyria, which is what

will happen if he joins the coalition. When he is confronted by Isaiah in v. 3, he seems to have already decided to hold out against Syria and Israel and seek the help of the King of Assyria against Israel and Samaria by submitting to Assyria as a client-king or vassal state. This is clear because he is out inspecting Jerusalem's water supply in preparation for a siege. The city of Jerusalem was in a difficult situation because their main source of water was a spring that was situated just outside the city gates. It was Ahaz's successor, Hezekiah, who would build the famous 500 meter long tunnel bringing the water supply right inside the city wall.

In vv. 3-6 Isaiah commands Ahaz and his people not to fear the kings of the Syro-Ephraimite coalition but rather to trust Yahweh. The paragraph closes with an announcement that the conspiracy arising from the Syro-Ephraimite Coalition will fail utterly.

Isaiah offers Ahaz a radical alternative: foreswear all military and political alliances and put his trust wholly in Yahweh! There is a play on words at the end of v. 9: "If you do not believe, you will not endure." Both the verb 'to believe' and the verb 'to endure' are from the same root (אמן). The NIV attempts to show this by using the word "stand": "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."

Isaiah also invites Ahaz to ask for just about anything as a sign. The answer given by Ahaz is pious, but insincere and completely lacking in covenant loyalty to Yahweh. He declares that he will not put the Lord to the test. From the history of Israel, we know that there is a sin of "testing God" exemplified at Massah during the Exodus (Exod 17:7). Essentially it is the sin of unbelief that says, "I will not believe nor I will not trust God unless he first proves himself trustworthy by some miraculous sign." When God brought the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land through the wilderness, they put Him to the test at a place called Massah. The events are recorded in Exodus 17. God wanted to know if the people would trust him to provide water for them on the basis of their recent experience of his trustworthiness. The people "tested" God by suspending their trust in Him until He did a miracle in providing water. This essentially treats God like a stunt man who has to demonstrate his ability to do tricks before we will accept proof of his person and power. In this text, it may seem that Ahaz is acting very piously by refusing to put God to the test, but in reality, he is demonstrating that he is a willfully unbelieving man. As we have seen, he has already decided what he will do. He is going to hold out in a siege attack from Syria and Israel and become a vassal of the King of Assyria in order to get the alliance of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Aram (Syro-Ephraimite Alliance) off his back. In view of Ahaz's refusal to trust the Lord, Isaiah announces in vv. 17-25 that Judah will soon be overrun and devastated by that very Assyria that Ahaz has foolishly decided to turn to for help. Set in between the *Threat to the Davidic House* in vv. 1-9 and the *Announcement of Desolation by Attacking Armies* in 17 – 25 is the paragraph in vv. 10 – 16 where Isaiah presents the Immanuel Sign.

The Immanuel Sign (7:13-25)

We come now to vv. 13-16 which speak of the Immanuel Sign. These verses are the heart of the section. Verses 1-12 lead up to them and vv. 17-25 which follow indicate the results of Ahaz's decision. From the New Testament, we know that this prophecy finds its ultimate fulfillment in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:21-23), but what is the meaning of the prophecy in Isaiah's time?

When Matthew and the other writers of the New Testament say that a particular prophecy in the Old Testament is fulfilled, they do not discuss how to interpret the text in the Old Testament. Some prophecies are what we might call direct prediction, and some involve typological prediction, i.e. events or people in the Old Testament are a model or pattern for what will happen in a greater event or person at a later time and so are said to foreshadow or predict the later event or person.

Examples of Different Kinds of Fulfillment

A couple of examples from the Gospel of Matthew will illustrate the approach of a gospel writer such as Matthew. In Chapter 2:3-6 Herod asked the Jewish leaders where the Messiah would be born. They respond by quoting the prophecy from Micah 5:2:

> But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
>   are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
> for out of you will come a ruler
>   who will be the shepherd of my people Israel

The prophecy in Micah is an example of a direct prediction. The prophet is simply describing the details of a future event which has no fulfillment in his own day and time.

Another example is the prophecy from Hosea 11:1 which says, "Out of Egypt I called my son." This is applied to the fact that Joseph was warned about the threat of Herod in a dream and was instructed to take his family to Egypt until the danger was over. When he then brought his family back to and settled in Nazareth, this was considered a fulfillment of the statement in Hosea. The statement in Hosea, however, has to do with the original Exodus. The nation of Israel was called the son of God (Exodus 4:22-23) and in the great events of the Exodus, God brought his son, Israel, out of Egypt. How is this a prophecy of the Messiah? In the gospel of Matthew, the life of Jesus is patterned after the history of the nation. Or, to put it the other way round, the history of the nation foreshadows or models the events that would later happen to the Messiah. The Exodus is a type and so we have a kind of typological prediction. When an Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled, the authors in the New Testament never pause to clarify whether it is a direct prediction or a typological prediction.

Common Interpretations of 7:14

It is impossible in a brief space to describe and evaluate all explanations given in the history of interpretation for Isaiah 7:14. Common interpretations are as follows: (1) Immanuel is Hezekiah, i.e. a wife of Ahaz will bear a son; (2) Immanuel is Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, i.e. a wife of Isaiah will bear a son; (3) Immanuel is a son born to an unknown woman who was a contemporary of Isaiah; (4) Immanuel is the Messiah born to a virgin in the (distant) future; and (5) a birth contemporary with Isaiah is a model/pattern/type of the future birth of the Messiah. Each interpretation depends heavily on how certain exegetical issues are handled. While it is not the purpose here to *defend* in detail the best handling of each of these issues, it is possible to briefly *present* them and *explain* how they are handled here. So while *exhaustive proof* is forthcoming, we need not be sidetracked by the main purpose of this treatment of Isaiah 7.

Exegetical Issues in Isaiah 7: 10 – 16

To whom is the prophet speaking in vv. 10-16?

It is not always possible from a modern translation to track the pronominal references throughout the brief segment of vv. 10 – 16. Verse 10 begins, "And Yahweh continued to speak to Ahaz saying…" This introduction clearly marks the beginning of a new segment of conversation or discourse. The conversation partners are clearly identified as Yahweh and King Ahaz. From the context, the medium of the message is Isaiah the prophet; he is the one through whom these words are presented to Ahaz.

Verse 11 continues, "Ask for yourself a sign from Yahweh your God. Make it deep to Sheol or make it high above / upwards." These three clauses contain imperative verbs—all second person masculine singular in form, as well as two pronouns, also both 2 m. s. Clearly these commands are issued directly and specifically to Ahaz. It is Ahaz who is to ask for a sign.

Verse 12 contains the brief response of King Ahaz: And Ahaz said, "I will not ask nor will I test Yahweh." The verbs are first person common singular in form and Yahweh is referred to in the third person since the medium between him and God is the prophet.

Verse 13 continues the conversation by the simple verb "And he said." This is obviously Yahweh / Isaiah speaking and giving a response to the answer given by Ahaz. The quoted speech begins as follows: "Hear O House of David, Is it too trivial for you to weary humans that you must also weary my God?" The two verbs, "hear" (שִׁמְעוּ) and "you must also weary" (תַּלְאוּ) are second person plural in form. The one pronoun employed with the infinitive "to weary" is also second person plural. Yahweh/Isaiah is no longer addressing Ahaz directly or specifically; he is addressing the entire dynasty of David past, present, and future—the whole House of David.

The two pronouns in verse 14 are also second masculine plural in form. The sign was offered specifically to Ahaz. Ahaz declined. Regardless of Ahaz's response, Yahweh gave a sign. The sign he gave was for the *entire family line* of David.

Verses 15-16a speak in the third person masculine singular about the promised child. Then remarkably, verse 16b switches back to second masculine singular in form. The translation of this sentence is problematic, but it clearly is addressed specifically to Ahaz.

This analysis of the pronouns resolves one issue: the sign given in v. 14-15 is not *necessarily* for Isaiah's contemporaries or time. It is a sign that spans the entire history of the remaining Davidic family tree, an issue to be clarified in the prophecy in 11:1.

The Verbs in Verse 14

Difficulties arise in dealing with the verbs in verse 14. The first clause is clear: "Therefore the Lord, He will give to you a sign." The verb is 3 m. s. and the subject is the Lord. The clause employs what is known as Left-Dislocation as a discourse grammar marker. If, for example, I have a clause "I like Charlie," I can say, "Charlie, I like him." By putting 'Charlie' in front, or in Extraposition, emphasis or focus is placed on the fronted item.

The second half of v. 14 is problematic. The first five words form a verbless clause: "Look! A virgin will conceive and bear a son." The verbs "conceive" and "bear" are in fact participles. The helping verb "to be" required by English has to be supplied from the context. One could render with present progressive tenses in English: "A virgin is conceiving and bearing a son." Or one could construe the participles as describing a future, as is normal syntax in Hebrew: "A virgin will conceive and bear a son." Both options are grammatically possible.

The next verb is וְקָרֵאת. First, this is a *waw*-consecutive Perfect and must be translated as a future tense. Thus construing the preceding participles as future is highly probable. Second, the verb could be 2 f. s. or 3 f. s.: "You shall call," addressing the virgin, or "She will call," where the referent is the virgin. The latter is the preferred reading as detailed analysis shows.

The Meaning of *'almâ*

There is a consensus among scholars today (regardless of whether one is conservative or liberal) that this word means only "young girl" or perhaps "young woman" and does not necessarily entail virginity. Four arguments are normally used to support this view: (1) etymology, (2) the fact that there already exists in Hebrew a word for virgin (*bĕtûlâ*), (3) the occurrence in Proverbs 30:19 where the word *'almâ* seems to indicate a girl who is not a virgin, and (4) Jewish tradition—both ancient and

solid—does not permit an equation between *'almâ* and *parthenos*, the Greek word for virgin.

The consensus has been challenged recently in a monograph by Christophe Rico which, in fact, represents the first comprehensive and exhaustive research done on the basis of modern linguistic semantic principles.[5] Rico claims analysis only as a linguist, and not as a theologian. Although Rico's research will be explained in depth elsewhere,[6] we can briefly summarise it as follows: (1) analysis particularly of Ugaritic shows the consensus is wrong in etymology.

(2) The fact that there is already a word in Hebrew for virgin is an inadequate reason for thinking that *'almâ* cannot also mean virgin. The word *bĕtûlâ* indicates a virgin regardless of age, whereas the word *'almâ* denotes specifically a young virgin. The following evidence from Rico show that it is common to have both words in Indo-European languages and is possible also in Semitic languages.[7]

Indo-European Languages

	"Young girl"	*"Young virgin"*	*"Virgin"*
Russian	*devuška*	*devica*	*devstevenica*
Classical English	*girl*	*maid*	*virgin*
Classical French	*jeune fille*	*pucelle*	*vierge*
Classical Spanish	*muchacha*	*doncella*	*virgin*
Catalan	*noia*	*poncella*	*verge*
Classical Italian	*giovinetta*	*pulzèlla*	*vergine*
Japanese	*shōjo*	*otome*	*shōjo*

Semitic Languages

	"Young Girl"	*"Young Virgin"*	*"Virgin"*
Arabic	*fatâ'ah*	*bikr*	*'aẓra'*
Hebrew	*na'ărâ*	*'almâ (?)*	*bĕtûlâ*

Just as the norm in Indo-European languages is to distinguish 'virgin' and 'young virgin', so this appears to be the pattern in at least some Semitic languages. Rico's analysis of usage in Hebrew strongly supports the denotation 'young virgin'.

(3) Proverbs 30:19 entails a problem in the history of the transmission of the text. The evidence can be summarised as follows, employing sigla standard for *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*.[8]

5. Christophe Rico, *La mère de l'Enfant-Roi Isaïe 7,14: « 'Almâ » et « Parthenos » dans l'universe biblique: un point de vue linguistique* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2013). The author is currently collaborating with C. Rico on a translation in English of this work.

6. As already noted, an English Translation of Rico's monograph is in preparation. Details will be supplied in the essay to be published in a forthcoming FS by B&H Academic.

7. The charts are adapted from Christophe Rico, *La mère de l'Enfant-Roi Isaïe 7,14*, 45-46.

8. This codification and nomenclature is derived from Dominique Barthélemy, *Critique*

30,19 cor בעלמיו [C] G Th Aq Syriac Vulg // err-graph: Sym M T בעלמה

What this diagram means is that the following manuscripts support the reading "in his youth": the Septuagint (G), the Jewish revisions of the Septuagint by Theodotion (Th) and Aquila (Aq) made before 120 AD, the Syriac translation (S) coming from the Second Century and the Latin Vulgate (Vulg), based on a Hebrew Text from the Fourth Century AD. Alternately, other manuscripts support the reading "in an *'almâ'*": the Masoretic Text attested from about 900 AD, the Targum from a medieval period, and Symmachus, a Jewish Revisor from perhaps 200 AD. The difference between the readings is a *hē* for *'almâ* at the end of the word while a combination of *waw* and *yodh* ends the word reading "in his youth." Anyone familiar with the Herodian script of the Dead Sea Scrolls would know how easy it is to confuse these two paleographically. Contra the review by Hugh Williamson,[9] Rico is not proposing to emend the text, but rather choosing the reading that has the earliest support spread wide among five witnesses and also best explains how the less meaningful reading in MT arose. In any case, it is unwise to claim a text that is uncertain in textual transmission as a strong argument against *'almâ* as 'young virgin'.

(4) Rico shows that because the difference between *'ayin* and *ġayin* was lost in Hebrew already in the Second Century BC, the entire Rabbinic tradition is based on a false etymology and is erroneous. Before the coming of Jesus of Nazareth whom the Jewish tradition rejects as fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, the Septuagint got the translation of Isaiah right.

It is important to note, however, that the main argument of this essay does not depend on understanding *'almâ* as young virgin. Other interpretations are possible which would support the thesis of this study.

The Meaning of the Verb in vv. 6 and 16

Two verbs are crucial to our understanding of the entire passage from 7:1-25. They are וּנְקִיצֶנָּה in 7:6 and קָץ in 7:16. In the first instance, the case is one of four verbs of actions proposed against Ahaz of Judah by the Syro-Ephraimite Coalition. In the second instance, in 7:16, the subject of the verb is Ahaz: Isaiah or Yahweh is accusing Ahaz of doing something. It is likely that there is a play on words here or that the two instances are connected in a literary manner.

textuelle de L'ancien Testament. 1. Josué, Juges, Ruth, Samuel, Rois, Chroniques, Esdras, Néhémie, Esther. Rapport final du Comité pour l'analyse textuelle de l'Ancien Testament hébreu institué par l'Alliance Biblique Universelle, établi en coopération avec Alexander R. Hulst, Norbert Lohfink, William D. McHardy, H. Peter Rüger, coéditeur, James A. Sanders, coéditeur (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 50/1. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982).

9. Hugh Williamson, Review of Christophe Rico, *La mère de l'Enfant-Roi Isaïe 7,14: « 'Almâ » et « Parthenos » dans l'universe biblique: un point de vue linguistique* (La Bible en ses Traditions: LD 258; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2013) in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 76* (2014): 338-339.

Most lexica derive these forms from the root קוץ meaning "to be disgusted, feel loathing" (so BDB, KB3, DCH, Ges18).[10] The form in v. 6 is usually analysed as a Hiphil Imperfect and the form in v. 16 as a Qal Participle. The lexica also argue that "be in dread" (Qal) or "frighten, terrify" (Hiphil) is an appropriate secondary sense for these two texts. The ESV illustrates the resulting translations.

> 6. Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it,"

> 16.…the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

Some translations like the NRSV and the NIV construe the meaning in v. 6 from קוץ "to cut (off)" and the meaning in v. 16 from קוץ "to dread." One of the problems faced by interpreters is how to construe the Qal Stem in v. 16 and the Hiphil Stem in v. 6. An exhaustive analysis of all (weak) roots in Hebrew sharing the consonants ק and צ suggests a better approach. The root is probably קיץ as in Old South Arabic. Therefore both the form in v. 6 and the form in v. 16 are Qal and mean "cut" or better "break, split" » "tear apart, demolish, destroy." This resolves the issue of a form in the Hiphil that is apparently not causative. As some lexicographers have already realised, this meaning fits better in v. 6. It *also fits better* in v. 16, as Zorell recognised,[11] depending on how we render the relative sentence.

The Translation of the last sentence in 7:16

The final sentence of 7:16 is תֵּעָזֵב הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה קָץ מִפְּנֵי שְׁנֵי מְלָכֶיהָ. A standard translation can be illustrated from the NRSV:

> … the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

Instead we propose, along with Murray Adamthwaite,[12] "the land which you (*Ahaz*) are tearing apart (*by your unbelieving policies*) will be forsaken of the presence of her two kings."

The pronoun on the suffixed noun, "her kings" must refer to "land" since the pronoun is feminine singular. So the two kings are the king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the King of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The two kings *cannot* be the King of Israel and the King of Aram, the two kings in the Syro-Ephraimite coalition, because one could not say of them, that "the land had two kings." This

10. BDB = Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1907); KB3 = L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, 6 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1967-1997); DCH = Clines, David J. A., ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 9 vols. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993-2016); Ges18 = R. Meyer, H. Donner, and J. Renz, *Wilhelm Gesenius Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, 18th Edition (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013).

11. F. Zorell, ed., *Lexicon Hebraicum Veteris Testamenti* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989).

12. Murray R. Adamthwaite, "Isaiah 7:16 – Key to the Immanuel Prophecy," *The Reformed Theological Review* 59.2 (2000), 65-83.

could only be said of the territory known as Israel after the time of Solomon. Thus the interpretation of the NRSV is highly unlikely because it contradicts the grammar of the text.

What is the Meaning of Eating "curds and honey" in VV. 15-16a?

Insufficient thought has been given by interpreters to the statement that the child born to the virgin will "eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good." First, refusing evil and choosing good is connected to the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 2:9, 16. It refers to making moral choices on one's own and hence refers to the age of accountability. In biblical culture, this is around 13 years old, the time of one's Bar Mitzvah.

Nogah Hareuveni has best explained "eating curds and honey."[13] Curds are a product of pastoralists, those who herd flocks of goats or sheep and cattle. Honey comes from bees and refers to the forests as opposed to cultivated land because honey bees flourished in the wild. In the land of Canaan there was always a struggle over the use of land. Pastoralists, those who grazed animals, would look for uncultivated areas for pasturage. Farmers, on the other hand, were terracing the hillsides and turning areas that grew wild into cultivated fields and vineyards. What Isaiah is saying is that the region will be so devastated by the Assyrians that there will be few farmers and the cultivated fields will return to regions left to grow wild. This would allow bees and pastoralists more territory. So eating curds and honey is not a statement of blessing, but rather a sign of devastation and judgment in the land. The fact that the child will eat curds and honey means that the land will be dominated by pastoralists and not farmers. This is an indication of the devastation and destruction resulting in exile and the conquest by the Assyrians and Babylonians. Therefore, a person reduced to eating curds and honey is a person in exile, not a person enjoying the good life. In the case of Jesus of Nazareth, this is fulfilled in the fact that the country was dominated by foreign overlords and in exile before the boy reached the age of accountability.

The Larger Literary Structure

The interpretation proposed fits the larger literary structure better since Isaiah 7:14 is construed as a prediction of the distant future.[14] First, it is the normal pattern of the author to place predictions of events to be fulfilled in the far future side by side with predictions of events to be fulfilled in the near future. There are three panels or

13. Nogah Hareuveni, *Nature in Our Biblical Heritage* (Kiryat Ono, Israel: Neot Kedumim, 1980), 11-22.

14. See Peter J. Gentry, "The Literary Macrostructures of the Book of Isaiah and Authorial Intent," in *Bind up the Testimony: Explorations in the Genesis of the Book of Isaiah* edited by Daniel I. Block and Richard L. Schultz (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2015), 227-254.

sections announcing the coming king: (1) the birth of Immanuel in 7:10-17, (2) the gift of the son El-Gibbor (Mighty God) in 9:1-7, and (3) the future reign of a shoot from the stump of Jesse in 11:1-9.[15] In each case, these predictions of the far future are placed side by side with predictions relating to the near future, such as the invasion of the Assyrians in 8:5-8. Note that in Isaiah 8:8, the country of Judah is designated as Immanuel's land. Such a designation would be appropriate for a king or even Yahweh himself—El Gibbor! Also note that the third section on the coming king predicts a shoot from the stump of Jesse. The shoot comes from the stump of Jesse because what is needed is not another David but a new David!

The Message of Isaiah 7:8 – 9

Isaiah gives incredible options to Ahaz: either put your trust in Yahweh, or be destroyed (you will not stand at all). One of the main points of Isaiah 1-39 is that a king is needed who is not only better than bad king Ahaz but better than good king Hezekiah.

This is also the reason that the author does not present the events of Isaiah 38 and 39 in chronological order. In Isaiah 38, Hezekiah finally puts his trust in Yahweh alone. In Isaiah 39, he is hedging his bets on Babylonian help. By ending with this narrative, readers know that Hezekiah is not the coming king for whom they hoped and prayed.

Moreover, we see that Manasseh, the most wicked king in the history of Judah, was born during the time God extended Hezekiah's life fifteen years. Furthermore, from a canonical perspective, Josiah is given a higher rating than Hezekiah (2 Kings 23:25), but his reforms were too little, too late. So events connected with Hezekiah's illness and political policies are significant factors in the cutting down of the Davidic tree, but the pivotal moment is the decision put before Ahaz in Isaiah 7:9. It was Ahaz's decision that brought down the Davidic House until "the falling shack", as Amos puts it, was later restored (Amos 9:11). Only the New Covenant prophesied in Isaiah 54-55, Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36-37 can save the Davidic Covenant in the plot structure of the storyline of the Bible. Thus Isaiah 7:9 is a pivotal moment in the history of the Israel Monarchy.

15. See Christophe Rico, *La mère de l'Enfant-Roi Isaïe 7,14*, 136-156.