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(Matt 1:23)

## The Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New: Isaiah, Matthew, and the Virgin

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**A**mong the first things that even casual readers of the New Testament observe is that its writers were well acquainted with the Jewish Scriptures and quoted from them extensively. Careful readers will also note that these writers often interpreted the scriptural texts in ways that deviated radically from their obvious meanings in the original Old Testament settings.

What should we make of this phenomenon? Does the interpretation of an Old Testament text given by a New Testament writer become normative or take precedence over the meaning of that text in its original setting? Can modern interpreters of the Old Testament effectively use the same exegetical methods as the writers of the New Testament?

These are the issues we shall consider in this article. However, rather than dealing with them abstractly, we shall study a particular case. This example involves the well-known quotation and interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23:

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. (Isa. 7:14)

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." (Matt. 1:23)<sup>1</sup>



This is one of the most revered pair of texts in the Christian Bible. The Old Testament prophecy was written by a prophet who is, to many people, the favorite prophet of all, largely because of this and other similar prophecies that are accepted as messianic. The New Testament passage forms the basis of the cherished doctrine of the virginal conception of Jesus that, for many, proves his supernatural nature. Because Matthew clearly refers to Mary and Jesus, Christians around the world and through the ages have taken the passage from Isaiah to refer to Mary and Jesus, as well.

We shall examine Isaiah 7:13-14 in the light of its literary and historical contexts, showing that it refers to Isaiah's own time. We shall also demonstrate that Matthew used and interpreted the text to mean something quite different by reading the text in a particular way and by employing methods of biblical interpretation current among Jews and Christians in his time.

The overall historical context of Isaiah seven is the Syro-Ephraimite War, dated in the middle of the eighth century B.C.<sup>2</sup> The war pitted the Syrian (Aramean) nation of Damascus and Israel, whose main tribe was Ephraim, against Judah. The great Assyrian superpower was knocking on the doors of the small nations in the area of Palestine, seeking ways to subject them—especially the Aramean kingdoms of Damascus, Israel, Judah, and Philistia—because they stood in the way of Assyria's march to Egypt, Assyria's ultimate goal. In order to counter this pressure it was necessary for the Palestinian nations to form periodic coalitions against Assyria. A similar alliance had already been effective in 853 B.C., when they stopped Assyria at the Battle of Qarqar, in northern Syria.

Whereas Damascus and Israel were already committed to the coalition, Judah was slow to join. Isaiah and his religious faction within the royal court strongly argued that the king should leave the defense of the nation in the hands of God, whereas the secular faction, whom King Ahaz seemed to favor, pushed for an alliance with Assyria itself. After all, had not Israel and Damascus been greater enemies to Judah in the immediate past than Assyria (1 Kings 14:30; 15:16, for instance)? Now would be a good time for Judah to get rid of Israel and Damascus, and in so doing curry the favor of Assyria.

For this reason, Damascus and Israel besieged Jerusalem (2 Kings 16:5). The siege weakened Judah significantly, so that Edom could successfully rebel and Judah lost control of the southeastern portions of its small empire. This development convinced Ahaz of his need for Assyria's protection from the two kingdoms on

his northern border, so he sent ambassadors to King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria formally asking for aid and gilding the request with gifts.

Isaiah seven is set in the context of Ahaz considering whether to make this request. Isaiah strongly argued that Ahaz should place his trust in Yahweh, the personal name of Israel's god, not Tiglath-Pileser. Although Isaiah made the argument as a religious appeal, his advice also made geopolitical sense because Assyria, if called in by Judah, could use the invitation to defeat Damascus and Israel. Assyria would then move its own occupation close to Judah, making the latter a vassal in the process.

Isaiah seven begins by quoting 2 Kings 16:5 (or vice versa) to set the stage politically and chronologically, then shifts in verse three to the religious concern and Isaiah's involvement. Isaiah gave his counsel and prophecy of future events in verses three to nine, including a statement in verse eight that within 65 years the troublesome nations of Damascus and Israel would no longer exist.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, Ahaz did not accept Isaiah's advice. After all, what wise king would bank on a 65-year prophecy to formulate his foreign policy? Isaiah apparently realized this weak link in his argument and recommended that Ahaz put Yahweh to the test. Isaiah suggested that Ahaz ask anything he wanted so that Yahweh could prove that the long-term prophecy would indeed come to pass. Ahaz demurred, probably not wanting to deal with the vagaries of religious promises and apparently preferring the practicalities of realpolitik (verses 11 and 12).

But Isaiah was not done, and he formally announced a sign anyway: "Then Isaiah said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also?'" (verse 13) Isaiah began his announcement of the sign—which ultimately proved the truth of the long-range prophecy—with a familiar prophetic command to "Hear." The announcement carried with it the force of the beginning of Israel's religious creed, probably recited each time a sacrifice was offered (Deut. 6:4-5). The word "hear" signified to ancient Judah an important and formal prophetic announcement.

The message was not addressed to Ahaz, but to the whole government or court. The "House of David" was the formal ancient name of Judah, as is now known from two monumental inscriptions written by foreign rulers.<sup>4</sup> The intended audience was thus a group of people, probably the king's court, a fact underscored by use of second person plural pronouns throughout verses



thirteen and fourteen. We do not see it in the English pronoun “you,” but Isaiah was addressing more than one person. His use of the pronoun “my” with “God” emphasized his close relationship with God and thus the certainty of the message.

At this point we should emphasize that the sign was intended to show the court of Ahaz that Isaiah’s long-range prophecy would come true. Isaiah needed to convince his audience that his message was so certain they should change their political policy and reject the help of Assyria *immediately*. There was no time to wait for prophecies that would take time. The sign must therefore be immediately provable and must be something that could be confirmed at the moment, or very soon thereafter. Isaiah was saying, “Okay, if you do not believe my long-range prophecy, here is something happening right now that neither you nor I at this moment can prove. However, in a few minutes, if you do some checking, you can see that it is true. If it is, know that the long-range prophecy is also true!”

Verse fourteen contains many lexical and grammatical elements that need explanation, for they have been misinterpreted consistently and mistranslated by generations of Bible commentators and translators under the influence of Matthew’s use of the text. Although Isaiah has used the personal name of Israel’s God, Yahweh, throughout the chapter so far, the book now switches to *’adonay*, translated as “Lord” with upper and lower case letters. While most uses of *’adon* refer to God, in many occurrences of the word—which servants and wives also used in reference to their lords and husbands—the reference is to a king or master as a title of respect.<sup>7</sup> In spite of this, most readers automatically understand “lord” to refer to God.

Because Isaiah used the divine form *’adonay* here, it is clear that he—or at least the Masoretes who vocalized the consonants this way—intended for God to be involved in giving the sign. In fact, exegetes universally assume the sign giver to be God alone.<sup>9</sup> However, we propose that Isaiah intended an ambiguous, double meaning, referring to both God and the king. The irony of the situation in this story makes the inclusion of the king as an unwitting sign giver attractive enough to suggest this new reading. Accordingly, King Ahaz had refused to ask Yahweh for a sign, so, instead of coming directly from God, the sign would come from the king himself. Apparently, the sign would somehow be produced by the king, a twist of Ahaz’s antireligious policy that no doubt left later readers with a wry grin of satisfaction. For, although Ahaz did not want to hear Isaiah’s sign at all, Ahaz was going to get it anyway and,

moreover, be the producer of it willy-nilly! Again the pronoun “you” is plural, so it was Ahaz who would give the sign to members of the court. Ultimately, Yahweh, the Lord, gave his sign, but he produced it through Ahaz, the lord.

Then comes the famous passage, which we translate, “Behold, the young woman is pregnant, is bearing a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (verse 14b). There is a definite article with “young woman,” indicating that it was not just any woman or some woman in the future, but a definite young woman, apparently recognizable to Isaiah’s immediate audience. Because it was Ahaz who, albeit unwillingly, gave the sign, the young woman was most likely associated with him in some way, perhaps as one of his wives in the harem.

The translation “young woman,” as opposed to “virgin,” reflects the reality of the Hebrew vocabulary. The word used in Isaiah is *’almah*, which refers to a post-adolescent young woman whether married or not, and therefore whether a virgin or not. The word carries no nuance about her sexual or marital status. The Hebrew word, which is normally translated “virgin” (*betulah*), refers to an unmarried woman who is a virgin by virtue of her single status. This word is not used in Isaiah 7:14. While many twentieth-century versions<sup>10</sup> of the Bible accurately reflect the Hebrew *’almah*, the King James Version (KJV) and some other translations<sup>11</sup> use the word “virgin” here, clearly because of the way Matthew cites the text in his narrative of Jesus’ birth, as we shall see below. Suffice it to say here that Isaiah did not intend to convey any idea of virginity in his reference to the woman in this text, notwithstanding any later use that others would give it.

The text continues with a progression of three future verbs in many English translations,<sup>12</sup> but the Hebrew verbs are not in the same “tense.”<sup>13</sup> The first of our three words is not a verb at all, but a predicate adjective modifying “young woman.” Normal translation technique is to add the verb “to be” in connecting the words. Thus, the best translation should be “the young woman is pregnant.”<sup>14</sup> It is very unlikely that Isaiah meant this phrase to refer to a future time. The pregnancy was thus already a given fact and the royal court most likely knew about it. The second verb is a participle and can be translated in almost any English tense the context demands, including the present tense, as we have chosen to do.<sup>15</sup> This was so because, in order for this sign to be of any use, it had to be confirmable at that time or very soon thereafter. In other words, it seems that this birth was taking place at that very time. Part of the new information Isaiah gave was that the



child would be a boy. But this was nothing remarkable and did not constitute the sign because Isaiah would have had a 50 percent chance of being correct. The sign needed to be much more unpredictable.

The real sign is the next clause, which occurs in a converted perfect tense (see note 13). In other words, in English it should be translated in the future tense, “and shall call his name Immanuel.” Isaiah was telling the court, “Go check with the pregnant woman who is, at this moment, bearing a son. When she gives him a name, you will find that she has named him Immanuel.” No one in the room could have known that. It would be, therefore, an important test of Isaiah’s credibility.<sup>16</sup>

The name Immanuel is a typical Israelite sentence name. It is not frequent, like Jeremiah or Nehemiah, but it has the typical two parts. (1) Most biblical names carried a name or title of God. The element *’el* in so many names like Daniel, Samuel, and Elisha is the word for “God.” The *-iah* endings of names, like Hezekiah and Isaiah, as well as the *Jeho-* beginning, as in Jehoshaphat or Jehoshua (Joshua), are shortened versions of Yahweh. Names could also contain kinship-based words as titles for God, like *’ab* (“father”) in Abraham. In the case of Immanuel, it is clear that the divine (theophoric) element is *’el*, meaning “God.” (2) The first element, *’immanu*, is a prepositional phrase meaning “with us.” The complete name thus means, “God is with us.” To the ancient Israelites the name did not mean “God has become us,” as future Christians wishing to express the miracle of the incarnation would see it. Rather, to Isaiah’s audience, the name had a meaning intimately tied in with their Old Testament salvation theology: “God is with us to deliver and protect us.” As such, the meaning had a direct bearing on Judah’s present situation and Isaiah’s counsel: “Trust in God to deliver.”

For Isaiah, therefore, the name had no cosmic meaning of God becoming human, but was simply a reasonably common Israelite sentence name that fit Isaiah’s message, although, ironically, he was not the one naming the child. This coincidence of the meaning of the name and Isaiah’s message would have undoubtedly lent significance to the sign.

Verses that follow the fourteenth explain how, if Judah would trust in God, it would prosper, just like the child eats curds and honey—foods symbolizing plenty—when he is twelve years old (verse 15).<sup>17</sup> This was because both Damascus and Israel would be destroyed by that time and trouble Judah no more.

Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser destroyed Damascus and most of Israel in 733–34 B.C. and completely destroyed Israel. Shalmaneser V and Sargon II deported

the Israelites to Assyria in 721 B.C. Our story is not dated precisely in the text, but when we overlap the reigns of Ahaz (including his coregency) and Pekah, we are limited to a three- to four-year span, 735–731 B.C. Because Damascus had not yet been destroyed in this story, it must have occurred early during that period, 735 or 734 B.C. Indeed, the fall of Damascus at that time must have been directly related to Ahaz’s request for an alliance. Tiglath-Pileser took Judah’s request as an invitation to become involved in the region and was successful.

Perhaps the best estimated date for the birth of Immanuel is 734 B.C. Within twelve years Damascus fell (733) and Samaria began to fall (722, with complete destruction in 721). Isaiah’s long-range prophecy proved correct, but his sign of the birth of Immanuel should have already told Judah that in 734. Immanuel was therefore a normal human child born of a normal mother who was probably wedded to Ahaz himself.

It seems clear that in verse fourteen Isaiah announced that the court of Ahaz would receive a sign that Yahweh intended to arrange the defeat of Judah’s enemies, even though Ahaz had refused such a sign. This sign would involve the conception and birth of a male child to a particular young woman, possibly with Ahaz as the father, and especially the woman’s naming of the child Immanuel—a typical Israelite name.<sup>18</sup> All aspects of this account and the prediction it contains dealt exclusively with the time of Ahaz and the events that immediately followed.

How, then, is it possible that this text appears in the Gospel of Matthew as a prophecy of the virginal conception of Jesus by Mary? The answer to this question involves several elements. The first has to do with the type of the Old Testament text that Matthew used.

Matthew 1:23 quotes Isaiah 7:14b in accordance with a Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint (LXX)—not according to the Masoretic Text (MT), a Hebrew text that later became standardized.<sup>19</sup> In the LXX, Isaiah 7:14 reads: “Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the virgin shall conceive and shall bear a son and you shall call his name Immanuel.”

This reading differs from the Hebrew<sup>20</sup> in three ways: (1) it uses the word for “virgin” instead of “young woman,” (2) it presents all three verbs in the future tense instead of the mixed “tenses” of the Hebrew, and (3) it gives the final verb in the second person singular instead of the third person feminine singular of the Hebrew.

The LXX usually translates the word *’almah*



("young woman"), found in the Hebrew of Isaiah 7:14, with *neanis*, a word that means "girl, maiden."<sup>21</sup> However, in Isaiah 7:14 the LXX uses *parthenos*<sup>22</sup> ("virgin") for 'almah, but, like the Hebrew, includes the definite article. Normally, the LXX uses *parthenos* to translate *betulah*,<sup>23</sup> the regular Hebrew word for "virgin," as noted above. The only other instance of the LXX using *parthenos* for 'almah is in Genesis 24:43, where the reference is to a young woman whom Abraham's servant prayed would offer him water. This turned out to be Rebekah, an unmarried woman and, presumably, also a virgin. Matthew found the word *parthenos* in the LXX text of Isaiah 7:14b and easily decided to use the text as a fulfillment citation relating to the virginal conception of Jesus.

Despite the LXX's use of *parthenos* in Isaiah 7:14, there is nothing in the text or its context to suggest that the translator intended to convey the notion that the woman would become pregnant by any extraordinary means. Rather, she was simply becoming pregnant with her first sexual experience. Furthermore, the child that she would bear would be her first. It is also possible that the translator used the word *parthenos* in the more general sense of "young woman," and thus equal to 'almah/*neanis*.<sup>24</sup> It is clear that, however he intended the word to be read, the translator did not envision a virginal conception.

The LXX also differs from the MT in Isaiah 7:14b in the tenses of the three verbs. Whereas the MT includes the ideas of conception, birth, and naming in "tenses" that suggest present, present, and future, respectively—as discussed above—all three verbs in the LXX are in the future tense. The three acts are to occur in the future. However, fulfillment was not required in the distant future. In fact, the LXX follows the MT in understanding this to be a sign concerning events about to occur. The translator did not see this as a prophecy concerning some distant time. Clearly, the future perspective of the LXX's rendition of this text is important to Matthew. Only when read in this way could it serve his purpose as a fulfillment citation.

The third difference between the MT and the LXX of Isaiah 7:14b concerns the pronominal subject of the final verb. The unvocalized Hebrew verb *qr't* could be understood as a second person masculine singular, "you shall call," and this was how the LXX translator took it.<sup>25</sup> However, the verb is an old third person feminine form that means "she shall call," continuing the third feminine pronominal subject of all three verbs. The LXX implies that the person Isaiah addressed, presumably Ahaz, would name the child Immanuel. In this case,

the child's mother would most certainly have been a member of the royal harem and not some young woman in the distant future.

That Matthew quoted Isaiah 7:14b according to the LXX is clear from the fact that his reading follows the LXX against the MT in the first two distinct LXX readings discussed above: he included *parthenos* and had all three verbs in the future tense. Of course, this is the only reading that would make sense as a prophecy of the virginal conception of Jesus by Mary. This was clearly why Matthew included it. However, he departed from both the MT ("she shall call") and the LXX ("you [sg] shall call") in his form of the third verb. Matthew reads "they shall call."<sup>26</sup>

Clearly, neither the reading of the MT nor that of the LXX would work for Matthew as a prophecy referring to the designation of Jesus as "Immanuel." First, for Matthew it was neither the woman (MT) nor the person addressed by the prophet (LXX) who named Mary's son. Instead, Matthew 1:21, 25 indicates that the angel told Joseph he was to name the child and that he did so. Second, Matthew reports that the child was to be called "Jesus,"<sup>27</sup> the name by which he was actually known, according to all the ancient sources. There is no record, even in Matthew, that he was ever called by the name Immanuel.

Matthew handled this problem by reading the last verb in Isaiah 7:14b as a third person plural—"they shall call [his name Immanuel]." This enabled Matthew to avoid the limitations of the MT and LXX. Presumably, he understood the text to imply that others outside the immediate family would think of <sup>28</sup>Jesus as Immanuel, which Matthew interpreted to mean "God is with us."<sup>29</sup> Matthew took Immanuel to be more of a title or designation than a name. This was one of the ways that Matthew himself apparently understood Jesus.<sup>30</sup>

Is this a case of blatant textual alteration by Matthew, or was he following a text of Isaiah available to him but no longer to us? While we can never answer this question with certainty, we should note that there is a Hebrew textual tradition that may lie behind Matthew's reading. This is reflected in 1QIs<sup>a</sup>, a manuscript of Isaiah from Qumran, that reads *qr'* "[his name] shall be called,"<sup>31</sup> the equivalent of Matthew's impersonal "they shall call [his name]." Unless Matthew used a form of the LXX no longer extant,<sup>32</sup> he either inserted a convenient variant reading from the Hebrew tradition or created a Greek reading to fit his purpose.

Before leaving this consideration of the LXX reading of Isaiah 7:14 and its use by Matthew, we must note that, despite the LXX's vocabulary and grammati-



cal differences from the Hebrew, its literary context and story line are identical to the Hebrew. In each version, the sign is given to the prophet's contemporaries and conveys the same meaning to them. Furthermore, the LXX's use of the word *parthenos* to translate 'almah does not imply a virginal conception. Thus, Matthew's greatest departure from the LXX was in applying the words of Isaiah to the situation involving Mary's virginal conception of Jesus.<sup>33</sup>

To the modern reader, Matthew's interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 in disregard of the text's literary and historical contexts seems indefensible. However, such an interpretation was not unusual in his time and place. Jews in first-century Palestine read their Scriptures in a variety of ways, all of which the writers of the New Testament used as well.<sup>34</sup> Matthew's approach is very much like at least one of these: peshar interpretation.

Peshar interpretation within Jewish practice is almost exclusively associated with biblical exegesis in the sectarian literature found at or near Qumran, i.e., the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Aramaic word *peshar* ("interpretation") occurs at the beginning of most exegetical statements that follow the quotation of biblical texts with the meaning, "the interpretation of this is." The unique characteristic of this type of exegesis is that the interpretations deal exclusively with the times, places, and circumstances of the interpreters. Unlike midrashic interpretation, in which the original meaning of the text is left intact despite its contemporary relevance, peshar interpretation disregards any original setting and declares the text to have only a contemporary meaning. In particular, the Qumran interpreters understood the biblical materials to be concerned with prophecies of their sectarian group, its leaders and opponents, and the issues with which they were concerned.

Like the practitioners of midrashic interpretation, those who employed the peshar method also manipulated the form of the biblical text with which they worked. This involved both textual alteration and the fortuitous selection of the desired reading from among various versions of the text.

It is with peshar interpretation that we find Matthew most comfortable. The Jewish Scriptures for him not only pointed typologically and analogically to Jesus—as it did for all New Testament writers—but also contained "prophecies" whose fulfillment lay solely in Jesus and the events of his life and ministry. Matthew uniquely included at least eleven of these "prophecies" with a peshar-like formula that declares their fulfillment in some event or detail associated with Jesus.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, as in the case of Matthew's citation of Isaiah

7:14b, he drew on different textual forms that variously read like the MT, the LXX, or other textual traditions. Sometimes we cannot identify his source.

Matthew quoted Isaiah 7:14b and interpreted it in peshar fashion by declaring that this prophecy was fulfilled<sup>36</sup> in the experience of Mary's virginal conception of Jesus and his designation as Immanuel. Not only did Matthew disregard the original literary and historical contexts of this material from Isaiah, but he also chose from among at least two textual forms to achieve his purpose. He would have been quite at home with the exegetes at Qumran.

We have examined a well-known case in which a New Testament writer cited a text from the Old Testament and found that this writer interpreted the text in a way that deviated radically from its obvious meaning in the original setting. We return to our initial questions.

What should we make of this phenomenon? First, we should accept it as fact. New Testament writers often quoted from the Old Testament without regard for its original historical or literary context and sometimes conveniently selected from among different forms of the texts they cited or altered those texts to suit their purposes. Second, we should not filter this observation through a preconceived notion of how inspiration works but should allow this discovery to shape our understanding of inspiration. Third, we should not be negatively critical of the New Testament writers, who were merely following practices well known to their contemporaries and followed by them. Fourth, we should try to understand the New Testament writers' approach within the context of their theological and hermeneutical worlds.

Does the interpretation of an Old Testament text given by a New Testament writer become normative or take precedence over the meaning of that text in its original setting? No. The meaning of an Old Testament text is determined by the intention of the Old Testament writer as exhibited in the vocabulary, grammar, theology, politics, etc., of the writer in particular literary and historical contexts. The citation of such a text by a New Testament writer has no effect on the original meaning. When a New Testament writer cited an Old Testament text, that text became part of the literary and theological output of the New Testament writer and should be interpreted as part of the new context, no matter how far from the original the writer may have moved. To understand the meaning of any biblical material we should study it in its own setting regardless of how later inspired works may cite and interpret it.

Can modern interpreters of the Old Testament



effectively use the same exegetical methods as the writers of the New Testament? Theoretically, this may be possible. In fact, some people today self-consciously try to use the same methods with biblical texts. However, the principles by which people interpret texts (hermeneutics) are not just a set of rules isolated from social and temporal contexts. To communicate effectively the meaning of a text an interpreter must hold in common with the reader at least some of the principles for interpretation. Such principles change over time and from place to place and from one social group to another. These changes make hermeneutics a relative discipline. If we are to communicate the meaning of biblical texts effectively today, we must employ the principles of interpretation current in our time and place. The methods of the first century will not work effectively today in most Western cultures as means to persuade today's readers, any more than the reverse.

To let the Bible be its own interpreter does not mean to superimpose on Old Testament texts the meanings ascribed to them by the inspired New Testament writers who cited them. Rather, it means to let the interpretation of such texts emerge from the texts themselves.

## Notes and References

1. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Bible are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). For consistency, we use the spelling "Immanuel," except where rendered "Emmanuel" within quotation marks, as here.

2. Compare Isaiah 7 to 2 Kings 16.

3. The number 65 is perplexing because, as we shall see, later in the chapter Isaiah acknowledges that it will be a much shorter time to their demise. It may be that the 65 years includes the importation of the alien nations into the old territory of Israel or the demise of Israel in exile.

4. See the Moabite Mesha Inscription and the Aramean Dan Inscription. Andre Lemaire, "House of David' Restored in Moabite Inscription," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20, no. 3 (May/June 1994): 30-37.

5. Represented in most English versions by the word "LORD," with all capital letters.

6. This is a form of the word *'adon* ("lord") that literally means "my lord." In distinction to *'adoniy*, which has the same consonants and also means "my lord," *'adonay* is used only for God.

7. Most of the 64 uses of *'adon* in Isaiah refer to God. However, Isaiah also used the word to mean a hard master (19:4), a master of a slave (24:2), other gods or rulers (26:13); and kings (three times for Hezekiah and four times for Sennacherib). Cf. Ps. 110:1.

8. The Masoretes were Jewish scholars who inserted vowel signs, accents, and marginal notes into the standard Hebrew consonantal text between the fifth and tenth centuries A.D. Before the Masoretes vocalized the word "lord" in Isaiah 7:14, the text had only the ambiguous consonants *'dny*, which

could be understood as either *'adonay* (God) or *'adoniy* (the king).

9. This appears to be the interpretation of the translators of the Septuagint (LXX), which uses *kyrios* ("Lord") without qualification for both the divine in the human/divine contrast in verse thirteen and the sign giver in verse fourteen. Many Hebrew manuscripts of Isaiah—including at least one from Qumran—read *yahweh* instead of *'adonay* here, suggesting that the Jews who produced them took this to mean God. Furthermore, the context also seems to support this view. In verse eleven, Yahweh invites Ahaz (identified in verse ten) to ask *yahweh 'eloheyka* ("Yahweh your God") to give him a sign. The declaration in verse fourteen that *'adonay* would give a sign—despite Ahaz's objection (verse twelve)—implies that Yahweh (called *'adonay yahweh* in seven) is the sign giver. Finally, the reference to *'adonay* ("my Lord") in verse fourteen immediately following *'elohay* ("my God") in verse thirteen suggests that both refer to God.

10. For example, the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB), the Jewish Publication Society version—1978 (JPS), and the NRSV read "the young woman," an accurate reflection of *ha'alimah* with the definite article (cf. "the maiden" in the Jerusalem Bible [JB] and the New World Translation [NWT]); the New English Bible (NEB), the Revised English Bible (REB), the American Translation (Smith-Goodspeed), Moffatt, Today's English Version (TEV), and the Revised Standard Version (RSV) read "a young woman" (cf. "a maiden" in Four Prophets [Phillips]).

11. For example, the Revised Version (RV), the American Standard Version (ASV), the Modern Reader's Bible (Moulton), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the Contemporary English Version (CEV) read "a virgin"; Berkeley, Beck, the New International Version (NIV), the King James II Version (KJII), the New American Bible (NAB), and the New Century Version (NCV) read "the virgin" (= LXX, Syriac Peshitta, and Matthew).

12. For example, KJV, RV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NIV, Berkeley, KJII, Phillips, NAB, NC, Beck, and NWT. Cf. LXX.

13. Hebrew verbs are not quite as easy to classify as this sentence may imply. Hebrew tenses are not true tenses because they do not indicate true time references such as present, past, and future, etc., although they are used many times with clear time references. For instance, the perfect tense in Hebrew is usually translated in the past, but it can also be used to indicate present situations, or sometimes even future ones. There are only two primary tenses in Hebrew, perfect and imperfect. As stated above, the perfect is usually used with reference to past time, whereas the imperfect refers to the future most of the time. There is no present tense. Instead, either of the two tenses may be used; or, as is often done, the participle can be employed: this is a common usage in the prophets. Another way to express past and future time references, especially in prose narratives, is with the consecutive, or converted, verb. This is done by adding a prefix in the form of the conjunction "and" to the verb, which is why so many Old Testament sentences begin with the word "and."

14. Cf. NRSV, NEB, REB, JB, NJB, JPS, TEV, Moffatt, Smith-Goodspeed, CEV, and Moulton.

15. Cf. Moulton. NWT has the strange combination of future and present for the first two ideas, "The maiden herself will actually become pregnant, and she is giving birth to a son."

16. Genesis 16:11 contains the same progression of ideas as Isaiah 7:14, involving the opening interjection, the predicate adjective *harah* with a present meaning, the verbs *yalaḏ* and *qara'*, and the closing identity of the promised male



child. There an angel tells Hagar, "Look, you are pregnant and shall bear a son and shall call his name Ishmael." The parallel to Isaiah 7:14b is obvious. Cf. Judges 13:5, 7 for similar uses of the opening interjection, the predicate adjective *harah* (here with a future meaning), and the verb *yalad* in an angel's address to Manoah and in her report to her husband. Isaiah apparently used a common oracular formula for the announcement of promised births.

17. The traditional age when young Jewish males are supposed to know how to tell good from bad.

18. We know nothing about the identity of the promised male child other than that he was to be named Immanuel. There is no supporting evidence for the ancient Jewish tradition that this child was Ahaz's son Hezekiah or for the view that he was one of Isaiah's sons.

19. Not surprising in a setting in which various versions of the Jewish Scriptures circulated, Matthew cites the Old Testament from several different sources, including text forms like the MT and the LXX, other Hebrew and Greek versions, and maybe even his own translations or emendations.

20. For the essence of the Hebrew, see the citation from the NRSV at the beginning of this article.

21. See Exodus 2:8; Psalms 67(68):25; Canticle of Canticles 1:3; 6:7(8). It is also used in some other early Greek translations of the Old Testament in Isaiah 7:14, namely Aquila (c. A.D. 130), Theodotion (second century A.D.), and Symmachus (late second century A.D.). Euripides uses *neanis* for "a young married woman" (*Andromache*, 192). In Proverbs 24:54 (30:19), the LXX translates *'almah* with *neotes*, which means "a youth."

22. In Greek literature the word *parthenos* is used exclusively for females, except in the strange reference to males found in Revelation 14:4.

23. Among the numerous examples in the LXX are the following from Isaiah: 23:4; 37:22; 47:1; 62:5.

24. In wider Greek usage, the word *parthenos* meant "maiden, girl." It was even used to signify unmarried women who were not virgins, e.g., *Iliad*, 2.514; Pindarus, *Pythian*, 3.34; Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, 1219; Aristophanes, *Nubes*, 530.

25. The translator may also have been influenced by the Greek of Genesis 16:11, which reads "you shall call (*kaleseis*) his name."

26. It is unlikely that Matthew departed from the LXX in reading *en gastri hexei* (literally "she will have in the womb")—the idiom for conception. While LXX AS (cf. Rahlfs, Göttingen) has this reading, the similar idiom *en gastri hēpsetai* (literally "she will receive in the womb") is found in LXX B and most of the Fathers. Matthew also used the first idiom, *en gastri echō*, in 1:18, probably under the influence of the citation from Isaiah. Cf. 24:19, although there he may simply have followed Mark. Both idioms are well represented throughout the LXX as translations of the Hebrew *harah* ("to conceive, be pregnant"). See, e.g., 2 Samuel 11:5, which contains both idioms in the LXX as translations of the repeated Hebrew *harah*. The LXX of Isaiah uses the *echō* form in 40:11 (there is no comparable expression in the Hebrew) and the *lambanō* form in 8:3; 26:18. On one hand, Christian scribes may have harmonized the LXX of Isaiah 7:14 to Matthew 1:23 (*echō*) or scribes may have harmonized Isaiah 7:14 to 8:3 and 26:18 (*lambanō*). Since this would be a minor discontinuity between Isaiah and Matthew compared to that created by their differences in representing the third verb—which Christian scribes did not harmonize—we prefer to take *en gastri hexei* as the original LXX reading of Isaiah 7:14.

27. Jesus is the Greek word used for the Hebrew name Jehoshua (Joshua), which means "Yahweh is salvation" or

"Yahweh saves" (cf. Matt. 1:21). The Aramaic equivalent is Jeshua.

28. For Matthew, this would have had more the meaning of "call" rather than "name," in the sense of how Jesus would be known by others.

29. Matthew apparently drew this interpretation from Isaiah 8:10.

30. The idea of the presence of God in the person of Jesus appears to be an important theme in the Gospel of Matthew, as displayed in the inclusion formed by 1:23 and 28:20.

31. Taken to be *qora'*, a qal passive (what some grammarians used to call pu'al).

32. The reading "they shall call" is not found as a variant in the LXX tradition.

33. Of course, this is not the only place where Matthew ignored the literary context of his fulfillment citations (e.g., see Matt. 2:15 [Hos. 11:1]; 2:17 [Jer. 31:15]; 13:14 [Isa. 6:9–10]), nor is he the only New Testament writer to engage in such a practice (e.g., see John 13:18 [Ps. 41:9]; 19:24 [Ps. 22:18]; Acts 1:16, 20 [Ps. 69:25; 109:8]).

34. It is common to classify the types of Jewish exegesis of the Old Testament during the first century as literalistic, midrashic, pesher, and allegorical. See Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), 28–50.

35. For example, "This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah" (Matt. 12:17), after which Matthew cites Isaiah 42:1–4. Note similar fulfillment formulas in 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 13:14 (cf. John 12:39–40), 35; 21:4; 27:9. Except as noted, these formulas and the citations they introduce are unique to Matthew among the Gospels. At least six of the eleven citations include quotations from Isaiah. In two additional cases, Matthew has a fulfillment formula without citing any Old Testament text: 26:54, 56. For the latter, cf. Mark 14:49. Matthew included one citation—also from Isaiah—with an implied fulfillment even though he did not use a fulfillment formula: 3:3 (cf. Mark 1:2–3; Luke 3:4–6; John 1:23). For a similar situation, see 2:5–6. Finally, we may note that, for Matthew, the essence of Jesus' relationship to the Jewish Scriptures was not one of contradiction or supplanting, but of fulfillment, i.e., these Scriptures found their fulfillment in him. This ultimate pesher interpretation is summarized in 5:17: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."

36. The citation formula is in Matthew 1:22: "all this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet."

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