

# ISAIAH 7:14–16

By Paul Peters

In undertaking an interpretation of this well-known and much discussed prophecy one is at once face to face with the question whether our prophecy is directly Messianic or whether it is typically Messianic. That this prophecy is Messianic cannot be questioned by anyone who still regards the Scriptures as inspired, since Matthew (1:22) has incontrovertibly declared our prophecy fulfilled in Jesus. But we are not being told by the Evangelist whether our text is directly or typically Messianic. His introductory words declaring our text to be Messianic are the same as those which proclaim Hosea 11:1 to be Messianic. In both cases Matthew introduces the prophecy with the words: “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet” (1:22 and 2:15). That the Hosea prophecy: “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” is typically Messianic is beyond a doubt, since the prophet in the verses immediately following speaks of Israel or Ephraim (vs. 3) as a people and tells us how God loved them (vss. 2–4). Through Israel, when it was a child, Hosea is speaking typically of the child Jesus whom God likewise called out of Egypt (Matt. 2:15).<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah in his prophecy is also speaking of a child, only this child is not called Israel but Immanuel. The question is justified whether Isaiah is speaking of a contemporary child which is to be regarded as a type of the Antitype, the child Jesus, or whether he is speaking directly or exclusively of the child Jesus. We cannot answer this question by declaring the directly Messianic prophecy more Messianic than the typically Messianic prophecy. A prophecy that is Messianic by type is in no wise Messianic in an inferior sense, since the type is not an accidental but a divinely ordained type and is described to us by the Spirit of prophecy. But how are we to decide whether a prophecy is directly Messianic or typically Messianic? In the case of Hosea 11:1 the text together with the context had to determine it for us. A study of II Samuel 7:12–17 and Isaiah 40:3–5 will illustrate this more fully.<sup>2</sup>

II Samuel 7 contains the well-known prophecy to David: “And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: but my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David” (vss. 12–17).

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Laetsch in *The Minor Prophets* has this to say: “In our day the typical mode of interpretation is favored generally. Israel’s history is regarded as the type of Christ’s life, and therefore, as Israel took refuge in Egypt and later was brought back to the Promised Land, so Christ fled to Egypt and later returned to His own country. Yet Matthew does not say that a type was fulfilled. He says that what was spoken by the prophet was fulfilled by Christ’s sojourn in Egypt. He speaks of the fulfillment of a historical fact prophesied by Hosea, the historical fact: Out of Egypt have I called my Son” (p. 88). Our answer to these remarks of Dr. Laetsch the reader will find in our review of this his commentary in the 1956 *Quartalschrift* (p. 157). Here we prefer to quote Dr. Fairbairn’s *Typology of Scripture* in reference to the Hosea passage: “The word in Hos. 11:1, ‘I called my son out of Egypt,’ ... as uttered by the prophet, was unquestionably meant to refer historically to the fact of the Lord’s goodness in delivering Israel from the land of bondage and oppression. But the evangelist Matthew expressly points to it as a prophecy, and tells us that the infant Jesus was for a time sent into Egypt, and again brought out of it, that the word might be fulfilled. This arose from the typical connection between Christ and Israel. The scripture fulfilled was prophetic, simply because the circumstance it recorded was typical. But in so considering it, the evangelist puts no peculiar strain upon its terms, nor introduces any sort of double sense into its import. He merely points to a prophetic element involved in the transaction it relates and thereby discovers to us a bond of connection between the Old and the New in God’s dispensations, necessary to be kept in view for a correct apprehension of both” (Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, Grand Rapids, p. 109f.).

<sup>2</sup> The reader’s patience will be taxed in that the author of this article is not immediately applying the aforesaid to Isaiah 7:14–16. This was our original intent. Upon request, however, we are giving further consideration to the typical and direct mode of interpretation, especially in view of Luther’s, Stoeckhardt’s, and Pieper’s use of the same.

Since Peter in his Pentecost sermon tells his hearers that “the patriarch David” as “a prophet” knew “that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne” (Acts 2:30), there can be no doubt in our minds that in II Samuel 7 Nathan is prophesying the Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom. The only question is whether Nathan was speaking to David of the Messiah without a type, i.e. directly, or by means of some type, i.e. indirectly. Luther is very emphatic in arguing that Nathan is speaking of Christ and of Christ only to the exclusion of Solomon. There were exegetes in Luther’s day, as Luther himself tells us, who interpreted II Samuel 7 typically and understood this prophecy as referring on the one hand to Solomon “as a figure of Christ” and on the other hand as interpreting it to mean Christ. “But if it is conceded,” Luther contends, “that the Scripture does not rest on one simple (*einfältig*) meaning, it loses its force.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore Luther translates and interprets II Samuel 7:12 as follows: “When your days are fulfilled and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you.... Here we have,” he adds, “the beginning of the real Messianic text. For this cannot be said of Solomon, still less of any other son of David. It must be the one real son of David, Messiah, who is to come after the scepter of Judah. He shall build an house for me (He says) and I will establish His kingdom forever. This house cannot be the temple of Solomon. For just prior to that He says: You shall not build a house for me to dwell in.... Therefore the house which the Messiah David and the Son of God shall build will be another, greater and more glorious house.”<sup>4</sup> As a result, Luther also understood the prayer of David in II Samuel 7:19 to mean that the Messiah God will come forth from his blood and that his Son Messiah must be very God of very God (*muss rechter natürlicher Gott sein*).<sup>5</sup> Consequently Luther changed his translation of verse 19, which in 1524 he had rendered: “Thou hast spoken also of thy servant’s house for a great while to come, and is this the manner of man, O Lord God” into: “Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant’s house for a great while to come. That is the manner of a man, who is God the Lord.” To this Roerer in a marginal note adds: “That is, you speak with me of such an eternal kingdom, in which no man can be king. He must be God and man, because he is my Son, which alone can be said of God Himself.”<sup>6</sup>

Stoekhardt follows closely in the footsteps of Luther and interprets verse 14, “I will be his father, and he shall be my son” as pertaining directly and exclusively to the Messiah and as revealing not his office and work, but his person and divine nature. He also translates the words of David’s prayer in verse 19: “That is the manner of a man—rather the man—who is God the Lord” and calls the translation “that is the manner of man, Lord Jehovah” a product of embarrassment, a monstrosity (*eine Ausgeburt der Verlegenheit, eine Ungeheuerlichkeit*).<sup>7</sup> Both Luther and Stoekhardt aimed at proving that according to II Samuel 7:14 and 19 the Messiah is being declared to be true God and that therefore this prophecy cannot refer to Solomon but alone to Christ.

The text and context as it occurs in both the Old and the New Testament can alone determine the mode (whether direct or indirect) and the meaning of this Messianic prophecy. The words around which all the words of this prophecy revolve are to be found in verse 12: “I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels.” It is the term “seed” which, according to our understanding of type and antitype, makes this prophecy a typical Messianic prophecy. It had been used in all the promises given to Abraham, designated as “thy seed after thee in their generations” (Gen. 17:9), as the seed to which God will give “this land,” i.e. the land of Canaan (e.g. 12:17; 13:15; 35:12), as the seed that “shall be called in Isaac” (21:12), to whom God promised “all these countries,” namely the countries in which Isaac sojourned (26:3, 4). From these and the following passages it is evident that the seed of Abraham includes Isaac and his seed (cf. 26:3), Jacob and his seed (28:4, 13, 14; 32:12; 48:4), as also Joseph and Ephraim and their seed (48:11, 19). It is because of this seed

3 St. Louis Ed., Vol. XII, 169.

4 Ibid., Vol. III, 1895ff..

5 Ibid., 1902.

6 D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Die Deutsche Bibel 3,398; cf. 9,318. Comp. Luthertum, Heft 24, Karl Brinkel, Luthers Hermeneutik in seiner Uebersetzung des A.T., pp. 14, 39f..

7 Ausgewählte Psalmen, ausgelegt von D. G. Stöckhardt, St. Louis, 1915, p. 27f..

which links together both type and antitype, both Isaac and Christ (Gal. 3:16), that we speak of these promises as being typical in their wording and their content.

Does not the same hold true of the promises made to David, since the term “seed” is also used in all these prophecies? Nathan speaks to David of “thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels” (II Sam. 7:12). With these words David is declared to be the progenitor of “a long line of successive generations” and is therefore spoken of by Peter as “the patriarch David” (Acts 2:29). The author of II Samuel 7 does not with so many words name the seed, but refers to it with singular personal and possessive pronouns (vss. 12, 13, 14, 15). That Solomon is the antecedent of these pronouns is evident from verse 14, where he is designated as one who may “commit iniquity”<sup>8</sup> and from verse 15, where he is placed in contrast to Saul, whom God put away.

The parallel passage in I Chronicles 17:11 has a somewhat different wording: “And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom.” Especially the expression “which shall be of thy sons,” has been interpreted by “the older orthodox exegesis” (Lavater, Starke, a. o.) as designating “not so much Solomon as the Messiah.”<sup>9</sup> Keil even finds a direct reference to the Messiah to the exclusion of Solomon in these words.<sup>10</sup> But Lange has already called attention to the very next prediction: “He shall build me a house” (vs. 12) as applying “clearly to Solomon only, as in II Chronicles 7:18 his person, and not that of some future Messianic descendant, is manifestly designated.” We can even go back to I Chronicles 28:5f., where David speaks of all of his sons whom the Lord has given him, and where Solomon is named by him as the one whom the Lord “hath chosen ... to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel” and the one concerning whom the Lord said: “Solomon, thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father. Moreover I will establish his kingdom for ever, if he be constant to do my commandments and judgments, as at this day” (Cf. also II Chron. 22:9).

Here we have examples of how the Messianic element in the typical term “seed” is limited essentially to the eternal duration that is promised to the kingdom of Solomon. Keil and Delitsch in their commentary on Samuel have defined this strange phenomenon as follows: “By the ‘seed’ we are not to understand Solomon alone, with the kings who succeeded him, nor Christ alone, to the exclusion of Solomon and the earthly kings of the family of David; nor is the allusion to Solomon and Christ to be regarded as a double allusion to two

8 To say as Paul E. Kretzmann does in his *Popular Commentary of the Bible* (Old Testament, Vol. I, p. 521) “that this is not spoken of Solomon, as most modern commentators will have it, may be seen from the fact that Solomon was a mere man, and there would have been nothing unusual in his being punished for any transgressions after the manner of men,” is to overlook the fact that the Old Testament does speak that way of Solomon (I Kings 11:9ff.). When applied to the Antitype one must with Kretzmann have recourse to “the implication”, that the sins of men “would be imputed to Him.”

9 John Peter Lange, D.D., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, trans. by Philip Schaff, D.D., 1877, Vol. VII, p. 122.

10 Keil in his *Commentary on Chronicles* (Eerdman’s, Grand Rapids, 1950, p. 223) argues that the phrase, **היה מן**, does not denote “to be of one, i.e. to belong to him, but to arise, be born, or go forth, from one” and refers his readers to Genesis 17:16, where even modern versions, both English and German, render this phrase: “Shall come from her” (RSV). Keil therefore translates our sentence in Chronicles with its **מבניך אשר יהיה**, “who will come out of (from) thy sons.” This leads him to conclude that “the words cannot be referred to Solomon at all, because Solomon was not a descendant of David’s sons, but of David himself. The author of Chronicles, he adds, has interpreted **את־זרעך אהרִיךְ** (“thy seed after thee”) theologically, or rather set forth the Messianic contents of this conception more clearly than it was expressed in **ממעִיךְ אשר יצא**, “which shall proceed out of thy bowels,” and then draws the final conclusion: “Thy seed after David, which will arise from his sons, is the Messiah, whom the prophets announced as the Son of David, whose throne God will establish for ever” (vs. 12).—It is extremely interesting to note what Kurt Galling in *Das Alte Testament Deutsch, Neues Göttinger Bibelwerk* (p. 54) has to say in regard to this our phrase in Chronicles: “In that the seed of David is designated as being ‘of thy sons’ (instead of ‘out of thy bowels’—II Sam. 7), the author of Chronicles is referring to a distant future. Ultimately a Messianic hope is behind it” [*letzlich steht dahinter eine messianische Erwartung* (v. Rad)]. Insofar the interpretation of the older orthodox exegetes, including that of Keil, has much in its favor, something which we do not want to lose sight of. Keil’s one mistake is not to find Solomon included in this prophecy.

different objects.”<sup>11</sup> The same must be said of all the other typical terms found in these promises, such as “kingdom,” “house,” “throne,” from which the expression “for ever,” as Luther has already pointed out, takes its corresponding meaning, either of a long incalculable period or of an eternal duration like “the days of heaven” (Ps. 89:30). The same must be said of the term “house,” which must not be restricted to Solomon’s temple, but includes the temple in which God will dwell forever (I Kings 8:13), the temple of Christ’s body (John 2:19), the Church built into a spiritual house of God composed of living stones (I Tim. 3:15; I Pet. 2:5). Hengstenberg, as quoted by Keil and Delitzsch in their Samuel commentary (p. 347), has clothed this phenomenon into the fitting words: “The building of the house of the Lord goes hand in hand with the eternity of the kingdom,” and Lange in his commentary on Chronicles (p. 122) has well said: “The ‘house’ or ‘kingdom’ of God, in which this preservation or confirming of the seed of David is to take place, is first the Old Testament theocracy, then the Messianic kingdom of the new covenant.”

Luther in his study of II Samuel 7 did not overlook the Chronicles passages. He compares II Samuel 7:14 and I Chronicles 23:10 (KJV 22:10) with one another, but calls II Samuel 7:14 together with Psalm 89:27, 28 “prophetical books,” Chronicles, however, “a historical book.”<sup>12</sup> Again he distinguishes between the promise in II Samuel 7:14 as a *promissio gratiae*, an unconditional promise, and I Chronicles 23:10 (KJV 22:10) as a *promissio legis*, a conditional promise because of the proviso: “If he be constant to do my commandments and my judgments” (I Chron. 28:7).<sup>13</sup> This distinction between the *promissio gratiae* and the *promissio legis* is, of course, a very important one for the interpretation of these prophecies, when correctly applied. We must note, however, that the *promissio gratiae* is not absent from the passage which Luther designates as referring to Solomon only (I Chron. 22:10), while the *promissio legis* is an important part of the passage which Luther interprets as pertaining to the Messiah only (II Sam. 7:14). Both the *promissio gratiae* and the *promissio legis* can be applied to all of the Messianic promises given to David due to the fact that all of them are typical promises and embody both the type and the Antitype.

If we keep this in mind, we shall also not force the meaning of the *generatio aeterna* on II Samuel 7:14 as both Luther and Stoeckhardt have done. “I will be his father, and he shall be my son” is called a  $\text{צֶדֶק}$  (*choq*), a decree of the Lord in Psalm 2:7, whereby the begetting into a royal existence, which takes place in and by the act of anointing, is decreed. “Whether it be David, or a son of David, or the other David, that is intended, in any case II Samuel 7 is to be accounted as the first and oldest proclamation of this decree.”<sup>14</sup> And we need not be in doubt as to its meaning, since Paul in Acts 13:33 has interpreted these words for us. After having spoken to the rulers of the synagogue in Antioch of David’s seed, from which “God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus” (vs. 23), he then declares unto them “glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” The *ἀναστήσας Ἰησοῦν* of our text is not that act of God whereby he raised Jesus from the dead, of which Paul does speak in verse 34, but whereby He made him to appear during His entire career from His incarnation to His exaltation. And the begetting of a Son is again a figurative expression for Jehovah’s placing this everlasting King on His throne. Here it is not David, not Solomon, but Jesus whom “he raised unto Israel a Saviour.”

The author of Hebrews (1:5) by also quoting Psalm 2 and then II Samuel 7:14 says the same thing, namely that Jesus “by inheritance obtained a more excellent name” (vs. 2) than the angels. The human nature of Jesus inherited this name “Son” in the Incarnation (Luke 1:32), which “ushered him into this world for his great work,”<sup>15</sup> because of which God gave “him a name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). This name “belonged to His Person from all eternity,” but in reference to his human nature was given to him already in the

11 Keil and Delitzsch, op. cit., p. 347.

12 St. Louis Ed., Vol. XII, 170.

13 Ibid., Vol; XX, 1922.

14 Delitzsch, *The Psalms*, Eerdman’s, p. 96.

15 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Columbus, 1938, p. 44.

Old Testament.”<sup>16</sup> To convince his readers of this the inspired author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 2 and II Samuel 7:14–16. Both David (Ps. 2:7) and Solomon (II Sam. 7–14) were called “son,” but Jesus’ name “Son” is superior to any name given to men, even to men like David and Solomon as types of Christ, superior even to that of angels (Hebr. 1:4 and 5). Although in Psalm 2 “the Messianic statement pertained to David” and in II Samuel 7:14 “this second Messianic statement pertained to Solomon, in both Jahveh looked far beyond both to the eternal Solomon, the ultimate Heir (Hebr. 1:2), in whom alone II Samuel 7:16 could be fulfilled: ‘And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established for ever.’”<sup>17</sup> As the great Antitype, “called the Son of the Highest ... the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:32f.). It is thus that the typical prophecy in Psalm 2 and II Samuel 7:14–16 finds its fulfillment in Jesus, whom God “appointed heir of all things” (Hebr. 1:2).

Isaiah 40:3–5 is the other passage which will serve our purpose best as an example of a typical prophecy. According to Matthew 3:3 it is the prophecy in which John the Baptist is spoken of. And John the Baptist himself, when asked by the priests and Levites, “Who art thou,” answered: “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias” (John 1:22f.). Mark first quotes Malachi 3:1 and then Isaiah, thus designating this voice as that of God’s messenger sent before His face (Mark 1:2f.). Isaiah in his audition already *heard* the voice of a caller. Who was this caller? Delitzsch has well said: “Who the caller is remains a secret; his personality vanishes in the splendor of his calling, retires behind the substance of his call.”<sup>18</sup> It is that of an “ideal person,” to quote Delitzsch again, whom the prophet “has in visionary objectiveness before him.”<sup>19</sup> We may therefore say that it was the voice of an angel whom God sent to Isaiah as His messenger, even as it was the voice of two other angels, whom in his audition he heard carrying on a dialogue (vs. 6). And to complete the whole picture, angels were the ones who were to prepare a way for the Lord, since they are to do something far in excess of what men are able to do; they are to make every mountain and hill low and thus prepare a way for their Lord to go to Babylon, in order to liberate His people. In short, the angelic caller, whose voice Isaiah heard, is a type of John the Baptist, whose voice was heard in the wilderness of Judea. But since this prophecy refers to John the Baptist by way of a type, “it does not,” to quote Prof. Pieper in his Isaiah commentary,<sup>20</sup> “only apply to the one individual, John, but to all preachers who have the same call as John the Baptist, whether they were active prior to or after him.” Consequently “the prophet Isaiah himself—as he speaks to us in following chapters—was this voice. It is here and in verses 6–8 that he speaks of his call and office. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others were the voice for Israel, yet only in a limited measure... They were preachers of repentance for the spiritually devastated Israel of their time. John was the preacher of repentance *κατ’ ἐξοχήν*, the one who, strictly speaking, prepared the way of the Lord... And he who is called to be a preacher of the Gospel after John and after the appearing of the Lord should know that he is also being spoken of in this prophecy, that he is also called to prepare a way for the Lord by the preaching of repentance.”<sup>21</sup>

It is thus that Professor Pieper does full justice to the typical form of this prophecy and for that matter of all other typical prophecies in Isaiah, in that he calls our attention to the various Old Testament elements of these Messianic prophecies, all of them “figures and types of New Testament, spiritual realities. Zion—Jerusalem, Israel, Jacob, my people a. o. are terms for the Church of all times, especially for the New Testament Church. Comp. Galatians 4:26ff., where Paul applies Isaiah 54:1 to the New Testament Church.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore we are being warned by him to distinguish clearly, when studying a definite prophecy, of what and of whom the

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16 Ibid., p 44.

17 Ibid., p. 46.

18 *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, by Franz Delitzsch, Edinburgh, p. 135.

19 Ibid., p. 137.

20 *Jesaias II* von Aug. Pieper, Milwaukee, 1919, p. 14.

21 Ibid., p. 17f..

22 Ibid., p. 16.

prophet is speaking, especially in view of the fact that Cyrus as a type of Christ and Christ Himself are placed in close proximity to one another, and again Israel as the servant of the Lord and Christ as the Servant of the Lord.

It is in this connection that we find ourselves confronted with the question where then, if at all, the prophets are actually speaking directly of the Messiah, without having any recourse to types and prefiguring images. This is the question which is under discussion in our day. How are we to answer it? The answer has to be sought for by all of us. As we know from our correspondence, it is being duly considered by members of our theological faculties and by former students in the ministry, as well as by our presentday students in the classroom.

We are face to face with this question above all in our study of Psalm 110, because the Lord Himself has quoted this Psalm in answer to His own question: "What think ye of Christ?" (Matt. 22:42). We all know the answer that He gave, especially the closing words: "If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son?" (vs. 45). We ask: Does David in this Psalm at all operate with type and antitype? We saw from prophecies in II Samuel and Chronicles that type and antitype flowed together. Even in II Samuel 23:1-7, where David "the highly exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob" (vs. 1) is speaking of a ruler over men, who "must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (vs. 3), we have difficulty to distinguish between type and antitype.<sup>23</sup> But in Psalm 110, where David addresses this ruler as "my Lord," is it not here that he is actually speaking of the exaltation of his Lord to the exclusion of his own person, although he himself is a type of the Messiah?

There is no question that the "royal psalms" and also Psalm 110 have a typical ground color for their prophetic contents and that their contents, even as they pertain to the future, rest upon a typical groundwork. In other words, each of these psalms "has points of connection with contemporaneous history" and as Delitzsch points out, the first of these connecting links is the bringing of the Ark home to Zion, "where Jahve, whose earthly home is the Ark, now took His place at the side of David; but, spiritually considered, the matter stood properly thus, that Jahve, when He established Himself upon Zion, granted to David to sit henceforth enthroned at His side."<sup>24</sup> Perhaps in view of this Calvin already says in reference to verse 1 of Psalm 110: "What is here stated might to some extent be applied to the person of David, inasmuch as ... it was by the direct authority of God that he reigned over Israel," but then adds: "That the whole of what is stated in this verse cannot be entirely and exclusively applied to David, is very obvious from Christ's reply to the Pharisees" (Matt. 22:44).<sup>25</sup>

While all this is not to be questioned in regard to the royal psalms in general, which as typical psalms apply both to the Davidic king and the Messiah, the question for which we are seeking a definite answer is whether this is also true in regard to our 110th Psalm. That the whole framework of this Psalm is of a typical nature, we do not question. Our question is whether David in this psalm is speaking of the Messiah to the exclusion of his own person. "Certainly, there is no other Psalm," Delitzsch admits, "in which David distinguishes between himself and the Messiah, and has the latter before him: the other Messianic Psalms of David are reflections of his radical, ideal contemplation of himself, reflected images of his own typical history; they contain prophetic elements, because David there too speaks ἐν πνεύματι, but elements that are not solved by the person of David." Here, however, David as author of this Psalm is speaking "directly and objectively in a prophetic representation of the Future One."<sup>26</sup> Only if David were not the author of this Psalm, could we interpret the מֵיָדֹנָי, "my Lord," typically as spoken by a third person in reference to David or some other king as a type of the Messiah. But Christ's argument hinges on the authorship of David: "How then doth David in spirit call him Lord" (Matt. 22:43). Delitzsch has given an answer, on which so readily no one will be able to

23 Luther's translation of verse 1: *Der versichert ist von dem Messias des Gottes Jakob* (Who is certified by the Messiah of the God of Jacob) is that of the Vulgate: *Cui constitutum est de Christo Dei Jacob*, which is not in accord with the original. The Hebrew *meshiach* does not refer to the promised Messiah, as Luther thought (St. Louis Ed., Vol. III, 1886), but to David. The rendering of verse 3 by the *Revised Version*: "One that ruleth over men righteously, that ruleth in the fear of God, he shall be, etc.," is to be preferred to that of the *King James Version*. Also this verse does not contain a direct reference to the Messiah, as claimed by Delitzsch in his Psalm commentary (op. cit., p. 186).

24 Ibid., p. 186f..

25 *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, by John Calvin, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1949, Vol. IV, p. 297.

26 Delitzsch, op. cit., p. 185.

improve: “The type, come back to the conscious of himself, here lays down his crown at the feet of the Antitype.”<sup>27</sup>

But is this the only Psalm in which David or any one of the other Psalmists is speaking directly of the Messiah? Delitzsch in the above quotation claims that it is. Prof. Pieper in his interpretation of the 22nd Psalm<sup>28</sup> raises the question “whether the Psalm is to be regarded as typical or direct Messianic,” and adds: “Also here it is not difficult to recognize the latter as the only correct one, although most of the modern positive exegetes, as for instance Kurtz, Stier, Moll, Hengstenberg, Delitzsch a. o., declare themselves in favor of the typical Messianic interpretation. How little the latter serves one’s purpose Delitzsch himself discloses, when he says: ‘In Psalm 22, however, David descends, with his complaint, into a depth that lies beyond the depth of his affliction, and rises, with his hopes, to a height that lies far beyond the height of the reward of his affliction.’ And it is a completely unsuccessful attempt at justifying the typical interpretation when Delitzsch has recourse to the poetical use of the hyperbole ... and that this exaggeration is made use of by the Spirit of God, who changes it into the prophetic. With this explanation the Psalmist inspired by the Holy Spirit is made into a fibbing babbling (*zum flunkernden Schwätzer*).

“The question concerning the typical and immediate messianism,” Prof. Pieper continues, “finds its answer in the other question, whether the content exceeds the historical structure of the type, or whether it remains within these its confines. David was a type of Christ, but self-evidently only in what he was, and of course not in what he no longer was. Everywhere there, where David prophetically says something of Christ that was not to be found in him, he talks without the means of a type, altogether Messianically direct. Now in itself it would not be impossible that in one and the same Psalm typical and direct prophecy would occur as a mixed prophecy. This is the very thing that Delitzsch and others want here, why they speak of a typical prophetic messianism of the 22nd Psalm. But that this should be the case here is not yet proven by a number of passages which can be interpreted as referring to David, since they, of course, also apply to Christ and can in a most natural way be brought into relation with Him, when it once has been established that the Psalm contains direct Messianic elements. Only there does one have a right to adopt this mixed Messianic form, where the typical portion contains additional elements which only apply to the type and to the office of the type as such. That is not the case in the 22nd Psalm. Every word of the Psalm is immediately adaptable to Christ... Added to this, no situation is to be found in the life of David, as all must confess, which would correspond to such a description as we have it in this Psalm. Least of all did his typical status offer a premise for the general conversion of the heathen as pictured in the last part of the Psalm. But all argumentation is brought to a close by the New Testament passages Matthew 27:35, John 19:24, and Hebrews 2:11. In the first two passages the parting of the clothes of the Crucified One and the casting of lots occurred that the Scripture (according to Matthew, the prophetic Scripture), the 18th verse of the 22nd Psalm, might be fulfilled. And according to the last passage it is Christ who speaks in Psalm 22:23: ‘I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.’ One makes himself guilty of vain words when one in view of such statements of the New Testament still speaks of the Lord as simply having appropriated these and other words of David as they occur in the 22nd Psalm.”

These arguments as advanced by Prof. Pieper for the direct Messianic interpretation of Psalm 22 have been quoted in full because of their cogency. Lenski in his *Eisenach Old Testament Selections* is one of very few modern commentators who likewise interprets our Psalm as a direct Messianic prophecy and compares it with Isaiah chapter 53: “Isaiah’s verses picture the Redeemer in his suffering and his glorification; David’s verses let us hear the Redeemer himself speaking in his agony and in his triumph.... The omniscient Spirit of prophecy only could have placed at the head of this Psalm that supreme cry of agony on the cross. For it is not because David wrote this line that Christ on the cross made it his cry, but because Christ would thus cry out on the cross David wrote it down as a prophet” (p. 429f.). Leupold in his *Exposition of The Psalms* also prefers the predictive approach, which “regards the entire psalm as pure prophecy concerning the Christ Himself and

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>28</sup> *Theologische Quartalschrift* 1905, p. 15f..

assumes that the author was conscious of the fact that he was prophesying,” although he does believe that elements of a typical prophecy “may be detected here and there” (p. 195). Hans Joachim Kraus, however, in his Psalm commentary declares that the Messianic interpretation of this Psalm cannot be upheld any longer and then quotes A. Cohen in the *Soncino Books of the Bible*: “A christological intention has long been read into this Psalm, but modern Christian exegetes are agreed that it describes a situation then existing and does not anticipate an event in the future.”<sup>29</sup> In accord with this the Interpreter’s Bible only speaks of “the correspondence between the sufferings of Jesus and those of the psalmist, ... of some sorely tried man who made so alive his own experience of despair that it has become a universal cry of suffering everywhere, and could be used even by our Lord to express his darkest moment” (p. 115f.).

In view of such a change in the course of the history of Old Testament exegesis one is prompted to ask whether there is still any room for Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, even if only for such that can be interpreted typically. This question is all the more called for in view of the background of the “royal psalms,” which modern exegetes want us to see. We are to see what these Psalms, for instance Psalms 2, 18, 21, 72, 110 a. o., depict, namely the enthronement of a king on Mt. Zion, God setting “a crown of pure gold on his head” (Ps. 21:3), laying “honour and majesty upon him” (vs. 5), so that “in his days the righteous shall flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth” (Ps. 72:7). All these and many similar expressions found in these “royal psalms” are understood by modern exegetes as echoes of an “Enthronement Festival,”<sup>30</sup> at which a king was installed on Mt. Zion and through the mouth of a prophet declared to be the son of God and God his father (cf. II Sam. 7:14). Therefore, these psalms, including Psalm 110, are to be viewed against the background of the “Enthronement Festival” with its “idea of divine kingship” and to be interpreted accordingly, i.e. given “the cultic interpretation.” Only then have we the assurance of finding the original, literal meaning of these psalms. In addition to this “we must assume that Israel took over a considerable part of its kingship ideology from the Canaanites” and that “this picture of Israelite kingship agrees in an astonishing way with ancient Mesopotamian kingship ideology.” However, this “kingship ideology” in its Old Testament context and setting, i.e. in “the history of revelation,” is not only the background but also “the necessary condition of the belief in the coming Messiah, it is the soil, from which the messianic hope has grown.... The divine kingship of ancient Israel is part of the preparations that were necessary for the realization of God’s plan of salvation. And the fact that we have to do with influences from ‘pagan’ cultures cannot diminish the religious values of these ideas. If we take our belief in God as the Master of history seriously,” we are told, “there is nothing offensive in the statement that this God could make use of non-Israelitic ideas of a divine king, when he wanted to build up the messianic hope in his people, or in other words, that the belief in Christ, the Messiah, is rooted ultimately in the ancient Oriental ideas of the divine king.”<sup>31</sup> It is in view of such a background and source for these “royal psalms” that we are prompted to ask whether modern exegesis at all recognizes messianism in these Psalms, and whether it permits us to interpret them typically, or even to find in them a direct reference to the Messiah. Strictly speaking, it does not.

Friedrich Baumgärtel in a most recent article states the case of modern exegesis without any equivocation. “Typological and Christological interpretation in our day is an anachronism, which scientific

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29 *Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament, Psalmen*, XV 3, Neukirchener Verlag, 1958, p. 184.

30 There is no direct reference to this Enthronement Festival to be found in the Old Testament, let alone a festival at which Jehovah was annually enthroned as king. The expression: מֶלֶךְ יְהוָה in Psalms 93:1, 96:10, 97:1, and 99:1 has been interpreted to be a coronation cry or acclamation and consequently has been translated: “The Lord has become a king.” However, Luther’s translation, *Der Herr ist König* (“The Lord is king”) is undoubtedly closer to the original meaning and does not at all imply an annual enthronement or reinstallation of Jehovah as king parallel with the annual enthronement of the Babylonian god Marduk. This does not exclude the possibility of a borrowing and a retention on the part of the inspired writers of terms employed by the Babylonians and Egyptians for their enthronement festivals. What is more, a comparison aids us in gaining a more precise picture of the enthronement of an Israelitish king, since references in the Old Testament are limited (cf. II Sam. 15:10; I Kings 1:11, 18; II Kings 9:13).

31 *Studies in Biblical Theology No. 18, The Messiah in the Old Testament*, by Elmer Ringgren, Allenson Inc., Chicago, 1956, p. 24. These Studies “are planned to further the study of Biblical theology within the Church” and “the primary aim of the series is to set out more clearly the nature of Biblical faith as a living phenomenon of vital significance for the contemporary Christian.”



veracity does not permit.” And then he tells us that the typological and Christological understanding must be eliminated, because it does not take over the Old Testament Word in the sense in which it wants to be understood (*in seinem Selbstverständnis*).<sup>32</sup> This is, however, not only the opinion of one liberal scholar, but is the well-espoused interpretation of modern exegesis. Returning once more to the “royal psalms,” Mowinckel tells us that “they do not speak of a future, much less an eschatological, Messiah, but of the contemporary, earthly king of David’s line, who has just been enthroned.... Of the origin and earliest history of the Messianic idea they can tell us nothing; for in the thought and feeling of the poet and those for whom he wrote, they referred not to the Messiah but to the conditions of their own time.”<sup>33</sup>

Most modern commentators follow this line of thought. The newest German commentary puts the question directly: “Can Psalm 110 be understood as a Messianic prophecy?” and answers: “It is wrong to apply a super-historical Christological mold of the Messiah to the Old Testament texts. By doing so orthodoxy has countenanced a docetic conception of the Messiah.”<sup>34</sup> *The Interpreter’s Bible*, which in our country will be used more and more by pastors of all denominations, also by students of our seminaries, has this to say in its *Exegesis*: “While the psalm has a primary meaning rich in promise for the age in which it was written, its phraseology and symbolism lend themselves to wider applications, and it is the fact that explains how the church found in these words, as in Isa. 53 and elsewhere in the OT, prophetic allusions to the ministry and work of Jesus. This psalm is the most often quoted in the NT because it was given a messianic interpretation. How early this interpretation arose among the Jews we do not know, but it is clear from the Gospels that it was current at the time of Jesus’ ministry... The psalm was employed by the early church in a messianic sense (Acts 2:34–35), and quotations from and echoes of it are numerous in the NT” And in its *Exposition* we read: “Who the king was of whom the psalmist wrote, no one knows. It may have been David or one of the Maccabees. It may have been an ideal messiah, the national hero of whom the Hebrews dreamed generation after generation.”<sup>35</sup>

But how about the question of our Lord: “How then doth David in spirit call him Lord” (Matt. 22:43; cf. Mark 12:35; Luke 20:41). To this Walter Eichrodt, who still sponsors a revised typical interpretation of the Old Testament, in effect replies: “One but has to think of the quoting of Psalm 16 and 110 as *ipsissima verba* of David in Acts 2:25ff. and Mark 12:35ff., and it becomes evident that only in part or not at all we can make the argumentation of the New Testament witnesses our own.”<sup>36</sup>

This, however, does not prevent modern exegetes from favoring a certain typology and fulfillment of Old Testament passages. They tell us that it is the duty of the exegete not to keep his gaze riveted on the cultic and historical sources, but after having studied them to give recognition to those passages which are still capable of fulfillment. The modern exegete must keep in mind that the Old Testament is adjusted to the New Testament. He is always being called upon to make this clear to the modern reader, and typology will also aid him in doing this. Mowinckel is endeavoring to perform this duty in reference to the royal psalms with these words: “The fact that the worshipper is in many instances a historical king of Israel does not alter the fundamental fact that the psalms are not prophecies but prayers with contemporary reference. But the words of these psalms have proved to be more enduring and far-reaching. So powerful are they in faith and in realism that in the fullness of time they could give expression to the situation and the achievement of Jesus... The early Christian community therefore regarded them as a perfectly valid expression for what they themselves had witnessed in their Lord and Master. The worshippers of ancient times became types prefiguring Christ. The words of the psalms found their true realization and fulfillment in Jesus Himself. In an account of the Messianic concept all these psalms must be considered again in the appropriate context as sources or documents concerning the thoughts about the Messiah which were current in the Christian community. But of the origin and the earliest history of the

32 *Theologische Bücherei, Bd 11. Probleme alttestamentlicher Hermeneutik* hrsgb. von Claus Westermann, Christian Laiser Verlag, München 1960, p. 130.

33 *He That Cometh*, by S. Mowinckel, trsl. by G. W. Anderson. Abingdon Press, New York, Nashville, 1954, p. 11.

34 Hans Joachim Kraus, op. cit., p. 763.

35 *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Volume IV, The Book of Psalms, New York Abingdon Press, Nashville, pp. 588 and 591.

36 Claus Westermann, op. cit., p. 213.

Messianic idea they can tell us nothing; for, in thought and feeling of the poet and those for whom he wrote, they referred not to the Messiah but to the conditions of their own time.”<sup>37</sup>

Still in discussing Isaiah 9:1–6 Mowinckel sees in this passage “that unrealized element in the ideal of kingship, which in time produced the Messianic hope. We are dealing with an ideal of kingship and a hope which in the last resort are supra-mundane, and which, in accordance with the spirit of revealed religion, came at last to express the recognition that no human king can bring that ideal and hope to fulfillment, but that the zeal of the Lord God Almighty must perform it, as the prophet here clearly sees. There was, therefore, every justification for the *later Jewish interpretation* (italics ours) of this passage as referring to the future Messiah, and for the Christians who from the beginning recognized that it had found its real fulfillment in Christ... That God Himself must perform the work, establish justice, bestow salvation, but that He will do it through a divinely equipped man, ‘a greater than Solomon,’ ‘a greater than Jonah’—that is what this prophet recognized. But who the child should be, was still hidden from him. It has been revealed to the Church; and there is every justification for reading this promise to the congregation as the first lesson at Morning Prayer on Christmas Day.”<sup>38</sup>

But this, undoubtedly, is going too far for Friedrich Baumgärtel, who is fully conscious of the fact that he with his argumentation is walking on the very brink of a yawning precipice and that he is raising critical questions in regard to theology as a science, to the relationship of the Bible and of systematic theology, of faith—revelation—the Word of God to one another, fundamental questions pertaining to the meaning and our understanding of the Scriptures and our adherence and loyalty to the Confessions. He does not want theological bridges built in such a manner that typological and Christological modes of understanding and interpretation of the Old Testament are renewed, modes which go back to the time when the Old Testament, far removed from all religio-historical penetration and from all historical thinking, was understood from the viewpoint of verbal inspiration.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, verbal inspiration is the very issue at stake. No less is the authority of the Word of our Lord Jesus drawn into question. Lenski and Leupold in their commentaries have called attention to this issue and have met it foursquare. Leupold, for instance, says concerning the 110th Psalm as a Messianic prophecy: “That it is granted to David to see more than others had seen must here also be attributed to the fact that David was ‘in the Spirit.’ Truth of this sort is revealed by divine inspiration.”<sup>40</sup>

It is this fact, namely that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God” (II Tim. 3:16), which we want to keep in mind as we are about to undertake an interpretation of Isaiah 7:14–16, “knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but the holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Pet. 1: 20–21).

The words preceding our text read as follows: “Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord” (vss. 10–12). According to this context the Lord Himself spoke unto Ahaz, who was under attack by Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, encouraging him to ask a sign of Him. No limit is placed on the realm from which Ahaz is to seek a sign, whether it be from the depth of Sheol or from the height of heaven. It is therefore needless to speculate what sign Ahaz would have asked for had he taken the Lord at His word. It suffices to know that the sign was to convince Ahaz of the certainty of divine help against Rezin and Pekah and of the preservation of Jerusalem. Ahaz refuses to ask the Lord for a sign, advancing the reason that he does not want to tempt the Lord. The Judean king wants to create the impression that he does not doubt the Lord’s Word and that he does not want to make himself guilty of the sin of unbelief by putting the Lord to a test, as the Israelites had done at Massah and Meribah (Ex. 17:7 and Deut. 16:6). His real reason for refusing to ask for a sign was the fear wrought by his unbelief of being committed to a policy in which he had no confidence. He prefers to ask the king of Assyria for aid (II Kings 16:7) and to renounce his allegiance to

37 Mowinckel, op. cit., p. 12.

38 Ibid., p. 109f..

39 Claus Westermann, op. cit., p. 137.

40 *Exposition of The Psalms*, by H. C. Leupold, D.D., The Wart-burg Press, Columbus, 1959, p. 777.

Jehovah. Because of this very act of unbelief God shall give him a sign of His own choosing. God's patience is at an end. With his unbelief Ahaz had not only wearied men but God (vs. 13). "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (vs. 14).

The giving of this sign hinges first of all on the לָכֵן (*lakhen*), "therefore", with which it is being offered and reminds us constantly of its threatening element. This threatening element is not to be sought exclusively in verse 15 or in verse 17, to which the *Interpreter's Bible* refers us, but already in verse 14 as quoted above. According to this verse it is not Ahaz and not the son of Ahaz through whom God saves His people, but a nameless virgin of humble rank, whom God has chosen, and whom He shows to His prophet in the mirror of His counsel. She will bring forth the divine deliverer of His people in the midst of the impending tribulations.

In addition to the לָכֵן (*lakhen*), "therefore", we also have the הוּא (*hu'*), "himself", which no less characterizes the promise made to Ahaz. Prof. August Pieper in *Die grosse Weissagung vom Jungfrauensohn in ihrem historischen Rahmen* ("The Great Prophecy concerning the Son of the Virgin in its Historical Setting") has this to say: "All of the following statement is characterized by means of the 'himself' as a threatening prophecy on the apostate house of David and Judah. You do not want a sign from God. Then you shall have one, whether you want it or not. God will give it to you without your asking at His very own discretion. But what was meant as a token of favor shall now be a token of judgment for you, and it is this: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."<sup>41</sup>

The import of these two introductory words "therefore" and "himself" will have to be kept in mind if we do not want to go astray in our interpretation of this prophecy and misunderstand the giving of the sign as if the Lord still wanted to give Ahaz a token of His favor, a guarantee of His help against Rezin and Pekah and of their downfall and imminent destruction. This sign, as Prof. Pieper further carries out, is being proclaimed as an accentuated renunciation and as a token of judgment. The sign as such concerning the son of the virgin has no trace of grace in it anymore for Ahaz, whose heart is ultimately hardened, and for the house of David and Judah, whose hearts in like manner are hardened. For them it is solely a sign of their final rejection. One who does not get this point creates nothing but confusion in the interpretation of our passage, as Prof. Pieper concludes these his remarks.

But what is the meaning of the sign that it should be a token of judgment for Ahaz? According to the translation of the *King James Version* one seems to encounter no difficulty in understanding what God wanted to say to Ahaz. Since, however, the *Revised Standard Version* has given Isaiah's words a different rendering, a discussion as to its exact meaning has again arisen. The discussion revolves around one word of this prophecy, namely the word עַלְמָה (*almah*). The translation of this word in this prophecy is the only point of difference between the *King James Version* and the *Revised Standard Version*. While the *King James Version* has followed the *Septuagint* with its παρθένος (*parthenos*) in rendering עַלְמָה (*almah*) with "a virgin", the *Revised Standard Version* has followed the other Greek translators, Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, with their νεανίς (*neanis*) and therefore renders עַלְמָה (*almah*) with "a young woman." This rendering leaves room for a typical interpretation of our prophecy, while the translation "virgin" demands a direct Messianic interpretation. Which of the two versions have rendered עַלְמָה (*almah*) most adequately?

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41 Prof. Pieper's article is to be found in the first volume of the *Theologische Quartalschrift* 1904, pages 219–240. Our quotation reads in the original: *Die ganze folgende Aussage wird durch das "selbst" charakterisiert als Gerichtsweissagung für das abgefallene Haus David und Juda. Ihr wollt kein Zeichen von Gott, so sollt ihr eins haben, ob ihr's wollt oder nicht. Gott wird's euch geben ohne euer Fordern, aus eigenem freien Gutdünken. Aber was euch als ein Gnadenzeichen vermeint war, soll jetzt ein Zeichen des Gerichts für euch sein, und das ist dieses: Siehe die Jungfrau ist schwanger und gebiert einen Sohn und sie nennt seinen Namen Immanuel* (p. 229).

It can be stated at the outset that lexicographers do not disagree in regard to the etymological meaning of the word עַלְמָה (*almah*). From Gesenius' *Thesaurus* to Koehler-Baumgarten's *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* the meaning given is that of *puella nubilis, virgo matura, mannbares Mädchen*, a girl, maiden, young woman, sc. of marriageable age. Gesenius-Buhl 16th edition adds however: *Das Wort bezeichnet lediglich das Mädchen als mannbares, nicht als Jungfrau (bethulah), auch nicht als verehelicht oder nicht verehelicht*, which Edward Robinson in his translation of Gesenius renders: "The primary idea of the word is not that of unspotted virginity, for which the Hebrews have the special word *bethulah* ... but simply the being of marriageable age, the age of puberty." Kittel in his *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament (sub parthenos)* agrees that the primary idea of the word is not that of unspotted virginity in stating: *Die Unberührtheit ist in almah jedenfalls nicht betont* (The spotless virginity is not especially emphasized in *almah*). This meaning is in conformity with the etymology of עַלְמָה (*almah*), which is one with the Arabic verb *galima*, "be vehemently affected with lust," from which not only עַלְמָה (*almah*) but also עֵלֶם (*elem*) and the Arabic *gulâmun*, young vigorous man, are derived.

On the strength of these etymological and lexicographical findings the rendering "young woman" (of marriageable age) for עַלְמָה (*almah*) seems to have much in its favor and even to be the most adequate translation. It is therefore not at all surprising that most expositors have made this translation their own. The Rev. Arthur F. Katt in a study entitled *Isaiah 7:14: Almah—Virgin (KJV), or Young Woman (RSV)?* has listed all the meanings given to the word by Old Testament scholars old and new. On page 4 paragraph 5 of his study we read: "RSV 'young woman' (Isa. 7:14): supported not only by lexicographers, linguists, exegetes already adduced, but by many others (translators, expositors, scholars)" whose definitions and interpretations are then quoted by him on the following pages. Some of these we do not want to withhold from our readers, since they represent the strongest arguments in favor of the rendering "young woman" for עַלְמָה (*almah*) that have come to our notice.

John P. Milton, Professor of Old Testament, Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul, writes in *God's Word to Men*: "If the word *almah* must mean virgin and nothing else, every translation mentioned (KJV, ARV, Douay, Luther, LXX, Vulgate) is incorrect in from 3 to 5 passages, and should therefore have been condemned long ago. It can be correctly translated 'young woman' even in Is. 7:14; for if it can mean young woman, or damsel, or maiden, or pike (Norwegian), or *flicka* (Swedish), or *Magd* (German) in some passages, we dare not insist that it must mean *virgin* in Is. 7:14, unless we claim that not only the Hebrew original, but also the Greek translation with *parthenos*, meaning virgin, was inspired. That would be a dangerous doctrine" (p. 7).

William Sanford La Sor, Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, who is designated by Katt as a "Conservative," has this to say in an article entitled, *Young Woman or Virgin?*: "An examination of any Hebrew lexicon or any Bible dictionary will reveal that the word *bethulah* means 'virgin' (*virgo intacta*), while *almah* means 'young woman of marriageable age, married<sup>42</sup> or unmarried.' These definitions are uniform, whether in liberal or conservative writings. 1) study of root: The only conclusion to be drawn from the evidence, in my opinion, is that *bethulah* unequivocally means 'virgin,' whereas *almah* simply means 'young woman.' 2) evidence of early translators: only 2 out of 9 times did LXX render *almah parthenos* (but 4 times *neanis* 'young woman'): Apparently the LXX translators did not feel that the word *almah* had to be translated by *parthenos*, 'virgin' ... The translators Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion were even able to use *neanis* 'young woman' in Isaiah 7:14" (p. 7).

Dr. J. Gresham Machen, "the champion Presbyterian fundamentalist," writes in his epoch-making classic, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*: a) It may readily be admitted that 'almah' does not actually indicate virginity, as does 'bethulah'; it means rather 'a young woman of marriageable age.' b) Whatever the true

<sup>42</sup> 42 In the Old Testament *almah* is never used of a married woman. In the *Ras Shamra* or *Ugaritic* texts it is never applied to a young woman after the birth of her first child. Cf. page 179 of this issue, footnote 5.

interpretation of Is. 7:14 may have been, the actual interpretation of that prophecy which was prevalent among the Jews in the *first century* after Christ was, unless all indications fail, as far as possible from the finding in the prophecy any prediction of the virgin birth of the Messiah. c) That was really a prophecy of the virgin birth; but it was couched in such terms, as to be fully intelligible only after the event. At any rate, whatever may have been the reason, it seems perfectly clear that the later Jews did not interpret Isa. 7:14 as referring to the virgin birth of the Messiah. d) Neither Justin Martyr nor his Jewish opponent displays the slightest acquaintance with any non-Christian Jews who expected the Messiah to be born of a virgin, or who interpreted Is. 7:14 in accordance with any expectation of that sort. This fact is worthy of careful consideration” (p. 13). On page 14 Katt after having added many more quotations from Machen’s classic, in a note draws these conclusions: “Isaiah’s words were intended to be understood. If *almah* to the prophet’s contemporaries meant *virgin*, they would so have understood it. But they didn’t. Again: In *pre-Christian* times there was *no anti-Christian bias* influencing the Jews to give *almah* an unnatural slant. —Finally: Machen puts up an unanswerable defense for the Virgin Birth of Christ, but in nowise on the basis or with the least help of Is. 7:14. The Virgin Birth is firmly established in the NT and does not stand in need of Is. 7:14 to give it support. So he contends” (p. 14).

In view of these strong statements and arguments made in favor of the rendering “young woman” for *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) in our prophecy, the question is brought very close to us whether the *Septuagint* had any special reason for translating *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) with *παρθένος* (*parthenos*) and whether with this translation it actually hit upon the meaning which Isaiah wanted to express with the term. In other words, why did Isaiah use *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) instead of *בְּתוּלָה* (*bethulah*) if he really intended to prophesy the virgin birth of the Messiah?

We already have learned to know the meaning of *בְּתוּלָה* (*bethulah*) as expressing the idea of unspotted virginity in differentiation from *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) with its specific meaning designating maturity and puberty. This meaning, of course, does not exclude the possibility of *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) being applied to a virgin. The important question is whether it is also applied to a married woman. In the eight passages besides our Isaiah passage in which this word is used in the Old Testament it never refers to a married woman but always to a virgin.<sup>43</sup> It is true, this limited number of passages does not exclude the possibility that it could also have been applied to a married woman and that Isaiah could have thus used it in our prophecy. This possibility, however, loses much probability through the non-biblical *Ras Shamra* or *Ugaritic* texts,<sup>44</sup> where this word is not only used a number of times in reference to an unmarried young woman, but where it is used synonymously with the Canaanite word for virgin. This is the case in a text which corresponds word for word with our Isaiah passage: “Behold, the young woman will have a son” (*hl glmt tld bn*). This line announcing the birth of a royal heir is preceded by the parallel line: “A virgin will give birth” (*tld btl*). The two synonymous words in these two lines are: *btl* and *glmt*, which are equivalent to the Hebrew *bethulah* and *almah*. Nikkal, the bride of Karit, who is to give birth to the royal heir, is characterized by these words as virgin and as damsel. This fact does not prove, as Mowinckel correctly states, that the word *glmt* as such means virgin, but it does prove that it could very well refer to a virgin and even be used together with the word for virgin in two parallel lines.

Edward J. Young in his *Studies in Isaiah* is therefore fully justified in drawing the conclusion that the word *παρθένος* (*parthenos*) as used by the translators of the LXX “is a far more accurate rendering of *עַלְמָה*

43 This is also true concerning Proverbs 30:19: “And the way of a man with a maid,” where *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) is interpreted by some as referring to a young married woman, but which both Luther (*Und eines Mannes Weg an einer Magd*) and our *King James Version* have correctly translated as referring to a “maid,” an unmarried young woman. Cf. A. Pieper op. cit., p. 231 and Edw. J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah*, p. 176.

44 Cf. *Ugaritic Literature, A Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts* by Cyrus H. Gordon, Roma 1949, p. 63f.. Cf. also page 184 of this issue of our quarterly.

(*almah*) than is the ἡ νεάνις (*hē neanis*) of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. At this particular point the translators of Isaiah showed remarkable insight into the true meaning of the text. It is not correct to say that they ‘interpreted the message as referring to the virgin birth and the Messianic ministry’ ... These Greek translators naturally knew nothing of the virgin birth; they merely were seeking to translate the original correctly” (p. 177). While this explains why the Greek translators preferred παρθένος (*parthenos*) to νεάνις (*neanis*) for עַלְמָה (*almah*), it does not yet explain why Isaiah inspired by the Spirit of prophecy preferred עַלְמָה (*almah*) to בְּתוּלָה (*bethulah*).

It is Edward J. Young in his *Studies in Isaiah* (p. 179f.) who has answered this question for us to our satisfaction. He calls our attention to the fact that “there were two classes of women who might bear the designation בְּתוּלָה (*bethulah*). One of these was the young girl who may have been of marriageable age, but who was technically a virgin in that she had not known a man. The other was the בְּתוּלָה מְאֲרָשָׁה (*bethulah meorashah*) or “betrothed virgin.” This betrothed virgin according to Deuteronomy 22, verses 23–29 “stood in a legal relationship to her husband-to-be that was not far removed from the state of marriage itself. She is called his ‘wife,’ אִשָּׁת (*eshet*), and a violation of the state of betrothal was regarded as being just as serious as a violation of the married state. In both cases the penalty was the same, and the act of unchastity was regarded as adultery, punishable by death.”

On the other hand this 22nd chapter of Deuteronomy also speaks of a בְּתוּלָה (*bethulah*) who is not betrothed but who being enticed by a man (cf. Exod. 22–15) was to become his wife after the man had given her father fifty shekels. In the former case the penalty was a very severe one—death for both when both were found guilty, or only for the man when he had taken the betrothed virgin by force. In the latter case, namely that of a girl who is a virgin but who is not betrothed, the fine which the man had to pay is fifty shekels. This can only be explained by the fact that the difference drawn between a betrothed virgin and one that was not betrothed was far-reaching indeed. It alone explains the severity of the penalty. A betrothed virgin who has yielded willingly to a man “is regarded not merely as guilty of fornication but as guilty of adultery. She has acted, in other words, like an unfaithful wife, and, therefore she is to be punished with death” (p. 182).

This should make us very conscious of the fact that there were two classes of virgins in the Old Testament, betrothed virgins and virgins not betrothed, and that one and the same word, namely בְּתוּלָה (*bethulah*), was used for both. Consequently explanatory phrases had to be added to the word בְּתוּלָה (*bethulah*), in order to distinguish the one meaning from the other. When the sacred writer wanted to refer explicitly to a betrothed virgin he added the word מְאֲרָשָׁה (*meorashah*). When he referred to a true virgin who was not betrothed, as in the case of Rebekah in Genesis 24:16, he added the phrase, “neither had any man known her,” or as in the case of the 400 “young virgins” of Jabesh-Gilead in Judges 21:12 he added, “who had known no man by lying with any male.” “This language,” as Young points out in referring to the last two phrases, “is not redundant,” but serves to make clear to the reader that the respective virgins “were truly virgins and not betrothed. If the mere word בְּתוּלָה (*bethulah*) would have had the one or the other connotation, there would indeed have been no point in an added description. But since the word as such was not without ambiguity, therefore such descriptions were added to remove all ambiguity.”

This amply explains why Isaiah did not employ the word בְּתוּלָה in his prophecy. “Had he used the word,” Young argues, “one would not have known precisely what he had in mind. Would he have been speaking of one who was truly a virgin or would he rather have in mind one who was betrothed, and hence a wife.... The usage of the word in Biblical Hebrew is ambiguous; it evidently was not suitable for the prophets’ s

purpose.” עַלְמָה (*almah*) was suitable and was chosen deliberately by the prophet. It alone insured the thought that the one whom it designated was an unmarried woman. Biblical as well as non-Biblical passages<sup>45</sup> use it only for an unmarried woman and there is no reason why our Isaiah passage should be an exception. Consequently its usage as far as we have a knowledge of it was not ambiguous and therefore it served the purpose of Isaiah’s prophecy better than בְּתוּלָה (*bethulah*) would have done.

This raises the question as to the best English equivalent for עַלְמָה (*almah*). It is no simple matter to find an exact equivalent in our language, for that matter in any other language, whether the Greek, the Latin, or the German, which corresponds in every detail to the characteristic meaning of the Semitic word עַלְמָה (*almah*). Luther already took pains to find an exact equivalent for it in German. He would not have done so were *Jungfrau* as a translation of *παρθένος* (*parthenos*) and of *virgo* (*Vulgate*) the exact equivalent for עַלְמָה (*almah*). In his discussion with the Jews he therefore took the word *Magd* (maiden) into serious consideration. In his writing, *Dass Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei*, he explains why he does so: “A *Magd* is a female (*Weibsbild*) who is still young, crowned with a bridal wreath as a sign of her virginity, so that one can say: She is still a maid and no woman. And although we are dealing here with another word than the word for *Jungfrau* (*bethulah*), still the word *almah* denotes a maid (*Magd*) who has not yet known a man, even as *elem* denotes an unmarried youth. Therefore Moses’ sister (Exod. 2:8) and Rebekah (Gen. 24:16) are called *almah*, while they still were *Jungfrauen* (virgins).” From this Luther draws the conclusion that anyone who does not want to let *Jungfrau* and *Magd* be one and the same thing, simply because two words are involved, such a one is carrying on a war of words. Thus also in our passage, although Isaiah is not saying *bethulah* but *almah*, still he means such a maiden who is marriageable, still wearing the bridal wreath, whom we call in idiomatic German a *Magd*. And still, Luther concludes, if I had to tell Isaiah how to say it, he would have had to say it with just that word *almah*, and not with the word *bethulah*. For *almah* is here a more fitting word than *bethulah*. It is also more readily to be understood when I say: *Siehe, eine Magd geht schwanger* (Behold, a maid shall conceive), than when I say: *Eine Jungfrau geht schwanger* (A virgin shall conceive).

But why, we ask, can the former be more readily understood than the latter? The word *Jungfrau*, Luther carries out, has a wider meaning. A *Jungfrau* may also be a female of fifty or sixty years who is barren. But a *Magd* is really a young female (*junges Weibsbild*), marriageable, fruitful, and still unmarried. The word *Magd* does not only imply virginity (*Jungfrauschaft*), but also youth and fruitfulness. Therefore in German young people are commonly called *Maegde* or *Maegdevolk* and not *Jungfrauenvolk*. But in giving a final meaning to the word עַלְמָה (*almah*) he writes:

“It means a *Jungfrau* or *Magd*, who still wears a bridal wreath in her hair, and who has not yet become a woman.”<sup>46</sup>

In view of all this one can well understand why Luther did not feel constrained to drop the word *Jungfrau* from his translation of Isaiah 7:14 and to replace it by the word *Magd*. Even in his Christmas hymns Luther uses the word *Jungfrau* when speaking of the virgin Mary. For both *Jungfrau* and *Magd* had the same meaning for Luther, namely that of a “virgin.” And in Luther’s usage of the word a *Jungfrau* was not only a virgin by connotation. The essential and primary meaning which Luther wanted to convey by means of this word is that of *Jungfrauschaft*, virginity. That is why he translated עַלְמָה with *Jungfrau*. At the same time he wanted to exclude the word *Frau* (woman) as an equivalent for עַלְמָה (*almah*). He insisted that nowhere in the

45 Mention should be made of the fact that in the *Keret-Epic* of the *Ugaritic* texts *glmt* (Hebrew: *almah*) is used as a parallel for *att*, woman, in a wedding feast announcement. “It describes the woman who is not yet queen, but who, after the marriage to Keret, will be the queen.” Thus “it would appear that the word *glmt* is not used of a married woman.” Cf. Edw; J. Young, op. cit., p. 169.

46 St. Louis Ed., Vol. XX, pp. 180ff. Cf. *Quartalschrift* 1953, pp. 64ff.

whole Bible the word עַלְמָה (*almah*) means “woman” but always “virgin” (*Jungfrau*) or “maid” (*Magd*). In rendering עַלְמָה (*almah*) with either *Jungfrau* (virgin) or *Magd* (maid) Luther is well aware of using these words in contrast to the word *Frau* (woman).

Luther is not alone with this his translation of עַלְמָה (*almah*). Outstanding scholars of our day fully agree with him. Edward J. Young, even in view of non-Biblical passages, can reaffirm what Luther already had asserted. His affirmation reads: “The word עַלְמָה alone makes it clear that the mother is to be unmarried. We are far from asserting that this word is the precise equivalent of the English ‘virgin.’ It rather seems to be closer to words such as ‘damsel’ or ‘maiden,’ words which most naturally suggest an unmarried girl. In fact the Hebrew word *almah* would seem to be a shade stronger than the English words ‘maiden’ and ‘damsel,’ since there is no evidence that it was ever used of a married woman. Consequently, one is tempted to wish that those who repeat the old assertion that it may be used of a woman, whether married or not, would produce some evidence for their statement.”<sup>47</sup>

Proksch in his commentary on Isaiah is just as emphatic in arguing that עַלְמָה (*almah*) in all the other eight Old Testament passages always has the meaning of *Mädchen*, maiden, even if the emphasis lies more on the marriageable age (*Mannbarkeit*) than on the virginity (*Jungfraulichkeit*). But he adds: “A married woman is never designated by עַלְמָה, even if theoretically this were possible. Had Isaiah desired merely to emphasize the womanliness (*Weiblichkeit*) and not the miracle, he would have said אִשָּׁה, and not עַלְמָה. That he does not say בְּתוּלָה finds its explanation in the fact that בְּתוּלָה excludes the idea of child-bearing. Essentially the translation of the Septuagint with *παρθένος*, of the Vulgate with *virgou* is in place, while Aquila’s, Symmachus’, and Theodotion’s *νεᾶνις* distorts the meaning.”<sup>48</sup>

It does this, as we can add, because it *also* has the connotation of “a young married woman.” *Νεᾶνις* according to *Liddell and Scott* simply means “girl,” “maiden.” Homer in the *Odyssey* (7:20) speaks of a *παρθενική νεᾶνις*, a youthful maiden. If *νεᾶνις* *only* had this meaning, it could be recognized as an equivalent of עַלְמָה (*almah*). But since it *also* had the meaning of “a young married woman”—and this according to all scholars is the meaning which these Greek translators wanted to convey to their readers—it indeed must be stamped as a word which “distorts the meaning” of our prophecy.

The translators of the *Revised Standard Version* in rendering עַלְמָה (*almah*) with “young woman,” do not tell us whether they want this expression to designate “a young unmarried woman” or “a young married woman.” Volkmar Hertrich in his *Isaiah Commentary (Das Alte Testament deutsch)* also translates: *Siehe, das junge Weib ist schwanger* (Behold, the young woman is with child), but in his exposition does not leave the reader in doubt as to how he wants the word עַלְמָה (*almah*) and his rendering, *das junge Weib*, understood. He asks: Was the Septuagint, when it translated the word with *παρθένος* justified in seeing in this prophecy a testimony to the virgin birth: Behold, a virgin is with child...? Or do the Greek translators, Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, do more justice to the original meaning of our prophecy, who render עַלְמָה with *νεᾶνις*: The young woman is with child ...? ... This word is never used for a married woman. In Genesis 24:43, where it is used in reference to Rebekah, it has the meaning ‘virgin’ (*Jungfrau*). Therefore the Septuagint’s rendering of

47 Op. cit., p. 183.

48 *Jesaia I übersetzt und erklärt von D. Otto Proksch* 1930, p. 121.



*parthenos* is correct, while this Version otherwise more often says *neanis*. This observation permits the conclusion,” Hertrich adds, “that the *Septuagint* also regarded *almah* in Isaiah 7 as a virgin.”<sup>49</sup>

Walter Eichrodt, the author of *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, in a Bible Study conducted at a teachers’ conference and published under the title *Gottes Ruf im Alten Testament* (“God’s Summons in the Old Testament”) with but one exception translates our prophecy as Luther did. This one exception, in strict literal accord with the Hebrew, is the definite article before *Jungfrau* (virgin), so that his translation reads: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, *the* virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”<sup>50</sup> To the word *Jungfrau* (virgin) Eissfeldt adds this footnote: “This translation does not exactly reproduce the Hebrew original, but still may come nearer to the original meaning than the modern favourite rendering: ‘the young woman.’”<sup>51</sup>

“One of the most informed and competent Jewish scholars of the day,” as Edward J. Young calls him, Cyrus H. Gordon, Professor of Assyriology and Egyptology at Dropsie College, in a short article in *The Journal of Bible and Religion*<sup>52</sup> has this to say: “From Ugarit of around 1400 B.C. comes a text celebrating the marriage of the male and female lunar deities. It is there predicted that the goddess will bear a son.... The terminology is remarkably close to that in Isaiah 7:14. However, the Ugaritic statement that the bride will bear a son is fortunately given in parallelistic form; in 77:7 she is called by the exact etymological counterpart of Hebrew *betulah* ‘virgin.’ Therefore, the New Testament rendering of *almah* as ‘virgin’ for Isaiah 7:14 rests on the older Jewish interpretation, which in turn is now borne out for *precisely this annunciation formula* by a text that is not only pre-Isaianic but is preMosaic in the form that we now have it on a clay tablet.”

To summarize: In the second millennium B.C. a Ugaritic text already brings *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) into parallelism with *בְּתוּלָה* (*betulah*) and vice versa. In the second century B.C. the Septuagint did nothing less and thereby was following an ancient precedent in rendering *עַלְמָה* (*almah*) with *παρθένος* (*parthenos*). Therefore Matthew, who under the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit bears witness to the virgin birth of Jesus, quotes from Isaiah by way of the Septuagint saying: “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matt. 1:22).

In this connection it is worthy of special note that Isaiah introduces his prophecy of a virgin birth with a *הִנֵּה* (*hinneh*), “behold,” thereby making known what he was seeing in a vision and what neither Ahaz nor the house of David was able to see. In order duly to appreciate this introductory *hinneh*, “behold,” we must know that it was used in the dream-visions of Jacob (Gen. 28:12–13) and of Joseph (37:7). No less was this done in the visions of the prophets, the *hinneh*, “behold,” even being preceded by the words: “Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me, and behold ...” (Amos 7:1, 4, 7; 8:1). This *hinneh*, “behold,” was of necessity used by Isaiah, because the prophet was relating something which God had shown to him alone and which he alone had seen. But not with one word does Isaiah reveal the identity of this virgin. Her identity is revealed for the first time by the angel of the Lord when He spoke to Joseph of Mary and of that which was conceived in her being of the Holy Ghost. It is then that Matthew in his divinely guided use of our prophecy adds: “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet” (1:22). Truly, “Matthew as interpreter towers high above the whole maze of opinions, when he sees the Immanuel prophecy fulfilled in Jesus.”<sup>53</sup>

49 *Der Prophet Jesaja, Kapitel 1–12, übersetzt und erklärt von Volkmar Hertrich* 1950, p. 127f.

50 The original reads: *Darum so wird euch der Herr selbst ein Zeichen gehen: Siehe die Jungfrau ist schwanger, und wird einen Sohn gebären, den wird sie heissen Immanuel* (p. 60).

51 This footnote reads in the original: *Diese Uebersetzung gibt das hebräische Original nicht genau wieder, dürfte aber dem ursprünglichen Sinn näher kommen als die heute beliebte Wiedergabe: das junge Weib*” (p. 60).

52 Vol. XXI, April 1953, p. 106.

53 *Ueberblickt man den ganzen Abschnitt auf Grund der Exegese, so hebt sich Matthäus (Matt. 1:23) als Ausleger turmhoch über das Gewirr der Meinungen empor, wenn er die Immanuelweissagung in Jesus erfüllt sieht* (Proksch, op. cit., p. 124).

Although Isaiah says nothing to identify the virgin mother of the child, he does reveal something concerning the child, which dare not be overlooked by us in our study of his prophecy. It is the poverty and the period of the child's infancy of which he speaks in verses 15 and 16. According to the *Revised Standard Version* these words read: "He shall eat curds (Luther and KJV: butter) and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted." Verse 15 undoubtedly finds its interpretation in verses 21 and 22: "And it shall come to pass in that day that a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep; and it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk that they shall give he shall eat butter: for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land." But how about verse 16? Does not this verse force us to seek the birth of the child in the days of Ahaz, a few years after the promise had been given? Anyone who has read the many commentaries on this verse will know of the many attempts at finding a satisfactory interpretation. Joseph Alexander in his *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (pp. 166ff.) has presented a full view of the different interpretations and has subsumed them under three different "hypotheses."

The first hypothesis, which Alexander declares to be false, is that the only birth and infancy referred to in Isaiah 7:14–16 are the birth and infancy of a child born (or supposed to be born) in the ordinary course of nature, and in the days of Isaiah himself. This interpretation with its many variations has again been revived by J. J. Stamm in an article, *Die Immanuel-Weissagung und die Eschatologie des Jesaja*,<sup>54</sup> in which he designates *almah* as the wife and Immanuel as the third son of the prophet Isaiah, the other two sons, Shearjashub and Mahershalalhashbaz also having prophetic names. With this interpretation Stamm, of course, contends that the original meaning of our prophecy is not at all a messianic one, that the messianic interpretation has its origin in a misunderstanding of the meaning of *almah* as virgin.

The second hypothesis which Alexander lists supposes "that the prophecy relates to two distinct births and two different children and that the prophecy contains two promises. First, that Christ should be born of a virgin, and then that Judah should be delivered before Shearjashub (or before any child born within a certain time) could distinguish good from evil." This is the supposition of a double sense or rather of a double fulfillment, which is actually to be applied to many Old Testament prophecies.

This interpretation has been newly presented to us by Walter Mueller in an article, *A Virgin Shall Conceive*,<sup>55</sup> In it he calls attention to "the principle of multiple fulfillment." A double or multiple fulfillment can again be subdivided into an "immediate and partial" and in a "future and complete" fulfillment. According to the Rev. Mueller the immediate and partial fulfillment of our prophecy is found in Isaiah 8, where the conception and the birth of Mahershalalhashbaz, the second son of Isaiah, is made known. It represents the immediate and primary fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14–16. The *almah* of 7:14 in its primary reference to 8:1–4 is the prophetess mentioned in verse 3 of chapter 8, while Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14 is her son Mahershalalhashbaz. In view of this primary fulfillment the word *almah* is, according to the Rev. Mueller, to be translated as "young woman" and only in its reference to its future and complete fulfillment does the word *almah* gain the meaning "virgin." This double fulfillment, Walter Mueller contends, is made possible by the twofold meaning of *almah*, young woman and virgin, so that it can be used of both the prophetess, the wife of Isaiah, and of Mary, the virgin-mother of Christ. But can the word *almah*, even when not translated as virgin but as young woman, be applied to the prophetess, who already was the mother of a son, namely of Shearjashub, who accompanied his father when he went forth to meet Ahaz? Our answer after our study of the meaning of *almah* must be that it cannot be thus applied.

The third hypothesis applies all three verses of our prophecy, verses 14–16, exclusively to the Messiah as the only child whose birth is there predicted, and his growth made the measure of the subsequent events. In its simplest form the prediction is supposed to relate to the real time of Christ's appearance, and the desolation foretold to be the one which should take place before the Savior reaches a certain age. "To this it is an obvious

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54 *Theologische Zeitschrift*, Basel, 1960, p. 439ff.

55 *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Editor F. F. Bruce, Manchester, 1960, pp. 203ff.

objection,” Alexander remarks, “that it makes the event predicted too remote to answer the conditions of the context, or the purpose of the prophecy itself” (p. 170). But Alexander together with most interpreters misinterprets the prophecy “as a promise of immediate deliverance to Ahaz” (p. 172). Fairbairn in *The Typology of Scripture* correctly states, however, that “the prediction manifestly bears the character of a threatening” to the wicked king and the kingdom of Judah (p. 380).

Prof. Pieper in his article *Die grosse Weissagung vom Jungfrauensohn*<sup>56</sup> has argued this point in his well-known forceful manner. The whole prophecy, he contends, has no sign of grace in it for Ahaz and Judah, but is solely a sign of their final rejection. Immanuel will not be born from a princess, but from a poor, despised *almah* of the house of David. Immanuel “shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground” (Isa. 53:2). And the fact that he will eat butter and honey will be a sign that the royal family of David will not again regain the throne but will remain lowly and despised. And finally the glory and pride of Israel will be a thing of the past, already prior to the appearance of Immanuel and then also in Immanuel’s own day. Of this final destruction of the land verse 16 speaks to us, not of the devastation of the land through Tiglath Pileser not quite two years after the date of Isaiah’s prophecy of the birth of Immanuel. Thus interpreted verse 16 causes the reader no difficulty. But can this interpretation of verse 16 be upheld?

According to the *Revised Standard Version* rendering this verse reads: “For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.” Does not this verse clearly make the infancy of the Messiah, during which he shall eat butter and honey (vs. 15), the measure of the time of the desolation? It does, of course. Only that most commentators take this to be the desolation which occurred shortly after Isaiah’s prophecy had been delivered, while Prof. Pieper most emphatically contends: “The thought that in this verse the desolation of the northern lands is meant, that desolation which set in some one and a half years after the date of the prophecy and which was wrought by Tiglath Pileser, has been carried directly from the pages of history into the text.” Even in the preceding verses of our chapter (vss. 4–9), Prof. Pieper argues, God did not offer Ahaz a sign the fulfillment of which would have special reference to the prophecy concerning Rezin and Pekah. The close of verse 9: “If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established” suggests that God first of all wanted to convince Ahaz of His omnipotence and faithfulness toward the house of David and of Judah. And to this end He offered Ahaz a sign. Therefore the sign which Isaiah finally proclaimed in no wise promised Ahaz help against Rezin and Pekah, rather foretold the utter desolation of all of the house of David and of Judah.

This desolation set in first of all in the northernmost lands, in Damascus (734) and Samaria (721), before whose two kings Ahaz is in dread and in which Immanuel will spend the days of his youth, namely in Galilee and the surrounding country, and then also in his native land, in Judah, which shall become a place for briars and thorns and whose inhabitants will live from butter and honey (7:21–25). The description of this desolation and the ensuing poverty is, of course, to be understood figuratively. Judah was not a place of briars and thorns in the literal sense of the word when the Messiah was born. It was, however, shorn of all its glory prior to Immanuel’s birth and contemporaneously with it. It is this desolation which is being revealed to the house of David in connection with the Immanuel prophecy and it is this child’s infancy, in which he knows to refuse the evil and choose the good, which is to be the measure of the fulfillment of this prophecy.

A partial fulfillment of verse 16 we do find in chapter 8 verse 4: “For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, my father and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spirit of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria.” No one can question the similarity which exists between both verses. This similarity permits us to claim a primary and partial fulfillment of Isaiah 7:16 for Isaiah 8:4 or, vice versa, a primary and partial reference of Isaiah 7:16 to Isaiah 8:4, i.e. to the infancy of Mahershalalhashbaz and to the desolation of Damascus and Samaria at the hands of the Assyrians.

The difference, however, between both verses is also quite apparent. The meaning of the name of the child referred to in 7:16, Immanuel, God With Us, actually refers to the child himself, in whose birth “God has

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<sup>56</sup> Op. cit., p. 239.

come,” so that “the birth of the child is no ordinary birth but one that is wonderful and miraculous”<sup>57</sup> and one that contains a wonderful promise, not, of course, for Ahaz to whom it was a savor of death unto death, but for the believing remnant in Israel. The meaning of the name of the child spoken of in Isaiah 8:4, Mahershalahashbaz, The Spoil Speeds, the Prey Hastes, does not refer to the child himself, but rather as a symbolical name to the swift and sudden spoliation of Damascus and Samaria. These two countries are given prominence in this verse by means of the mention made of their names, while in 7:16 they are only spoken of in a general way as “the land.” Because of this difference the future and complete reference of Isaiah 7:16 is not merely to the destruction of Damascus and Samaria by Tiglath Pileser, but to the land in general in which Immanuel is to be born and the desolation of which his infancy is to be the measure of its fulfillment.

As a result of the translation of the word עֲלִמָּה (*almah*) as “virgin” does not mean that there must be two virgin births, as is often asserted. Such a conclusion, if it were stringent, would indeed “destroy the uniqueness of Christ’s incarnation through the power of the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary” (Mueller). Isaiah 7:14 as a direct prophecy promises only one virgin birth, namely the birth of the coming Messiah, “conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary.”

But does not this interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 as a direct prophecy militate against the *analogia proportionis* of both Testaments? Must we not instead resort to a typical interpretation of this prophecy, so as not to isolate 7:14 unnecessarily from its Old Testament context and read into it a New Testament fulfillment? It would, of course, be following the line of least resistance for our thinking if we would simply designate the Immanuel sign as a type of Jesus Christ. But this would necessitate the finding of the type in the Old Testament. All attempts at finding it have heretofore failed. Hans Walter Wolff in his *Immanuel* shows how futile the different attempts at identifying the *almah* with the wife of the king or the prophet have been. He concludes these his findings by saying that “the attempts at identification want to be more intelligent than the prophet himself” (p. 33). In contrast to such attempts he calls attention to the fact that the prophet is proclaiming what he had seen in a vision and what was visibly present to his enlightened eye alone. Nevertheless, Wolff also contends that “the Immanuel sign is one type of Jesus Christ” because of the *analogia proportionis*, which must receive its due recognition. It calls our attention to the difference between the Testaments despite all their similarities. When, therefore, Matthew 1:23 carries out that in the birth of Mary’s child and in the name of Jesus it is “fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet,” then we on the one hand “must not ignore the reference in this Gospel message of the Evangelist to the fact that Jesus cannot be known and understood without the preceding Word of God in Israel.” On the other hand Matthew only succeeds in discovering, as the whole early church (*Urgemeinde*) did, the connection between his Bible and the life of Christ (*Christusgeschehen*) “with the aid of the Rabbinic understanding of the Scriptures of his time. In doing this he is able to cull passages out of their context and to interpret them as prophecies which exclusively and from the very outset gain their meaning in the fulfillment of the history of Jesus” (p. 44).

Indeed, we do not want to lose sight of the *analogia proportionis* in our interpretation of the Old Testament. But apart from his questionable reference to Matthew’s “Rabbinic understanding of the Scriptures,” Wolff and others overlook the fact that the child is a miracle-child of most wondrous birth and that according to Isaiah’s own prophecy “his name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6 RSV). Here in the context of the Old Testament itself the Immanuel is already brought to

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57 Edward J. Young, op. cit., p. 194. Young also quotes Delitzsch who points out that according to chapter 9:5 Immanuel Himself is a פְּלֵאָה—He is God in bodily self-presentation. If, however, the Messiah is עֲמֻנָאֵל in the sense that, as the prophet in chap. 9:5 (cf. chap. 10:21) expressly says, He is Himself אֵל His birth must also be a wonderful and a miraculous one (*Commentary on Isaiah*, Vol. I, Edinburgh, p. 210).

view in his majesty and glory as the future “spiritual antipode of the worldly king,” in whom the remnant in contrast to the unbelief of Ahaz and the house of David placed all its faith.<sup>58</sup>

In how far this believing remnant or for that matter Isaiah himself had a clear view of the historical figure of Jesus is a question for which we need not seek a definite answer (cf. I Peter 1:10f.). We can agree with Hertrich in his Isaiah commentary that “the virgin was known to the believers even as ‘she which travaileth’ according to Micah 5:3 was known to them. What the prophet saw—perhaps in a vision, at least under the guidance of the divine Spirit—is the dawn of God’s day (*der Anbruch der Zeit Gottes*), the birth of the Redeemer.” But are Proksch and Hertrich right in assuming that Isaiah expected the birth of Immanuel in the very near future, that “prophetic eschatology ... is *always* (italics ours) *Naherwartung*,” something that is always expected to take place in the near future. In view of the fact that the prophets prophesied without a perspective with all its implications one can speak of such *Naherwartungen*.<sup>59</sup>

Johann Fischer in his Isaiah commentary has put it into these words: “The prophets often see future events far remote from one another cast into one mold. The lack of a temporal perspective is an invariable characteristic of Biblical prophecy. Even in the *Parousia* discourses of our Lord a clear dividing line between the downfall of Jerusalem and the end of the world can only be imperfectly drawn. In one graphic description both are viewed as one. Thus also Isaiah was hardly or not at all aware of the wide interval between prophecy and fulfillment. Of course one must also take into consideration that because of our lack of experience it remains a mystery for us how the prophets became conscious of and how in their visions they entered into communication with the Deity. Only imperfectly can this be explained.”<sup>60</sup> In this sense we indeed can speak of a *Naherwartung* on the part of the prophets.

On the other hand we must also keep in mind that Peter in his First Epistle tells us that the prophets searched “what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you.”<sup>61</sup> In accord with this Wilhelm Möller in his *Messianische Erwartung der vorexilischen Propheten* (p. 175)<sup>62</sup> Correctly states that both Isaiah and his contemporary Micah “knew of a longer development of the Messianic period, that they knew of the threatening attack of the Assyrians (Isa. 8:4, 7), of the exile (6:11–13), and of the complete

58 Proksch (op. cit. p. 124) in accordance with Isaiah’s own words (9:6) characterizes him thus: *So ist der Immanuel wirklich ein Wunderkind von wunderbarer Geburt; er ist der geistliche Antipode des weltlichen Königs. Er verbürgt mit seinem Namen die Gottesgemeinschaft des gläubigen Restes, in dem ein neues Gottesvolk heranwächst, während das alte im Sturm untergeht. Wir haben eine messianische Weissagung erster Ordnung vor uns, die Geburtsstunde von Jesaias eigenem Messiasbilde, dem Stern seiner ganzen Prophetie.*

59 Volkmar Hertrich in his *Jesaja* has well stated what prophecies without a perspective imply: *In einer gewaltigen Zusammenballung der Zeit sieht der Prophet im Morgengrauen den ganzen Tag. Schwangerschaft, Geburt, Kindheit, Mannestum, Herrschaft, ewige Zeit—das alles sind nur unzulängliche Versuche, das Unerhörte auszusagen, das jetzt vor Zeiten Erhoffte, Erwartete, Gefürchtete (Am. 5, 18–20) im Anbrechen ist. Prophetische Eschatologie ist—so gewiss sie sich entfalten kann zur Aufzeigung der Aufeinanderfolge einzelner Perioden im Ablauf der Endgeschichte—immer (!) Neuerwartung* (p. 135).

60 *Das Buch Isaias* übersetzt und erklärt von Dr. Johann Fischer, I. Teil, Peter Hanstein Verlagsbuchhandlung, Bonn 1937, p. 74—Here our quotation reads in the original: *Die Propheten schauen oft weit voneinander entfernte Ereignisse in einem einzigen Bilde zusammen. Der Mangel an zeitlicher Perspektive ist geradezu ein Charakteristikum der biblischen Prophezie; sogar in den Parusiereden des Herrn ist eine reinliche Scheidung zwischen Untergang Jerusalems und Ende der Welt nur unvollkommen durchzuführen; in einem einzigen grossen Gemälde wird beides zusammengeschaute. So ist auch Isaias bei der Emmanuelprophetei der weite Abstand zwischen Weissagung und Erfüllung nicht oder doch nur unvollkommen zum Bewusstsein gekommen. Freilich muss man anderseits auch in Rechnung stellen, dass für uns das prophetische Bewusstsein und der Verkehr mit der Gottheit im prophetischen Schauen mangels Erfahrung ein Mysterium bleibt, das nur unvollkommen entschleiert werden kann.*

61 *The New English Bible*, New Testament, Oxford University Press, 1961, renders this passage thus: “They tried to find out what was the time, and what the circumstances, to which the spirit of Christ in them pointed, foretelling the sufferings in store for Christ and the splendours to follow; and it was disclosed to them that the matter they treated of was not for their time but for yours.”

62 Published 1906 in Gütersloh by C. Bertelsmann and is still very much worth reading. *Licentiat* W. Möller is well known to many of our readers as a most able and conservative proponent of Old Testament studies among European scholars. Cf. *Quartalschrift*, 1957, p. 56.

devastation of the land and of the downfall of the Davidic rule (9:5; 11:1), events which both prophets certainly did not expect to happen in the very near future. And all this Isaiah knew because God had revealed it to him when he put the question “how long” to his Lord (6:11).

But despite the length of this distinct and distant future mention is nowhere made in the Old Testament of a type of the virgin’s son and consequently not of a primary and partial fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy. Its one and only fulfilment is the one of which Matthew speaks: “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel which being interpreted is, God with us” (1:21–23). It is to this interpretation of Isaiah’s prophecy of the virgin birth that we will always have final recourse for our understanding of whom the prophet is speaking.