

Scriptures

**Immanuel of the Bible:
Is it a Prediction for Jesus Christ? (I)**

Abdus Sattar Ghauri

The book of Isaiah of the Old Testament of the Bible has preserved the following prediction:

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and¹ will call him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.²

Almost every Christian commentator of the Bible has interpreted it in terms of a prediction in favour of Jesus Christ (sws). Barton Payne has also recorded it as such in his 'Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy'.³ For most of the Christians it is a matter of their faith to believe in its predictive status because it has been quoted as such in the 'Gospel' according to Matthew.⁴ In fact it is simply due to the misconception of the

1. Masoretic Text; Dead Sea Scrolls: 'and he' or 'and they' (note b14 by the editors/translators, p.615).

2. NIV - Isa. VII:14-16, p.615.

3. J. Barton Payne, *Encycl. of Biblical Prophecy*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1973, pp.292,93 and p.666.

4. The Bible - Mt. I:22f.

writer of the gospel and misinterpretation of the commentators of the Bible on the basis of the wrong translation of the Hebrew word 'ALMAH' as 'VIRGIN' by the translators of Septuagint that it has been attached to Jesus Christ (sws); whereas it has nothing to do with this theme. Seeing the word 'VIRGIN', they could not overcome their crave to mould and exploit it in favour of Jesus Christ (sws) and came out with all their proficiency of interpretation and hermeneutics and displayed their wonderful skill to expound it in terms of a prediction in favour of Jesus Christ (sws). In the following lines, the subject will be discussed under three topics:

1. Historical Back-ground of the prophecy.
2. The word 'VIRGIN' and the whole story about it.
3. The word 'IMMANUEL' and its significance.

1. Historical Back-ground of the Prophecy

Isaiah was 'The prophet to whom the canonical book of Isaiah is attributed. (...). He lived in Jerusalem and his prophetic activity extended at least from 742 to 701 BC.'⁵ 'He was married to a woman whom he calls prophetess (8:3) and they had at least two sons: *Shearjashub* and *Maher-shalal-Hashbaz*. Their names are associated with prophetic pronouncements (7:3; 8:3). He may also have had a third son, Immanuel, who also bears a symbolic name. (...). Isaiah was a contemporary of the prophet *Micah* and was preceded slightly by *Amos* and *Hosea*, who were active in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Isaiah prophesied in Judah during the reigns of kings *Uzziah*, *Jotham*, *Ahaz*, and *Hezekiah*.'⁶

Ahaz was the king of the Southern Kingdom, Judah, during 735-715 BC.⁷ He inherited the throne of his father, *Jotham*⁸,

5. J.L. McKenzie, Dictionary of the Bible, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1984, p.397. [758 to 698 B.C. according to W. Smith, A Dic. of the Bible, Regency Reference Library, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1967, p.267 ; and approximately between 740 and 701 B.C. according to Paul J. Achtemeier (Gen. Ed.), Harper's Bible Dictionary, T.P.I., Bangalore, 1994, p.426.]

6. Harper's B. Dictionary, op.cit., p.426.

7. According to J.L.McKenzie, op.cit., p.16; Harper's, op.cit., p.17;

when he was only twenty. At that time, the king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was *Pekah*⁹, son of *Remaliah*.¹⁰ Damascus¹¹ was ruled by *Rezin*.¹² Assyria was a sort of super power of the

The Interpreter's, Dic. of the B., Vol.I, Abingdon Press, Nashville, NY., 1962, p.64; and Siegfried H. Horn, Seventh Day Adventist B. Dic., Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, p.32; and 741-726 according to W. Smith op.cit.; and 733-721 according to T.K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black (Editors), Encycl. Biblica, Vol.I, Watts and Co., London, E.c., 1899, p.c.95; and 735-719 BC according to the Jewish Encyclopedia, KTAV Publishing House, Inc., N.Y., 1901, Vol.I, p.285.

8. *Jotham* was the son and successor of *Uzziah* or *Azariah*, and was king of Judah ca.750-35 BC.

9. '*Pekah* (open-eyed), son of *Remaliah*, originally a captain of *Pekahiah* king of Israel, murdered his master, seized the throne, and became the 18th sovereign of the northern kingdom, B.C. 757-740. Under his predecessors, Israel had been much weakened through the payment of enormous tribute to the Assyrians (see esp. 2Kings 15:20), and by internal wars and conspiracies. *Pekah* seems to have steadily applied himself to the restoration of its power. For this purpose he contracted a foreign alliance, and fixed his mind on the plunder of the sister kingdom of Judah. (...) When, however, his (the then king of Judah, *Jotham*'s) weak son *Ahaz* succeeded to the crown of David, the allies no longer hesitated, but entered upon the siege of Jerusalem, B.C. 742. (...). The kingdom of Damascus was finally suppressed and *Rezin* put to death, while *Pekah* was deprived of at least half his kingdom (...). *Pekah* himself, now fallen into the position of Assyrian vassal, was of course compelled to abstain from further attacks on Judah. (...), *Hoshea* the son of *Elah* conspired against him and put him to death.' (W. Smith's Dic. of the B., op.cit. pp.495f.)

10. *Remaliah* had been a captain of the king of Israel, *Pekahiah*, murdered his master and became the 18th sovereign of and reigned over Israel for 757-740 BC.

11. Capital of *Aram*, which was the name of Syria in those days.

12. 'King of Damascus. He attacked *Jotham* during the later part of his reign, 2Kings 15:37; but his chief war was with *Ahaz*, whose territories he invaded, in conjunction with *Pekah*, in about B.C.741. Though unsuccessful in his siege of Jerusalem, 2Kings 16:5; Isa.7:1, he 'recovered *Elath* to Syria.' 2Kings 16:6. Soon after he was attacked, defeated and slain by *Tiglath-pileser* II [or III?], king of Assyria. 2Kings 16:9.' (W. Smith, A Dic. of the B., p.563.)

'*Aramae*an king of Damascus. In 735 BC he formed an alliance with

region at that time and its king was *Tiglath Pileser III*.¹³ After his successful campaigns in the North and East, he laid siege to and eventually conquered *Arpad*, in N. Syria during ca. 742-40 BC. The effect of this victory was far-reaching; and tributes came in from Tyre, Damascus, Cilicia, *Carchemish*, etc. The king of Damascus *Rezin* became active to forge an alliance of all the anti-Assyrian forces of the *Levant*¹⁴. *Pekah* of Israel joined the coalition readily.

The king of Damascus, *Rezin*, was among those who paid tribute to the Assyrian king *Tiglath-pileser III* in 738 BC., but within three years *Rezin* had organized an anti-Assyrian coalition consisting of Damascus, Tyre, Philistia, Israel, some Arab tribes, and perhaps Edom.”¹⁵

Pekah of Israel against Judah, then ruled by *Jotham*, to compel Judah to join a coalition against Assyria. *Jotham* died very shortly afterwards, and his successor *Ahaz* offered tribute to Tiglat-pileser III of Assyria and asked for assistance.’ (J.L. McKenzie’s Dic. of the B., p.738.)

13. His original name was *Pulu*. He was the sovereign of Assyria during 745-727 BC. ‘Before the accession of *Tiglath-pileser* Assyrian power had fallen to a low estate under a series of weak kings. *Tigleth-pileser* attained the throne by a Coup d’etat of which the details are not known; he was not a member of the reigning royal family. From his accession he exhibited extraordinary ability and industry; he is the true founder of the Assyrian empire, which endured for 100 years after his death. He conquered the Aramaean tribes of Babylonia and made himself king of Babylon; this attempt to settle the Babylonian question by personal union of the two monarchies of Babylon and Assyria was imitated by some of his successors. He transported many of the peoples of Babylonia to other regions of the empire; he was the first to practice transportation on a large scale with the deliberate purpose of breaking national and tribal consciousness and uniting all subjects under the one monarchy of Assyria. (...). He conquered Galilee and Gilead in 734 BC and incorporated them into an Assyrian province. Damascus was defeated and razed in 732; this kingdom also was incorporated into an Assyrian province. Other kings of Syria and Palestine submitted and paid tribute. [J.L. McKenzie, Dic. of the B., op.cit., p.890.]

14. Levant is the name for the countries of the eastern coast of the Mediterranean.

15. Harper’s B. Dic., op.cit., p.870.

Scriptures

Pekah of Israel and *Rezin* of Damascus wished that *Ahaz* of Judah should also join his hands with them in the coalition. *Ahaz* of Judah declined to join this coalition. Perhaps having estimated the power of Assyria, he was afraid of it; or, perhaps, because he had not remained faithful with *Yahweh* and *had inclined towards idolatry and pagonism*. *Pekah* and *Rezin* decided to attack Judah to topple the government of *Ahaz* and to plant the son of *Tabeel* (who was probably *Ahaz's* step-brother from some *Aramaean princess*) on the throne of Judah as a puppet king.

It was in connection with this crisis that the prophet *Isaiah* was sent to *Ahaz* to assure him of God's help in his struggle with Israel and the Syrians, and evidently also to warn him against calling for foreign aid (Is 7). *Ahaz*, however, did not appreciate this counsel and turned to *Tiglath-pileser III* of Assyria for help, sending him a large gift of money taken from the treasures of the Temple and palace. *Tiglath-pileser* responded by invading Israel and besieging Damascus (2ki 16:5-9; 2Chr 28:6-21). Damascus was captured (in 732 BC) and *Rezin* killed, and much territory of Israel was taken from *Pekah* and made into an Assyrian province (see 2 Ki 15:29). It was probably with the connivance of *Tiglath-pileser* that *Pekah* was assassinated by *Hoshea*, who usurped the throne for himself and was confirmed in his office by the Assyrian king. While *Tiglath-pileser* was at Damascus, *Ahaz* went up to meet him, apparently to pay homage as a vassal along with the Syrians. He sent home a model of a foreign altar that he had seen in Damascus, with an order to have a similar one built for the Temple at Jerusalem. This was probably an Assyrian altar to be used to worship Assyrian national gods. It replaced Solomon's altar of burnt offerings (2 Ki 16:10-16)."¹⁶

At the refusal of *Ahaz* to join their Coalition, Damascus and Israel decided to attack Judah. *Ahaz* of Judah being afraid of the coalition decided to seek protection from Assyria through paying huge amounts as tribute to *Tiglath-pileser III*. *Isaiah* did not like that *Ahaz* relinquish the liberty of Judah to the pagan king of

16. Seventh-day Adventist B. Dic., op.cit.,1979, p.24.
36 **Renaissance** September 1999

Assyria. As instructed by God, Isaiah called on *Ahaz* along with his son, *Shear-Jashub*, and told him not to be afraid of Israel and Damascus. The Bible records it as follows:

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, *that* Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to *make* war against it, but could not prevail against it.

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

3. Then the Lord said to Isaiah, “Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Jashub your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller’s Field,

4. “And say to him: ‘Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be faint-hearted for these two stubs¹⁷ of smoking firebands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and the son of Remaliah.

5. ‘Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying,

6. “Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabeal”--

7. ‘Thus says the Lord God: “It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass.

8. For the head of Syria *is* Damascus, and the head of Damascus *is* Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, so that it will not be a people. [stress added].

¹⁷ Stub means: “short end piece or stump remaining from a pencil, cigarette or similarly-shaped object; butt” (Oxf. Adv. Learners Dic., p.907)

9. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established.” ’ ’¹⁸

The following are the salient points of these verses:

a) The Alliance of Israel and Damascus designed an abortive attempt against Judah.

b) As a first step for this invasion, the Syrian armies assembled in Israel. The people and the king of Judah were frightened at it.

c) The Lord told Isaiah to take his son *Shear-jashub* with him to meet *Ahaz* out side the city at the end of the water-supply pipe-line near the water reservoir, which he was getting repaired in anticipation of the impending invasion/siege. God also asked Isaiah to advise *Ahaz* not to be afraid of the invasion of the coalition of Syria and Israel because their decline is already in process and their nefarious designs against Judah are doomed to fail.

d) Within sixty five years the state of Israel will come to an end and it will no more be a nation.

e) If *Ahaz* did not have faith, he will perish.

As a surety the Lord told *Ahaz* to ask for a sign. *Ahaz* declined and said that he will not like to test the Lord. The Bible records the event in the following words:

10. Then the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying,

11. “Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven.”

12. But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!”

13. Then he said, “Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well?”

14. “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign:

¹⁸ The NKJV - Isa. VII:1-9, p.687.

Scriptures

Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel.

15. “He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows *enough* to refuse evil and choose good.

16. “For before the boy will know *enough* to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.

17. “The LORD will bring on you, on your people, and on your father’s house such days as have never come since the day that Ephraim separated from Judah, the king of Assyria.”¹⁹

The story has also been recorded in 2Kings XVI:1-9 in the following words:

In the seventeenth year of *Pekah*, son of *Remaliah*, *Ahaz* son of *Jotham* king of Judah became king. *Ahaz* was twenty years old when he came to the throne, and he reigned in Jerusalem for sixteen years. He did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God like his forefather David, but followed in the footsteps of the kings of Israel; he even passed his son through the fire, adopting the abominable practice of the nations whom the LORD had depossessed in favour of the Israelites. He slaughtered and burnt sacrifices at the hill-shrines and on

¹⁹ NASB - Isa.VII:10-17. Note: The concept of the v.17 is not clear in this version. To make the concept clear, it would be desirable to look into some other translations as well:

NKJV-- “The LORD will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father’s house--days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.”

NAB -- The LORD shall bring upon you and your people and your father’s house days worse than any since Ephraim seceded from Judah. [This means the king of Assyria.]

GNB -- “The LORD is going to bring on you, on your people, and on the whole royal family, days of trouble worse than any that have come since the kingdom of Israel separated from Judah--he is going to bring the king of Assyria.

the hill-tops and under every spreading tree.

Then *Rezin* king of *Aram* and *Pekah* son of *Remaliah* king of Israel attacked Jerusalem and besieged *Ahaz* but could not bring him to battle. At that time the king of *Edom* [the king of *Edom*: prob. rdg.; Heb. *Rezin* king of *Aram*.²⁰(under foot-note ‘u’ of the book)] recovered *Elath* and drove the *Judeans* out of it; so the Edomites entered the city and have occupied it to this day. *Ahaz* sent messengers to *Tiglath-pileser* king of Assyria to say: ‘I am your servant and your son. Come and save me from the king of *Aram* and from the king of Israel who are attacking me.’ *Ahaz* took the silver and gold found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent them to the king of Assyria as a bribe. The king of Assyria listened to him; he advanced on Damascus, captured it, deported its inhabitants to *Kir* and put *Rezin* to death.²⁰

As to the prediction: ‘Within sixty-five years *Ephraim* will be broken, so that it will not be a people.’, it is by way of a consolation for *Ahaz* and his people that they should ‘have no fear (...) because of these two stubs of smoldering firebands.’ Taken as it is, it loses all significance, because ‘**the prediction was made about 734 B.C.,**’²¹ (or even, maybe, in 733); and if it was to be fulfilled in the time-span of 65 years, i.e. by 668 or 669 BC; it could be of no use for *Ahaz*, who died 18 or 19 years after it: in 715 B.C.²² It could have been meaningful and consolatory for *Ahaz* only in case it could spare him from the impending disaster. If it was to take place some 65 years later,

20. NEB - 2Kg. XVI:1-9, p.286.

21. The Seventh Day Adventist BIBLE COMMENTARY, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, 1977, Vol.4, p.132.

22. ‘Ahaz (...) The 12th occupant of the throne of the kingdom of Judah, who reigned approximately 20 years (c. 735-c.715 B.C.), (...). After his father’s death he reigned 16 years (2Ki 16:2; 2Chr 28:1).’ (Seventh Day Adventist Dictionary Revd. Ed., p.23). J.L. McKenzie has also recorded his reigning period as 735-715 BC. in his B. Dic.(p.16).

Scriptures

Ahaz could not have survived to celebrate it and Judah would have been crushed to nothingness by the joint forces of the alliance long before the predicted destruction of the two kingdoms. Moreover it is not in conformity with the theme of the sign promised in the forthcoming verses 14-16. It is asserted there that:

The virgin (...) will give birth to a son, and will call his name Immanuel(...). But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.²³

This prediction, no doubt, could have been very much meaningful to *Ahaz*. The *boy's* being born and the *boy's* being able to reject the wrong and choose the right might not have taken more than 10-15 years in all; and it is to be noted that the devastation of the two kingdoms was to be accomplished *before* it, when the forthcoming child was still undergoing the stage of '*boyhood*'. To be more exact, it had to be accomplished before 12 years, as The *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* has asserted:

That is, when he attains the age of legal accountability (*doubtless twelve years of age* [stress added]). This would come out to 721, after the destructive campaigns of *Shalmanesser V* and *Sargon*. Certainly by 721 Damascus was forsaken (having been captured by Assyria in 732) and likewise *Samaria* (which fell in 722)²⁴

The interpretation made by the Broadman Bible Commentary is very interesting and it remarkably resolves the matter:

Ahaz was told specifically that before the child knew *how to refuse the evil and choose the good*, that is, before he reached the age of moral responsibility **ü** perhaps to be understood as 12 years of age **ü** the kings of Syria and Israel would be put to flight. *The prophecy was fulfilled*

23. NIV - Isa. VII:14-16.

24. The Wycliffe B. Commentary, Ed. by Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, Moody Press, Chicago, 1962, 618.

in a most remarkable way, for in 732 Tigleth-pileser III not only destroyed Damascus but also compelled Samaria to surrender to him. [stress added].²⁵

Moreover, it is in complete conformity with the actual sequence of the historical events of the time. Damascus had been conquered and its king *Rezin* put to death by the Assyrian king *Tiglath-pileser III* (2Kings XVI:9) in 732 B.C., i.e. within one or two years of the prediction; while, at the same time, *Samaria* was also compelled to surrender to him. The significance of the event should carefully be appreciated; it should not be overlooked or under-estimated. When the main instigator of the alliance (king *Rezin* of Damascus) and his kingdom were exterminated; king *Pekah* of Israel should also have lost all hope and courage and could have no more been ‘dreadful’ for king *Ahaz*, being himself a vassal of Assyria. He would have found it difficult to save his own land from Assyria, not to say of indulging himself in invading Judah. Broadman Commentary’s approach seems to be genuine, when it explains the point in the passage quoted above.

It was more literally and explicitly materialized not later than ten years of it. The capital of Israel, *Samaria*, was besieged by Assyrian king *Shalmaneser V* in 722 BC, the capture of which was claimed by his son, *Sargon II*. Deportation of its inhabitants was carried out and foreigners were installed in their place (2Kings XVII: 5). It means that within one or two years of the prediction, the ‘dreadfulness’ of the ‘two kings’ had come to an end; and within 11 (i.e. before 12) years of the prediction, it was conspicuously fulfilled in-toto. It should be noted here that Isaiah uses the words ‘stubs of smoldering fire-bands’ for the two kingdoms of Israel and Syria, which signifies that the beginning of the end of those two kingdoms had long been operative and their final catastrophe was at hand. They are ‘smoldering fire-bands’ means: they are like a piece or stick of wood which is in the process of burning; but it is not burning with a flame, it is merely smudging and burning slowly. Then the word ‘stub’ is again very picturesque and allegorical. It is a

25. The Broadman Bible Commentary, Vol.5, p.216.
42 *Renaissance* September 1999

short piece of something (e.g. a pencil, a cigarette, or a stick of wood) left after the larger part of it has been consumed or burnt out. *Dummelow* has well explained it:

RV 'let not thine heart be faint because of these two tails of smoking fire-bands.' The prophet regards them as no more than *expiring torches* [stress added].²⁶

KJV uses the word 'tail' for this 'stub'. Originally, in the Hebrew Bible, the Hebrew word '**zanab**' has been used for it. As a primary root the word '**zanab**' means: 'to *curtail*, i.e. *cut off the rear*'. Hence, figuratively (or, may be, even literally) it means a [*curtailed*] tail.²⁷ Keeping in view the historical background of the age: the fast-expanding and overwhelming Assyrian empire; and the ever-declining small Near Eastern states; the account of Isaiah in no case seems to be an exaggeration. *If the destruction of those two kingdoms was as far away as 65 years, it would signify:*

- (a) the words '*stub of smoldering fire-bands*' are not in concordance with the real situation.
- (b) They, in no way, carry any consolation or satisfaction for *Ahaz*, who was facing the instant atmosphere of menace and threat from the alliance of the neighbouring states.

That's why the commentators of the Bible find it difficult to interpret the verse in a satisfactory and convincing manner. The writer of the Seventh Day Adventist Bible Commentary says:

The meaning of this prediction is uncertain. According to the chronology of the kings followed tentatively in this commentary (see Vol. II, pp.77, 143, 749), the prediction was made about 734 B.C., and no chronology places the accession of *Ahaz* earlier than 742. Yet by 722 Israel, the

26. A Commentary on the Holy Bible, Ed. Rev. J. R. Dummelow, N. Y., The Macmillan Company, 1956, p.918.

27. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance together with Dictionaries of the Hebrew and Greek Words, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984, p.35: entry Nos.2179,2180.

northern kingdom, had come to its end with the fall of *Samaria* to the Assyrians. Some modern scholars have concluded that the clause introduced by these words was inserted by a later hand. (...). Assuming that the number 65 was in the original text of Isaiah, and there is no conclusive reason for thinking that it was not, two possible fulfilments have been suggested. Sixty-five years after 734, inclusive, would be 670, when *Esarhaddon* (681-669) reigned over Assyria. It is a fact that *Esarhaddon* (and after him his successor *Ashurbanipal*, the Biblical Asnapper) had certain Mesopotamian peoples transported to the former territory of the northern kingdom (Ezra 4:2-10). This was long after Israel had come to its end as a nation (723/22). The Assyrian policy of scattering subject peoples was designed to obliterate old national identities and loyalties. So many Israelites of the ten tribes were absorbed into the neighbouring populations that they have frequently been referred to as 'lost' tribes. It is probable that some of them later joined the captives from Judah and returned with them after the Exile, but as individuals in a Jewish community that was the continuation of the old kingdom of Judah, not of Israel.

Another interpretation has been suggested -- that the 65 years may have begun about the time of the earthquake, during the reign of *Uzziah* or *Jeroboam II*. This earthquake was the token of the Lord's judgements upon Israel mentioned by Amos. If so, Isaiah here merely refers to the fall of *Samaria* in 723/22. This is possible, but not provable, because the exact date of the earthquake is not known. Since no definite starting point of the 65 years is given, it is not possible today -- nor is it necessary -- to determine the meaning of the prediction. In all probability, a specific prophecy such as this was clear and meaningful to the people in whose day it was given. Obviously, it was more important for them to understand it than it is for us.²⁸

The salient features of the above passage are given below with some running comments where necessary:

- i) The meanings of the prediction are uncertain.
- ii) The prediction was made *about* 734 BC.
- iii) The northern kingdom of Israel had come to its end by 722 BC with the fall of *Samaria* to the Assyrians.
- iv) Some modern scholars have concluded that the clause ('Within threescore and five years') was inserted by a later hand. They point to the fact that this statement seems to interrupt the flow of thought between vs. 8 and 9. It would be pertinent here to elaborate the observation of the worthy commentator and provide the names and observations of some of such authorities who consider it a later addition, or show serious reservations about its genuineness, or give it in parenthesis: which shows that according to them the clause is not a genuine one and is a later addition:

The New American Bible, 1991, p.788: '**If** [stress added] the text is correct, its reference is unknown.'

The Holy Bible, R. S. V., Catholic Ed., 1966, p.694: in ().

New American Standard Bible, Reference Ed.,1977, p.864:in ().

The New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition for India, 1996, p.80: in ().

Christian Community Bible, na., p.523, has incorporated this theme in the very text of the translation. Moreover, it has marked this piece of verse 8 as '8b' and has placed it in between verse 9, bifurcating it into two pieces: '9a' and '9b'. Its translation is: 'Within five or six years now *Ephraim* will be shattered and will no longer be a people.'

The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, 1994, p.235: "sixty-five years: **Verse 9a is a later addition** [stress added] and probably refers to the settlement of a foreign population in *Samaria* by *Esarhaddon*.'

The New Bible Commentary, 1953, p.569: '*These words are regarded by some commentators as a gloss by a later writer* [stress added]: it is argued that the prophets did not normally

date their predictions in this precise way.’

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, 1962, p.617: ‘Actually, *Samaria* fell within eleven years (722 B.C.), and her population was deported beyond Assyria.’

A New Commentary on Holy Scripture, 1928, p.439: ‘*The reference is obscure, and the statement seems out of place here.* [stress added]’

Peake’s Commentary on the Bible, 1967, p.495: ‘The sentence is not in accord with the facts, and would, in any case, be cold comfort to *Ahaz*. Possibly it should be read, ‘Yet six, nay five, years more...’ and placed after 9a’.

A Commentary on the Holy Bible, Dummelow, 1956, p.419: ‘*On account of the manner in which this prediction interrupts the parallelism, some modern scholars regard it as an addition by a later editor.*[stress added]’.

v) Assuming that the number 65 was in the original text of Isaiah, the worthy commentator gives two justifications: (i) 65 years after the date of the proclamation of the prophecy (in 734 BC.) would be 670 BC., when *Esarhaddon* (681-669BC.) reigned over Assyria. He and his successor, *Ashurbanipal* had transported certain Mesopotamian peoples to former Israel, long after its extinction in 722 or 721 BC. (It is a far-fetched and worthless justification, because the Israelites had already been transported from Israel to somewhere even beyond Assyria in 722 or 721 BC after the fall of *Samaria* by the then Assyrian king *Shalmaneser V* or *Sargon*; which shows that Israel was completely destroyed in 722 BC. As far as *Esarhaddon* is concerned, he did not transport the Israelites from Israel; he only transported certain Mesopotamian peoples to former Israel, which does not mean that the destruction of Israel was accomplished 65 years later by *Esarhaddon*.) (ii) The second justification: that the 65 years may have begun about the time of the earthquake, during the reign of *Uzziah* or *Jeroboam II*; is so baseless and vague that it needs no comment at all.

vi) Since no definite starting point of the 65 years is given, it is not possible today to determine the meaning of the prediction. (It is obviously incorrect and an abortive attempt on the part of the commentator to confuse the matter. He had himself stated

above that the prediction was made about 734 B.C. (3rd line of the quotation from the commentator above)).

Matthew Henry has also offered some interesting interpretations about the verses. While explaining verse 9, at one point, he notes:

Interpreters are much at a loss how to compute the sixty-five years within which *Ephraim shall cease to be a people*; for the captivity of the ten tribes was but eleven years after this: and some make it a mistake of the transcriber, and think it should be read *within six and five years*, just eleven.²⁹

While explaining verse 16, he brings forward quite a unique interpretation; which curtails the period between the utterance and fulfilment of the prediction to three or four years:

Here is another sign in particular of the speedy destruction of these potent princes that were now a terror to Judah, v.16. 'Before *this* child (so it should be read), this child which I have now in my arms' (he means not Immanuel, but *Shear-jashub* his own son, whom he was ordered to take with him for a sign, v.3), 'before this *child shall know how to refuse the evil and choose the good*' (and those who saw what his present stature and forwardness were would easily conjecture how long that would be), 'before this child be three or four years older [from now], *the land that thou abhorrest*, these confederate forces of Israelites and Syrians, which thou hast such an enmity to and standest in such dread of, *shall be forsaken of both their kings*, both Pekah and Rezin,' who were in so close an alliance that they seemed as if they were the kings but of one kingdom. This was fully accomplished; for, within two or three years after this, *Hoshea* conspired against *Pekah*, and slew him (2Kings xv.30), and, before that, the king of Assyria took Damascus, and slew *Rezin*,

29. Matthew Henry, An Exposition of the Old and New Testament Vol.V, N.Y., Robert Carter & Brothers, n.a., p. 46.

2Kings xvi. 9. Nay, there was a present event, which happened immediately, and which this child carried the prediction of in his name, which was a pledge and earnest of this further event. *Shear-jashub* signifies *The remnant shall return*, which doubtless points at the wonderful return of those 200,000 captives whom *Pekah* and *Rezin* had carried away, who were brought back, not by might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. Read the story, 2 Chron xxviii. 8-15. The prophetic naming of this child having thus had its accomplishment, no doubt this, which was further added concerning him, should have its accomplishment likewise that Syria and Israel should be deprived of both their kings.³⁰

From all the above references and dissertations the following conclusions can be safely arrived at without any strained contention:

- a) The prophecy was pronounced by the prophet Isaiah to *Ahaz*, king of the southern kingdom of Judah, more than seven hundred years prior to the birth of Jesus.
- b) At that time *Ahaz* was facing the threat of invasion by the alliance of Syria and Israel to dethrone him and establish some *Tabeel* in his place as their puppet.
- c) *Ahaz* thought that he could not withstand the invasion and decided to seek patronage from the then super power of the region, *Tiglath-pileser III*, the pagan king of Assyria.
- d) God did not like that *Ahaz* should relinquish the liberty of the land and the people of Judah to a pagan king, who could otherwise do no harm to *Ahaz* or Judah.
- e) It was at this stage that the prophecy was addressed to *Ahaz* by Isaiah as directed by the Lord Himself.
- f) To all intents and contents, the prophecy was to console and ensure *Ahaz* that the coalition could do him no harm, was nothing to be afraid of, and was itself to be exterminated in the very near future -- within a period of a few years; and before the very eyes of his.

30. Matthew Henry, op.cit., p.48.

g) The cycle of the fulfilment of the prophecy started functioning within months, and *Tiglath-pileser* of Assyria, who was already entangled with the members of the coalition (it may be noted here that the very purpose of the formation of the coalition was to defend against the fast-encroaching advancements of Assyria), began to occupy vast territories of Syria and Israel; and within an year or two captured Syria; putting her king *Rezin* to death. As to the king of Israel, *Pekah* son of *Remaliah*, his kingdom became subject to the Assyrian invasion within months depriving him of most of his territories leaving almost only the capital *Samaria* under his control. King *Pekah* himself was assassinated by a conspiracy led by *Hoshea*, who succeeded him, in c.732 BC. It can thus be appreciated that both the kings who plotted against Judah were murdered and the alliance had been shattered and was no more a threat for *Ahaz*, which becomes a partial fulfilment of the prophecy.

h) The prophecy was fulfilled in-toto within the time span of eleven to twelve years with the fall of Jerusalem to Assyria in 722 BC.

i) Naturally, once fulfilled in letter and spirit, the prophecy had nothing to do with any event to occur at any time or stage of the history of man-kind.

j) The application of the prophecy to the birth of Jesus Christ -- an event taking place seven and a quarter centuries after the complete and perfect fulfilment of the prophecy -- is quite arbitrary, absurd and baseless.

That's why a great number of the Christian authorities is also of the same opinion, for example:

A New Commentary on Holy Scripture observes: 'As delivered by Isaiah, its only reference was to the *immediate future* [stress added], and amongst the Jews it was never connected with the Messiah: see Gore, *Dissertations*, 289 f.'³¹

31. *A New Commentary on Holy Bible*, Ed. Charles Gore, p.439.
49 *Renaissance* September 1999

Peakes Commentary records: ‘It is not a direct prediction of Christ, or even of a scion of David’s line who would rule his people in justice and peace (...). since the Christian affirms that this hope, and all the hope of Israel, found its ultimate fulfillment in Christ, he may say that this prophecy too points onward to him.’³²

The Seventh-day Adventist B. Commentary asserts: ‘*the prediction here made had an immediate application within the frame-work of the historical circumstances set forth in the chapter.* (stress added)’³³

The Broadman Bible Commentary has recorded its observations as follows: ‘A particularly important rule to remember in exegesis is that **no verse of Scripture can be properly understood apart from its context** (stress added). *In this case the context unquestionably demands that the promised child serve as a sign to king Ahaz, thus ruling out the possibility that Isaiah was looking into the far distant future. The birth and early childhood of Immanuel were related to events that transpired in the later half of the eighth century B.C. The specific events in question were the defeat of Israel and Syria (vv. 15-16) and the invasion of Judah by the Assyrians (vv.17-25). To overlook these facts is to miss the whole point of the passage* (stress added).’³⁴

From the above discussion, it is to be concluded that the prophecy relates to a specific historical background -- that of the latter half of the eighth century BC -- and should be translated and interpreted accordingly.

(To be continued)

32. Peake’s Commentary on the Bible, Ed. Matthew Black, Nelson, 1967, p.495.

33. The Seventh-day Adventist B. Commentary, Vol.4, p.135.

34. The Broadman Bible Commentary, Vol.5, p.215.