
A Call for Faith and the Sign of Immanuel: A Rhetorical Analysis of Isaiah 7:1-7 and its Implication for the Church in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The text of Isaiah 7:1-17 is a pericope in the prophecy of Isaiah which has experienced countless interpretations over the years. This is a text that gives a prophecy of the sign of “ha‘almah” mostly translated (the virgin) who would conceive and give birth to a son called Immanuel (God with us). This prophecy came when Ahaz and the people of Jerusalem were threatened to be invaded by the allied kingdoms of Aram and Israel as a result of Ahaz’s refusal to join them fight against Assyria. However, through the instrumentality rhetorical analysis of the text, the paper argues that Ahaz lacked faith in God despite God’s comforting words that “these plans will not take place, it will not happen.” Ahaz was called to stand firm in faith through which they would experience their salvation in full in both immediate and distant future because God is with them—Emmanuel. Finally, this prophecy is considered relevant to the church in Africa, because the African church is threatened in every angle by the enemies of the church as in the case of Judah. As such, the church is called to continue to have faith in God and be encouraged that he is Immanuel.

Key words: Faith, sign of Immanuel, ha ‘almah, Ahaz, Isaiah 7:1-17, rhetorical analysis, African Church.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Isaiah the Prophet has gained an unequalled popularity in the world of Old Testament (OT henceforth) Biblical scholarship. This is simply because the prophecies recorded in this book are rich and timely. This book is considered the most quoted OT prophet by the New Testament (NT henceforth) writers, including Jesus Christ himself. In agreement with this, Mary Fairchild says, “The NT quotes Isaiah 66 times, surpassed only by the Psalms.”²⁸⁰ His predictions of the birth of the Messiah, his suffering, death and resurrection are found equal to their fulfilments in the NT. Consequently, this book is called “the book of Salvation” for the name *Isaiah* means “The salvation of the Lord” or “the Lord is salvation.” Furthermore, because of his popularity, Isaiah is called the “Prince of Prophets,” he shines above all the other writers and prophets of the OT.

The prophecies Isaiah gave revolve around the themes of judgment, holiness, punishment, captivity, the fall of the nation, comfort, hope and salvation through the coming Messiah. But the theme of salvation is the overarching theme in the book.²⁸¹ Many of Isaiah’s prophecies predicted events that occurred in his near future, yet at the same time he foretold the events of the distant future. However, many interpreters of the book of Isaiah abound, some focused on some selected sections and motifs within the book, while others take the book as a whole in a trial to offer close readings of the book for better understanding. As a result of these readings and interpretations, many issues raised in the book continue to be highly debatable texts in the bible. Nonetheless, the message the book envelopes as mentioned

²⁸⁰ Mary Fairchild, “Book of Isaiah” retrieved from <https://www.learnreligions.com/book-of-isaiah-701145> on 13th July, 2023.

²⁸¹ John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 41.

is timely and so applicable and relevant to all people regardless of their era, and dispensation.

To this end therefore, this work engages one of the most debatable passages in the book of Isaiah—7:1-17. From the earliest times to the present the discussions which have centered about the issues in this section (especially the prediction of the Virgin birth) have been both interesting, varied, and at times even heated. This is the reason why Charles L. Feinberg quoting Johannes Lindblom characterizes Isaiah 7:14 as “the endless discussed passage of the Immanuel sign.”²⁸² Fairchild recorded that Rosen Mueller gives a list of twenty-eight authors who have written dissertations on this portion of scripture, and he himself added the twenty-ninth. Yet this subject is far from being exhausted. John Skinner having this in mind also notes that “... no single passage of the OT has been so variously interpreted or has given rise to so much controversy as the prophecy contained in [these verses of scripture].”²⁸³ Therefore, with a keen acknowledgment of the already existing interpretations on this portion of scripture, one still considers it important to reconsider Isaiah 7:1-17 with regards to a call to faith and the sign of Immanuel. Furthermore, this work employs a rhetorical analytical method of interpretation in order to give an exegetical exploration of this text under question with a call to the African church to have firm faith in God because it is only through faith that victory is assured to the church in these trying times.

²⁸² Charles L. Feinberg, “The Virgin Birth and Isaiah 7:14” *MSJ* 22/1 (Spring, 2011), 11.

²⁸³ John Skinner, *The Book of Prophet Isaiah* (Nabu Press, 2011) <https://www.amazon.com/book-prophet-Isaiah-John-Skinner/dp/1174640456>

THE TEXT OF ISAIAH 7:1-17²⁸⁴ AND ITS TRANSLATION

vv	Hebrew text of Isaiah 7:1-17	English translation of Isaiah 7:1-17
1.	<p>וַיְהִי בִימֵי אָחָז בֶּן־יוֹתָם בֶּן־עֲזַרְיָהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה עָלָה רֶצִין מֶלֶךְ אֲרָם וּפְקַח בֶּן־רִמְלִיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ־ יִשְׂרָאֵל יְרוּשָׁלַם לְמַלְחָמָה עָלָיו וְלֹא יָכַל לְהִלָּחֵם עָלָיו:</p>	<p>Then Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it.</p>
2.	<p>וַיִּגַּד לְבֵית דָּוִד לֵאמֹר נִחָה אֲרָם עַל־אֶפְרַיִם וַיִּנְעוּ לִכְבוֹל וּלְבָב עֲמוֹ כְּנֹעַ עֲצֵי־יַעַר מִפְּנֵי־ רוּחַ:</p>	<p>Now the house of David was told, "Aram has allied itself with Ephraim"; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.</p>
3.	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל צֵא־נָא לְקִרְיַת אָחָז אֵתָהּ וּשְׂאֵר יְשׁוּבֵי בְּנֵי אֶל־קִצֵּה תַעֲלֶת הַבְּרִכָּה הָעֹלְיוֹנָה אֶל־מִסְלַת שָׂדֵה כּוֹבֵס:</p>	<p>Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field.</p>
4.	<p>וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו הַשְׁמֵר וְהִשְׁקֵט אֶל־תִּירָא וּלְבַבְךָ אֶל־יֵרֶךְ מִשְׁנֵי זַנְבֹּת הָאוּדִים הָעֹשְׂנִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּחַר־אַף רֶצִין וְאֲרָם וּבֶן־רִמְלִיָּהוּ:</p>	<p>Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood — because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah.</p>
5.	<p>וְעַן כִּי־עָצָה עָלֶיךָ אֲרָם רַעַה אֶפְרַיִם וּבֶן־רִמְלִיָּהוּ מָר:</p>	<p>Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying,</p>

²⁸⁴ The Hebrew text of Isaiah was adopted from Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia and the translation follows the New International Version.

6.	<p>נַעֲלֶה בְּיְהוּדָה וְנִקְיָצְנָה וְנִבְקַעְנָה אֵלֵינוּ וְנִמְלִיךְ מֶלֶךְ בְּתוֹכָהּ אֶת בֶּן־ טַבְּאֵל:</p>	<p>“Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it.”</p>
7.	<p>כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה לֹא תִּקְוִים וְלֹא תִהְיֶה:</p>	<p>Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “It will not take place, it will not happen,</p>
8.	<p>כִּי רֹאשׁ אַרְם דַּמֶּשֶׁק וְרֹאשׁ דַּמֶּשֶׁק רִצִּין וּבְעוֹד שְׁשִׁים וְחֻמֵּשׁ שָׁנָה יִחַת אֶפְרַיִם מֵעַם:</p>	<p>for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people.</p>
9.	<p>וְרֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם שַׁמְרוֹן וְרֹאשׁ שַׁמְרוֹן בֶּן־ רִמְלִיָּהוּ אִם לֹא תִאֲמִינוּ כִּי לֹא תִאֲמִנוּ:</p>	<p>The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”</p>
10.	<p>וַיִּנְסַף יְהוָה דְּבַר אֶל־אֲחָז לֵאמֹר:</p>	<p>Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz,</p>
11.	<p>שְׁאַל־לְךָ אֹת מֵעַם יְהוָה לְהִיךְ הַעֲמִיק שְׁאֵלָה אוֹ הַגְּבֵה לְמַעְלָה:</p>	<p>“Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”</p>
12.	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר אֲחָז לֹא־אֲשָׂאֵל וְלֹא־אֶנְסֶה אֶת־יְהוָה:</p>	<p>But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”</p>
13.	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמֹעוּ־נָא בַּיִת דָּוִד הַמַּעֲט מִכֶּם הַלְאוֹת אַנְשִׁים כִּי תִלְאוּ גַם אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי:</p>	<p>Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?</p>
14.	<p>לָכֵן יִתֵּן אֲדֹנָי הוּא לָכֶם אוֹת הַנְּהַה הַעֲלִמָה הָרָה וְיִלְדַת בֶּן וְקָרְאת שְׁמוֹ עִמָּנוּ אֵל:</p>	<p>Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.</p>

15	<p>חֶמְאָה וְדָבַשׁ יֹאכֵל לְדַעְתּוֹ מֵאִסּוּ בָרַע וּבְחֹר בְּטוֹב: :</p>	<p>He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right.</p>
16	<p>כִּי בְטָרָם יֵדַע הַנַּעַר מֵאִסּוּ בָרַע וּבְחֹר בְּטוֹב הַמַּעֲבֹד הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה קֹץ מִפְּנֵי שָׂנֵי מַלְכֶיהָ: :</p>	<p>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.</p>
17	<p>יָבִיא יְהוָה עֲלֶיךָ וְעַל־ עַמֶּךָ וְעַל־בַּיִת אָבִיךָ יָמִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־בָאוּ לְמִנּוּם סוּר־אֶפְרַיִם מֵעַל יְהוּדָה אֶת מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר: :</p>	<p>The LORD will bring on you and, on your people, and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah — he will bring the king of Assyria.”</p>

ISAIAH 7:1-17 AND ITS IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

In biblical hermeneutics and interpretation, it becomes a known phenomenon that a biblical text does not stand in isolation from those around it. This is to mean that a biblical text depends on the surrounding texts in order to make known its meaning accurately. Consequently, it is remarkable that Isaiah 7 has a great relationship with its immediate context—the preceding and succeeding chapters 6 and 8 in a glaring way. For example, chapter 6:1 opens with a mention of King Uzziah who died in the year Prophet Isaiah saw the vision of God. While chapter 7:1 opens with a mention of king Ahaz, the grandson of King Uzziah. Chapter 6:8 records “then I heard the voice of the Lord saying” and 7:3 even though rephrased says “then the LORD said to Isaiah.” Yet, verse 9 of chapter 6 goes in similar fashion with verse 3 of chapter 7 which says “Go and tell this people” 6:9, and “Go out you and your son...” It would be discerned at this point that in verse 9 of 6, Isaiah was sent to the entire people of Judah, but in verse 3 of 7 he was sent to King Ahaz. But the relationship between these two verses is that it was Isaiah the prophet whom the Lord sent with a message;

which also shows that the call he answered to go, was to anyone the Lord sent him.

Similarly, there is a clear relationship between chapter 7 and chapter 8 of this book. One of the ways we could see this relationship is in the aspect of repetition of some terms as found in both chapters. For instance, the warning the Lord gave to king Ahaz through Isaiah in 7:4 to “be careful, keep calm, don’t be afraid and do not lose heart” is reechoed in 8:12 where the Lord warned Isaiah himself not to “fear what they fear, and not to dread what they dread.” In 7:4 king Ahaz is not to fear because the Lord would fight for him and his people, while in 8:12 prophet Isaiah is not to fear or dread anyone but fear the Lord alone and regard Him alone holy. Additionally, the word *aman* translated “believe or faith” occurs in 7:9 while in 8:17 the word *qarah* translated “look,” is used.²⁸⁵ But in this context, it can be translated “trust” as other versions rendered it, because it refers to an “expectant look” that believes something good would come out from the object upon which the action is directed. another important relationship is seen between 7:6-7 and 8:9. In these two references, it is the foreign nations that were planning the ruin of the people of God, but in turn, the Lord says of those plans in 7:7 “it will not take place, it will not happen” and in 8:9 “prepare for battle and be shattered ... device your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand.” These plans will not stand or be established because the Lord is not behind them just as King Ahaz was cautioned to stand firm in his faith otherwise, he would not stand at all.

Likewise, the name Immanuel mentioned in 7:14 is also repeated in 8:8, we also see a woman conceiving and giving birth in both 7:14 and 8:3. Moreover, we come across another clear similarity between the assertion “but *before the boy knows*

²⁸⁵ James Strong, *New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary* (PC Bible Electronic Database: Biblesoft Publishers., 1994), n.p.

enough to reject the wrong and choose the right” in 7:16 and “*before the boy knows* how to say my father or my mother” in 8:4. Yet in these verses, there are two expressions that seem similar in meaning even though different in the use of vocabulary. These are; “the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste” 7:16 and “the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria” 8:4. When the king of Assyria invades Damascus and Samaria, their wealth and plunder taken away, they would inevitably be laid waste as 7:16 puts it.

ANALYSIS²⁸⁶ AND STRUCTURE OF ISAIAH 7:1-17

In the introduction to this paper, we promised that rhetorical methods would be used in order to analyze the text under scrutiny. In describing this approach, James Muilenburg issued a famous call in 1968 to go beyond form criticism and focus on the unique features of a text. In doing this, he unveiled that rhetorical criticism or methodology helps in understanding the nature of Hebrew literary composition, it helps in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole.²⁸⁷ Therefore, in order to understand the flow of thought and succession of

²⁸⁶ Note: the analysis of Isaiah 7:1-17 in this section is made through the extensive aid of Karl Ellinger & Wilhelm Rudolf, (ed.), *Interlinear Transliterated Bible* (PC Bible Electronic Database: Biblesoft Publishers, 1994) and James Strong, *New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary* (PC Bible Electronic Database: Biblesoft Publishers., 1994), n.p.

²⁸⁷ James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 (1969) 1-18. For more discussions on rhetorical criticism as a method of Bible interpretation, see; Douglass Lawrie, *Speaking to Good Effect: An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2005), Steven L. McKenzie & Stephen R. Haynes, *To Each its own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticism and their Application* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), Hassan Musa, *Reading the Bible Anew: An Introduction to the Multidimensionality of the Biblical Hermeneutics for African Contexts* (Kaduna: Essence Publisher, 2021).

ideas, rhetorical method appears to be the most suitable. It would help in analyzing the grammar and syntax of Isaiah 7:1-17. It is hoped that when this is properly done, the meaning of this text will be obvious for further explanations and subsequent application of the text to the context of our concern.

The first verse opens this discourse with the verb *way^ahiy* (in *Qal* form, *waw* consecutive, third person masculine singular plus a conjunction) which is a formula with which narratives often begin. It indicates time or period when the event enveloped in a story begins to take place. So, it is translated “and it came to pass” but sometimes it is just translated “when” since it has to do with time. Hence, *biymeey Ahaz ben-yotham* (this word *biymeey* is in a construct state relying on the proceeding words to complete its meaning, it is a noun from the root *yom* “day,” it is a common noun, masculine and as it is used in this verse, it is in a plural form referring to “days” this word could refer to literal days in terms of a day (from sunrise to sunset) or a space of time that can be called a “period, age, era or epoch.” we can therefore say “it happened in the era of Ahaz son of Jotham the son of Uzziah king of Judah, that Rezin and Pekah *alah* (a verb, *Qal* perfect, 3ms) which is translated “went up or matched up.” This action of going up is a decisive action having a mission which was to *lamilchamah aleyhaa* “war against it” as highlighted above, the *alah* is in perfect tense, which means that the plan and the matching up had taken place but *w^alo yakol l^ahilachem ‘aleyha* “but could not prevail against it” the word *l^ahilachem* is a verb Niphal, infinitive construct with a preposition, referring to the fact that the action (of marching to war) previously taken did not yield a positive result to the invaders at all.

Since verse 1 and the rest of our pericope are accepted as narrating one and single story, then we can agree that the result of the plan, collaboration and execution of the war against Jerusalem has been presented to us already by the narrator in verse 1. In this light, verse 2 and the following verses began to narrate the story properly as if the results were not known.

Therefore, verse 2 begins with *wayyugad* (a verb, in Hophal perfect form, 3ms plus a conjunction “now or and”), so it could be translated “Now or and it was told,” that is, the house of David was told of the plans made by the two nations (Aram/Syria and Ephraim) to wage war against Jerusalem. This news shook the hearts of King Ahaz and his people like the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind. The use of this metaphor “like the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind” is profound, it gives a picture of how trees are intensely shaken to the extent that some are even pulled off. The words used for moved are *wayyana’* and *k^anoa’*” all in *Qal* form which depict a past action with the second one having a preposition *k^e* “as or like.” The use of the preposition and likening the shaking of the king’s heart and the hearts of his people reflect the extent to which fear gripped them so deeply. Now seeing the state of the king’s heart and the hearts of his people, verse three came into the scene. The verse begins with *wayyomer Y^ewah* translated “then said the Lord” the word *wayomer* is in *Qal* form, *waw* consecutive 3rd person masculine singular and attached to it is a particle—conjunction. The use of the conjunction tells us that Yahweh’s speech to Isaiah is as a result of the fear that gripped king Ahaz and his people. The Lord responded with a command to Isaiah saying@ *tseⁿah liq^ra’t* meaning “Go forth now.” This word *ste’* *Á* is a verb *Qal* imperative masculine singular from the root *yaastaa’* meaning “to go out” It is a command given and so Isaiah would have to obey right away.

Isaiah was sent with words that could stabilize the hearts of Ahaz and his people. VERSE 4 records some strong words used here; *hishamer w^ahash^aqeet al-tiyra ulbab^aka al yerak*. “be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart” the first two verbs used; *hishamer w^ehashqet* are Niphal imperatives masculine singular, suggesting that they are commands to king Ahaz and the second two verbs; *al-thiyra’* and *al-yeyrak* are in *Qal* imperfect with negation *al-* saying “fear not” and “be fainthearted not.” Furthermore, other metaphors are used here in order to show the reason why king Ahaz and

his people should obey the command of the Lord and find peace of mind. These nations conspiring against Jerusalem are described as *ha'udiyim ha 'asheniym* these words are common nouns, plural in nature and both in absolute state. Translated “these two smoldering stubs of firewood.” This is just to mean that they are equal to nothing.

Verses 5 and 6 are a detailed account of the plot made by Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son to ruin Judah. The word *ya 'ats* used in verse 5 also translated “have taken counsel (*Qal* perfect form 3rd person masculine singular), indicates that the actions have taken place already. in verse 6, we encounter an outstanding beginning; *na'aleh* a verb *Qal*, perfect. This same word is used in verse 1 even though rendered differently. But in all the renderings, it connotes a decision to “go up” against Judah with the purpose of making it a desolate place and unconducive for habitation. In this verse, the reason given behind their going up against Judah was to *uwnqiytsenah* which is in a verb hiphil imperfect, common gender, 3rd person plural with an additional conjunction “and,” meaning “and vex it” or to “make it anxious, distressed or grieved.” By inflicting suffering upon it through dethroning its king and setting their own king upon it who would act according to their dictates.

Verse 7 opens with another prophetic formula, *koh amar adonay Yahweh* “thus says the Lord God.” Other English versions like the NIV qualifies the name “Lord” and hence rendered it “sovereign Lord,” and also eliminated “*Yewah*” translated “LORD/Yahweh.” So, they rendered the expression as “this is what the sovereign LORD says.” In as much as this is good and meant for emphasis and does not in any way distort the meaning of the text, it should still be noted that the word “sovereign” is not found in the original text. Nonetheless, Isaiah's use of this formula “thus says the LORD” simply connotes the fact that it is “the LORD” who gave him the message and therefore, the message carries authority, authenticity and it should be heard and received with all sense of urgency. What then does the LORD say? The second part of the verse answers

this question saying: *lo taqum w^alo tih^ayeh* translated “it shall stand not, neither shall it come to pass.” The two verbs *thih^eyeh* and *taqum* are all Qal imperfect 3rd person feminine singular. This is an expression of what is going to happen in the future and the use of the “shall” and “will” expresses certainty and inevitability, meaning that the plans made by the enemies of Judah in verse 6 would “never” come to pass. Not that it will “not” or it shall “not” happen, but the negation is a strong one “never” which connotes absoluteness and completeness to refer to the fact that these plans will not even come close to execution.

Verse 8 gives the reason behind which the plans made in verse 6 will never take place and neither shall it happen as depicted in verse 7. The word *kiy* opens verse 8. It is a participle and conjunction referring to a causation. *Kiy rosh Aram dameseq warosh dameseq Ratsiyn* translated as “for the head of Syria is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Resin” this then means that as a consequence of the fact that the leader or the strength of Aram is Damascus and the leader of Damascus is Rezin, and the people of Judah had the LORD as their leader, then these plans will never even come close to implementation. Furthermore, to prove to the king that the Lord is out for their rescue, he concretizes His assertion by giving a time within which Ephraim would be extinguished and eliminated entirely, saying; “within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people.” The verb used for shattered *yechat* is a niphal imperfect, 3rd person masculine singular which denotes “to break down, prostrate (to level flat) either literally by violence or figuratively by confusion or fear.” Thus, because Ephraim has joined hands together with Aram and Remaliah’s son, Ephraim would cease to be a people because they would be scattered, shattered, and eliminated by God himself.

As the narrative progresses, coming to verse 9, we are confronted with a similar assertion found in the opening of verse 8. Even though verse 8 begins with *kiy!* “for” verse 9 begins with *w^e* “and.” So verse 9 is a continuation of verse 8, and since verse 8 expresses causation, 9 also continues with this notion implying that the action of shattering Ephraim to cease to be a people would take place because “the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah’s son. Hence, they are too weak to stand against the judgment of the Lord, and they have trusted themselves not the LORD. Therefore, the king is now cautioned *im lo ta’ a’miynum kiy lo te’amenum* “if you will not believe, surely you shall not be established.” The two verbs used in this verse, *tha a’miynu* (verb, Hiphil imperfect, 2nd person masculine plural) and *the a’menu* (verb niphil imperfect, 2nd person masculine plural) are from the same root *aman* literally meaning “to build up or support” but figuratively meaning “to stand firm or faithful, to trust or believe.” The figurative meaning is rather used in most of the English translations like the NIVERSE While the NLT adopting the figurative usage, which gives a totally different rendering saying, “unless your faith is firm, I cannot make you stand firm.” One could actually wonder where this translation comes from when the original text is considered. Nonetheless, it can be clearly seen that this is “an implied interpretation” because this is not what the text connotes. In addition, in the original text, the noun “faith” is not used, but English translations are translating the conjunction *kiy* as a noun which is far from the original meaning. Hence, we can translate the text as “if you do not remain faithful, surely/indeed you shall not be established.” But by implication, the king is to put or remain faithful to God, because it is only God who would establish or make him stand. Therefore, this is a caution not to trust any human ally or alliance for it is only God who gives victory.

VERSE 10 gives a transition from the first thought to another subject matter even though in a tune of continuity. It expresses the fact that King Ahaz additionally received the

word of the Lord. The way the narrator puts it, it appears like the LORD spoke to Ahaz directly without any mediator, but certainly, we are to presume that the LORD spoke through the prophet Isaiah. However, verse 11 began the unveiling of the contents of the speech of the LORD to Ahaz. The Lord spoke to Ahaz saying, *sh^a'al laka owt meim Yahweh 'Eloheyaka* “ask the LORD your God a sign” the word used to open the verse *sh^a'al* is the verb of the sentence, a *Qal* imperative, masculine singular, translated “ask, request, enquire or pray.” Meaning that it is a command given to Ahaz not a suggestion to enquire of the LORD for a sign or miracle that could confirm that the plans made by his enemies would not succeed. But in response, Ahaz answered *lo'esh' al walo anaceh et Yahweh* “I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord” the word *lo'-'esh a'l* is a verb with a negation “no/not.” The verb *e'sh^e'al* is a *Qal* imperfect 1st person common singular. The Lord commanded King Ahaz to ask for a sign, but he responded saying he will not; meaning he is ready to disobey the instruction of the Lord, thinking through disobedience he would please the Lord. Ahaz used another word *a'naseh* which is also a verb *Qal* imperfect 1st person common singular. The use of these two verbs *e'sh a'l* and *a'naseh a* in the imperfect form with a negation *lo'* implies that king Ahaz was not conditional in his reply but decisive in his stance not to obey the command of the Lord to enquire for a sign thinking that doing that would “put the Lord to test.”

Azah's disobedience to enquire of a sign from the Lord now brought verse 13 into the scene. In this verse, two rhetorical questions were asked, but before the questions, the Lord called their attention saying *shim uwna* “hear now” the word *shim u'* is a verb, *Qal* imperative masculine plural. Hence, since it is an imperative, it means the Lord is giving a command that the house of David/Ahaz should hear and listen keenly to what the Lord has to say. His stance not to ask the Lord for a sign thinking that it would be a test, turned that he was trying the patience of God. But the word used for patience in most English

translations does not fit the original word. The word *hal o'th* from the root *la a'h* is used in its Hiphil infinitive construct form, meaning “to weary, grieve, or even to be disgusted.” In a sense, this kind of pious attitude of disobedience is disgusting to the Lord. And the Lord resolved to give the sign by Himself in verse 14. So verse 14 gives a new texture to the narrative in response to the disobedience of king Ahaz, it says *laken yiten adonay huw laken owt* the use of the verb *yishen* in Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from the root *nathan* (he gave) shows that the Lord is decisive to offer a sign to king Ahaz and his people in response to king Ahaz’s decisive stance to disobey God by not asking for a sign. Furthermore, the word used for sign in the text *o'th* could be translated “signal, evidence, miracle or mark.” This sign is meant to prove that the plans of these kings will not take place and it will not happen. This sign or evidence is that *ha'almaḥ harah wayoledet ben waqara shamow immanuw-el* “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call him Immanuel” the word *ha 'almaḥ* is from the root *'almaa* meaning a young damsel or maid, usually used in reference to a young lady who has never known a man sexually. In this text, there is an attachment of a definite article *ha* which means that the narrator is specific in terms of the spinster he is referring to. Therefore, it would indeed become a miracle that such a young woman would conceive without knowing a man sexually. Just as the narrator is specific in reference to the virgin, he is also specific with the name which the child will bear. This is indeed a predictive prophecy that unveils the mind of God regarding the absolute salvation of his people.

The child to be born as a sign, out of a miracle from the LORD is going to follow the normal natural process of growth. This is the reason why verse 15 opens to tell us that the young child will eat “*chem a'h*” translated “butter” and “*d'ebash*” translated “honey” when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. The two adjectives used *bara'* and *batob* are mostly translated “wrong and right.” But it should be noted that translating these words to mean mere “wrong and right” is a

deliberate liquidation of its original meaning. Hence from the original sense of the word, *ra'* means "evil" and *tob†* means "good." the proper translation could be "evil" and "good." Interestingly, the child would be given "free will" to be able to choose for himself when he gets to the age of discernment. Some translations, like the interlinear puts it that; the boy would be able to know and reject evil and choose the good as a result of the honey and butter he would take. In a sense, the result of eating butter and honey is to produce the knowledge of rejecting evil and choosing good. Now verse 16 is a further prediction and explanation of what verse 15 expresses. Verse 15 tells us that the child is going to grow naturally as every other human being does, but before verse 15 comes to reality and fulfilment, *te'azeb ha'adamah asher atah qats*, literally translated as "the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken" the word *the a'zib* is a verb in Niphal form and so it is imperfect, 3rd person, feminine singular, which can also be translated as "to forsake, to leave destitute." Again, the word *qats* is used in this passage in the *Qal* form as a participle, masculine singular, in absolute state to mean "distressed, be weary, anxious or grieved." With this, we can say that the Lord is predicting the downfall of the two kings that were conspiring against Jerusalem, the land of these two kings are to become desolate, destitute, and a waste.

The last verse of our corpus—verse 17 closes our literary unit. This verse concretizes our understanding of the fact that what the Lord planned to do will surely come to pass. The usage of the word *yabiy* "shall bring" in connection to the proper noun *Ye'wah* "the LORD" is a pointer to the certainty of the action the LORD would take on behalf of His people in Jerusalem; hence, he would bring to them and their people and upon the house of their fathers a time unlike any since Ephraim allied with foreign kings to attack Jerusalem. The sign to be given by the Lord as stated in verse 14 is such that had never happened to the people of Judah since the departure of Ephraim. However, here comes a direct object pointer *eth* which preceded the mention of "the king of Assyria." The presence of this pointer connotes that the

king of Assyria would be used as an instrument through which the Lord would deliver his people from their enemies. With this thought in mind therefore, we can say that this prophecy has a short-term and long-term validity and application. The coming of the Assyrian king would be a sign that the Lord would deliver his people from their present predicament and the sign of the virgin birth is pointing to the absolute emancipation of the Lord's people from their spiritual slavery and predicaments of the distant future which could only be obtained by standing firm in faith.

The above analysis of the text of Isaiah 7:1-17 without doubt helps us to understand that this text as a literary unity maintains a good narrative flow of thought. The story moves smoothly without any alteration. Now considering the analysis given above the following structure could be gleaned as follows:

THE STRUCTURE OF ISAIAH 7:1-17

A. Foreign Allies' Inability to Overpower the People of God (7:1)

1. Foreign Allies coalition for fight Jerusalem
2. Their Inability to Overpower Jerusalem

B. Obedience to The Commands of The Lord; Absolute Peace Is Found 7:4

1. Be careful
2. Keep Calm
3. Don't be Afraid

C. The Counsel of the Wicked Against the Righteous will be Futile and their Plans Shattered Verse 5-9a

1. It will not take place
2. It will not happen
3. Ephraim will be shattered

D. A Call to Stand Firm in Faith VERSE 9b.

1. Stand firm in faith

2. Without faith there is no establishment

E. A Sign Required and True Obedience Desired 10-13

1. Ask the Lord for a Sign
2. The Lord gave the sign of Immanuel

F. The Distressed Heart Found Hope in The Virgin Birth of Immanuel Vverse 14-16.

1. A Sign of Immanuel verse 14.
2. The natural developments of the child Immanuel
3. The knowledge of the child Immanuel

G. The Present Physical Deliverance of God's People Predicted VERSE 17.

ISSUES RAISED BY THE PERICOPE—ISAIAH 7:1-17

Upon studying this text, one would have no option than to be perplexed with the predictive prophecy this pericope envelops. Undoubtedly, this prophecy has raised so many issues that space and time would be insufficient for one to address sufficiently. These issues most often than not raise countless questions in the reader's mind, thus: Is this prophecy of "the virgin birth" referring to the birth of Jesus Christ the Messiah? Who could this virgin be, looking at the context of this prophecy? Who/what is the fulfillment of this sign, Jesus Christ or the king of Assyria? These among many are the questions that come up when engaging this portion of scripture. Consequently, this pericope and especially verses 14-16 is one among the many stimulating passages found in the book of Isaiah; hence, scholars over the years have vehemently debated and are hitherto debating on its meaning in an attempt to have a better interpretation and application of the text. Charles L. Feinberg is one among the numerous scholars who engaged this text; and in his article, "the Virgin Birth and Isaiah 7:14" he expresses the fact that "from earliest times to the present the discussions which have centered about this theme have been

both interesting, varied, and at times even heated.”²⁸⁸ In like manner, Johannes Lindblom describes Isaiah 7:14 as “the endlessly discussed passage of the Immanuel sign.”²⁸⁹ Furthermore, George Rawlinson gives a list of twenty-eight authors who have written dissertations on it and his work becomes the twenty-ninth, yet this subject is not close to been exhausted. Remarkably, with a heart full of concern for the true meaning of this text, Albert Barnes articulates his confusion on this passage saying: “who this virgin was, and what is the precise meaning of this prediction, has given, perhaps more perplexity to commentators than almost any other portion of the Bible.”²⁹⁰

Unquestionably, the bewilderment into which this text has thrown many scholars has produced abundant literature on this particular portion of scripture, and nonetheless discussions on the text are on the increase. With a keen consideration of the context of this prophecy, many scholars have argued that the situation in which king Ahaz and his people found themselves, they needed an immediate intervention from the Lord and hence, interpreted this sign of the virgin birth as something that had to do with their immediate future even though a distant future fulfilment of the prophecy cannot be sidelined. There are some number of views upheld by scholars with regards to the interpretation of this “virgin birth and the sign of Immanuel” found in 7:14-16. On the one hand, many scholars have frequently identified the mother (arguing that the word *ha’almah* does not speak of virginity but refers to a young woman of marriage age) with the wife of Ahaz; so the child is the kings’ own son, this point of

²⁸⁸ Charles L. Feinberg, “the Virgin Birth and Isaiah 7:14” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 22/1 (Spring 2011): 11-17.

²⁸⁹ Johannes Lindblom, “A Study on the Immanuel Section on Isaiah vii, 1-ix, 6,” *Scripta Minora* 1957-58:4 (Lund, Sweden: Lund CWK Gleerup, 1958), 15.

²⁹⁰ Albert Barnes, “Isaiah,” in *Notes on the Old Testament: Explanatory and Practical*, ed. Robert Frew (1853; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950), 148.

view goes in line with the argument presented by Joel Edmund Anderson when he reflects that “when read within the immediate literary context of Isaiah 7-14, Isaiah 7:14 is first and foremost a prophecy about the birth of a royal son of Ahaz who would become king and whose reign would witness the humiliation of Assyria [and] based on historical analysis and the analysis of the greater literary context of Proto-Isaiah, that Immanuel was understood to be Hezekiah.”²⁹¹

While others hold that the *almah* is Isaiah’s own wife, the prophetess of 8:3, one of the several wives or his new wife after the death of Shear-Jashub’s mother, and that Immanuel was one of the prophet’s sons.²⁹² In addition, Gleason Archer discusses that the woman was Isaiah’s fiancée, soon to be married to the prophet and that the birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz is the immediate fulfilment of the prophecy.²⁹³ While giving a synopsis of the relationship between the text of Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23, Maarten J. J. Menken highlights very cogent issues with regards to the translation of Isaiah 7:14 in relation to Matthew 1:22-23 and he came to a conclusion that the application in Matthew is to Jesus, while Isaiah refers to a child to be born in the near future.²⁹⁴ In all these views, the most popular views still remain the perspectives that maintain and agreed that the virgin birth is referring to Jesus Christ. For instance, Gerard Van Groningen observes that “...there is no ground, grammatical, historical, or logical, for doubt as to the

²⁹¹ Joel Edmund Anderson, “Isaiah 7:14: Identity and Function within the Bookend Structure of Proto-Isaiah” *A PhD Dissertation* (University of Pretoria, 2008), 145.

²⁹² Herbert M. Wolf, “A Solution to the Immanuel Prophecy in Isaiah 7:14-8:22” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (Dec., 1972): 450.

²⁹³ Gleason Archer, *Old Testament quotations in the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 54.

²⁹⁴ Maarten J. J. Menken, “The Textual Form of the Quotation from Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23” *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Apr., 2001): 144-160.

Immanuel: Prophecy and Fulfilment [Isaiah 7:14-17; 8:8; 95-7; Matt. 1:22] *The Old and New Testament Student*, Vol. 12, no. 6 (June 1891): 377-388.

main point, that the Church in all ages has been right in regarding this passage as a signal and explicit prediction of the miraculous conception and nativity of Jesus Christ.”²⁹⁵ Herbert M. Wolf also argues soundly that Isaiah 7:10-17 could not refer to Hezekiah because the wider context prohibits it and that same reading which forbids Hezekiah to be the fulfiller actually indicates that Jesus has fulfilled the prophecy.”²⁹⁶

It is noteworthy however that this text when interpreted with the view of the immediate fulfilment alone, error would be inevitable because the historical context would inform us as agreed by many scholars that king Ahaz and his people needed an immediate fulfilment of the prophecy which would suit the situation they had at hand and so any future fulfilment without immediate intervention would become meaningless to them at that point in time. On the other hand, if we only agree that the text is only historically valid and only apply to the immediate fulfilment without the distant future fulfilment, then still running into error may be unavoidable and the plans of God for the entire humanity may be out of this picture entirely. This therefore means that the text connotes immediate intervention to King Ahaz and his people as well as a distant future fulfilment which takes into consideration the entire human race as part of God’s salvific plan. Therefore, in all these views, extremes should be avoided.

AN EXPLANATION OF ISAIAH 7:1-17

This passage is a story of an alliance by a foreign nation and the king of Israel to fight against Jerusalem. The reason of their coming together with this common goal is not mentioned in the text; we have no idea of how Jerusalem became an enemy to these people. All that we can say as verse 1 informs us is that “but they could not overpower it.” Jerusalem is considered the

²⁹⁵ Gerard Van, Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990), 100.

²⁹⁶ Wolf, “A Solution to the Immanuel Prophecy in Isaiah 7:14-8:22,” 452.

city of God, Psalm 132:13-14 expresses that “for the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling, saying, ‘this is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned for I have desired it.’” Even though Jerusalem is not mentioned here categorically, but in explaining this verse, Dennis Pollock says, in other words, God says, “I’m going to make Jerusalem My city, my home—because I want to!”²⁹⁷ so Jerusalem as a city was not just valued for nothing, it was valued because the chosen people of God indwell the city. As such, verse 1 speaks clearly that because the people of God dwelled in Jerusalem, foreign allies could not overpower it—and this became the summary and conclusion of the matter. This is because the LORD was with them.

After giving the summary in verse 1, the narrator informed the house of David concerning this plan. Ahaz and everyone (in Jerusalem—the house of David) who heard the news became terrified and their heart shook terribly. At this point, the only thing needed was absolute obedience to the commands of God in which absolute peace is found. The words used in verse 4 show that peace is not found on what we can see physically. Ahaz and his people were seeing war and defeat, there were terror and death, but then God commanded through the prophet saying, “be careful, keep calm, do not be afraid and do not loose heart.” In our analysis, we discovered that the first two verbs are in *Niphal* form, meaning they are commands, while the second two are in *Qal* imperfect with a negation “no/not,” and this is meant to highlight that they are orders to follow and through them absolute peace is promised. Furthermore, it could yet be discerned in verse 4 that the reason why Ahaz and his people were instructed to keep calm is because those nations allying against them were equated to nothing when compared to the power and might of the God of

²⁹⁷ Dennis Pollock, “Jerusalem—the City of God” *Spirit of Grace Ministries*, retrieved from https://www.spiritofgrace.org/articles/nl_2015/00_jerusalem.html on 24th August, 2023.

Jerusalem who already gave the conclusion of the matter even before it began. They are equated to mere firewood which is only good for fuel. The assertion of Watts makes it clearer and simpler when he articulates concerning God's commands in which absolute peace is found, thus "this encouragement from the Lord indicated approval and support from God."²⁹⁸

Following the commands given in verse 4, vverse 5 and 6 tell us the details of the counsel made by these wicked people against Jerusalem the city of the LORD. But we later understand that these counsels against the righteous people of God were futile and will be futile. The wicked may be planning the ruin of the righteous, thinking of how to invade and divide the plunder of the righteous among themselves, but those plans are in total mess already because the Lord is with the righteous. Interestingly, verse 7 opens with a strong prophetic formula which further strengthens our point on the fact that the plans of the wicked will come to nothing, the Lord says, "it will not take place, it will not happen." Isaiah's use of the two different names referring to God here "*Adonay and Yahweh*" is for emphasis in order to draw out attention to the sovereignty of God the "I AM," in contrast to the gods of other nations—the enemies of Jerusalem. It is therefore important to note that these plans were not coming to pass not simply because Jerusalem was strong, no, but because they had a strong God by their side. And because of this, the plans of these wicked people would be unsuccessful. In addition, verse 8 makes it clear that since the head of Aram is Damascus not God, the head of Damascus is Rezin not God and the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son not God, then, within a very limited time of sixty-five years it will be in oblivion.

In the midst of all these, verse 9b comes with a clarion call to king Ahaz and his people to have firm faith in God, the owner of Jerusalem. Commenting on this verse, Watts adds that "verse

²⁹⁸ Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 131.

9b comes with an important encouragement that appears to be one of the most meaningful couplets in the scripture... the words are meant for the entire government, the king and his advisers.”²⁹⁹ By this he is simply denoting that even though before this verse, Ahaz was addressed in a second person singular, but coming to verse 9b, he was addressed in second person plural which include everyone in his palace, in fact the entire people of Jerusalem inclusive.³⁰⁰ This is because it is only in faith and by faith they would be firmly established as a people and faith requires that one trust what seemed not working physically, been hopeful that the sovereign God is on top of the matter. Yet on this, Watts supplements that “the young king was clearly uncertain and frightened, as well he might be. He is reminded of God’s faithfulness and of God’s assurance. But in verse 9b he is reminded that he has a task to fulfill, like that outlined for Solomon and Jeroboam.”³⁰¹ Faith is the task that he must take risk to have even in those trying times. Feinberg also acknowledges that “In that dark hour it required faith to lay hold of this pronouncement of Isaiah, and he warned that if God’s word through him were not believed, there would be no establishment of the king and his people.”³⁰²

Walter Brueggemann says, “we are not given the reaction of the king to the prophetic summons of verse 9b. What follows in verses 10ff. suggests that King Ahaz refused the call of Isaiah to radical faith.”³⁰³ With the above understanding, we can therefore say that King Ahaz’s refusal to have faith in God necessitated the need for a sign. Faithless people always require a sign/evidence their eyes can behold in order to believe. This brings to mind the story of Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus, who was told that Jesus had risen from the dead and

²⁹⁹ Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 132.

³⁰⁰ Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 132.

³⁰¹ Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 132.

³⁰² Feinberg, “the Virgin Birth and Isaiah 7:14”

³⁰³ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 69.

even appeared to the rest of the disciples while he was away, but in response he retorted saying “unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25) now in order to make Thomas believe, Jesus had to reappear to them while Thomas was with them and said to Thomas “put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” (Jn. 20:27).

Similarly, King Ahaz did not believe what the Lord had spoken concerning the futility of the plans of their enemies and therefore needed a sign to that effect which would make him trust God. Fascinatingly, despite his unbelief and desire for a proof, when the Lord commanded him to ask for a sign of whatever kind, “not only to prove that Yahweh your God is trustworthy, but also to implement Yahweh’s purpose,”³⁰⁴ he piously rejected the offer. For King Ahaz to say “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to test” the words used are all in *Qal* imperfect tense which suggesting that Ahaz was decisive not to ask for a sign. Stephen A. McKinion quoting Jerome explains that “... it is not from humility but from pride that he does not wish to ask for a sign from the Lord. For although it is written in Deuteronomy, “you shall not tempt the Lord your God” ... he should have fulfilled that commandment in obedience, especially since both Gideon and Manoah sought and received signs.”³⁰⁵ In similar note, Goldingay expresses that “the offer functions to expose Ahaz as a man who did not want to trust in God even if he had the evidence ... admittedly, he was a man good at *argumentum ad hominem* who knows how to sound scriptural (Deut. 6:16) when it suits (verse 12).”³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ John Goldingay, *Isaiah: New International Bible Commentary* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), 64.

³⁰⁵ Stephen A. McKinion, Ed., *Isaiah 1-39: Ancient Christians Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament X* (Downer Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 60.

³⁰⁶ Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 64.

In verse 14, we see the Lord going ahead to give the King a sign. On this, Brueggemann further comments that “the sign is a visible gesture whereby the theological claim of God is made concrete and therefore inescapable”³⁰⁷ this claim refers to the theological claim that God is with his people, this has been concretized in the sign God gave. And because he is with his people within a very short period of time, before the child grows enough to the point of taking decisions on his likes and dislikes, those kings that made the hearts of Ahaz and his people shake like the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind would vanish, be laid waste. In other words, what these nations organized themselves to do against the people of God would come upon them without anyone to rescue them. Nevertheless, this sign, as it has experienced different interpretations, can be considered to have long-term and short-term fulfilments. One fulfilled in one of the sons of Ahaz and the other in the person of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, two different aspects of deliverances are pictured here; physical deliverance as needed by Ahaz and the people of Judah and spiritual deliverance that is needed by the entire human race which is found in Jesus. Having in mind this short-term fulfilment of the sign, Goldingay elucidates, thus:

“Isaiah need not have a particular woman in mind; she could be any woman who will soon marry and conceive in the ordinary way. When her baby is born, it will be a time of deliverance from Aram and Ephraim. By the time he can choose between good and bad food, he will have good food to enjoy and the allies will themselves be devastated (vverse 15-16). So they were. Thus, his mother will call him **God** [is] **with us** out of gratitude for God’s amazing faithfulness.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, 69.

³⁰⁸ Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 64.

Goldingay's submission comes to play simply because the text did not name any woman in specification. It only says "the virgin" which could refer to any woman of a marriageable age but not married yet. In the Jewish culture, a woman not married yet must and should be a virgin. Therefore, he refers to this virgin as any woman who would get married and give birth to a son and before he grows reaching the age of discernment, the enemies of Jerusalem would be no more. And this is the hope, the distressed hearts of Ahaz and Jerusalemites found in the virgin birth of Immanuel which also predicted their present physical deliverance.

CONCLUSION: A CALL TO THE AFRICAN CHURCH TO HAVE FAITH IN IMMANUEL

The text of our discussion in this paper is about Ahaz and the people of Jerusalem, the people called by the name of the Lord. A time came in their history during the reign of Ahaz that their enemies allied against them in order to overpower them and ruing their city to a point of desolation. But as we have explored in our discourse, their alliance became fruitless simply because it was done against the people of God. Applicably, the heart of the African church (Christians) in the present time is being shaken as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind, as in the case of Ahaz and his people. Sunday Bobai Agang in his book, *No More Cheeks to Turn?* Expressed this reality saying:

African Christians live in the same reality as everyone else, and Africa's violent crises have deeply affected them. Some are on the brink of despair. I know of a pastor whose church was burnt and several of his members killed by Boko Haram Islamist ... I have heard of an evangelical seminary where several students and alumni have lost their lives in religious violence.³⁰⁹

This is the reality in which the African church lives; threats everywhere, killing of Christians by the Islamist terrorists every

³⁰⁹ Sunday Bobai Agang, *No More Cheeks to Turn?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Hippo Books Publishers, 2017), 1.

day. Irrefutably, many nations of the African continent are experiencing serious security challenges where kidnapping is always on the increase. However, among these people being kidnapped and even killed, majority are the Christians. This therefore, is making some to “even argue that Christians [Africa] are experiencing war, and that they are thus entitled to arm themselves as combatants fighting what they regard as a “just war”³¹⁰ amidst this, what is the hope of the African church?

Apostle Peter’s declaration of the person of Jesus in his answer to Jesus’s question of “who do people say the Son of Man is?” and Jesus’s response to Peter in Matthew 16:13-18 are pivotal to the church in Africa. Jesus declares in verse 18 saying “and I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” Well, it should be noted at this point that exegeting and interpreting this verse is beyond my goal at the moment, but my focus is on the statement “I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” This statement underscores that even though the church in Africa is bedeviled by the wicked plans of the wicked, just as the narrative in Isaiah 7:1 says “but they could not overpower it.” So also, the church in Africa cannot and will not be overpowered by the enemy since it is Christ who established and sustains it. This does not however mean that these wicked plans will not affect the African church, but even when it does, there is an assurance that “they cannot overpower it, the gates of Hades cannot and will not overcome it.

Verse 4 of our focal text made it known to us that in obedience to the command of the Lord, absolute peace is found. This then suggests that inasmuch as the African church is established and is been sustained by Christ, yet for the church to find peace the kind Jesus himself gives, (Jn. 14:27) the church needs and should be obedient to the commands of God through Jesus Christ, because it is through such that love towards Him is expressed and remaining in his love is achieved, yet, through

³¹⁰ Agang, *No More Cheeks to Turn?*, 2.

his enablement (Jn. 14:21; 15:10). This obedience refers to an absolute submission to the Lordship of Christ. Furthermore, the church is called to firm faith in Christ as required of King Ahaz, trusting that God is capable of preserving the church to the extent that the counsel of the wicked against the righteous (church) will only remain futile and their plans shattered. Because of the unbelief of King Ahaz, God told him to ask for a sign which would serve as a proof that God was with him and his people, and the wicked plans of his enemies would not come to pass, when in piousness rejected the sign, God went ahead and gave him a sign that would be both for them in their day, and for the entire world. To the church in Africa, this sign is considered and accepted as the birth of Jesus Christ. And in what is considered the inauguration of his social ministry in Luke 4:16 he declares “the Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” This scripture is a quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2^b and Jesus concluded by saying “today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Luke 4:21^b.

because of Jesus’ presence in the church—Immanuel, the church in Africa does not need to fear, rather it should “be careful, keep calm and [not to] be afraid.” In all the dealings of the African church, faith in Christ is pivotal, because if the African church does not stand firm in (her) faith, even amidst these threads and violence, then it will not stand at all. The leaders of the church cannot help the church, the governments of the African nations cannot help the church, there is no any power that can help the African church, but God alone, the founder of the church through Christ.

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