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NOT COWARDICE BUT FAITH. EXEGETICAL LOOK AT IZ 1: 1-17

I. Introduction

The oracle given to King Ahaz in this chapter has occasioned so many discussions and views that one hardly knows where to begin. But if we stay with the major ideas and probable interpretations we shall find a straightforward interpretation and a powerful message. It is a message that challenges our faith.

The prophecy of the chapter is amazingly accurate. The sign that a boy was about to be born is the pivotal point. Before he would be old enough to tell right from wrong, that is, about 12 years old, the enemies would not only be defeated but cease to exist.

The message of the chapter for the time of Ahaz corresponds nicely with the timeless truth the passage teaches, and so we can word it in a general principle: *True security from all danger (even judgment) comes by faith in God's supernatural provision of Immanuel.* There is a glorious future promised by God through the Davidic Covenant; that future is guaranteed and confirmed through a divinely appointed birth that is completely unexpected and that is proof of God's presence. Thus, God calls people to believe His word and find security in troubling times, in this life, and in the life to come. In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son to be born of the Virgin Mary; this One is Immanuel in the true sense of the word. His birth confirmed that His word was trustworthy. Faith in Him guarantees participation in the glorious future of peace and righteousness.

The application for *unbelievers* is certainly the warning to believe or they will not be confirmed. The application for *believers* would be two-fold: to gain confidence through this sign that their destiny is sure, and to

share the work of the prophet in calling for others to become part of the remnant of the LORD and put away fears of the circumstances of life.

II. Delimitation and structure of text

The chapters 7-12 create series so called *The book of Emmanuel* because all the sentences, phrases, oracles that create all this *book*, the mention of Emmanuel is the unique consolation among all this terrifying messages, judgments which strike the people according to condemnation proclaimed against it in chapter sixth.

The thing is that there is no general agreement about where the section ends. When we take a look at chapter sixth which we could describe as autobiography tale, here in chapter seventh we find an account written in third person, so it is totally different literary language.

The first part of the chapter recounts appearances before King Ahaz. There are two appearances so it has to be seen two components in the text. Unfortunately we may ask, *where is the end of this story*. Responding at this question, scholar Gray underlined that the end we find in verse 16, because a verse 17 leads into a new section, even if the verse 17th begins with formula *yiqtol* אֵיךְ אֵיךְ, he suggested that it is only a conclusion of what a prophet has said¹.

Some scholars give a suggestion that verses 1-9 and 10-17 should be treated separately but personally I doubt and I am in agreement with the scholar *Dohmen*² who says that v. 10 begins with אֵיךְ אֵיךְ and it means a progress not division. Generally speaking we could divide this passage in this manner but most of all I was trying to focus till verse 14 (I included next three verses to give a quite clear view):

- A) historical introduction (vv.1-2)
- B) the first Isaiah's appearance before Ahaz (vv. 3-9)
- C) the second Isaiah's appearance before Ahaz (vv.10-17)

¹ Cf. G. B. GRAY, *The Book of Isaiah I-XXVII. Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, Edinburgh 1912, 1980, p. 114ff.

² Cf. C. DOHMEN, *Das Immanuelzeichen. Ein jesajanisches Drohwort und seine inneralttestamentliche Rezeption*, *Biblica* 68 (1987), p. 308.

We may say that the three announcements about Emmanuel we find in chapters 7;9;11. Chapters 6;12 are considered as prologue and epilog of this composition. Our chapter seventh takes part of it and in this chapter announcement of Emmanuel's birth is clearly appeared.

That sort of composition throughout the chapters 7-11 creates a basic thesis which treats about Emmanuel with prolog (ch.6) and epilog (ch.12). The pericope 7,1-17 has its own place in well coordinated and composed integrity of the *book of Emmanuel*, and it must not be separated and understood without complexity of the book.

III. A. Literary context

As every biblical passage which has to be analysed, in the case of Is,1-17, a literary context has a fundamental meaning. The book of Isaiah has been described as having "one of the most complex literary structures of the entire Old Testament."¹ Its sixty-six chapters address issues facing Israel spanning hundreds of years and at least three empires. Its verses explore the essential themes of identity, faithfulness, judgment and restoration. While its opening verse identifies the author as Isaiah son of Amoz, the content, flow and structure have lead many to argue for multiple authors and/or redactors. The nearest context of Isaiah's appearance are the chapters 6 ; 8. The connection between chapter 6 and 7 is temporal informations: Is 6,1 : עָזַרְיָהוּ הָיָה הַמְּלָךְ בְּשָׁנַת־מָוֹת ; and 7,1:

אָּ הָיָה בְּיָמַי וַיְהִי־יָ׃ Probably this second mention was constructed to show the genealogy of Ahaz. It was so, because in the tale about Ahaz we have not only a new time period but first of all a fulfilment and confirm of what was told to the prophet in the chapter 6, in the moment of vocation in the times of Ussiah.

Oracles of salvation can be delivered in various circumstances, either to individual important personages or to the people as whole. The present passage of 7,1-17 has recently been interpreted in light of the so-called war addresses. Therefore, there can be hardly any doubt that Isaiah models his address according to the pattern of the oracle of salvation, delivered to kings at the time when there was a threat of war, and that, already at that time, part of the technical vocabulary in this genre included the theme *faith, fidelity*.

A vision of vocation has depicted also infidelity of chosen people toward a prophet's proclamation and unavoidable consequence of lack of repentance. On the other hand in this background of judgment of infidel

people, prophet has seen a rescue and salvation for a small group of people (the rest of Israel). So the chapter 7 brings that kind of confirmation that there is a salvation and rescue from God's hand who will send Emmanuel and through him God will free his people from every sort of evil.

The *Immanuel sign*, interpreted as a means to put Isaiah's promise in motion, if it might be said that, should really confront the king with utter clarity, convincing Ahaz that he ought not call upon Assyria for help, but rather, only rely on trusting that YHWH alone would be present to help bring about a victory in the war against Aram and Ephraim, a glorious triumph for the prophet.

III.B. Redaction and literary genre

Beginning from the genre, Isaiah's literary skills surpass all Old Testament prophets. His word plays and poetry are majestic and intriguing. The book is mostly Hebrew poetry (see Appendix One). It is difficult to sit down and read all of Isaiah at one time. It is also difficult to outline the book. This is because Isaiah was a preacher, not just an author or editor. His book records his spoken messages over a long period of time and these are linked together, sometimes by theme, sometimes, by chronology, by events which affect Israel, or cultural norms of the Ancient Near East, and obviously by key words and word play, which personally I think he uses most of the time.

Focused on our passage 7,1-17, we can describe as a rapport or account, and I think that the second theme is better to use because that sort of account brings an explanation within it. The essence of this account is quite clear when we compare with chapter 6. In this passage Isaiah offers to Ahaz *a sign*, as a salvation's instrument, so we can call this account as a symbolical sign or symbolical action. The similar accounts we may find in other books in the bible, for example: Is 20; Jer 19,32; Os 1-2, these accounts are composed in the literature's prophets in the third person. Generally speaking that kind of accounts contain: God's command to do something, explanation of this action.

There is an interesting thing about chapter 7 because here we have no execution of God's order and its interpretation. Maybe for author, that sign of Immanuel is so evident and clear, that he considered that is not necessary to add some other information about it.

Also is it worth to underline that every kind of the oracles begins with η, η, η , it is typical genre literary used by prophet's language, espe-

cially when the oracle is about to be proclaimed in the name of the IHWH.

IV. Exegesis

Regarding to the passage 7,1-17 is quite long and obviously examining each verse takes a long time and space. Besides I'm not a professional scholar so I try to be focused on several verses that personally are important for me. I will divide in two sections: 7,1-9; 7,10-17.

The first section 7,1-9:

Verse 1:

וַיְהִי־בִימֵי־אָחָז־בְּנֵי־יֹזָבָב־הוּמָלְךָ־יְהוּדָה־עַל־הָרָצִין־מִלְדָּא־רָם־וּפְחָח־בְּנֵי־רַמְלֵי־הוּמִלְדָּא־יִשְׂרָאֵל־יְרֻשָׁלַם־לְמַלְחָמָה־עַל־יְהוָה־אֵלֵינוּ־לְהַלְחֵם־עֲלֵיהֶם׃

In the days of Ahaz... This information gives us a general vision in which we are able to date a prophetic message very precisely, with great confidence, I would say. This is not only a historical tip, but rather author wanted to underline a connection between a prophetic's revelation and the story of Israel. Naturally we cannot say that story itself is a revelation, not at all, but we can say the story is some kind of ground which in a revelation grows.

Secondly all the genealogical information shows a connection of current chapter with the chapter 6, that means that here what we about to hear was already proclaimed in the previous chapter. We see that harden heart of Israel in the front of God's word proclaimed by a prophet leads into the self destruction and then next step there was a chance to rebuild a covenant with God.

Verse 2: בֵּית־דָּוִד־בְּיָמָיו׃ there is nothing interesting in this verse for me, except this phrase *house of David*. It is not simple expression from the political point of view, but rather it contains a religious aspect. Thought the prophet Natan's mouth IHWH had said to David (2Sm 7,16):

בֵּית־דָּוִד־בְּיָמָיו׃ וְיִהְיֶה־הוּמִלְדָּא־לְפָנָיִךְ־עַד־עוֹלָם־וּמִמְלַכְתָּהֶם׃
The house of David means whole his dynasty, which will endure forever, sealed by God himself. This David's dynasty will be a guide in the entire *book of Immanuel*.

Verse 4: וְגַב, וְתִּמְשַׁן יִי אֶל־יִבְרָה וְיִלְבַּבְהָ אֶל־תִּירָא וְהִשְׁמַטְהָ הַשָּׁמַר אֶל־לְיוֹ וְאָמַרְתָּ. וּבְיַד־רַמְלֵיהוּ: וְאָרְם רָצָן יִן בְּחֵרֵי־אֶף הָאֵלָה הַעֲשֵׂנָיִם הָאוֹדִים יִם

These four expressions we could shrink to the one : do not be afraid! The first verb not only means “to watch”, “to guard”, but maybe ³שָׁמַר we could translate this verb comparing the meaning with Ex 34,12 (.... (לְךָ הִשָּׁמֵר), *watch yourself* but one meaning to retain some evil action, to stop to doing that is evil in the Lord’s sight. Maybe here we could apply the same meaning. Isaiah tell what Ahaz should do: so he tells him : do nothing at all. Here in this case there is a note of negative sense.

Also it is often used in deuteronomic terminology, warning someone to be careful not to forget the events of the salvation history (Dt 4,15) or the covenant (Dt 4,23). Therefore there is a question: Does Isaiah intend to say that Ahaz should not forget the covenant which IHWH made with David, including its assurance of a dynasty?

The verb שָׁמַר, also has a positive meaning, ex. *I will keep guard my ways*....Ps 39,2: דָּרְכַי אֶשְׁמֵר הַ,

אֶל־תִּירָא, The preferable way to introduce oracles of salvation is using this expression. This encouragement is accented, and made more explicit, by a whole host of other parallel terms in our passage.

Verse 7: תִּהְיֶה וְלֹא תִקְוֶם לֹא יְהוָה אֲדַנְּי אָמַר כֹּה

This sentence is very important I would say it is some kind of hinge which connects vv. 3-6 and vv. 7-9. Composed all together they create topical and artistically unity. Not the plans of human beings, but rather the plan of IHWH is the one which actually is carried through to the end.

Verse 9,b: כִּי תִאֶמְרֵנוּ לֹא אֵם בְּיַד־רַמְלֵיהוּ שָׁמַר וְזֶן וְזֶן אֵשׁ שָׁמַר וְזֶן אָפַר יִם וְזֶן אֵשׁ תִּאֶמְנוּ: לֹא

If you do not believe, then you will not remain. Lot of scholars give different translations. Every translation struggles with whether one ought to ignore the wordplay or else give a rendering which sounds rather forced. We can compare some example:

³ See the meaning of שָׁמַר in: L. KOEHLER, W. BAUMBARTNER, *A Bilingual Dictionary of the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament*, Leiden-Boston-Köln 1998, p. 993.

LXX: καὶ ἡ κεφαλὴ Εφραιμ Σομορων καὶ ἡ κεφαλὴ Σομορων υἱὸς τοῦ Ρομελίου καὶ ἐὰν μὴ πιστεύσητε οὐδὲ μὴ συνῆτε (Se non crederete non intenderete).

Per fidem, habetur rerum divinare cognitio (through the faith it might have a knowledge of divine things (comments Theodotian)⁴

I think it is also good to mention a verb אָמַן, which here is used in two different conjugations: hiphil and niphil. Probably Isaiah was conscious using אָמַן in two different meaning. He referred to the old oracle pronounced to David through the prophet Natan (2Sm 7,16): בִּיתָהּ, וַיִּצְמַח יְהוֹנָדָה הַכֹּהֵן לְפָנָיו אֵת עַד-עוֹלָם וַיִּמְלֹךְ עָלֶיהָ. A verb ‘mn used in niphil means to be saved, to have stability. Maybe if we could rely on hebrew play’s words I should say it would be: *If you will not have stability in faith, you will not survive at all*⁵.

The second section 7,10-17:

Verse 10: לֹא־מָרָא אֶל-אַחָז דָּבַר יְהוָה וַיִּיָּסֶף

This verse opens a second part of our passage
the word יָסַף indicates that here we have another scene which in Isaiah has a meeting with Ahaz. On the other hand that word could a signal that here we have a second part of a discourse, nothing more. Isaiah however continue to encourage Ahaz , but we have no information about place or time so as scholar Oswalt⁶ suggests , we have to treat this verse as a continuation of vv.1-9.

Verse 11: לְמַעַן תִּשְׁאַל לְךָ אֵת שְׂאֵלֶיךָ

Ask a sign for yourself, Isaiah invites king that he may give a change to God’s providence and his faithfulness. Nevertheless our faith doesn’t rely on external signs yet God himself wants to give us his proves (*signs*), in order that our faith might be strengthened. The same way goes

⁴ Cf. G. GIROTTI, *Il Vecchio Testamento. Introduzione generale ai profeti:: Il libro di Isaia*, vol. VII, Torino 1942, p. 203.

⁵ That is my personal suggestion, whether it is correct or not according to the others.

⁶ See J. N. OSWALT, *The book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39 (NICOT)*, Grand Rapids 1986, p. 204.

for Ahaz. Maybe in this verse is rather a theological explanation rather than exegetical but apart of that a quality of a sign is extraordinary because Isaiah render this אֲוֹת, which can touch or reach whole the creation beginning from *Sheol* שְׁאֹל לְהֵרֵא, and all the way into heaven (the things that make high, that exalt).

Secondly an expression אֱלֹהֵי יָדָי, which brings my thought to a opinion about Ahaz. Isaiah doesn't tell about some unknown god, about the one who is totally unreachable, but by this expression he wants to tell Ahaz that he speaks about God who is known very well, the One who has set up David's dynasty and who tied himself with His people by his holy covenant.

Verse 12: אֶת־יְהוָה וְלֹא־אֲנֹסֶה לֹא־אֶשְׁאַל אֶת־זֶרַע וְיִאמְרוּ

It seems that an answer of Ahaz is humble and respectful toward the prophet's words but in reality he rejects God's proposition because he has already planned and chooses what to do. His answer for the verb שְׁאַל, (qal imperative), which doesn't mean only ask, "request", but also "demand", "require". Ask means here to desire to put God to the test. But that would be presumptuous, and a human being ought not be found guilty of such action over against one's God.

With his answer, Ahaz is not only thinking on his feet but, according to the letter of the law, is absolutely right. I would say, a lack of the courage which boldly risks acting on his faith.

Verse 13: כִּי אֲנִשְׂאִים הֲלֹא, וְזוֹת מִכֶּם הַמַּעֲטָה דָוִד בְּיַת שְׁמֵעוֹנִי, אֲנִי אֹמֵר אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי: גַּם תִּלְאֹוּ

One notice that Isaiah uses the formula אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי, *my God*, Nowhere else does Isaiah speak of IHWH as "his God"; when he does it here, the way in which he personally lays claim to IHWH for himself is intended to show that the connection between IHWH and the house of David has been broken. IHWH remains God whether a human being believes or not. But that "my God" comes only within the boundaries of faith.

Verse 14: וְקָרָאתָ בְּיָו וְיִלְדָת הַרְהֵה הַעֲלֵמִה הַגִּיהָ, וְאוֹת לְכֶם הִיא, וְאֶדְבַּר יְהוָה לְךָ: אֵל: עֲמָ, בְּנֵי שְׁמֵוֹ

The storm center of the text is, of course, the word $\eta' \text{עֲלֻמָּה}$ (young woman). Reams have been written upon it and, doubtless, reams will be written on it in the future. What is the exact translation of this important and pivotal word? Is there an element of ambiguity in it, or has the vagueness been imported into the discussion by interpreters? Here the exegete of Isaiah has a splendid opportunity to go slowly and plough deeply. To be accurate in one's conclusions all the evidence available must be weighed properly.

But what is the precise meaning of $\eta' \text{עֲלֻמָּה}$? There are numerous scholars who are noncommittal as to whether the term signifies a virgin or a married woman. Rogers states his position clearly: "First of all, it must be said that the Hebrew word $\eta' \text{עֲלֻמָּה}$ may mean 'virgin,' but does not necessarily mean anything more than a young woman of marriageable age. Had the prophet intended specifically and precisely to say 'virgin,' he must have used the word *betûlâ* (maiden), though even then there would be a faint shade of uncertainty.

It is in place here to indicate that many reputable scholars have held and do hold that the Hebrew term in this context means virgin. $\eta' \text{עֲלֻמָּה}$ means a girl, or young woman, above the age of childhood and sexual immaturity...a person of the age at which sexual emotion awakens and becomes potent; it asserts neither virginity nor the lack of it; it is naturally in actual usage often applied to women who were as a matter of fact certainly or probably, virgins.

Secondly, it must be noticed that the noun has the definite article ($\eta' \text{הַעֲלֻמָּה}$). The better interpretation of the passage would see a significance in the prophet's use of the definite article, pointing to a specific person. But does it render to the person of Virgin Mary?

Against the view that verses 14–16 relate wholly and entirely to the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the position maintained here, has been levelled the charge that it gives the prophecy no relevance to the day in which it was uttered. This is a serious matter, for the prophet must speak to his own generation as well as to future ones. To many a fulfillment centuries later would be worthless to Ahaz and his contemporaries in their distress. But the exact opposite is true. Ahaz and his courtiers were fearful of the extinction of the David's dynasty and the displacement of the king by a Syrian pretender. However, the longer the time needed to fulfil the promise to the David's house, the longer that dynasty would be in existence to witness the realization of the prediction.

V. Conclusion

In this essay I wanted to show from general point of view a structure of the passage 7,1-14 its context in the *book of Immanuel* and also some exegetical problems or some suggestion made by lecture of these verses which brings me to a new field of wherein I can expand my perception and way of thinking regarding to the person of the prophet Isaiah and his mission in very specific times for Israel.

On the Ancient East signs had a double meaning: first on the sky, like stars, moon, comets, any cosmological events etc; second from the Sheol like the spirits of the dead ones

It is worth to say, that God throughout ages always in opportune time has been giving lot of signs to conduct his chosen ones to the community with Him. Today unfortunately a human being are not able or with difficulty read signs or even see them. That's why as a human nation we are stepping back in our humanity, moreover without God's signs, we create our owns, which lead us into annihilation. Maybe a small reflection on this passage will set up a internal fire to seek but first of all to start think, who we are, where are we going, what is the main purpose of our life? I think that not only exegetical analyse of Is 7,1-14 might give some hints but also theological aspects which also are included in this Isaiah's oracle.

Isaiah propose a sign given by God to Ahaz. Jerusalem was found in a dramatical situation. King prepares all the military stuffs etc., But the prophet gives a sign: a child... This Child which not only will save Jerusalem from the enemies but also or first of all will give a peace, a reconciliation with God, a renewed covenant, new times for the God's people. He will be known as Immanuel, meaning "God with Us." This was true of Jesus *in fact*, not only as a title. Immanuel speaks both of the deity of Jesus (*God with us*) and His identification and nearness to man.

In what sense then, is Christ God with us? Jesus is called Immanuel, or *God with us*, in his *incarnation*; *God with us*, by the influences of his *Holy Spirit*, in the *holy sacrament*, in the *preaching* of his *word*, in *private prayer*. And *God with us*, through every *action* of our life, that we begin, continue, and end in his name. He is *God with us*, to *comfort*, *enlighten*, *protect*, and *defend* us, in every time of *temptation* and *trial*, in the hour of *death*, in the day of *judgment*; and *God with us* and *in us*, and we *with* and *in* him, to all eternity.

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NIE TCHÓRZOSTWO, ALE POSTAWA WIARY.
EGZEGETYCZNE SPOJRZENIE NA IZ 1, 1-17

Streszczenie

Zaprezentowany fragment Księgi Izajasza jest dość złożony, biorąc pod uwagę wszystkie kryteria egzegetyczne; co więcej, jego interpretacja wciąż pozostaje jakby kwestią otwartą. Śledząc tekst Iz 1, 1-17, można bez trudu odczytać zapewnienie o zbawieniu, które jest nie tylko przedmiotem zachęty, ale także przestróg i upomnień. Struktura tekstu ma charakter dialogu pomiędzy prorokiem a królem, de facto będącego echem pewnych faktów historycznych. Prorockie zapowiedzi nawołujące do postawy ufności wobec Bożych obietnic, zderzają się jednak z czysto ludzkim myśleniem i realizacją „własnej” wolności opartej na doraźnych wyborach politycznych i społecznych. Stąd też ów fragment Księgi Izajasza ukazuje napięcie pomiędzy ludzką wolą a zbawczym planem Boga.