



The Burning Bush

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THE BURNING BUSH

Official organ of the student body
of the

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EDITORIAL

The Burning Bush was published as a student newsletter or bulletin as early as 1970. Its primary aim was to disseminate information to the Far Eastern Bible College and Bible-Presbyterian community. Since then, the 4–16 page newsletter has been published in an A4-sized format. The journal format, from this issue onwards, replaces the magazine format. The reasons for this change are (1) to allow for longer articles like term papers, graduate theses, and faculty write-ups to be included, and (2) to make it easier for readers after perusal to shelve it in their bookcases for future reference.

The Burning Bush will remain a student journal. The contents will consist mainly of student reports, term papers, sermons, book reviews, testimonies, etc. College events will be reported or announced under College News, and alumni activities and feedback under Class Notes. Graduates of the College are encouraged to submit papers, sermons, reports, or testimonies for publication.

Far Eastern Bible College is a Reformed, Premillennial, and Separatist School. As such, the papers published should reflect this theological stance of the College. FEBC believes the 66 Books of the Holy Bible to be the inerrant, infallible, verbally and plenary inspired Word of God. The Board of Directors, and Faculty swear before God at every Convocation by taking this solemn oath,

I swear in the Name of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that I believe “the Bible is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne. Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is direct utterance of the Most High. The Bible is none other than the Word of God, not some part of it more, some part of it less, but all alike the utterance of Him that sitteth upon the throne, faultless, unerring, supreme.” So help me God. Amen.

The Burning Bush abides by the same oath.

We hope you will enjoy reading *The Burning Bush*. That it will motivate you to love the Written Word, and the Living Word more is our only desire. To God be the glory!

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THE BIRTH OF JESUS?

Khoo Peng Kiat

Although December 25 is traditionally observed and celebrated as Christmas Day—the day of Jesus’ birth—yet no one really knows the actual day or month when Jesus was born. This has not been revealed to man. Nevertheless, what is significant is the fact that Jesus was born, and that His birth gave the day its true significance.

What is unique about the about the birth of Jesus? It is unique in that:

- (1) He was born of a Virgin. He was not conceived by a human father, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, “that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (Mat 1:20, Lk 1:35). “Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Mat 1:23, Isa 7:14).
- (2) His birth was foretold long ago by the prophet Isaiah. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isa 9:6–7).
- (3) His birth place was predicted by the prophet Micah. “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth, have been from of old, from everlasting”

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(Mic 5:2). Both the predictions of the birth of Jesus and the place of His birth were foretold about 750 years before!

- (4) He was God incarnate. The word “incarnate” comes from the Latin words *in*, and *caro*, or *caris* (flesh), meaning, “in the flesh.” To become incarnate is to become a human being. Remaining as God, Jesus became man, and as such lived among men. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). The humanity of Jesus is evident in the Gospel accounts of His natural growth. “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Lk 2:52).
- (5) His birth occurred several months after the birth of John the Baptist. John was born to be the forerunner of the Messiah. “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not the Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light’ (Jn 1:6–8). “John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me” (Jn 1:15).
- (6) His birth was signalled by a special star. It guided the wise men from the east to Jesus. “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that was born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him” (Mat 2:1–2). And “lo, the star, which they saw in the east went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was” (Mat 2:9).
- (7) His name was given from heaven. Just before His birth, an angel gave Him the name “JESUS,” and announced that He would “save His people from their sins,” thus declaring the unique purpose of His coming (Mat 1:21). Here was a Man-Child who was “so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb” (Lk 2:21). He was divinely named not by His parents, but from Heaven. For an angel directly from heaven said to Mary, “And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS” (Lk 1:31).

- (8) His birth was hailed by two aged holy persons—Simeon and Anna—through the Spirit of God. They identified Jesus as the Messiah-Deliverer. The revelation of Jesus by the Holy Spirit to Simeon and Anna and their testimonies are recorded in Luke 2:21–39.
- (9) Hosts of angels burst forth praises, and proclaimed news of coming peace (Lk 2:8–16). “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Lk 2:13–14).
- (10) Satan had a ready agent in King Herod. Herod ordered the killing of the Bethlehem infants. “When Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (Mat 2:3–18). However, the evil intentions of Herod were thwarted by the higher plans of God through dreams given to the wise men (Mat 2:12) and to Joseph (Mat 2:13).

The birth of Jesus—our Lord and Saviour—is indeed unique in that “the Son of God became the Son of man, that the sons of men might become the sons of God” (Calvin). May Christmas be celebrated with a spirit of thankfulness and gratitude for all that God has done for us. He so loved us that He gave His only begotten Son, His unspeakable Gift to us, the most precious Gift that anyone can receive. Amen.

Elder Khoo Peng Kiat is a ruling elder of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. He has served with distinction as acting pastor of Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church in Melbourne, Australia. He is a special student of FEBC.

THE SIGN OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Jeffrey Khoo

Isaiah 7:14—”Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”—is a Messianic prophecy par excellence. Of late, this prophecy of the Virgin Birth of Christ has come under attack. The view that Christ did not directly fulfill Isaiah 7:14 is gaining popularity. A paper presented to the Evangelical Theological Society recently suggested that Christians might have misread Matthew’s use of Isaiah 7:14 all this while.[1] The paper argued against translating the Hebrew, *‘almah*, and Greek, *parthenos*, as “virgin” in an effort to prove that Isaiah 7:14 is not directly Messianic.[2] Isaiah 7:14 is considered to be fulfilled by a certain difficult-to-identify woman in the time when the prophecy was given.

ISAIAH 7:14 ATTACKED IN THE STUDY BIBLES

The majority of Study Bibles today teach that the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled twice.[3] Consider the following examples,

***The Believer’s Study Bible*, edited by W. A. Criswell,**

7:14 *‘Almah* (Heb.) is one of two words translated as “virgin.” The other term, *betulah* (Heb.), is very specific, only meaning “virgin,” whereas *‘almah* is more general and can sometimes mean “a young woman of marriageable age.” The ambiguity of this term is reflected in its being translated “virgin” in some places and “maiden” in others. . . . it is puzzling why Isaiah chose the ambiguous term, *‘almah*, over the more frequent and specific one, *betulah*. The answer may be related to vv.16, 22, which suggest a double fulfillment of the prophecy. The prophet may have used *‘almah* instead of *betulah* because the impending birth which would be a

sign to Ahaz would not be a virgin birth, but the future birth of Immanuel . . . would be the Virgin Birth.

The Evangelical Study Bible, edited by Harold Lindsell,

7:14 *a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.* Before we can understand this verse, we need to consider two Hebrew words. One is *bethulah* and the other *almah*. The former means virgin, and the latter an unmarried female. *Almah* is used here. Its use in this context covers two cases. One has to do with the wife of Isaiah and her newborn son (Isa. 8:1–4). Isaiah’s wife was a virgin until she was married. She was no longer a virgin when married. Of course, one supposes that an unmarried female is a virgin. The second case covers that of the virgin Mary. She was a virgin before the conception of Jesus. And she remained a virgin then, because Joseph was not the father of Jesus. The Holy Spirit was [sic]. Stated another way, Isaiah’s wife was no longer a virgin when she conceived; Mary was still a virgin after she conceived, for she had not yet known a male. Interestingly, the Septuagint translates *almah* by the use of the Greek word *parthenos* which means virgin. And Matthew uses the word *parthenos* for Mary’s case. The word *almah* thus covers both births involved in this prophecy and we learn that Mahershalal-hash-baz, the son of Isaiah, had a human mother and father and his birth was a natural one. Jesus, on the other hand, had a human mother but not a human father. His birth was supernatural. *Almah* allows for both prophetic views.

Life Application Bible, edited by Ronald A. Beers,

7:14–16 The Hebrew word used here sometimes means “virgin” and sometimes “young woman.” Its immediate use here refers to Isaiah’s young wife and her newborn son (8:1–4). This, of course, was not a virgin birth. God’s sign was that before this child was old enough to talk, the two invading kings would be destroyed. However, Matthew 1:23 tells us that there was a further fulfillment of this prophecy, in that virgin (Mary) conceived and bore a son, Emmanuel, the Christ.

The NIV Study Bible, edited by Kenneth Barker,

7:14 *sign.* A sign was normally fulfilled within a few years (see 20:3, 37:30; cf. 8:18). *virgin.* May refer to a young woman betrothed

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to Isaiah (8:3), who was to become his second wife (his wife presumably having died after Shear-jashub was born). In Ge 24:43, the same Hebrew word (*'almah*) refers to a woman about to be married (see also Pr 30:19). Mt 1:23 apparently understood the woman mentioned here to be a type (a foreshadowing) of the Virgin Mary. *Immanuel*. The name “God with us” was meant to convince Ahaz that God could rescue him from his enemies. . . . “Immanuel” is used again in 8:8, 10, and it may be another name for Maher-shalal-Hash-Baz (8:3). If so, the boy’s names had complementary significance. . . . Jesus was the final fulfillment of this prophecy, for he was “God with us” in the fullest sense (Mat 1:23; cf. Isa 9:6–7).

The Ryrie Study Bible, by Charles C. Ryrie,

7:1–16 God’s sign to Ahaz was that of a virgin (when the prophecy was spoken, it probably referred to the woman, a virgin at that time, whom Isaiah took later as his second wife, 8:1–4) and whose son would not be more than 12 to 14 years old before Syria and Israel would be captured. The virgin of Isaiah’s prophecy is a type of the virgin Mary, who, by the Holy Spirit, miraculously conceived Jesus Christ (see Matt. 1:23). The Hebrew word that is here translated *virgin* is found elsewhere in the O.T. in Gen. 24:43; Exod. 2:8, Psa 68:25; Prov, 30:19; Song of Sol. 1:3, 6:8, and in these instances refers only to a chaste maiden who is unmarried.

Spirit Filled Life Bible, edited by Jack W. Hayford,

7:14 This prophetic **sign** was given to Ahaz as an assurance of Judah’s hope in the midst of adversity. It therefore had an immediate, historical fulfillment. Its usage in the NT shows that it also has a messianic fulfillment. The Hebrew word for **virgin** (*'almah*) means either a “virgin” or a “young woman” of marriageable age. Isaiah’s readers could have understood it to be either. Messianically, it irrefutably refers to the Virgin Mary (Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:27), where the Greek *parthenos* (virgin) removes any question. The optional form of the Hebrew word was essential for the prophecy to serve the dual situation, relating both to the Messiah’s birth in the future and to a more immediate birth in the kingly line. A **Son** to Isaiah’s readers would have been an

unidentified heir from Ahaz's house, perhaps his son Hezekiah. Messianically, it was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The Student Bible, edited by Philip Yancey,

7:14 A Famous Sign. Like so many prophecies, this one probably had two meanings: one for Isaiah's time and another much later. Isaiah urged King Ahaz to seek a sign from God about Judah's safety from its neighbors. Ahaz, notoriously stubborn and ungodly, refused.

Isaiah told the sign anyway: a young boy would be born, and before he grew out of childhood Judah's feared enemies would be destroyed. . . . The New Testament sees a further meaning in this prophecy, applying it to the birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:23).

The Quest Study Bible, edited Marshall Shelley,

Is this a prediction of the Messiah? (7:14–16) Like many prophecies, this passage seems to have a double meaning. First, a child, perhaps another son of Isaiah, would be born to a virgin (which could simply refer to a young woman) during the time of Ahaz. By the time he was grown, Judah's two enemies (Israel and Aram) would be destroyed. The second meaning was later applied to the birth of Christ (Matt. 1:23). The name *Immanuel, God with us*, became a title for the Messiah.

In summary, the above Study Bibles say that (1) the word '*almah*' has two meanings: "a young woman of marriageable age," and "a virgin"; (2) the virgin refers to either Ahaz's wife or Isaiah's second wife (who were virgins before marriage, but no longer virgins after that), and finally to the virgin Mary; and (3) the son to be born refers to either Mahershalalhashbaz or Hezekiah, and finally to Jesus Christ. Therefore, Isaiah 7:14 has two meanings, requiring two fulfillments: (1) an immediate fulfillment in a son born in the time of Isaiah, and (2) an ultimate fulfillment in the Messiah.

**THE FALLACIOUS HERMENEUTICS
OF WALTER C. KAISER**

The insistence that the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 required an immediate fulfillment in the time it was written is symptomatic of a

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Kaiserian approach to Scriptural interpretation. The hermeneutics of Kaiser, namely, “the analogy of antecedent Scripture,” is propounded in his book, *Toward An Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis For Preaching and Teaching*, published by Baker Book House in 1981. According to Kaiser, the meaning of a Biblical text must be restricted to (1) the intent of the human author who penned the words, and (2) the recipient’s understanding of those words:

Only the doctrine and the theology prior to the time of the writer’s composition of his revelation . . . may be legitimately used in the task of theological exegesis, in other words, where the writer directly cites or obviously alludes to the theology that preceded his writing and formed a backdrop against which he cast his own message. . . . The “analogy of [antecedent] Scripture” then was the “pre-understanding” of both the writer and of those in his audience who were alert to what God had revealed prior to this new word of revelation.[4]

Kaiser also calls his hermeneutics, “informing theology.” He writes,

The exegete will use Biblical theology whenever a concept, word, citation, or event in the passage being exegeted indicates that there were originally both an awareness of its relation to a preceding core of faith and an intention of making further contribution to or elaboration on that preceding core. Identification of this lively conversation which Biblical writers had with those who went before them legitimately introduces concerns of theology and instructs the exegete on how he can direct his own formulation of significances and applications.[5]

He elaborates,

For successful exegesis, there must be some procedure for identifying the center or core message of the passage being examined. Only when the core of that text and the assemblage of books which are available in the canon *up to the time of the writing of that text* have been identified will the interpreter be enabled to determine God’s normative Word.[6]

Depending on where the exegete is working in the canon, he will use the theology of the periods which preceded his text as they introduce analogous or identical topics, share key words, or raise similar theological interests. It is this theology which “informs” the text and supplies the background and available message against which this new revelation was given.

Instead of using the NT or subsequent OT texts and ideas to interpret . . . the old material—an outright act of rebellion against the author and his claim to have received divine authority for what he reports and says—we urge the new biblical theologian to provide the exegete with a set of accumulating technical, theological terms, identifications of the key interpretive moments in the history of God’s plan for man, and an appreciation for the range of concepts grouped around a unifying core—all of these according to their historical progression in time.[7]

Underlying Kaiser’s hermeneutics is the presupposition that the Biblical prophets did not write better than they knew.[8]

In an attempt to demonstrate how his hermeneutics is to be applied, Kaiser chose the prophecy of the Virgin Birth in Isaiah 7:14.[9] In his paper, he concluded that the Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14 was Hezekiah, and the “virgin” was Ahaz’s wife, the queen. How then is Isaiah 7:14 related to the Messiah? Kaiser answers,

I would like to boldly suggest that *only Hezekiah meets all the demands of the text of Isaiah* and yet demonstrates how he could be part and parcel of that climactic messianic person who would complete all that is predicted in this Immanuel prophecy. Only in this, the most recent instalment in the Abraham-Davidic promise, could it be seen how God was still being “with” Israel in all His power and presence.[10]

In other words, Hezekiah was the one who literally fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14; Jesus fulfilled it only in a secondary sense.

Kaiser’s hermeneutical procedure necessitates an eighth century B.C. fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. If Matthew 1:22–23 did not exist, Isaiah

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7:14, by the standards of such advocates, should be considered non-messianic. Bratcher's ridicule of dual or typical fulfillment advocates should not be taken lightly. He said,

To try to maintain that the prophecy referred to, and was historically fulfilled in, the normal birth of a boy in the time of Ahaz, and also referred to, and was Messianically fulfilled in, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ some 700 years later, is simply an attempt by the Scripture interpreter to have his hermeneutic cake and eat it too.[11]

The problem is therefore a hermeneutical one. The idea that the intent of the human author is the final level of exegetical procedure, and that it can be ascertained only from the amount of prior information available to the text under consideration should be seriously questioned. The "analogy of antecedent Scripture" was not the hermeneutical method of the Reformers.

The Reformers were the ones who started the trend toward the historical-grammatical method of interpretation. They emphasized the need to discover the authorial intent of a passage. John Calvin said that "it is the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does say." [12] But this was not the final step of the Reformer's hermeneutical procedure. There were exegetes who sought to do just that in the days of Calvin which caused him to respond by commenting that there are instances when "the dogmatist gets the better of the exegete, because the exegete had failed to grasp the progressiveness of revelation and the external circumstances of age and relative knowledge by which it is conditioned." [13] The Reformers understood the nature of progressive revelation, and hence, the organic unity of the Holy Bible. Thus, Scripture interprets Scripture. Augustine's well-worn couplets illustrate this fact, "The New is in the Old contained and the Old is by the New explained," and "The New is in the Old concealed and the Old is by the New revealed." The Westminster theologians affirmed, "the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly." [14]

Scripture must be allowed to be its own interpreter. While it is true that the historical context is important in determining the authorial intent of a text, it is also crucial to realise that Biblical revelation transcends time. Hanke was correct to point out that “many prophetic and especially messianic texts in the Old Testament have a setting quite foreign to the context in which they are found; they appear as a kind of prophetic parenthesis.”[15] Thus, it is extremely important to see how God has unfolded His soteriological plan as revelation progressed. The exegete’s use of the New Testament to shed light on the Old allows him to appreciate the continuity that is inherent in Biblical revelation. This is because all of Scriptural revelation is Christocentric. The historical context is important in determining which portion of the prophetic passage was immediately relevant to the people then, but the Messianic meaning of the text finally rests upon the canonical context. Kunjummen correctly criticises Kaiser’s hermeneutics,

The analogy of *antecedent* Scripture as a strict canon of interpretation is not a valid one. . . . When later revelation clearly identifies the serpent of Genesis 3 as Satan (Rev 12; 20:2), the knowledge of such identity cannot and should not be shut out from the interpreter’s mind. When Christ said in John 8:56 that Abraham rejoiced to see his day, this becomes a fact of Abraham’s life and history even though the information is provided to the interpreter much later in the canon. If messianic awareness is attributed to Abraham, his life and history will be perceived and interpreted with altered emphasis. Indeed, exegetes often emphasize the psychology of the biblical authors and characters in order to gain a fuller understanding of the text. When the NT reveals more facts concerning the persons and events of the OT than is available in the OT . . . , it is essential to approach the interpretation of the relevant portions of Genesis and the rest of the canon in the light of these facts.[16]

The hermeneutical method of Kaiser displays an obsessive preoccupation with the human intent at the exclusion of the divine intent. Kaiser, apparently, failed to understand that God is the Author of the Holy Scripture. It is God’s mind that the exegete should seek, not just how the human writers and their readers would have understood the revelation

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given to them at that particular point in time. Since the Bible is God's Word, it is the divine intent that determines the meaning of a prophetic text.

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF MATTHEW 1:22–23

There was only one Virgin Birth and it was fulfilled only in Christ. This is clearly revealed in Matthew 1:22–23: “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” Matthew 1:22–23 is the inspired commentary on Isaiah 7:14. Matthew meant exactly what Isaiah meant in his application of the Immanuel prophecy to Jesus Christ. An exegetical study of Matthew 1:22–23 is thus in order.

The Historical Background

As promised in Isaiah 7:15, Judah was rescued by God from the attacks of Ephraim and Syria. Judah's failure to repent was finally dealt with punitively by God in 586 B.C. when the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem and carried the people into exile (2 Kgs 25). The Lord in His covenant had promised that He would not utterly forsake His people. He would preserve for Himself a remnant, and restore the land. The Jews spent seventy years in captivity. In 536 B.C., Cyrus the Persian king, allowed the Jews to return to Palestine.[17]

The return from exile under Zerubbabel (536 B.C.), Ezra (458 B.C.), and Nehemiah (445 B.C.) saw the temple restored (Ezr 3–6), the city walls rebuilt (Neh 1–6), and the people reformed (Neh 7:1–13).

There was a period of silence for 400 years after the last Old Testament prophet, Malachi, passed away. Prophetic activity was absent during this period. It ended when “Elijah” (i.e., John the Baptizer) came to announce the advent of the Messiah. Political upheavals and military takeovers characterised this intertestamental period. The Greeks succeeded the Persians as world power in 332 B.C. Hellenisation of the ancient world followed. The Romans became the final world rulers from 63 B.C. onwards.

It was during the Roman period that the Messiah came. “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son” (Gal 4:4).

A Grammatical Analysis

While Isaiah 7:14 is being alluded to in Luke 1:31, John 1:45, and Revelation 12:5, it is being quoted only in Matthew 1:23. Matthew quoted Isaiah 7:14 to prove to Joseph that what Mary was going through was pre-planned by God.

The Statement of Fulfillment

When Matthew quoted Isaiah 7:14, he used a statement of fulfillment, “Now all this was done, *that it might be fulfilled* which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet” (Mat 1:22).

The phrase, “Now all this,” refers to all that has occurred from verses 18–21. The verb, *gegonen* (Perfect Active Indicative), “was done,” should reflect its basic perfective force by being translated “has occurred.”[18] It indicates that Mary was already pregnant “before they (Joseph and Mary) came together” and that the child to be born “is of the Holy Ghost” (Mat 1:18, 20). The perfect *gegonen* also allows Matthew 1:20b–23 to be seen as the angelic annunciation. The fulfillment statement need not be seen as coming from Matthew himself. This would mean that it was the angel rather than Matthew who declared the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 in Mary and Christ. Therefore, unless one cares to say that the angel was wrong in declaring that the birth of Christ through the virgin Mary was a literal and direct fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy, one cannot but admit this to be the case.[19]

The whole purpose of the Virgin Birth was to fulfill the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. The issue of whether there was an initial fulfillment in the eighth century may be solved by ascertaining who the author of the Immanuel prophecy was. Who was the author of Isaiah 7:14? Isaiah 7:14 is stated to be that “which was spoken of (*hupo*) the Lord by (*dia*) the prophet.” The Greek preposition *hupo* speaks of the agent, while *dia* the instrument.[20] Isaiah 7:14 was spoken *by* the Lord *through* the prophet. God was thus the Source of the Immanuel prophecy. Isaiah who declared it was merely the prophetic mouthpiece. The meaning of Isaiah 7:14 therefore does not lie in human, but *divine* intent.

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The Meaning of *Parthenos*

The word *parthenos* means “virgin.”[21] It is used 16 times in the New Testament: (1) four times by Matthew of Mary and in the “parable of the 10 virgins” (1:23, 25:1, 7, 11), (2) twice by Luke with reference to Mary (1:27), (3) once in Acts of Philip’s four virgin daughters who were prophetesses (21:9). (4) seven times in 1 Corinthians where Paul made a distinction between a wife and a virgin (7:25, 28, 34, 36, 27, 38), (5) once in 2 Corinthians where it is used figuratively of the Church—the Bride of Christ (11:2), and (6) once in Revelation of sexually inexperienced men (14:4).

All the major English versions translate *parthenos* as “virgin” in Matthew 1:23. It goes without saying that the context clearly indicates that Mary was a virgin (Mat 1:18, 20). Mary’s own words were, “I know not a man” (Lk 1:34).

Moreover, since Mary was to bear the incarnate Son of God—the second Person of the Holy Trinity—a Birth that is out of the ordinary is only expected. It had to be a miraculous Birth because the Person to be born was a Preexistent Being (Phil 2:5–11).

The Identity of Emmanuel

The term Emmanuel is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew *‘Immanu’El*. It occurs only here in Matthew.

The identity of the Isaianic Immanuel is finally revealed in the Matthean narrative; Jesus is Emmanuel (Mat 1:21, 23). The term Emmanuel should be regarded as a descriptive title, rather than a formal name. The Messiah was not named Emmanuel, but Jesus. The term Emmanuel thus belonged to the list of Messianic names found in Isaiah 9:6.

The Fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14

The wondrous story of the miraculous birth of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel account records the fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy to its minutest detail. The Messiah was born of a virgin of the house of David (Mat 1:18–25, Lk 1:26–38). It was the angel Gabriel who brought the message from God that all this happened in order that Isaiah 7:14 might be fulfilled. The incarnate Son of God was truly the Immanuel, for

in every sense of the term, He was “God with us.” The grandeur of the Immanuel prophecy demands a strictly Messianic fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14.

The double fulfillment view of Isaiah 7:14 must be categorically rejected. If a predictive prophecy can have more than one fulfillment, then the question of prediction and fulfillment is rendered dubious.[22] If there can be more than one fulfillment in a single prophecy, why stop at two then?

Hosea 11:1 has often been cited as an example of Matthean typology as though the existence of such usage by the Apostle settles the issue concerning his use of Isaiah 7:14. It must be pointed out that the analogy is false. A comparison of Isaiah 7:14 and Hosea 11:1 reveals a significant difference between the two passages. It should be noted that Hosea was not giving a prophecy in 11:1, but reminding Israel of her past in an attempt to prove that Israel had broken the covenantal relationship she had with Jehovah. Isaiah 7:14, on the other hand, is undoubtedly prophetic, and thus clearly demands a fulfillment. While Isaiah 7:14 is a predictive prophecy, Hosea 11:1 is a prophetic narrative. Isaiah 7:14 anticipated a literal fulfillment. Hosea 11:1, on the other hand, had no indications whatsoever that its statement was intended to be prophetic, and thus may be legitimately used by Matthew, under divine inspiration, to introduce a type. Kent, who saw Isaiah 7:14 as a strictly Messianic prophecy, wrote that for an event to be a genuine type,

it must bear not only a resemblance of its antitype but that resemblance must have been intended. In the historical account of the Exodus, it is exceedingly difficult to see Christ prefigured. However, Hosea cites Jehovah as saying, “I . . . called my son out of Egypt.” It would seem that Matthew found the key to typological interpretation not merely from the event, but from the particular statement of Jehovah about the event in which He used the expression “my son.” This designation of the nation as Jehovah’s “son” suggested to Matthew of God’s greater Son, Jesus. A similar typological prefigurement is seen in the designation of Abraham’s seed as a nation (Gen. 13:15–16; 15:5), and also as an individual (Gal. 3:16).[23]

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It is therefore the task of the careful interpreter to see types only when the situation clearly calls for it, bearing in mind that there must not only be an identifiable but also intentional resemblance between the type and its antitype. The question remains: In what way does an ordinary birth of a child by a young woman resemble the supernatural birth of the Son of God through the virgin Mary? There is none!

Matthew 1:22–23 is the anchor text which determines the meaning of Isaiah 7:14. But some may question: Since the people in the time of Isaiah did not have the benefit of the information given in Matthew 1:22–23, could they have seen Isaiah 7:14 to be strictly Messianic? Does Isaiah 7:14 itself provide sufficient information for them to understand that the prophecy refers only to the coming Messianic Saviour? The answer is yes.

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF ISAIAH 7:14

In arguing for a strictly Messianic fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, this part will attempt to prove, by means of an exegetical study, that (1) the word “sign” has a miraculous phenomenon, (2) the word *‘almah* can only mean “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14, and (3) the Immanuel is a title unique to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Historical Background

Ahaz was the twelfth king of Judah. The Biblical account of his reign is given in 2 Kings 16, 2 Chronicles 28, and Isaiah 7.

As a king, Ahaz failed miserably in the sight of God. Like the other evil kings before him, he “did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord his God, like David his father” (2 Kgs 16:2).

The history of the Near East at this time indicates that Assyria was extending her control over Palestine. Pekah and Rezin, the worried kings of Ephraim and Syria respectively, formed an anti-Assyrian alliance and desired Ahaz’s participation. Ahaz, however, was not interested. Ephraim and Syria, thus, made attempts to invade Judah. By conquering Judah, they hoped to replace Ahaz with the Aramean Ben Tabeal (Isa 7:6). They dealt a heavy blow on Judah but failed to capture Jerusalem (2 Chron 28:5, 1 Kgs 16:5). This failure did not stop them from trying again. The

news of a renewed Syro-Ephraimic attack threw Judah into a quandary (Isa 7:1).

Isaiah, the prophet, was at this time told to deliver a word of hope to the distressed king (Isa 7:3–9). He declared to Ahaz that the plans of Rezin and Pekah would be thwarted. It is significant to note that the Lord told Isaiah to bring his son Shearjashub to meet Ahaz. The prophet's sons were meant for "signs" (Isa 8:18). Shearjashub's name meant "a remnant will return." It sought to confirm the promise of deliverance in the prophecy of the Virgin Birth. God had already promised that the Davidic throne would be permanent (2 Sam 7:14–17). The Judean throne was reserved for the Son of David, and not the Son of Tabeal. Thus, Isaiah 7:14 ought to be read in the light of the Messianic motif.

The Interpretation of 'Sign'

The meaning of Isaiah 7:14 cannot be adequately ascertained until a study of the meaning and prophetic usage of the word *'oth*, translated as "sign," is done.

Opinions vary on the meaning of the word *'oth* in Isaiah 7:14. There are basically two views: That (1) it simply denotes an ordinary phenomenon,[24] or (2) it indicates an extraordinary event wrought by divine intervention to assure faith and to demonstrate authority.[25]

The Use of *'Oth* in the Old Testament

The word *'oth* ("sign") is used 80 times in the Old Testament.[26] It is used 31 times to denote a symbol or indicator (e.g., "a token of the covenant" [Gen 9:12, 13, 17; 17:11], an "ensign" [Num 2:2, Psa 74:4], and "indicator of time" [Gen 1:14], a "seal" or "stamp" [Gen 4:15]). It is used 49 times of miraculous activities or events. This use of the word is often accompanied by *mopheth* which means "wonders" (Deut 4:34, 7:19, 13:3, 28:46, 29:2, 34:11, Isa 20:3, Jer 32:21). It may be readily seen that the word *'oth* is mostly used to refer to "miraculous signs." [27] Isaiah himself used *'oth* 11 times of which seven of them (excluding Isa 7:11 and 14) had a miraculous intent (Isa 8:18, 20:3, 37:30, 38:7, 22, 55:13, 66:19). The frequency of authorial usage alone does not determine word usage. The immediate context must determine precise word meaning.

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The Use of 'Oth in Isaiah 7:14

The context of Isaiah 7:11–14 points very strongly to a miraculous use of the word 'oth in the prophecy. God had presented Ahaz with a gracious offer similar to that given to Solomon, “Ask a sign of the LORD, thy God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above” (v. 11 cf. 1 Kgs 3:5). In other words, God was willing “to move heaven and earth” to provide a sign for Ahaz. The sign God offered to perform could be nothing short of miraculous. Consider the signs given to Gideon (Judg 6:17), and Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:8). Both of them received *supernatural* signs!

Although Ahaz was offered such a sign from God, he arrogantly refused to accept it. He had already made up his mind to trust in Tiglath-Pileser instead of Jehovah. Ahaz's refusal to ask for a sign resulted in God's withdrawal of that privilege. Ahaz forfeited the privilege of requesting a sign of his own choice. Nevertheless, God was going to give His people a sign, Ahaz's refusal notwithstanding.

The question that needs to be answered is: Could this sign that God Himself would choose be anything short of miraculous? It is not unreasonable to say that Ahaz could not have suggested a more wonderful sign than the sign which God was about to give: “Behold the 'almah shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (v. 14). A pregnant virgin; what a miracle!

In regard to this, it is significant to note Isaiah's usage of God's name within Isaiah 7:10–14. In verse 14, instead of referring to the Lord as *YHWH*—God's covenant name (vv. 10, 11, 12), Isaiah used the term 'Adonai which speaks of the Lord's omnipotence and might.[28] This could very well reveal the fact that God was trying to tell Ahaz that He cannot be thwarted by man's wickedness, and as 'Adonai, He is capable of giving a sign that would surpass anything Ahaz might have suggested.

It is also interesting to note Isaiah's change in the use of pronouns. The plural *lachem*, “to you” (v. 14), identifies who the recipients of this sign will be. The plural *lachem* stands in marked contradistinction to the singular *lecha*, “to you,” of verse 11. No longer was God addressing Ahaz as an individual but the faithful remnant of the house of David. God was mindful of the Davidic covenant wherein He promised, “I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever” (2 Sam 7:13). Disobedience within the

Davidic clan results in divine discipline, not covenant abrogation (Lev 26:44). Since the sign was given to the community of faith, it behooves the reader to understand that the promised sign goes beyond an eighth century situation.

The Meaning of 'Almah

The word *'almah* is the key to understanding the meaning of Isaiah 7:14. The word *'almah* is used nine times in the Old Testament (Gen 24:43, Exod 2:8, 1 Chron 15:20, Psa 46:1, 68:25, Prov 30:19, Cant 1:3, 6:8, Isa 7:14).[29] It is translated “young woman” in the Revised Standard Version (RSV) and New English Bible (NEB), and “virgin” in the King James Version (KJV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New International Version (NIV), and Living Bible (TLB). Which is the correct rendering? Does *'almah* mean “young woman,” or “virgin?” In order to answer this question, an attempt will be made to observe (1) how *'almah* has been translated by the major versions of the English Bible, (2) how it has been used in the Old Testament, and (3) how it should be translated in Isaiah 7:14.

The Translation of *'Almah* in the English Bible

First, a survey on how the main English Bibles translated *'almah* in seven of its nine Old Testament occurrences.[30]

	KJV	NASB	NIV	RSV	NEB	TLB
Gen 24:43	virgin	maiden	maiden	young woman	young woman	girl
Exod 2:8	maid	girl	girl	girl	girl	little girl
Psa 68:25	damsels	maidens	maidens	maidens	girls	girls
Prov 30:19	maid	maid	maiden	maiden	girl	girl
Cant 1:3	virgins	maidens	maidens	maidens	maidens	young girls
Cant 6:8	virgins	maidens	virgins	maidens	young woman	virgins
Isa 7:14	virgin	virgin	virgin	young woman	young woman	virgin

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The word *'almah* has been rendered in several ways: “maid(en),” “virgin,” “young woman,” “(young or little) girl,” and “damsel.” It is interesting to note that *'almah* in Genesis 24:43 is translated “virgin” by the KJV while the RSV and NEB rendered it as “young woman” even though it is an undisputed fact that Rebekah was a virgin. The NASB and NIV have it as “maiden” and the TLB has it as “girl.” A comparison of how the above translations rendered *'almah* in Isaiah 7:14 leads to a reasonable assumption that the NASB, NIV and TLB used “virgin,” “maiden,” and “girl,” synonymously. The word “virgin” is not used by the RSV and NEB at all. It is probable that the translators of the RSV and NEB do not consider “virginity” to be intrinsic to the word *'almah*. Were they right to translate *'almah* as “young woman” in Isaiah 7:14?

The Usage of *'Almah* in the Old Testament

A study of the word *'almah* in the Old Testament shows that the translation, “virgin,” fits contextually in all seven occasions of its usage.

The intended meaning of *'almah* in Genesis 24:43 is undoubtedly “virgin.” Abraham’s servant had in mind a “virgin” when he prayed to God for an *'almah* to offer him and his camels drink. A bride for Isaac who is less than a virgin is certainly out of the question. It is significant to note that although *bethulah* was used as well of Rebekah, it needed the qualifying statement, “neither had any man known her” (v. 16). It would seem that *'almah* is the definitive term for “virgin,” while *bethulah* simply means “a young lady,” thus requiring a qualifier to describe her marital state.[31]

In Exodus 2:8, the *'almah* referred to was Miriam, the sister of the baby Moses. The context suggests that Miriam was a virgin at that time. That Miriam was present at the time when Pharaoh’s daughter found Moses reveals that she was probably one of the “maidens” who served the Egyptian princess (v. 5). The word used for “maiden” was *na'arah* which means “girl,” or “damsel.”[32] Youthfulness is the idea conveyed by the word. The combination of *'almah* and *na'arah* indicates that Miriam was a teenage, virgin girl then.

Although not much is said about the *'alamoth* in Psalm 68:25, there is reason to believe that they were young virgins. These were described as “playing with timbrels.” In the ancient Near East, the virgins were the ones who greeted the returning army with music and dancing. Consider

Jephthah's daughter who played her timbrel to celebrate her father's victorious homecoming (Judg 11:34). Jephthah's daughter was a virgin (Judg 11:38–39). It is most likely that the “young women” who celebrated the military success of their kings were the virgin daughters of Israel.

Proverbs 30:19b is best understood in the light of a sinister backdrop (cf. v. 20). The wickedness of man is that which the author finds extremely difficult to comprehend, even surpassing his imagination (v. 18). The reference to “the way of a man (*geber*, “a warrior”) with a maid (*'almah*)” thus is not indicative of a marital relationship between husband and wife, but of “a strong man” who overpowers and rapes a “virgin maid.”

It is not necessary to conclude that just because the *'alamoth* are found in Solomon's harem (Cant 1:3, 6:8), they are therefore non-virgins. Chapter 6:8 tells us that there were three classes of women in the king's harem: (1) queens, (2) concubines, and (3) virgins. The order is logical. Esther evidently belonged to the third class in the harem of the Persian king before she became queen (Esth 2:1–20). Considering the fact that Solomon had no less than 1,000 women in his harem, it would not be surprising that there would be some, if not many, whom Solomon never had the opportunity to be sexually intimate. Translating *'alamoth* as “virgins” in no way distorts the meaning of the texts.

R. Dick Wilson, the great linguist of the old Princeton Seminary, concluded, “every *'alma* is virgin and virtuous, unto she is proven not to be.”[33] Against those who assert that *'almah* is used in the Bible “to describe young women who are clearly not virgins,” MacRae has this reply, “This is not only a direct attack upon what the New Testament clearly asserts (Matthew 1:22–23), but is also directly contrary to fact, since there is not even one place in the Bible where the Hebrew word *'almah* is used to describe a young woman ‘who is clearly not a virgin’.”[34]

The Use of *'Almah* in Isaiah 7:14

It is now appropriate to answer the question: Can *'almah* be accurately translated “young woman” in Isaiah 7:14? The fact that the Biblical usage of *'almah* favours the reference to a young virgin should cause us to see this to be its meaning in Isaiah 7:14. In any case, even if *'almah* could be taken to mean a “young wife,” does the context of Isaiah

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7:14 allow for it? To answer this question, let us examine the various ‘*almah* candidates suggested by scholars: (1) Ahaz’s wife, the queen,[35] (2) Isaiah’s wife, the “prophetess,”[36] and (3) the virgin Mary.[37]

The context of Isaiah 7:11–14 reveals that Ahaz, by his arrogance, has forfeited the right and privilege to a God-given sign. The Lord in giving His sign addressed the “house of David,” not Ahaz. It is not God’s nature to condone man’s unbelief (Mat 13:58). Ahaz has disqualified himself as a recipient of this sign, his wife included. That she was the bearer of this child as an ‘*almah* is not possible.

Could Isaiah’s wife qualify then? Although this seems to agree with the context of Isaiah 8:1–4, it is important to note that the text says nothing of the death of Isaiah’s wife, and his subsequent marriage to the “prophetess” (v. 3). It is also very strange that the child born to this wife was named “Mahershalalhashbaz,” meaning “quickly to the spoil, hurry up the prey,” instead of “Immanuel,” “God with us,” as required by Isaiah 7:14. To identify the ‘*almah* as Isaiah’s second wife is at best speculative.

Who could the ‘*almah* possibly be? The answer lies in how the ‘*almah* is described in Isaiah 7:14. First, the definite article (i.e., ‘the’) is connected to ‘*almah*. The Hebrew article *ha* functions “to denote a single person or thing (primarily one which is yet unknown, and therefore capable of being defined) as being present to the mind under given circumstances”[38] Thus, *ha’almah* should be translated, “the *particular* virgin.”[39] The articular noun directs attention to the referent’s *identity*, hitherto unspecified.[40] In the case of Isaiah 7:14, *ha’almah* designates a certain and unique person in the prophet’s mind.[41]

The state of the ‘*almah* is described by the adjective *harah*. Although the adjective is found in the predicate position, the phrase *ha’almah harah* may be translated “the virgin is pregnant,” or “the pregnant virgin.” It ought to be mentioned that if Isaiah had in mind a pregnant woman, and not a pregnant virgin, he would most likely have employed the substantival use of the feminine adjective *harah*, which he later did in Isaiah 26:17 (cf. Amos 1:13, 2 Kgs 8:12, 15:16, Jer 31:8). The usage of ‘*almah* with *harah* overstates the meaning of the text if a young married woman and an ordinary birth were intended. Freeman correctly observed that the emphasis in the vision was not temporal, but with the fact that *a virgin was already with child*, thereby making it a sign.[42]

The Qal Active Participle, *yoledeth*, “bear,” can refer to present or future time.[43] Although it is predicting a future event (cf. Greek, *texetai* [future middle], in Mat 1:23), it contains a present-time sense. This is due to the fact that the prophetic vision is introduced by the demonstrative particle, *hineh*. With *hineh*, the participial clause usually describes immediate circumstances. Thus, in Isaiah’s present enraptured experience, he envisioned a future event.

The verb *weqara’th* is the Qal Perfect of *qara’*, “to call.” It may be translated as “and YOU shall call” (second feminine singular), or “and she shall call” (third feminine singular). Walter Kaiser argues for the second feminine singular because he assumed that Isaiah was speaking directly to the ‘*almah* who was supposedly present in Ahaz’s court at that time.[44] In Kaiser’s mind, the ‘*almah* was really Ahaz’s consort. However, *weqara’th* may not be a second, but third feminine singular “and SHE shall call.”[45] This is supported by Codex Sinaiticus which rendered *weqara’th* as *kalesei* (third singular) in Matthew 1:23. It is significant to note that the Majority Text has it as *kalesousin* (third plural), “THEY shall call.”[46] Reymond may be right to suggest that, “precisely who it was who would actually do the ‘naming’ apparently is of no great moment.”[47] Kaiser’s proposition that the ‘*almah* of Isaiah 7:14 had to be someone who lived at the time when the prophecy was given on the basis of *weqara’th* rests on grounds which cannot be dogmatically asserted either way. Even if a second feminine singular ending is accepted, how could Ahaz’s wife be “virgin”?

If the word ‘*almah* means “virgin,” and does not refer to the queen, the prophetess, or anyone belonging to the eighth century, who then could she be? Maybe, identifying who Immanuel is might help.

The Identification of Immanuel

Scholars have suggested that Immanuel could be either one of the following individuals, (1) Hezekiah,[48] (2) Mahershalalhashbaz,[49] or (3) Jesus Christ.[50]

The Usage of ‘*Immanu ’el* in the Old Testament

The Hebrew words ‘*immanu ’el* is the result of a combination of the preposition ‘*im* (‘with’), the first plural suffix *nu* (‘us’), and the noun for deity ‘*el* (‘God’); hence, “God with us.” This combination occurs only

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three times in the Old Testament, and all within the book of Isaiah (7:14, 8:8, 10).

The preposition *'im* carries with it certain significant theological implications. Every preposition indicates relationship, and *'im* emphasises intimate relationship.[51] The name *'immanu 'el* thus reminded Israel of God's providential presence with them in times past. God was with Abraham (Gen 17:7), Jacob (Gen 28:15), Moses (Exod 3:12), Joshua (Josh 1:5), and David (2 Sam 7:9). The column of cloud, the pillar of fire, and the ark of the covenant were all symbols of God's presence with His people.

The Immanuel Candidates

In the light of the above theological implications of the word *'immanu 'el*, who could the person referred to in Isaiah 7:14, 8:8, and 10 be?

First, let us examine the suitability of Hezekiah. It has been argued by Walter Kaiser that Immanuel had to be Hezekiah because the prophecy was delivered to the "house of David." Therefore the birth of the child had to be restricted to the royal family.[52] Kaiser's conclusion is a classic case of "being at the right place but at the wrong time." He was correct in saying that the child belonged to the royal line, but wrong to say that it was fulfilled at the time Isaiah said those words.

The controversy over chronology renders the whole proposition of Kaiser debatable.[53] In any case, on the basis of 2 Kings 16:1–2, 17:1, and 18:1–2, Hezekiah must have been at least nine years old when Isaiah gave the Immanuel prophecy. How then could Hezekiah be the son who "will be born" when he was already such a grown-up boy? And how could Hezekiah be virgin born?

It has been suggested that in the light of Isaiah 8:1–10, Immanuel must have been Mahershalalhashbaz, the prophet's son. The close similarities between Isaiah 7:14–16 and Isaiah 8:3–4 seem to allow for such a view. Although the similarities are apparent, the differences should be taken into consideration. The similarities between 7:14–16 and 8:3–4 do not necessarily mean that they are one and the same. Firstly, 7:14 anticipates a supernatural birth which Mahershalalhashbaz did not fulfill. Secondly, the child was not named Immanuel, but Mahershalalhashbaz.

And thirdly, it was not “she” (*weqara’th*, “and she shall call” [7:14]) who did the naming but “he” (Isaiah; “Then said the LORD unto me, call his name . . .” [8:3]).

Isaiah 7:14–16 issued a promise of God’s deliverance, while 8:1–10 carries a threat of an Assyrian invasion. It is thus obvious why Isaiah named his second son “Mahershalalhashbaz” meaning “quickly to the spoil, hurry up the prey” instead of “Immanuel,” “God (is) with us.” But if 8:1–10 speaks of judgment, why the mention of Immanuel in verses 8 and 10? This is because God was trying to tell Judah that although He will use Assyria to chastise her, she will not be completely destroyed, hence, the reiteration of the Immanuel promise (v. 8). Judah was to learn a painful lesson, namely this: her trust must never be in man, but in God alone. Her trust in the power of other nations (Isa 8:6, 9, 10) will not bring her national security but divine chastisement for “God (is) with us” (v. 10). It is because God is with His people that chastisement comes (Deut 8:5, Heb 12:6).

The Immanuel prophecy ties in very well with the extended description of the child in Isaiah 9:6–7. Who is this child? Verse 6 indicates that this child is God. His name is not only “Immanuel,” but also “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” Verse 7 reveals that this child is David’s greater Son, “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever” (2 Sam 7:8–17, cf. Acts 15:14–17).

It is important to note the function of the verb, *yullad*, “is born,” in Isaiah 9:6. The word is written in the perfect tense. Although the Hebrew perfect is commonly used to express completed action, the context here demands that it be seen as a *prophetic* perfect. This is especially the case in prophecies, promises, and threats.[54] Only the Lord Jesus Christ fits the description of the Child in Isaiah 9:6–7. This climatic text of the “Son” aptly closes the Immanuel section (Isa 7:1–9:7).

By virtue of the fact that God was going to give a miraculous sign to the house of David in involving a virgin-born Son who bears the divine title, “Immanuel,” it is necessary to conclude that this virgin-born Son of God can be none other than the Messiah Himself.

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Two Common Objections

Two valid questions raised by those who oppose the strictly Messianic view need to be answered: (1) What is the meaning of Isaiah 7:15–16 in the light of verse 14 if a strictly Messianic birth was intended? (2) Could not Immanuel be Isaiah’s son since his sons were meant for “signs and wonders” (Isa 7:14, 8:18)?

In answer to the first question, it must be said that there is no need to insist on an eighth century fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 just because verses 15–16 had a contemporary significance. The chronology of prophetic oracles is not always sequential. To see a distant fulfillment of 7:14 and a near fulfillment of 7:15–16 pose no difficulty to the prophet’s bifocal foresight. Tow explains,

THE PROPHETIC’S PANORAMA



Like a man looking out of his window into the distance, the seer and the prophet, insofar as prophetic history is concerned, can see a panorama of four mountain ranges, as illustrated above.[55]

The prophet was thus able to predict both immediate and future events in different sections of the same passage all at the same time. In a single vision, Isaiah saw the Virgin Birth of Christ in verse 14, and then the imminent destruction of Rezin and Pekah in verses 15–16.

Does Isaiah 7:14 need to be immediately fulfilled in order for it to have an eighth century relevance? J. Barton Payne’s insightful observation is noteworthy. A prophecy, he wrote,

may serve as a valid force in motivating conduct, irrespective of the interval preceding its historical

fulfillment, provided only the contemporary audience does not know when this fulfillment is to take place. Even as the Lord's second coming should motivate our faithful conduct, no matter how distant it may be . . . , So Isa 7:14, on His miraculous first coming, was equally valid for motivating Ahaz, 730 years before Jesus' birth.[56]

Although this is reason enough, it still does not fully answer how Isaiah 7:15–16 is related to verse 14. Tow explains,

Though we know that the event of the birth of Christ through Mary did not occur until 700 years afterwards, the prophet in ecstasy saw it as an accomplished fact. In vivid sequences, he saw also the dissolution of the Syria-Israel coalition in a matter of a few years, the period of early infancy of a child when he should know between good and bad.[57]

This prophetic phenomenon was also observed by McClain, "The prophet sometimes saw future events not only *together*; but in expanding their description of these events, they seem occasionally to *reverse* the same sequence in their record of the vision." [58]

The second objection to a strictly Messianic interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 revolves around the supposition that Immanuel must be Isaiah's son on the basis of Isaiah 8:18. The question arises: Did Isaiah actually have two (Shearjashub and Mahershalalhashbaz) or three (plus Immanuel) sons? It is not possible that Immanuel was Isaiah's third son. There is no explicit identification whatsoever that Immanuel was Isaiah's son, as compared to Shearjashub who was called "thy (i.e., Isaiah's) son" in 7:3, and Mahershalalhashbaz who was the result of conjugal activity between Isaiah and his wife (8:3). His two sons were rightly given for "signs" (8:18) in the sense that their names functioned as predictive prophecy. The predictive element in their names explains the use of the word '*oth*' ("sign"). There is no evidence whatsoever that Isaiah fathered a third son, "Immanuel."

The Prediction of Isaiah 7:14

The foreboding Syro-Ephraimic attack threatened to annihilate the whole Davidic dynasty. God will not allow this to happen because He is faithful to keep His promise to David, viz., through him will come the

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Messiah, and Jehovah “will establish his kingdom for ever” (2 Sam 7:13, 16). The privilege of knowing how the Messianic King will proceed from the line of David (2 Sam 7:12) was given to Isaiah and the faithful remnant of David’s household, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa 7:14). God assured His people that the northern invasion would not happen. The prophet, in his vision-experience, used the infancy of the Messiah symbolically as a measure of time to predict the imminent destruction of Rezin and Pekah.

CONCLUSION

In opposition to the Study Bibles which attack the traditional view that Isaiah 7:14 is a strictly Messianic prophecy, we want to promote the few Study Bibles which remain faithful to the precious doctrine of the Virgin Birth by upholding the fact that it was only Jesus who fulfilled the Immanuel prophecy.

The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible, edited by Spiros Zodhiates,

7:14 The famous prophecy of Christ’s virgin birth is contained in this verse . . .

Few passages have provoked such controversy as this verse. . . . Recent studies have a uniform tendency to downplay the miraculous aspects, and rationalize that this verse is a prophecy that some young woman would shortly bear a child in the normal way. . . . It is believed that these approaches do not do justice to the text, . . .

The child born . . . cannot be just any child for . . . the “son” to be born . . . is clearly a divine Person. No child of normal parentage could be so understood; certainly not the child of Isaiah or Ahaz, as some commentators have suggested.[59]

The King James Study Bible,

7:14 **Therefore** is a transitional word used to connect verse 14 to the preceding statements. **The Lord** here is *Adonai*. **Behold** is used to call attention to the unusual birth that is about to be announced. (See also Gen. 16:11 and Judg. 13:5). A **virgin** is better read, “the virgin.” The Hebrew definite article *ha* indicates that a specific woman is in view. The word *virgin* used here is the unique Hebrew term ‘*almah*. A comparison of the six other instances where it occurs (Gen. 24:43;

Ex. 2:8; Ps. 68:25; Prov. 30:19; Song 1:3; 6:8) shows that it is the most precise term the prophecy could have chosen to indicate that the young woman in view was indeed a virgin. The more common word *betulah* is used twice to refer to a married woman (Deut. 22:19 and Joel 1:8). Thus the Septuagint translation of '*almah* as *parthenos* (virgin) is correct, as is Matthew 1:23. **Shall conceive** is a feminine adjective connected with an active participle ("bearing") and should be translated "is pregnant." Thus the scene is present to the prophet's view, and he sees the pregnant virgin about to bear a Son. That this prophecy must refer to the virgin birth of Christ is obvious since the virgin is pregnant and is still a virgin! **Immanuel** is a symbolic name, meaning "God with Us." He is the incarnate Son of God who is further pictured as the Child-Prince in 9:6, 7.[60]

The Kaiserian approach to Biblical interpretation ought to be rejected because it limits the meaning of the text to the human intent. In so doing, it dismisses the divine element that is intrinsic to Holy Scripture. The Holy Bible is thus being treated like an ordinary book. Again, it must be stressed that in Biblical interpretation, it is not the mind of the human author that needs to be sought, but the divine. The divine intent is located in subsequent Scripture.

What is the divine intent of Isaiah 7:14? Gromacki has well answered,

the **divine intent** of Isaiah 7:14 involved true virginity. . . .
The clear interpretation of Matthew 1:22–23 should explain whatever ambiguity one might find in Isaiah 7:14. This is the proper order of Christian exegesis.[61]

Isaiah 7:14 is, indeed, a very special Messianic prophecy. As such, only a strictly Messianic view of Isaiah 7:14 does justice to the language of the prophet. There is absolutely no necessity to spurn the traditional view that Isaiah 7:14 is exclusively predictive of the Virgin Birth of Christ.

In the light of Matthew 1:22–23, Isaiah 7:14 must be seen as strictly Messianic. The prophecy was fulfilled only in Christ. There is only one meaning to the text, and it calls for only one fulfillment. Buswell wrote,

It should be clear that we may accept Matthew's record of the supernatural revelation of the angel, which included a

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specific interpretation of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, without the slightest embarrassment either on linguistic or historical or literary contextual grounds. A frank examination of what Isaiah prophesied in its context shows that he gave a prediction of precisely such an event as took place in the virgin birth of Christ.[62]

The sign of Isaiah 7:14 is therefore the sign of the Virgin Birth.

ENDNOTES

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³See Kenneth Barker, gen. ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), 1027; Ronald A. Beers, gen. ed., *Life Application Bible* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989), 1163; W. A. Criswell, ed., *The Believer's Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 931; Jack W. Hayford, gen. ed., *Spirit Filled Life Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 971; Harold Lindsell, gen. ed., *The Evangelical Study Bible* (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1986), 1080; Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 1024; Marshall Shelley, gen. ed., *The Quest Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 946; Philip Yancey and Tim Stafford, *The New Student Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 624.

⁴Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Single Intent of Scripture," in *Evangelical Roots*, ed. Kenneth Kantzer (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978), 140.

⁵Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward An Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 90.

⁶Ibid., 133–4.

⁷Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 19.

⁸Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 18–19.

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¹¹Robert G. Bratcher, “A Study of Isaiah 7:14,” *The Bible Translator* 9 (1958): 115.

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¹³*Ibid.*, 349.

¹⁴Chapter I, paragraph IX. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Philadelphia: Great Commission Publications, n.d.), 4.

¹⁵Howard A. Hanke, *The Validity of the Virgin Birth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), 25.

¹⁶Raju D. Kunjummen, “The Single Intent of Scripture: Critical Examination of a Theological Construct,” *Grace Theological Journal* 7 (1986): 102–3.

¹⁷Cf. Isaiah 44:28; 45:1 with Daniel 6:28; 10:1. The year is calculated from the time of Judah’s first captivity in 606 B.C. See W. Graham Scroggie, *The Unfolding Drama of Redemption*, vol. 1 (London: Pickering and English Limited, 1953), 369.

¹⁸James A. Brooks, and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1979), 94. The *aktionsart* of the Greek perfect tense is punctiliar-linear. It indicates a present state which has resulted from a past action.

¹⁹K. Stendahl, “Matthew,” *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1962), 771.

²⁰Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 2d ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 843, 180.

²¹*Ibid.*, 627.

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²²Payne ably defends the single fulfillment view in predictive prophecy in *Biblical Prophecy*, 121–6. See also Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Winona Lake: BHM Books, 1974), 180.

²³Homer A. Kent, Jr., “Matthew’s Use of the Old Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121 (1964): 37.

²⁴P. Douglas McIntosh, “The Immanuel prophecy,” Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary (May 1971), 18. See also E. Hammershaimb, “The Immanuel Sign,” *Studia Theologica* 3 (1951): 126–35.

²⁵J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1930), 290–1.

²⁶Cf. Gerhard Lisowsky, *Koncordanz Zum Hebraischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1958), 37–8.

²⁷*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. “’wt” by Robert J. Alden.

²⁸’Adonai is a plural of majesty. E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2d English ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 242. See also *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. “’dny” by Robert L. Alden.

²⁹Cf. Lisowsky, *Konkordanz*, 1072

³⁰’Imwt in 1 Chronicles 15:20 and Psalm 46:1 is transliterated *alamoth* in all the versions except two—the NEB and TLB. They left it out completely. It is not certain that the plural ’Imwt here is derived from ’Imh. It is probably a musical term. See John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 2, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n.d.), 194.

³¹In any case, a strong case can be presented that *betula* is not a technical term for *virgo intacta* in the OT, a conclusion that has important bearing on the meaning of ’alma in Isa 7:14.” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. “’bt” by Bruce K. Waltke.

³²*The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*, s.v. “’n’rh.”

³³R. Dick Wilson, “The Meaning of ‘Alma (A.V. ‘Virgin’) in Isaiah vii.14,” *Princeton Theological Review* 24 (1926): 316.

³⁴Allan A. MacRae, *Biblical Christianity* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1994), 106–7.

³⁵See John J. Scullion, “An Approach to the Understanding of Isaiah 7:10–17,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87 (1968): 300.

³⁶See Gleason L. Archer, “Isaiah,” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1961), 618.

³⁷See Robert Horton Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 226–7.

³⁸Kautzsch, *Grammar*, 407–8.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰Bruce K. Waltke, and Michael O’Conner, *An Introduction to Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 236.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 242–3. It is “designating a particular person or thing necessarily understood to be present or vividly portraying someone or something whose identity is not otherwise indicated.”

⁴²Hobart Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 205.

⁴³Choon Leong Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 48.

⁴⁴Kaiser, *Old Testament Theology*, 208.

⁴⁵*Weqara’th* could be the “rarer form” of the third feminine singular of *lamedh-aleph* verbs. Kautzsch, *Grammar*, 120–1.

⁴⁶Zane C. Hodges, and Arthur L. Farstad, eds., *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, 2d ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 3.

⁴⁷Robert L. Reymond, “The ‘*lmh* of Isaiah 7:14,” *Presbyterion* (1989): 3.

⁴⁸John Lindblom, *A Study on the Immanuel Section in Isaiah* (Lund: Gleerup, 1958), 19.

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⁴⁹David M. Sweets, "Isaiah vii.14," *The Homiletic Review* (1894): 555.

⁵⁰Edward J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1954), 194–8.

⁵¹*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. "mm," by Gerhard Van Groningen.

⁵²Kaiser, "Isaiah 7:14," 64.

⁵³See J. Barton Payne, "The Relationship of the Reign of Ahaz to the Accession of Hezekiah," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126 (1969): 40; Harold A. Stigers, "The Interphased Chronology of Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Hoshea," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 9 (1966): 81–3.

⁵⁴Seow, *Grammar*, 93. According to E. J. Young, the perfect verbal form emphasises "the historical nature of the birth . . . a birth in history upon this earth at a definite time and a definite place," *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 329.

⁵⁵Timothy Tow, *The Gospel Prophets* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, n.d.), 11.

⁵⁶J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 292.

⁵⁷Tow, *Prophets*, 45. See also Machen, *Virgin*, 291; Young, *Isaiah*, 293–4; *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Isaiah," by R. Laird Harris.

⁵⁸Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), 138.

⁵⁹Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1991), 861–2.

⁶⁰*The King James Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 1028–9.

⁶¹Robert Glenn Gromacki, *The Virgin Birth: Doctrine of Deity* (New York: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1974), 141.

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JOHN SUNG AND HIS LEGACY IN SINGAPORE

Timothy Tow

In the early years of the thirties, “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” of the Church in China began to echo to her sons and daughters in Southeast Asia. It was the voice of a Chinese John the Baptist, the greatest preacher China has ever heard.

The voice of John Sung, preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ, brought thousands, campaign after campaign, to the feet of the Saviour. The voice of John Sung, preaching holiness and dedication, called thousands more to an evangelistic crusade and hundreds into the full-time ministry. In a brief fifteen years, this apostle of modern China had traversed the length and breadth of his own country and all over Southeast Asia, winning several hundred thousand souls to Christ.

John Sung was born in Hinghwa, Fukien province in 1901, one of many sons and daughters of a Methodist pastor. A brilliant scholar with a high ambition, he found his way to the United States in 1920. From 1920 to 1926 he applied himself with all his might to the study of science. He graduated with a PhD in chemistry at the head of his class.

At the zenith of success glittering with many honours, there came the Word of the Lord Jesus to him, “For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” (Mk 8:36).

Remembering his vow of earlier years to serve the Lord, John Sung gave up a lucrative profession to study for the Gospel ministry. He was introduced by a friend to Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Alas! A Seminary that taught a “God is dead” theology under the caretaking of a principal surnamed (Henry Sloane) Coffin became but a “Cemetery” to John Sung’s troubled soul. But God showed John Sung the way of salvation and life everlasting as he diligently sought Him, the



modernist theologians notwithstanding. This brought such a flood of joy to his quickened soul that he literally burst to tell his teachers and friends of his new found salvation.

Supposing John Sung had lost his mind, the Seminary authorities sent him to a mental hospital. Here he was kept for 193 days, days of bitter suffering, yet of deeper communion with his Lord. During this period, says William E. Schubert his bosom friend, he read his Bible forty times! His wilderness days over, John Sung made his way back to China, answering the call of God to minister to his own people. As the ship ploughed through the Pacific Ocean, he tossed into the sea all his academic awards, even medals and gold keys, save his doctor's diploma to show his father in filial piety. "For whosoever shall save his life shall

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lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel shall save it” (Mk 8:36).

The first three years of his labours were years of probation. From 1930 onwards, however, the Lord began to multiply his ministry, more and more, until the close of the decade. Knowing from the Lord that he had but “five-times-three” years to finish his work, John Sung burned the candle of his life at both ends without any let up. He died in Beijing, August 18, 1944 at the age of 43, consumed in the Master’s service.

One decade after John Sung’s death, his exploits were made known to the English-speaking churches by Leslie T. Lyall through “John Sung, the Flame for God in the Far East.” Other English publications on John Sung such as William E Schubert’s “I Remember John Sung” and numerous articles appearing in magazines and periodicals from time to time have also increased this knowledge, to the edification of saints old and young.

HIS LEGACY IN SINGAPORE

When Dr John Sung came to Singapore in August 1935 at the invitation of the Chinese Inter-Church Union, he came almost unannounced, like Elijah appearing solo on Mt Carmel. He had come to conduct two weeks of Revival Meetings at the Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church (Pastor Rev Hong Han Keng).

Spiritual life of the Chinese Churches in Singapore was at its lowest ebb. It was a Sunday Church-going Christianity without vitality. The souls of men and women brought up under a professional missionary leadership were languishing white to harvest (John 4:35).

John Sung came upon this scene like the Baptist of old. He denounced all who came to hear him for their sins, naming them one by one. He called for repentance. The main theme of his messages was the New Life, the need to be born again. He lifted high the Cross whereon Christ died for our sins. The Blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, only, could cleanse us from sin, and grant forgiveness. The response was overwhelming. Hundreds repented in tears and confession of their sins.

John Sung continued to instruct his hearers, step by step, in the doctrine of sanctification and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. But there

was no speaking of tongues. Neither did he stress Baptism's mode, for he declared he came not to baptise but to preach the Gospel (1 Cor 1:17). "More faith less water. Less faith more water!" From Singapore John Sung went to Malaysia and to Medan, Indonesia.

Returning from Malaysia and Medan, Indonesia, John Sung held a second campaign in late October 1935. Together with the 1,300 gloriously saved at the first campaign the total number of those born again through John Sung's first two Singapore campaigns netted 2,000.

A Church cleansed from sin and evil, we witnessed many who were delivered from tobacco and alcohol. Restitution of moneys stolen was another phenomenon. Feuding elders and deacons made peace with one another. A rich man Mr Gan who came with his three wives and their families was totally converted. He "paid off" his second and third wives, gave over his import and export business to his eldest son. He became a lay evangelist, and near the end of his life wrote a commentary on "Song of Solomon."

A revived Church was a singing Church. John Sung Choruses, 130 of them, were later enlarged to over two hundred. These remain an Auxiliary Song Book for many Chinese Churches to this day. If music is next to theology according to Martin Luther, music is part and parcel of John Sung's sermons. John Sung would stir the hearts of his hearers by leading them to sing their theme choruses.

John Sung practised faith healing reluctantly at first in North China at the suggestion of an English Missionary because multitudes of the sick could not find medication. John Sung's style of healing was not like today's charismatic extravagance. In Singapore's first campaign, he preached 40 times at three sermons a day for 14 days. Each sermon lasted two hours. At the 41st sermon only one afternoon was given to praying for the sick. The last session was a testimony and farewell service.

Revival leads to fervent evangelism. Well over 130 preaching bands were organised for his converts. Each band, carrying a triangular flag, consisted of two or three or more. All who joined the Preaching Bands were consecrated at a special service. They promised to go out evangelising at least once a week, especially on Sunday afternoon. An Evangelistic League comprising all these bands was organised, headed by

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Miss Leona Wu his interpreter and successor. They held regular meetings every month.

Apart from the Preaching Bands, there were 85 who were called to full-time service. These also had their monthly meetings. Of the 85 a score has given themselves to the Lord to this day.

A more permanent legacy of the Revival was the founding of Chin Lien Bible Seminary by Miss Leona Wu and Miss Ng Peck Loan, May 14, 1937. Chin Lien Bible Seminary is mentioned in the Singapore Year Book 1993. It has graduated hundreds during the last 57 years, more women than men.

The work of the preaching bands has resulted in Gospel stations started. These preaching stations soon developed into churches, e.g., The Presbyterian Church in Lim Chu Kang, Methodist Church at Bukit Panjang. The most outstanding is the Pasir Panjang Christ Church, an instant Church arising from the Revival Campaign. Mr Phoa Hock Seng, a school teacher, became lay preacher. He was ordained after WWII by Bishop D. A. Thompson of the Reformed Episcopal Church of England. (Mr Phoa was of the Anglican tradition.)

Another legacy of John Sung is the spirit of the Singapore Pentecost persevering in the lives of his young followers. One of them was Elder Peter Yap, interpreter of the Billy Graham crusade. Insofar as Bible Presbyterians are concerned, it is still burning brightly in the hearts of her founders, Rev Timothy Tow, Rev Quek Kiok Chiang, Rev Hsu Chiang Tai (now in New York) and Dr Tow Siang Hwa.

One aspect of John Sung's spirit that has remained with the B-Pers is John Sung's stand against liberalism and modernism, having tasted its poison when a student at Union Seminary, New York. The spirit against unbelief in these John Sung followers led them to affiliate with the International Council of Christian Churches in 1948, to withstand the Ecumenical Movement of the World Council of Churches.

John Sung My Teacher by Timothy Tow, translated into Chinese by Miss Ng Sang Chiew on the eve of the 60th Anniversary of the Evangelistic League (1935–1995) is a lasting legacy for the children of the Chinese Churches that invited him to Singapore, 1935.

“He being dead, yet speaketh.” John Sung speaks all the more today to the English-speaking world through the many books on John Sung.

Rev Dr Timothy Tow is the Founding Pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and Principal of Far Eastern Bible College. Converted during the ministry of John Sung, Rev Tow has written “John Sung My Teacher” (also available in Chinese), “The Asian Awakening,” “Born Again in the Singapore Pentecost,” and “In John Sung’s Steps: The Story of Lim Puay Hian,” and has translated John Sung’s Sermons in two volumes. These are obtainable from the Far Eastern Bible College Press, 9A Gilstead Road, Singapore 309063.

BEING A GOOD PASTOR

Bob Phee

Tonight is most momentous for Galilee B-P Church in the ordination of Simon Nagarajan. This is the excitement of your pastor, Rev Philip Heng, to confirm the calling of Simon to the ministry of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Rev Heng invited me to bring the Word, I felt that it was my duty as I have been involved in Simon's theological training at Far Eastern Bible College and I also have a close interaction with Galilee B-P Church.

“Being a Good Pastor” is tonight's topic. The work of pastoring is a calling of the Lord. A pastor lives under the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to take the stress and strain of the ministry. To be a good pastor, a minister has to stand in the might and grace of the Lord. The word ‘good’ is expressed by two words in the Greek language: *agathos* and *kalos*. Both words mean ‘good’ in English. *Agathos* has to do with outward goodness, e.g., someone who has put on a very smart appearance and we say he looks good. The “good” here is basically outward. But the other word, *kalos* means good inwardly. It has intrinsic value and an inward quality that typifies a man's character. These are two words which must qualify what a good pastor ought to be. Paul spoke of the good work of a bishop: “If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work” (1 Tim 3:1). A pastor is a shepherd who takes care of the flock of the Church. The qualifications of a good pastor are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:7–9 (see also Ezekiel 34, etc.). In short, a good pastor must have the quality of love. He must be a lover not of the world or material things (1 Jn 2:15–17), but a lover of God, his flock, and his family.

A GOOD PASTOR MUST BE A LOVER OF THE TRIUNE GOD

First, he must be a lover of the Triune God. The pastor must love God the **Father** who is the Creator of all things and in supreme control of all events in this world. He must also love **Jesus Christ** who being the God-Incarnate came to this earth two thousand years ago and sacrificed His life for the sins of many particularly for those He loves. The pastor must never neglect his love for the Third Person, the **Holy Spirit**, who regenerates us to become the children of God. It is the Triune God who has chosen and called us to be under-shepherds over the flock.

The pastor's love for the Triune God must be demonstrated by his work. As God's work is carried out in and through the Church and missions, he ought to obey the Great Commission. It is the duty of a good pastor to preach the Gospel at every given opportunity: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (1 Tim 4:2). This involves not only preaching the Gospel, the caring and nurturing of the flock, but also the administration of the Church. The maintenance of the Church comes under his pastoral duty. In addition, the lover of the Triune God must extend the Great Commission beyond the shores of his country. This is the work of foreign missions that he challenges his members to undertake with him to further the cause of Christ.

As much as a good pastor must excel in his church work, he must also possess a goodly character. The Apostle Paul has described these qualities in his epistles. In summary, he has to be holy as God is holy. Charles Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, once said to his students that those who serve the Lord must be 100% holy. A pastor has to be holy; holy in his thinking, holy in his actions and holy in his speech. He must also portray the character of God in goodness. That is in kindness, tenderness and gentleness for the purpose of working out the salvation which the Father has given to him. He needs also to see that his character radiates God's truth. Because God is always true and does not tolerate deceit, the pastor is to preach nothing but the truth in all honesty and sincerity.

Being a pastor of the B-P Church, it is required of him to take the separatist stand. He must instruct his congregation to understand the

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doctrine of Biblical separation. That we separate from apostasy and from the present ecumenism which denies the Word of God is the founding principle of the Bible-Presbyterian Church. Hence, a good pastor of the B-P Church will want to uphold this teaching so that the church will not be polluted and corrupted by the false doctrines which are so prevalent today.

A GOOD PASTOR MUST BE A LOVER OF HIS PEOPLE

The ordination of Simon Nagarajan to the ministry of the Gospel in general, and of Galilee B-P Church in particular, is in line with the calling to be the Lord's under-shepherd. The exhortation of Peter should be taken seriously: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:2-3).

The prophet Ezekiel was terribly disturbed with the callous attitude and unfaithfulness of the shepherds of his day. They neglected the care of and the feeding of the sheep. However a good pastor is a faithful preacher of God's Word. He has to study God's Word diligently so that his flock will receive the nutritious feeding. He is not easily distracted by circumstances. He will deliver the Lord's message even though he might have had an heated argument with his spouse on Sunday morning. Therefore, shepherding is a great task, a marathon not to be distracted along the way until the race is won.

A good pastor is a protector of his sheep. He protects his sheep against false teachings as Paul had warned the Ephesian elders: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30). He does this by defending God's Word. He not only stands for the truth as summarised in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, but inculcates his flock to do the same.

When some of his members are hurt, a good pastor understands their struggle. Like a physician, he endeavours to find a solution to their problems. He prays to the Lord on their behalf. He has to teach them with patience in their walk with the Lord. As a lover of his people, a good pastor realises that to teach the congregation to think the right and undo the wrong is more difficult than resort to scolding from the pulpit. He has to teach them not just by speech but also by example.

A GOOD PASTOR MUST BE A LOVER OF HIS FAMILY

Paul has said in very clear terms that a good pastor needs to rule his own house well: "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim 3:5). The logic is simple. If a pastor cannot rule his house of a few members, how is he to rule God's house of a bigger membership?

How is he to rule his household? First, I believe he needs to abide by the Biblical injunction to love his wife as Christ loves His Church. Of course, the wife ought to submit to him as the head of the home (Eph 5:22; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1). Secondly, a good pastor can rule his home well by loving his children. God's Word urges fathers not to provoke their children to anger. In the East, the father is the authority. A father's word is final and the children are to be seen and not heard. But in the West, a child can speak of his rights and he will be heard. However, both ways of the East and West taken to extreme can result in provoking the children. Being too strict will retard their growth, being too lenient may spoil them. We need moderation to nurture and raise them in the way of the Lord.

Instead of provoking the children to wrath (Gal 6:4), fathers ought to provoke them to love and good works (Heb 10:24). This is the harder thing to do. It demands more thinking and creativity and time to interact with them. If we desire our children to walk in the way of the Lord then we have to spend sufficient time with them. Pastors have a great task to be lovers of their family. His family, whether he likes it or not, becomes the example for others to follow or criticise. Hence there is a tremendous need for the people of God to pray for pastors.

Finally, how does a good pastor being a lover of the Triune God, the people and his family balance his time to give attention to each of them?

BEING A GOOD PASTOR

Some people feel that equal time be given to each one of them. Another suggests that 40% of his time must be devoted each to God and Church and 20% to his family, as the Lord will take care of his family. There are still others who would minimise the role of the pastor's family as he is called to serve the Lord full-time. However, the family is very important to the pastor. If he neglects his wife and children, it will mar his testimony. How can he edify his members when his household is not at peace? However, it would also be wrong for a pastor to care so much for his family that his church work is neglected. There needs to be a balance. It is never easy but with a pastoral love for God's work and the responsibility for the family, a good pastor will always be there to meet the need that arises. One important principle to follow is this: When we have a piece of work to do, let's give our total devotion. When we spend time at home with the family, let us give them our full attention, to spouse and children. In all that we do, let us do it out of love for God, and He will bless us accordingly.

I believe that the devotion to God, to Church and to family are to be seen as a unit. May the Triune God grant us the wisdom and help us to know how to conduct ourselves for His glory. And may these words which I have given bless many hearts.

The above was preached at the ordination service of Simon Nagarajan on September 12, 94 at Galilee Bible-Presbyterian Church by Rev Bob Phee Eng Soon, pastor of Sembawang Bible-Presbyterian Church, and lecturer at Far Eastern Bible College.

HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THE MINISTRY: THE EXAMPLE OF PETER

Hpung Raw Hpung Seng

The text of my sermon is found in Luke 5:1–11. In this passage, we find how Simon Peter left his occupation as a fisherman to become a disciple of Jesus. Peter was one of the twelve disciples. He was one of the three disciples who were closest to Jesus. After the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, at the day of Pentecost, he became the leader of the Apostolic Church. He followed Jesus right to the very end of his life. We can, therefore, say that Peter was a successful follower of Jesus.

Let us consider, from this text, how Peter became a successful follower of Jesus. We Burmese have a proverb which means, “A good start, a good finish.” Here, we see how Peter started to follow Jesus and to enter into the ministry. All these experiences are his keys to success. What are these keys?

PERSEVERANCE

Firstly, Peter was a man of perseverance. He learned to persevere as a fisherman. Before Peter became a disciple of Jesus, he was a fisherman. He lived in a town called Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. I believe we all know the life of a fisherman. It is a difficult job. Normally, they fish when it is still dark. They have to face the waves of the sea, the rains and the storms. They need to work very hard day and night.

In Luke 5, when Jesus came to the Sea of Galilee to preach the Word of God, Peter was there. They had fished the whole night, but caught nothing. According to verse 2, they had stopped fishing, and were cleaning their nets. Jesus entered Peter’s ship, and taught the people from there. Many people gathered to hear Jesus’ sermon because they knew it came from God. After his speech, Jesus said to Peter, “Launch out into

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the deep and let down your nets for a draught.” Peter could have rejected this order. He could say, “I have tried the whole night, I could not catch a single fish. I am tired now. Let me rest.” Moreover, Jesus was a carpenter, what does he know about fishing, Peter might have thought. We Burmese have a proverb, “Don’t teach a crocodile how to swim.”

But Peter did not despise Jesus’ instruction. Although he was already very tired after a whole night of fishing, and depressed because he caught nothing, he persevered, obeying the Lord’s word. Peter went to fish, and this time he caught plenty. Peter persevered and he became successful.

OBEDIENCE

Secondly, Peter was a man of obedience. When Jesus said, “Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught,” he obeyed. Peter could have thought, “Last night we did not catch anything. It will be no different if we had gone out again.” But he did not. Peter told Jesus, “Nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net.” When he lowered his net according to Jesus’ word, what happened? He caught a lot of fish, so much so, that his net began to tear. The fish he caught could fill two boats.

Peter failed to catch any fish at first, but his failure was turned to success when he obeyed God’s Word. Obedience is another key to success.

HUMILITY

Thirdly, Peter was a man of humility. When Peter saw this miracle of Jesus, he and his friends were amazed. He realised that Jesus was no ordinary man. He saw the deity and holiness of Jesus. Jesus was God. He began to see that he was not worthy of Jesus. So, he knelt down immediately before Jesus and confessed that he was a sinner. Peter said, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” This revealed his humble spirit. When Jesus saw that Peter humbled himself with a broken heart, He said to him, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.” Jesus can use such a humble man. And Peter forsook all he had to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

LESSONS

When we consider this story, there are many precious lessons we can learn. How can we have a successful ministry? Jesus said to Peter, “Henceforth, thou shalt catch man.” So, we know that the preaching ministry is like fishing. The fisherman catches the fish from the sea. Likewise, in the world, we also catch lost souls by the Gospel net.

Sometimes, the fisherman catches many fishes, but sometimes, even if he works hard, he does not catch any. Our ministry is also like that. Sometimes, we spend time, money, and energy in preaching the Gospel, but there is no result. We cannot catch a single soul for Christ. We fail. In the Christian life and ministry, the Bible never promises we will be successful all the time. We struggle through difficulties. We must not give up when the going gets tough. Success follows failure. Our duty is to work hard for the Lord with perseverance.

I believe Peter would not be able to forget this wonderful miracle for the rest of his life. When he obeyed Jesus, he caught a lot of fish. In his service for the Lord, whenever he obeyed Jesus, he found success. Deuteronomy 11:27 says, “A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day.” If we obey the Word of God, we will receive His blessings. Our service to the Lord must be in accordance to His Word. Our duty is to do all that the Lord has commanded us, and do it to the best of our ability.

A servant of the Lord or a follower of Jesus needs to forsake worldliness. The lust of the flesh, filthy lucre, and vain glory must all be forsaken. In other words, we need to cast aside sinful ambitions to strive to enter the kingdom of God.

In conclusion, Peter was a successful follower of Jesus because he was a man of perseverance, obedience, and humility. If we want to become a successful follower of Jesus Christ, we should be like Peter, and must follow Jesus.

May God bless all of you. Amen.

Hpung Raw, a second year Diploma in Theology student from Myanmar, preached this in the Homiletics class on August 17, 94.

FROM A FARMER OF WHEAT TO A FISHER OF MEN

Errol D. Stone

I enjoyed 24 years of farming in Quairading, in the Central Wheatbelt of Western Australia. I farmed for 20 years with my father and three brothers on 14,000 acres of land, with 4,500 acres of wheat, oats, barley, and lupins. We also had 12,000 Merino sheep for wool and meat production. In 1990, the family partnership dissolved, and we farmed 2,800 acres, with 3,000 sheep, on our own.

My secondary education was at Wesley College in South Perth. I was married to Robyn in 1975, and we have three children. All have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. I was saved in 1989 in the Charismatic Movement.

I give thanks to the Lord for our salvation and for the assurance we have of spending eternity in heaven. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." I religiously sat in a Church until I learnt that salvation could be gained by confessing with the mouth, and believing in the heart that Jesus is the Son of God, that He was born of a virgin, that He died on the cross for our sins once for all, that He rose again from the dead, ascended from heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, and that He will come again. By repenting and confessing our sins before God and believing there is only one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, we are born again (1 Tim 2:5; Jn 3:3).

I had the honour of pioneering Farm Safety in Western Australia, and speaking on it throughout Australia. I represented Australian farmers at several World Conferences. I was Chairman of the Agricultural Conference at the First World Conference on Injury Control in Sweden in

1988. I also co-ordinated, and presented Australia's first Farm Safety film called "Putting Safety First On The Farm," at the Second World Conference of Injury Control in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, in May 1993. Since 1987, I have visited nearly 30 countries. I was also involved in suicide prevention, sporting and community organisations, including the St. John's Ambulance as a volunteer ambulance officer.

During the 1993 grain harvest, the Scriptural verse that continually came to me was Matthew 9:37-38, "The harvest is truly plenteous, but the labourers are few: Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."

Two years earlier, I believed the Lord would show a sign if He wanted us to move from the farm. On Saturday, 19th December, 1993, a sign appeared. Amazingly, there were two rainbows on our property. The whole family saw it.

On 2nd January, 1994, we had fellowship at the People's Church in Esperance-a fundamental Bible-believing Church. At the conclusion of the service, I was handed an RPG (Read, Pray and Grow), a Banner Publication from Tabernacle Books of Singapore, edited by Dr S. H. Tow. On the back cover was printed a statement of faith which convicted me for the entire two weeks of our holiday. It read, "At F.E.B.C. we earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints. We oppose every form of false teaching that has invaded the Church-liberalism, modernism, neo-orthodoxy, neo-evangelicalism, charismaticism, pentecostalism, Romanism, ecumenism, the pernicious deception of liberation theology, and New Age mysticism. For conservative, reformed, Protestant scholarship, come to FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE, 9A Gilstead Road, Singapore." The Scripture in my mind was from 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

The day after our holiday, I listed a clearing sale for our belongings on the computer. On the second day, I faxed to FEBC for more information. The next Sunday, we attended the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Perth, and to our amazement, Dr S. H. Tow was preaching. Soon after that, we flew to Singapore to meet Rev Dr Timothy Tow to see if the College did stand by the statement of faith that it confessed, and to study the doctrines.

FROM A FARMER OF WHEAT TO A FISHER OF MEN

I found the King James Bible being used and defended because of its accurate translation of the inerrant and infallible Word of God (2 Tim 3:16).

After much prayer, it was agreed that we should go to Singapore as a family. We had a number of mature Bible-believing fundamental pastors and Christians confirm our decision by prayer. As expected, we also encountered opposition to our decision.

I give thanks to the Lord for all things, and find comfort in Matthew 7:14, "Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

The following week, we organised a sale of all our machinery, household items, sheep, and grain. On 25th March 1994, we had several thousand people attend one of the largest clearing sales held in the Central Wheatbelt. This was certainly a blessing from the Lord.

On the 28th May, 1994, we departed from Perth leaving our loved ones behind, having leased the farm, having stored away several sentimental items for our children, and basically owning our suitcases, left for Singapore, for the Far Eastern Bible College, for four years of study, God willing.

One Scripture text that I became familiar with as a Christian was Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Mr Errol Stone, with wife Robyn, and children Emma, Renee, and Bryce, are settled in Beulah House across the College. Errol is into his second semester of studies, in the B.Th. programme.

GOING THE WAY OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

Alex Wugu

Thank God for the manifold blessings I have received during my three years' course at FEBC. My spirit has been greatly blessed by the teachings at FEBC, the Christian fellowships I had in various Bible-Presbyterian Churches, and last but not least, the opportunities to go on mission trips.

I also learned of God's faithfulness as He provided for my every need. Indeed great is His name, and greatly to be praised. I will leave to remember my alma mater, and all my lecturers for the zeal in the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

I leave FEBC with one great desire, that is to go the way of the Great Commission. Apart from teaching at the Bible College of East Africa in Nariobi, God willing, I will involve myself in missions. My principal—Rev (Dr) Timothy Tow—who is also pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, constantly reminded us of missions and has set it as a standard for his Church. That good spirit from my spiritual mentor burdened me for the same cause.

If by God's grace we can start this ministry, we will name it MAP (Missions Accelerated Programme) AFRICA. The spirit of MAP will be after the Bible-Presbyterian Churches' spirit of missions. I hope that this ministry will add to the growth of the tree of the Gospel of the mustard seed to the end that its branches may reach the four corners of the earth. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Mat 24:14).

Why MAP? Or what is it for? MAP's main aim is already noted above, that is the acceleration of missions. It is an attempt to fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord. "God ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15). We are living in the very last days.

GOING THE WAY OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

Every watchful Christian cannot be ignorant of the need of this eleventh hour as far as missions is concerned. Let us do the work of missions until the Lord comes. May God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, grant sufficient grace to those who preach and teach the Gospel. Let us occupy till He comes. Even so come Lord Jesus, Amen!

Alex Wugu and Leonard Musyoka have completed their residential studies and have returned home to write their respective B.Th. theses. Alex serves as lecturer at the Bible College of East Africa under the principalship of Rev Mark Kim Kyung Soo, also an FEBC graduate. Leonard returns to his mother Church—the Independent Presbyterian Church of Kenya—where he serves as pastor of one of the Churches. He has a burden to start a Christian ministry in Kenyan Boarding Schools.

VACATION EVANGELISM IN THE RIAU ISLANDS

Phoa Ang Liang

I learned many things through this vacation evangelism. First, before we went there, we practised the songs we were going to present in the Riau Islands. I would like to thank sister Jenny Chin for choosing those meaningful songs. The first song tells us that in this chaotic world, only in Jesus we have peace and hope. I really had the joy of heart to sing this song. The second song teaches that all is vanity, and nothing but Jesus satisfies. This song presentation impressed me most in this trip.

Second, the message delivered by Rev Peter Chua on the Christian ministry at the Tanjung Pinang Church rebuked me for my lack of prayer. I need to spend more time in prayer. The message delivered by Dr Jeffrey Khoo on Matthew 20:28 at Kijang Church reminded us to be humble; to be like Jesus who did not come to be served, but to serve. The Gospel message preached by Rev Bob Phee on the last night at Calvary Batam Bible-Presbyterian Church resulted in eight souls being saved. I believe during that time many were praying for them.

I really praise God for His goodness. Sometimes I am weak, but God sends others to strengthen me, especially sister Jenny Chin, my best friend. She really reached out to the people. She brought Gospel tracts when we went to Senggarang Island and gave to the people there. She introduced me to an old lady she had preached the Gospel to in Batam in order that I can follow up later. She has set a good example for us.

I thank God also for sisters Nancy Khoo and Hannah Yeo. They were very helpful. I remember when I was not feeling well at one stage with cough and sore throat, sister Nancy brought the medicine for me. One week later, she brought cough drops for me. I really thank the Lord for a good sister in Christ.

VACATION EVANGELISM IN THE RIAU ISLANDS

I think the more important things in our Christian life are a good testimony so that souls may be won for Christ, and a good fellowship so that we can encourage one another in the faith. Christians can be a stumbling block to others. In every aspect of our life, we must be careful to do all things to glorify God (1 Tim 4:12). Rev Tow reminded us in the homiletics class, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatever we do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).

Miss Phao Ang Liang is a Dip.Th. student from Batam, Indonesia. This trip from September 5–8, 94 to the Riau Islands—Bintan and Batam—during the mid-semester break was participated by 45 students.

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