

## ISAIAH AND HIS SONS<sup>1</sup>

### I. INTRODUCTION

Christian missionaries claim that the name עִמָּנוּאֵל (*Imanu'EL*)<sup>2</sup> in Isaiah 7:14 is unique among all the other names of biblical personalities. According to Christian theology, this verse prophesies the birth of Jesus by a virgin who conceived him from the Holy Ghost. The author of the Gospel of Matthew states it this way (unless stated otherwise, highlighting added for emphasis throughout this document):

**Matthew 1:23,25(KJV) – (23) "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." (25) But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.**

Clearly, this newborn baby boy was named Jesus and not “Emmanuel”, and the author’s explanatory comment at the end of v. 23 intends to bridge this gap.

This essay is an "excursion" relative to Isaiah 7:14, a verse that was analyzed in detail in other essays.<sup>3</sup> Here, the significance of the names of Isaiah’s sons is explored, with particular attention given to the name עִמָּנוּאֵל.

### II. ISAIAH AND HIS SONS

Consider Isaiah’s own declaration about himself and his children:

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<sup>1</sup> Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in ***bold italicized*** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in **SMALL CAPS** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letter that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
  - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
  - A vocalized letter י is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
  - The letter ח is transliterated as “h”
  - The letter כ is transliterated as “ch”
  - The letter ק is transliterated as “k”
  - The letter ע is transliterated as “q”
  - A vocalized **SHVA** (שְׁוָא) – **SHVA NA** is transliterated as a superscripted “e” following the Consonant
  - There is no “doubling” of letters in the transliterations to reflect the **dagESH** (emphasis)

<sup>2</sup> A variation of the Hebrew name appears among manuscripts. Some sources have the name as one word, עִמָּנוּאֵל, others have it as two words, אֵל עִמָּנוּ (*Imanu EL*) - a difference that affects neither the pronunciation nor the context.

<sup>3</sup> [Isaiah 7:14 - PART 1: An Accurate Grammatical Analysis – http://thejewishhome.org/counter/Isa714\\_1.pdf](http://thejewishhome.org/counter/Isa714_1.pdf) and [Isaiah 7:14 - PART 2: Refutation of Christian Apologetics Isaiah and His Sons - http://thejewishhome.org/counter/Isa714\\_2.pdf](http://thejewishhome.org/counter/Isa714_2.pdf)

**Isaiah 8:18 - Here I am, and the children whom the Lord has given me for signs and for wonders in Israel; [they are] from the Lord of Hosts, Who dwells on Mount Zion.**

By saying that God gave him children for signs to the nation of Israel, Isaiah indicates the method for naming his children.<sup>4</sup> All his sons have names that are symbolically connected with certain prophesied events, a clue that will be applied in the analysis.

#### **A. One son - יְשׁוּבָה יִשְׁרָאֵל (Sh<sup>e</sup>AR Yashuv)**

The name of a son that is encountered first in the Hebrew Bible is יְשׁוּבָה יִשְׁרָאֵל:

**Isaiah 7:3 – And the Lord said to Isaiah, “Now go out toward AHAZ, you, and Sh<sup>e</sup>AR Yashuv [יְשׁוּבָה יִשְׁרָאֵל] your son; to the edge of the conduit of the upper pool, to the road of the washer’s field.**

The literal translation of the name יְשׁוּבָה יִשְׁרָאֵל is **a remnant shall return**, and there is no doubt about this boy being Isaiah’s son – it is explicitly stated in the text.

The sign, יְשׁוּבָה יִשְׁרָאֵל, **a remnant shall return**, is present twice in a prophetic passage by Isaiah:

**Isaiah 10:21-22 – (21) A remnant shall return [יְשׁוּבָה יִשְׁרָאֵל], a remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God [or, mighty hero]. (22) For if your people Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, a remnant {of them} shall return [יְשׁוּבָה יִשְׁרָאֵל (Sh<sup>e</sup>AR Yashuv {BO})]; the decreed destruction shall overflow with righteousness.**

Note that, while the events described in Chapter 7 relate to the siege on Jerusalem by the two northern armies during the reign of King AHAZ, the prophetic words in Chapter 10, about a righteous remnant of Israel returning, were spoken by Isaiah to King Hezekiah, the son of King AHAZ.

The historical realization of this sign is found in an account of the celebration of the Passover by Hezekiah following the cleansing and consecration of the Temple in Jerusalem. The narrative starts with the invitations that Hezekiah wrote and sent out:

**2Chronicles 30:1 - And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and he wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, to come to the House of the Lord in Jerusalem; to do the Passover [sacrifice] to the Lord, the God of Israel.**

Messengers were dispatched throughout the entire region to deliver the letters:

**2Chronicles 30:6 - And the couriers went with the letters from the king and his ministers throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the command of the king,**

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<sup>4</sup> Isaiah himself was ordered to be a sign to Israel, a story that is recorded in Isaiah 20.

saying, "People of Israel, return to the Lord [שׁוּבוּ אֶל־יְהוָה] (*SHUVU EL-A-donai*), the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and He will return to the remnant [הַפְּלִיטָה הַנִּשְׁאָרָתָם] (*ha'pleyTAH ha'nish'ERet*) of you, who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria."

As these messengers passed from city to city to distribute the invitations, they did not have an easy time of it - they were being heckled and mocked by many. However, some people accepted the invitation:

**2Chronicles 30:10-11** – (10) And the couriers passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh and as far as Zebulun; and there were those who laughed at them and mocked them. (11) But some people of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem.

Those who gathered in Jerusalem celebrated the Passover for seven days and, upon their return to their respective cities, they destroyed the symbols of idolatry:

**2Chronicles 31:1** - And when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah, and smashed the pillars to pieces, and cut down the Asherah trees, and broke down the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, and in Ephraim, and in Manasseh, until they had completely destroyed them all; and all the people of Israel returned, every man to his possession, to their own cities.

A remnant from what was left of the Northern Kingdom of Israel returned to Judah, during the reign of Hezekiah, to celebrate the Passover, and they repented and returned to God. Thus, the prophetic sign, שְׁאֵר יְשׁוּב, a remnant shall return, was realized.

## B. A second son – מַהֵר שָׁלַל חֵשׁ בַּז (MaHER ShaLAL HaSH BAZ)

The name of another son is מַהֵר שָׁלַל חֵשׁ בַּז:

**Isaiah 8:3** - And I was intimate with the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son; and the Lord said to me, "Call his name MaHER ShaLAL HaSH BAZ [מַהֵר שָׁלַל חֵשׁ בַּז]".

The literal translation of the name מַהֵר שָׁלַל חֵשׁ בַּז is **quicken-booty hasten-plunder** and, as was the case with שְׁאֵר יְשׁוּב, there is no doubt that this child, too, is Isaiah's son – this is explicitly stated in the text.

This sign, מַהֵר שָׁלַל חֵשׁ בַּז, **quicken-booty hasten-plunder**, is found three times in the Hebrew Bible – once in the identical form of the name itself, and twice more with similar Hebrew terminology and in the same context. The first instance is a prophetic statement about the impending looting by Assyria of all the possessions of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and about Babylon's arrival to pillage the Kingdom of Judah, along with Zedekiah and that generation:

**Isaiah 8:1** - And the Lord said to me, "Take a great scroll, and write on it in clear script, quicken-booty hasten-plunder [מְהֵרָה שְׁלַל חָשׁ בָּז]."

The other two instances are included in prophetic statements concerning those who perverted justice and took advantage of widows, orphans, and the poor among the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, against whom Assyria will be sent in retribution:

**Isaiah 10:2** - To pervert the judgment of the impoverished, and to rob the right from the poor of My people; to make widows be their booty [שְׁלָלָם (*sh<sup>e</sup>laLAM*)], and orphans they should plunder [יָבֹזוּ (*yavozu*)].

**Isaiah 10:6** - I will send them against a hypocritical nation, and against the people that anger Me will I order them; to take booty [לְשָׁלַל (*lshLOL shalAL*)], and to plunder [וְלָבֹז (*v<sup>e</sup>lavoz BAZ*)], and to tread them down like the mud of the streets.

The historical realization of this sign is the exiling and dispersal of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians, a process that occurred in three stages:

**2Kings 15:29** - In the days of Pekah, king of Israel, Tiglath-Pil'eser, king of Assyria, came and took Iyon, and Abel-Beth-Maachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria.

**2Kings 17:3-4** - (3) Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, went up against him [Hoshea the son of Elah]; and Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute. (4) And the king of Assyria found out that Hoshea betrayed him, because he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and brought no tribute to the king of Assyria, as [he had done] year by year; and the king of Assyria arrested him, and incarcerated him in prison.

**2Kings 17:5-6** - (5) The king of Assyria went up against all the land; and he went up to Samaria, and besieged it for three years. (6) In the ninth year [of the reign] of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and exiled Israel to Assyria, and he settled them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel was uprooted, with the distress being felt by the population, just as described according to the sign.

The Kingdom of Judah also turned away from God. Its fate was similar:

**2Kings 25:1-11** - (1) And it came to pass in the ninth year of his [Zedekiah's] reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and camped against her; and they built a siege wall around her. (2) And the city was under siege until the eleventh year [of the reign] of king Zedekiah. (3) On the ninth day the famine grew stronger in the city, and there was no food for the people of the land. (4) And the city was broken into, and all the men of war [fled] during the night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was near the king's garden, and the Chaldeans had surrounded the city, and [the king] went the way of the Arabah. (5) And the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook him on the plains of Jericho; and all his army had deserted him. (6) And they seized the king and brought him to the king of Babylon in Riblah; and they put him on trial. (7) And they slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; and [they] blinded the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with chains of copper, and carried

him to Babylon. (8) And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year [of the reign] of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, the chief executioner, a servant of the king of Babylon, to Jerusalem. (9) And he burnt the House of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the house of the dignitaries he burnt with fire. (10) And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the chief executioner, demolished the walls around Jerusalem. (11) And the rest of the people who were left in the city, and the defectors who defected to the king of Babylon, and the remainder of the population, Nebuzaradan, the chief executioner, carried away....

The prophetic sign, מְהֵרָה שָׁלַל חָשׁ בַּז, **quicken-booty hasten-plunder**, came true.

### C. A third son – עִמָּנוּאֵל (*Imanu'EL*)

Whose son is this, in Isaiah 7:14, who would be named עִמָּנוּאֵל? Clearly, he was going to be the son born to the female mentioned in this verse, but who might that female have been, and who, then, would have been the child's father?

The Jewish Sages are not unanimous in their opinions regarding the identity of this child. Yet, they all agree that the boy was born within the historical timeframe of the events being described by the Prophet. Some hold that the female was the pregnant (or soon to be pregnant) Queen Avi'yah, the wife of King **AHAZ** (1Chronicles 29:1). Accordingly, this child would be a son of King **AHAZ** and a younger sibling of Hezekiah, who was about nine years old at the time. Others suggest the female was the pregnant (or soon to be pregnant) "prophetess", the wife of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:3), so that the child was one of Isaiah's sons. This disagreement among the Jewish Sages is inconsequential to the context of the historical events described here. The feasibility that עִמָּנוּאֵל is another one of Isaiah's sons is demonstrated in the analysis that follows.

Two of Isaiah's sons have already been identified, the signs that correspond to their respective names have been located in the generally relevant portion of the text, Chapters 7-10, and the evidence of the fulfillment of these prophetic signs was identified in the historic accounts of 2Kings and 2Chronicles. Can this also be done for עִמָּנוּאֵל?

The name עִמָּנוּאֵל first appears in the following well-known passage:

**Isaiah 7:14 - Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign, "Behold, the young woman is with child, and she will bear a son, and you [young woman] shall call his name Imanu'EL [עִמָּנוּאֵל]."**

The literal translation of the name עִמָּנוּאֵל is **with us [is] God**; this is commonly translated as **God is with us**. Yet, unlike the case with the previous two names, the relationship of this child to Isaiah is not explicitly stated in the Hebrew Bible. Whose son is he?

This sign, עִמָּנוּאֵל, **God is with us**, is present twice in the nearby text:

**Isaiah 8:8** - And it will penetrate into Judah, it will overflow as it passes through, it will reach up to the neck; and the tips of his wings shall fill the breadth of your land, Imanu'el [עִמָּנוּאֵל]. [Note: Some Hebrew Bibles use the alternate form, עִמָּנוּ אֵל.]

**Isaiah 8:10** - Take counsel, and it will be foiled; speak a word, and it will not happen; for God is with us [כִּי עִמָּנוּ אֵל] (*KI IMANU EL*).

In Isaiah 8:8, עִמָּנוּאֵל is identified as someone from the Tribe of Judah who is part of the prophecy described in that passage. In Isaiah 8:10, עִמָּנוּ אֵל is part of the phrase כִּי עִמָּנוּ אֵל – a prophetic manifestation of the sign reflected in this person's name, **[for] God is with us**.

Historically, this prophetic sign was soon to be realized, as related by the account of the siege on Jerusalem by **Sanheriv**, king of Assyria. The promise from Hezekiah to his people comes first:

**2Chronicles 32:7-8** – (7) "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid and dismayed because of the king of Assyria, and because of all the multitude that is with him; for He Who is with us [עִמָּנוּ] (*IMANU*) is greater than that [which is] with him; (8) With him is an arm of flesh; and with us is the Lord our God [וְעִמָּנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ] (*v<sup>e</sup>IMANU A-donai E-loHEINU*) to help us, and to fight our wars." And the people relied on the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah.

Later, the outcome of the conflict is described:

**2Chronicles 32:22** - And the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of **Sanheriv**, the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side.

God was with the House of Judah, but He was not with the House of Israel. The prophetic sign, עִמָּנוּאֵל, **God is with us**, was realized for Judah.

Following the pattern established for the names of the two sons שְׁאָר יָשׁוּב and מִהַר שְׁלָל חָשׁ בַּז, the analysis demonstrates that the name עִמָּנוּאֵל, too, has an associated prophetic sign and its fulfillment. Therefore, it is most likely that עִמָּנוּאֵל was also the son of Isaiah.

#### D. Does the name עִמָּנוּאֵל have a special significance?

It is rather common for Hebrew names to contain one of the titles used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to God, and often these names include a description and/or an accolade of God. This matter can be the subject of a long discussion all by itself, which is beyond the scope of the present analysis. It is, however,

instructive to examine this attribute, as it pertains to the name עִמָּנוּאֵל, via the subset of Biblical names shown in Table II.C-1.

**Table II.C-1 – Other biblical names that share some attributes with the name עִמָּנוּאֵל**

Hebrew Name	Transliteration	English Name	#	# of Persons	Sample Citations (one per person)	Meaning of name
אַבְיָאֵל	<i>Avi'EL</i>	Abiel	3	2	1Samuel 9:1, 14:51; 1Chronicles 11:52	God <u>is</u> my father; <i>avi</i> means <b>my father [is]</b> , <i>EL</i> means <b>God</b> .
אַבְיָה	<i>Avi'YAH</i>	Abijah	23	8	1Samuel 8:2; 1Kings 14:1; Nehemiah 10:8; 1Chronicles 2:24*, 3:10**, 7:8, 24:10; 2Chronicles 29:1*	God <u>is</u> my father; <i>avi</i> means <b>my father</b> , <i>Yah[u]</i> means <b>[He is] God</b> .
אַבְיָהוּ	<i>Avi'YAHU</i>		2	1	2Chronicles 13:20**	
אַחִיָּה	<i>Ahi'YAH</i>	Ahijah	19	8	1Samuel 14:3; 1Kings 4:3, 11:29***, 15:27; Nehemiah 10:27; 1Chronicles 2:25, 8:7, 11:36	God <u>is</u> my brother; <i>ahi</i> means <b>my brother</b> , <i>Yah[u]</i> means <b>[He is] God</b> .
אַחִיָּהוּ	<i>Ahi'YAHU</i>		5	1	1Kings 14:4***	
אִיתִיָּאֵל	<i>Iti'EL</i>	Ithiel	3	2	Proverbs 30:1; Nehemiah 11:7	God <u>is</u> with me; <i>iti</i> means <b>with me [is]</b> , <i>EL</i> means <b>God</b> .
עִמָּנוּאֵל	<i>Imanu'EL</i>	Immanuel	2	1	<b>Isaiah 7:14</b> (Phrase at Isaiah 8:10 not included)	<b>God <u>is</u> with us.</b>
* - A female ** - This is the same person, the King of Judah *** - This is the same person, the prophet from Shiloh						

In the first three names (and alternate names) shown in Table II.C-1, the literal meaning of the names אַבְיָאֵל [Abiel] and אַבְיָה [Abijah] reflect a father-son relationship with God, and the name אַחִיָּה [Ahijah] reflects a brother-brother relationship with God. The name אִיתִיָּאֵל [Ithiel] is most closely related to the name עִמָּנוּאֵל. As was noted above, the English translation of this name is **God is with me** and, hence, the similarity to עִמָּנוּאֵל – instead of עִמָּנוּ, **with us [is]**, which is inflected in the 1<sup>st</sup>-person plural, there is אִיתִי, **with me [is]**, inflected in the 1<sup>st</sup>-person singular.

Since these relationships are, of course, not literally true, certainly not for the specific personalities who bore those names in the Hebrew Bible, one would have to wonder why Christian missionaries, following Matthew 1:23, claim that the name עִמָּנוּאֵל points to Jesus and proves his divinity. By applying this (faulty) logic, similar arguments could be offered about אַבְיָאֵל [Abiel], אַבְיָה [Abijah], אַחִיָּה [Ahijah], and other names of this type in the Hebrew Bible.

Moreover, as was demonstrated with the name אִיתִיאל [Ithiel], it is the "singular voice" equivalent of the name עִמָּנוּאל.

The two salient questions are:

- ⇒ Why do Christian missionaries single out עִמָּנוּאל as having messianic significance?
- ⇒ What makes עִמָּנוּאל special relative to all those other names described above?

The answer is that the name עִמָּנוּאל occurs in a passage that, with the help of some "editorial liberties" in the translation process, can be made to appear as having Christological content. Since none of the other names occur in similar passages, the missionaries have no particular interest in them and ignore them.

### III. SUMMARY

The Prophet Isaiah, in his own words, declares that his children were given as signs from God (Isaiah 8:18), and that the name he gave to each of his three sons carried a prophetic message described by these signs and identified as historical events that already took place. The three sons have been identified: שָׁאֵר יָשׁוּב (*Sh<sup>e</sup>AR YASHUV*; Isaiah 7:3), עִמָּנוּאל (*Imanu'EL*; Isaiah 7:14, 8:8), and מַהֵר שָׁלַל חֵשׁ בַּז (*MAHER SHALAL HASH BAZ*, Isaiah 8:3). Also identified were the respective events for which these names were the prophetic signs, along with the accounts of their respective fulfillments, as recorded in the Hebrew Bible.

This particular method by which the Prophet Isaiah named his children is not a unique occurrence in the Hebrew Bible. The Prophet Hosea, Isaiah's contemporary who ministered to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, was ordered by God to name his children יִזְרְעֵאל (*Yizr<sup>e</sup>EL*), **God will sow** (Hosea 1:4), לֹא רַחֲמָה (*Lo Ruḥamah*), **[she was] not pitied** (Hosea 1:6), and לֹא עַמִּי (*Lo Ami*), **[you/they are] not My people** (Hosea 1:9). Each of these names represented a specific sign that carried a prophetic message, as described in the first chapter in the Book of Hosea.

The passage Matthew 1:23 demonstrates, in several ways, that its author either did not have an understanding of the Hebrew language and of the Hebrew Bible, or that he deliberately perverted the words of the Prophet Isaiah to create a passage that would support his specific agenda. In addition to the mistranslation of the Hebrew noun הַעֲלָמָה (*ha'alMAH*), **the young woman**, and misrepresentation of the adjective הָרָה (*hARAH*), **[she is] pregnant**, which were discussed elsewhere (see footnote 3), of particular interest here is that same author's faulty explanation of the name עִמָּנוּאל as meaning **God with us**, instead of its correct meaning **God is with us**. The omission of the verb "to be" from its meaning serves the author's purpose of infusing into this name a false allusion to Jesus.