



Isaiah 7:14 in Context

The “Problem” Passage!

14 “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

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

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

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

Why We Struggle With This

- Historically, Ahaz was facing a threat that would end in his lifetime.
- God promised to end the threat, and so the sign seems to be a verification of the promise.
- If Immanuel refers to Jesus, born in 4 B.C., then how can his birth be a confirmation to Ahaz that God will remove the threat?
- If we did not have Matthew 1:23 would we think that this was the Virgin Birth of Messiah?

Initial Answers to These Questions

- Historically, Ahaz was facing a threat that would end in his lifetime.
- In the context of the passage, the real issue is not the Syro-Ephramite alliance but the arrogance of the Israelites.
- The coalition attacking Judah has been sent by the LORD: 2 Ki 15:37: “In those days the Lord began to send Rezin king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah against Judah.”

Initial Answers to These Questions

- God promised to end the threat (v7), and so the sign seems to be a verification of the promise.
- The best answer in the passage is that the promise has 3 parts (vv7-9), and so does the prophetic utterance concerning the sign (vv14-17)
- Thus the Virgin Birth prophecy is the SIGN given in response to Ahaz' unbelief. V9 corresponds to v14.

Initial Answers to These Questions

- If Immanuel refers to Jesus, born in 4 B.C., then how can his birth be a confirmation to Ahaz that God will remove the threat?
- Actually, the prophecy of the Virgin Birth in v14 is the miraculous sign (v11) that unbelief will result in instability for the House of David in Ahaz' generation.
- This offer of additional revelation in the same promise of Gen 3:15 and Gen 12:3 is a judgment against unbelieving Judah, just foretold in Is 6.

Initial Answers to These Questions

- If we did not have Matthew 1:23 would we think that this was the Virgin Birth of Messiah?
- There are several ways scholars have approached the quotation of Matt 1:23.
- From the context of Isaiah 7, we observe that the offer is for a miraculous sign. This means something different than a young woman having a child. Cf. 2 Ki 20
- Also, based on v9, the sign is not to bolster Ahaz' faith but a judgment confirming the promise regarding faith itself.

What do the Scholars Say?

Walvoord: “The prophecy concerning a virgin with child has been variously considered by conservative scholars. Some believe it referred to a contemporary situation where a young woman, still a virgin, was about to be married and would bear a child, fulfilling the prophecy. Another point of view is that the prophecy is exclusively messianic and refers to the fact that Mary, while still a virgin, would be the mother of Christ.... Still others consider this prophecy as referring to both, that is, a contemporary reference to a child whose birth is mentioned in Isaiah 8 and whose ultimate prophetic fulfillment is the birth of Christ.

The Near-Fulfillment Position

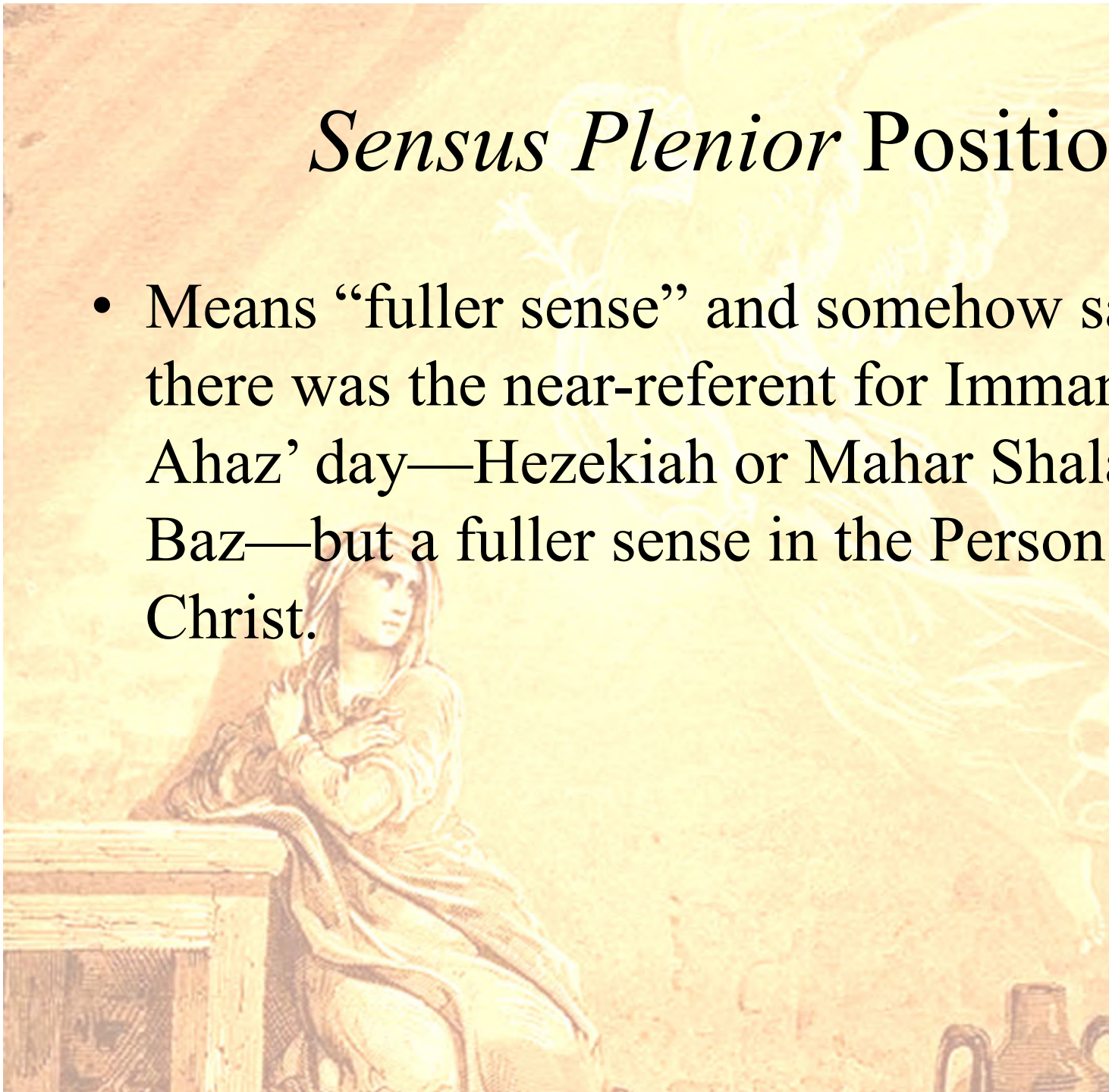
- Based on misidentifying the “sign” as other than a judgment against Ahaz for disbelief.
- Fails to notice that Isaiah’s first son, Shear Yashub, is standing next to him.
- Misidentifies the miraculous nature of the sign determined by the context.
- Conflates the parallel prophecy concerning Israel and Aram in Ch 8.
- Suggests that Matthew was changing the meaning of the OT to fit his purposes. (!)

The Double-Fulfillment Position

- Same criticisms except the last one about Matthew changing the meaning of the OT.
- Violates the principle of author-directed single meaning of a statement. Nothing in Isaiah 7 suggests two fulfillments of this prophecy. Conservatives argue that this amounts to a change of meaning.

Sensus Plenior Position

- Means “fuller sense” and somehow says that there was the near-referent for Immanu El in Ahaz’ day—Hezekiah or Mahar Shalal Hash-Baz—but a fuller sense in the Person of Jesus Christ.



Traditional or “Correct” Position

- The Virgin’s Son Immanu El is none other than Jesus Christ.
- There are typically two ways of understanding the passage within the bounds of this interpretation.
- First Way: vv15-16 refer to Jesus and are about the duration of Jesus’ childhood. The space of time it will take for Him to reject evil and choose good will be the space of time before the desolation of Samaria and Damascus—either 3 or 12 years.
- Second Way: vv15-16 refer not to Jesus but switch in REFERENCE to Shear Yashub. This is best because of 8:5, 18.

Why This is Important

1. It is the next phase of the Seed Promise introduced in Gen 3:15.
2. The Virgin Birth is absolutely necessary for the Hypostatic Union.
3. The Text and the doctrine of authorial intent are at stake.
4. The PROMISE of the Lord and the Fear of the Lord.

Pieces of the Promise

V7: It will not be established/exalted (QUM)
And it will not happen (HAYAH)

V8: For the head of Aram is Damascus
And the head of Damascus is Retziyn
And in the duration of sixty-five years
it will be shattered, Ephraim, from
being a people.

V9: And the head of Ephraim is Samaria
And the head of Samaria is the son of Remalyahu
If you do not believe,
then you will not be stabilized.

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Why This Context is Hard

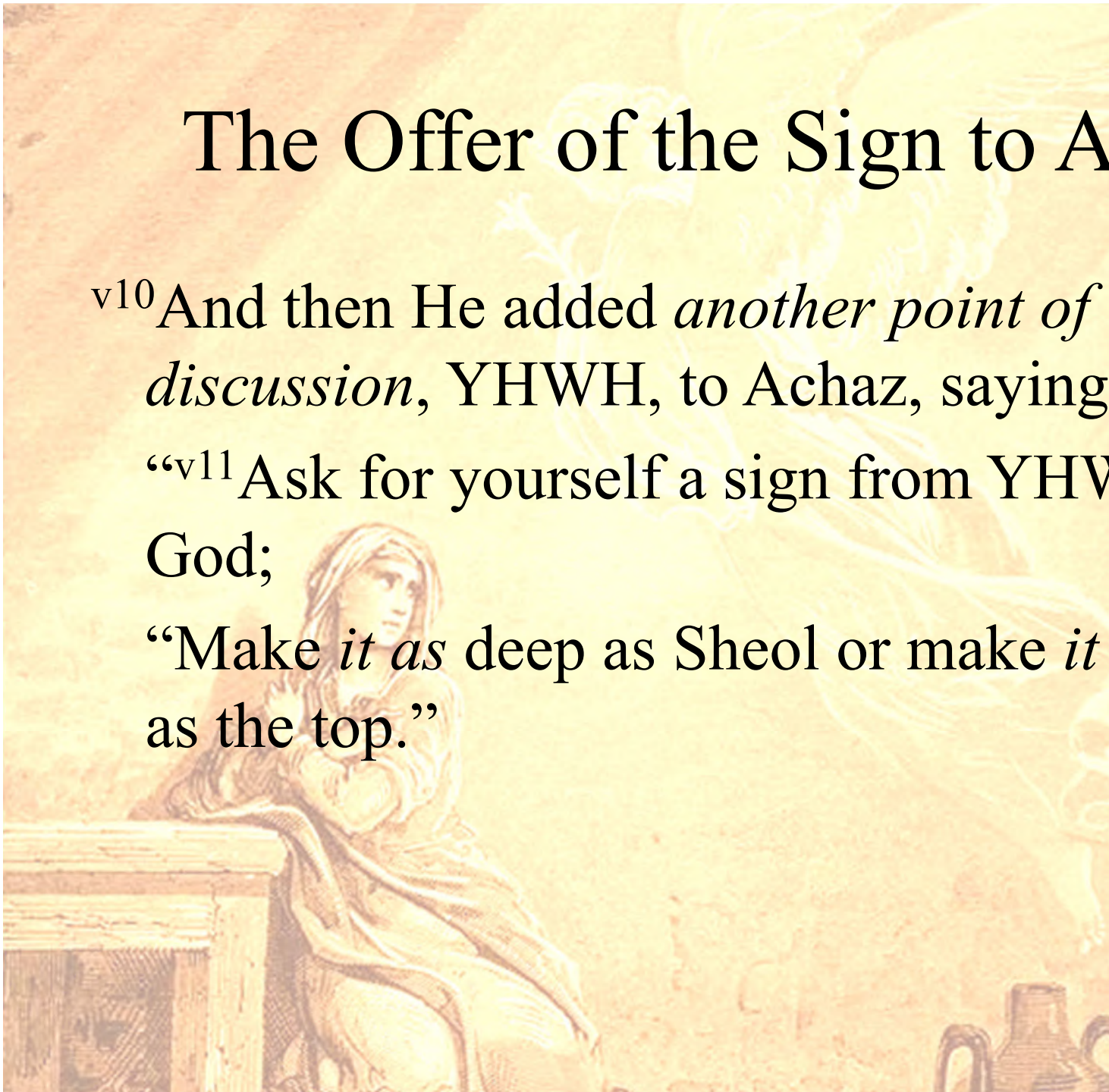
1. The offer of a sign in v11 is often interpreted as referring to the promise being portrayed in v7.
2. Actually, the promise God makes Ahaz goes from v7 through v9.
3. The near-term events of v7 are coupled with the long-term issue of Achaz' destiny in v9.
4. In sum, God's promise is **VERY COMPLEX**.

The Pieces of the Promise

- From v7: The **Crisis** is focal: The plans of Ephraim and Aram will not be established. Tabal will not be made king in Jerusalem, and the conquest by the Syro-Ephraimite alliance will not be completed.
- From v8: **Duration** is focal—within the duration of 65 years the Northern Kingdom will be completely removed as a nation
- From v9: Achaz' **dynasty** depends on his faith—no faith, no succession of his dynasty

The Offer of the Sign to Achaz

^{v10}And then He added *another point of discussion*, YHWH, to Achaz, saying,
“^{v11}Ask for yourself a sign from YHWH your God;
“Make *it as* deep as Sheol or make *it as* high as the top.”



The Offer of the Sign

1. The sign is a crutch for faith. Cf. Hezekiah's requests for signs in 2 Ki 19:29, 20:8-9; Is 38:22.
2. The pattern is that God makes the promise and man receives the certification that God is
 - 1) able
 - 2) the One speaking
3. By definition, then, the sign is directed towards v9 or part 3 of the promise: FAITH
4. The offer of a crutch for faith must be seen as God's test of faith.
5. Of course God did not require a test to know Achaz' heart; however he did choose to demonstrate His faithfulness and justice through Achaz' disobedience and unbelief.

Irony in Isaiah 7

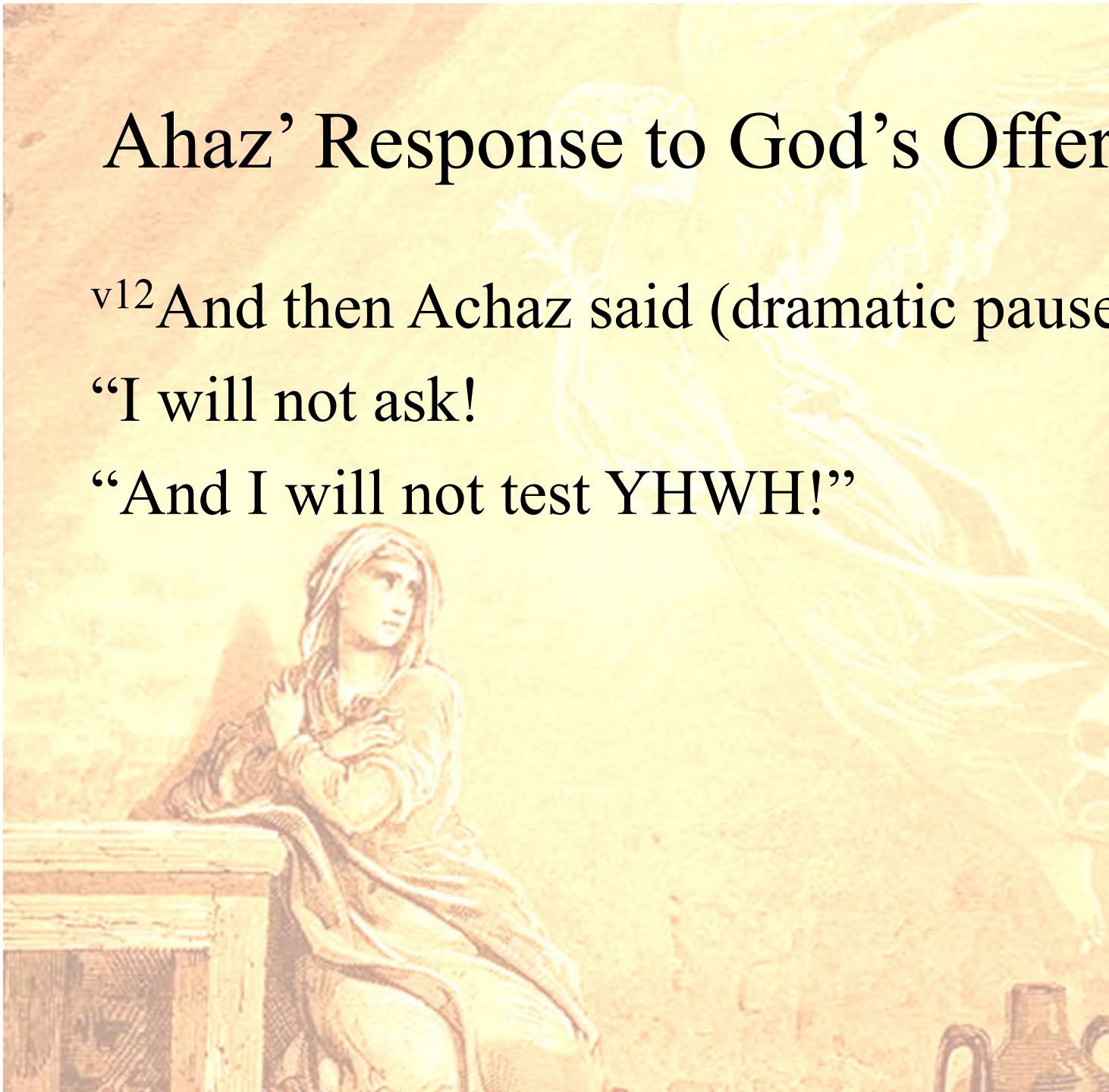
- **With a sign passage we expect 3 components:**
 - 1: **Promise**
 - 2: **Sign** verifying the promise
 - 3: The **faith** response of the recipient after the sign.
- **With Ahaz' sign passage we see the 3 components, right?**
 - 1&3: **Promise** *regarding faith*
 - 2: **Sign**

Ahaz' Response to God's Offered Sign

v¹² And then Achaz said (dramatic pause),

“I will not ask!

“And I will not test YHWH!”



Who is Testing Whom?

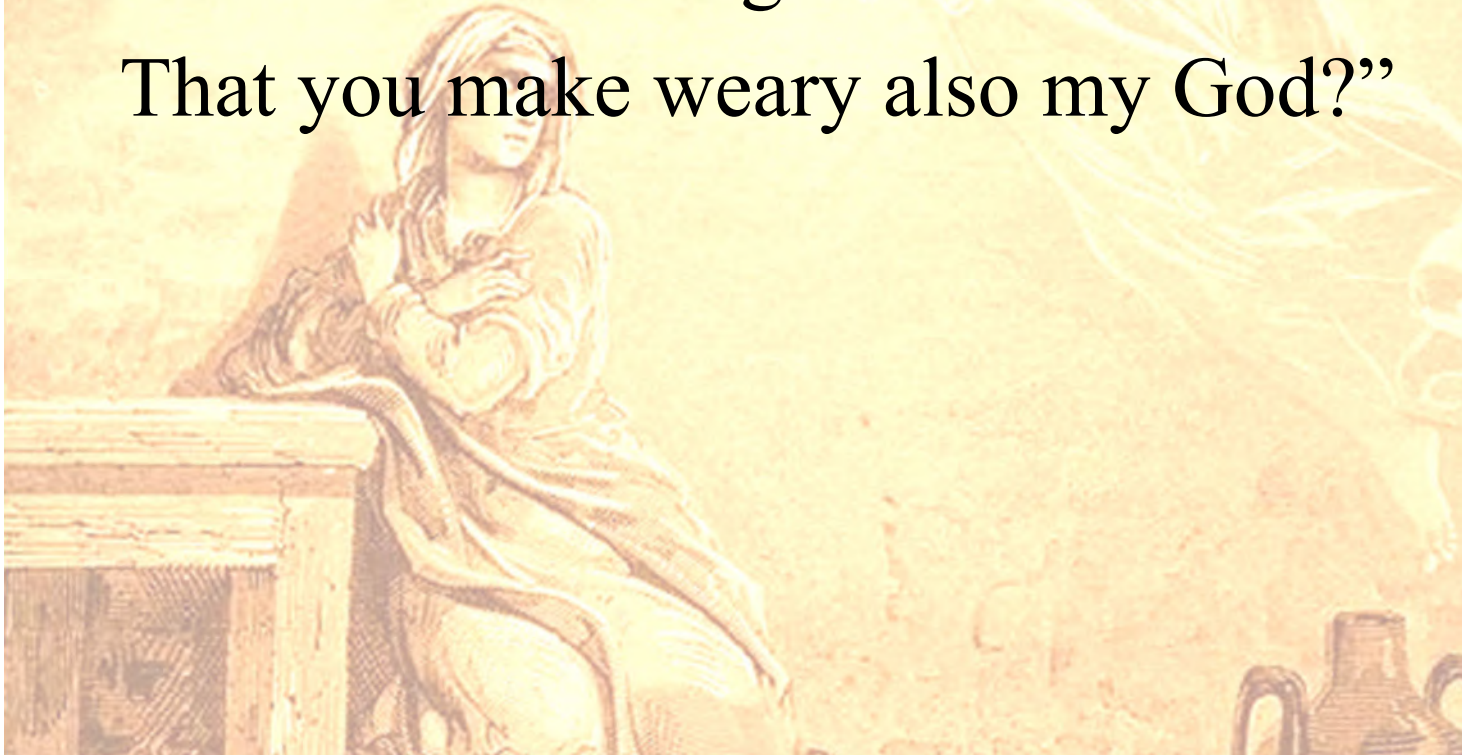
1. The promise God has issued culminates in an if-then statement: fail to believe and there will be no establishing a dynasty.
2. The offer of the sign is a very public demonstration of whether Achaz will submit to YHWH as the HEAD of Judah.
3. God knows, however, that Achaz has already made arrangements for dealing with the invading armies.
4. So the test is of Achaz' faith, and his wry statement about testing the LORD is proof of his lack of faith.
5. Be very clear of Achaz' error here: He is trusting in human solutions to problems he observes.
6. The human solution he is proposing is an alliance with Assyria.

The Prophetic Evaluation of Achaz's Performance

v¹³ And then he said,

“Listen here, House of David! (PAUSE)

“Is it *such* a trifling matter to make weary men
That you make weary also my God?”



Oh, that's what's wrong here

1. Achaz has not been reading Isaiah 7.
2. Therefore he cannot know that Isaiah is speaking directly for the LORD.
3. In v10 we have YHWH as the speaker, so we know that what Isaiah says is what God says.
4. Achaz' initial problem is that he does not believe that Isaiah is really speaking for the LORD.
5. This is part of why God offered Achaz the sign, to verify that Isaiah was inspired.
6. Notice that God is making a very thematic statement about the chain-of-command: the king of Judah is supposed to listen to and obey the prophets.

Mediation in OT Israel

Theocratic Kingdom GOD

AUTHORITY

Mediated Kingdom MAN



The background features a faint, golden-toned illustration. On the left, a king is depicted sitting on a throne, looking towards the right. On the right, a prophet stands, wearing a long white robe and holding a staff. The overall scene is set against a warm, golden-yellow background with a subtle, textured pattern.

Theocratic Kingdom GOD THE WORD

AUTHORITY

Mediated Kingdom MAN



The king was to make his decisions as unto the LORD.
They were supposed to demonstrate His character as a model.
The prophet was to tell the king what his decision should be.

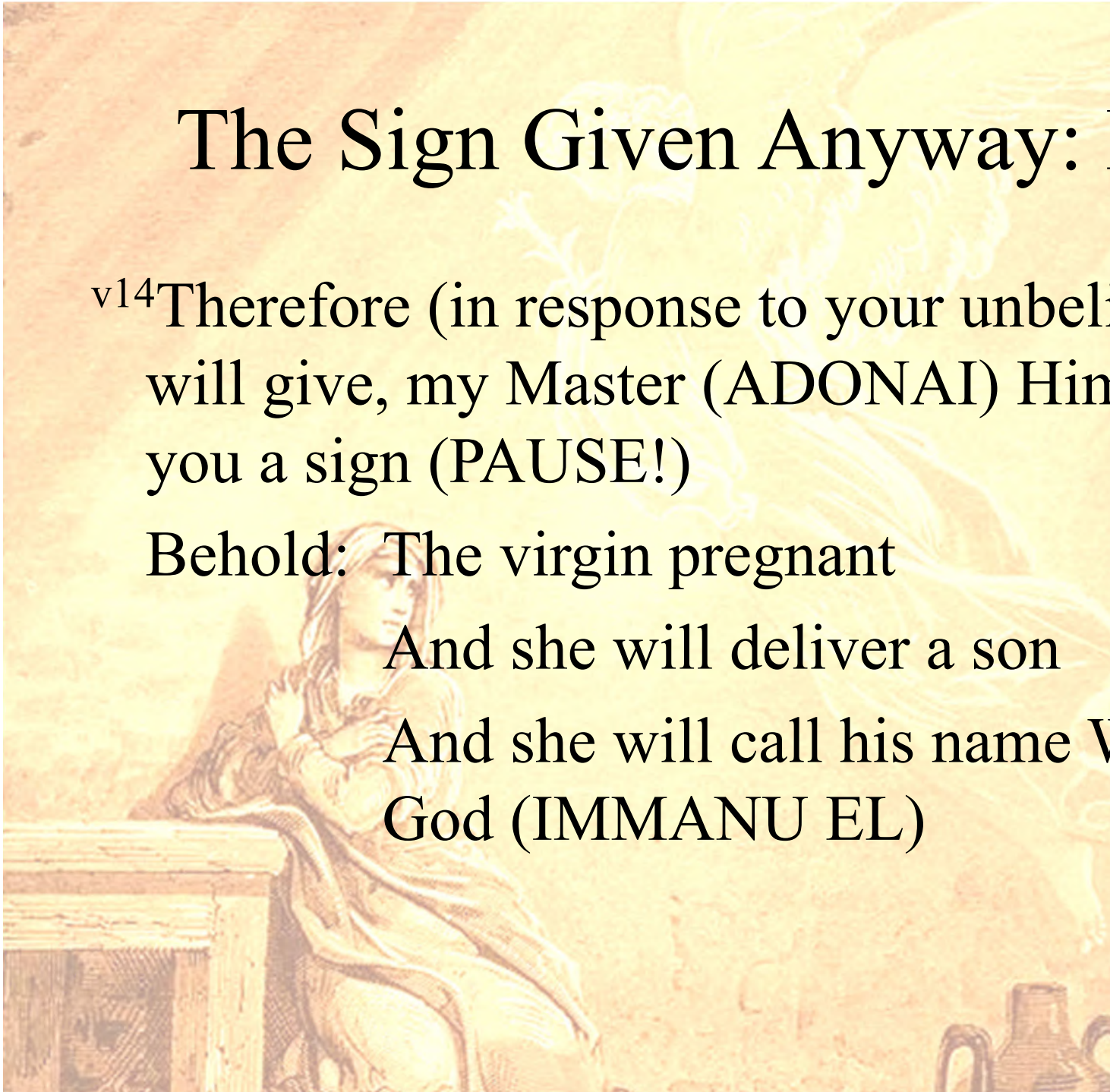
The Sign Given Anyway: Faith

^{v14}Therefore (in response to your unbelief) He will give, my Master (ADONAI) Himself to you a sign (PAUSE!)

Behold: The virgin pregnant

And she will deliver a son

And she will call his name With us *is*
God (IMMANU EL)



The Sign Given Anyway: Duration

v¹⁵Curds and honey he will eat

With regard to his knowing to refuse evil and
choose good

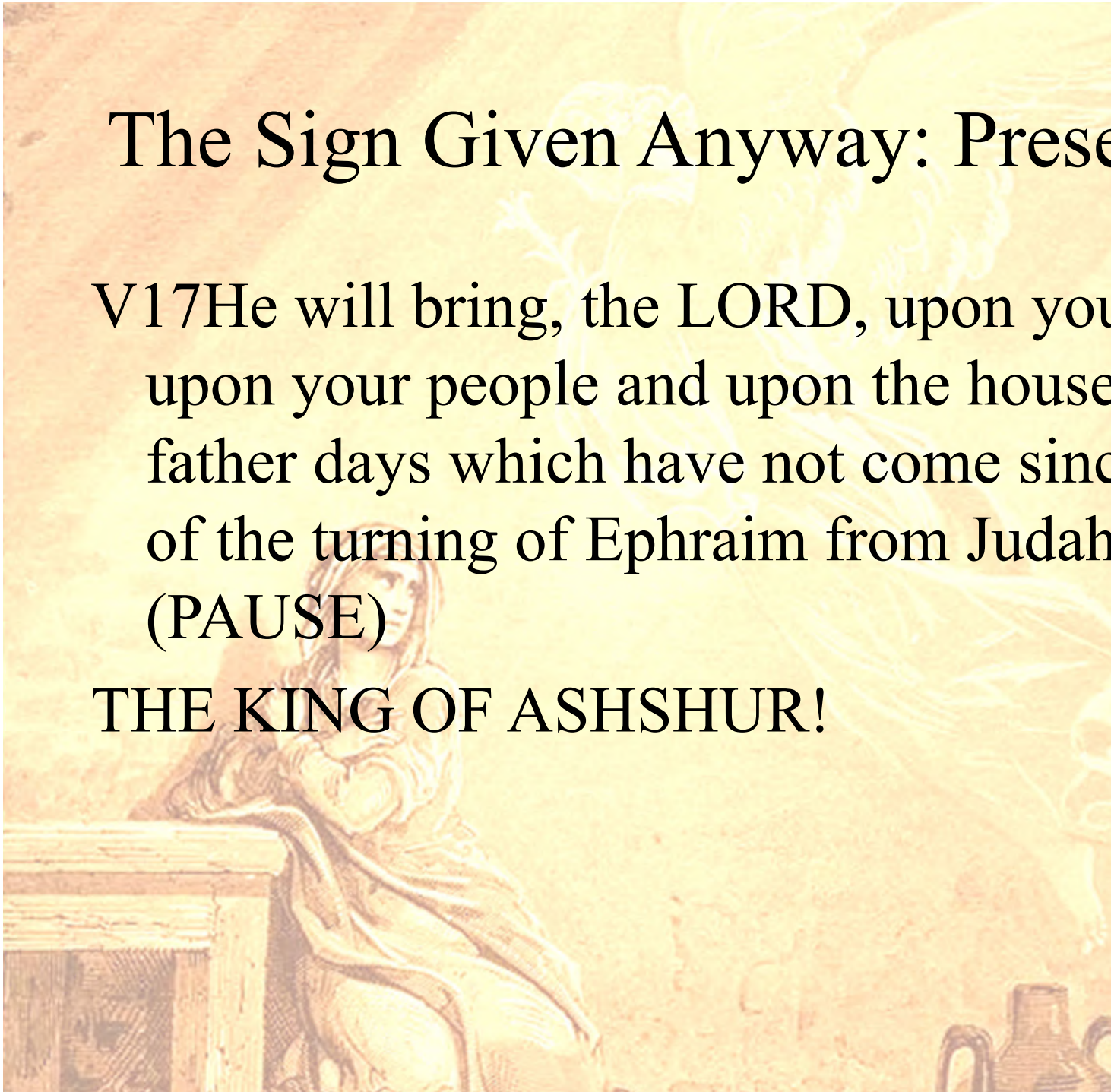
v¹⁶For before he knows, the boy, to reject evil
and to choose good

It will be left for dead, the land which you dread,
from before her two kings.

The Sign Given Anyway: Preservation

V17He will bring, the LORD, upon you and upon your people and upon the house of your father days which have not come since the day of the turning of Ephraim from Judah:
(PAUSE)

THE KING OF ASHSHUR!



The Promise and the Sign

Promise

V7: 1) Ahaz will not be removed from the throne by the two small armies

2) The armies will not conquer Judah

V8: Duration of Samaria's existence emphasized

V9: No faith, no establishment of a dynasty

Sign

V14: No faith, no dynasty: Virgin Birth will bring God With Us.

V15-16: Duration in time—the period during which Ahaz can expect the end of the Syro-Ephramite threat—3 yrs? 12 yrs?

V17: A worse fate than Aram-Ephraim

The Irony is Even Stronger than we Thought

1. Ahaz' fear of being removed from his throne by Syro-Ephraem is nothing compared to the loss of identification with the line of Messiah.
2. What Ahaz feared would not happen; however something worse would happen because of Ahaz' handling of the threat.
3. Phechach and Remalyahu would not remove Ahaz from David's throne, God would.
4. Ahaz' choice for a solution to the crisis, alliance with Assyria, would cause the military destruction he feared.
5. In all this, God would be working the pieces together.
6. Ahaz' problem is the arrogance of fear.