

## ISAIAH 7:14 IMMANUEL (PART I)

“The Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”<sup>1</sup>

**S**igns loom large in the Word of God. I don't mean to imply that there is a plethora of signs, though there are many signs provided in the Bible, for various reasons; I do mean that perceptive readers will want to pay careful attention to the multiplied signs since they point to significant events. In the text before us, the LORD God was speaking through the Prophet Isaiah. He addressed a godless king named Ahaz. Things in Judah were rather dicey; the northern kingdom of Israel had formed an alliance with Syria to invade Judah. That was disquieting, to say the least. Whether Judah could survive was very much in question.

God sent the Prophet Isaiah to Ahaz, the godless king of Judah. Isaiah was to take his son, Shear-jashub, to meet Ahaz in order to convey God's message to the king. Isaiah's message was to counsel the king, “Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah. Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, ‘Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it,’ thus says the Lord GOD:

“It shall not stand,  
and it shall not come to pass.  
For the head of Syria is Damascus,  
and the head of Damascus is Rezin.  
And within sixty-five years  
Ephraim will be shattered from being a people.  
And the head of Ephraim is Samaria,  
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.  
If you are not firm in faith,  
you will not be firm at all.””

[ISAIAH 7:4-9]

God said, “Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven” [ISAIAH 7:11]. Ahaz responded to the Lord, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test” [ISAIAH 7:12]. The LORD bristles at this supposed piety and responds by pointing to the coming Messiah. “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria” [ISAIAH 7:13-17]!

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Think of that! During a time of national crisis, God promised deliverance. The promised deliverance was no doubt welcomed, but it was the divine statement concerning timing that would comfort mankind for generations to come. Those who heard that prophecy, and no doubt for centuries afterward those who would read the words of that prophecy, could not have understood how it would touch all mankind. God works that way. The Lord God works, and only occasionally do we realise the universal impact of His words. In this instance, an otherwise obscure prophecy that would normally be ignored holds great comfort for all mankind throughout the long ages since that Word was delivered.

**PIETY? PRIDE? OR UNBELIEF?** Why would Ahaz not respond to God's gracious offer? Wouldn't you give God an answer if He invited you to ask for a demonstration of His power? What could make the king refuse to answer God when invited to see His power? Was it piety? Was it pride? Or was it raw unbelief? The Word of God doesn't tell us why the king was silent. Despite whatever thoughts we may have, it is impossible to say why the king refused to ask God for a demonstration of divine power when the Lord had invited him to ask; nevertheless, the king refused to seek a sign.

It raises the question of why people, even staunch followers of the Master, doubt God. Can it be a sense of *false piety* that keeps people from seeking assurance? The king voices a pious reason to avoid asking God for a sign. We do have the Word of God that provides rich promises; yet, even conscientious Christians on occasion will remain silent when invited to seek God's presence or power. But, why should anyone be silent when God invites us to ask?

Isaiah recognised the false piety behind the king's words. Isaiah responded to this fraud by saying, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also" [ISAIAH 7:13]? Ahaz had already tried the patience of the people. In the writings we read of an event in Israel's history that helps explain the frustration evinced in Isaiah's response. Rezin, the king of Syria, had attacked Israel earlier [see 2 KINGS 16:6]. Ahaz' response was to hire the Assyrians to defend Israel. "Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, 'I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.' Ahaz also took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasures of the king's house and sent a present to the king of Assyria" [2 KINGS 16:7, 8].

Surely it can't be that we are so confident of God's power that we will not debase Him in our mind by asking for a demonstration of power! God is glorified in fulfilling the assurance of His people. When we walk in boldness before the Living God, He is honoured in the presence of others. That our assurance is revealed through our walk with the Lord is witnessed in a promise given in the Letter to Hebrew Christians. The writer encourages believers when he writes, "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" [HEBREWS 10:19-25]. Assurance draws us near to God; and our confidence encourages fellow believers. Thus encouraged, followers of the Risen Saviour seek to meet together so that they can build one another.

You may recall as well that this same writer spoke of faith, saying, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation” [HEBREWS 11:1, 2]. He continues from that point to remind us of heroes of the Faith—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses, the faith of the Israelites who fled Egypt took the nation across the Red Sea and also brought down the walls of Jericho. The writer then names Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel, men who set the standard for those who would follow in their train. We still celebrate men, “who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight” [HEBREWS 11:33-35].

If a false piety didn’t keep Ahaz from seeking a sign, perhaps it was *pride*. Pride does keep many people from serving God. Human nature recoils from admitting that we are dependent upon the unseen God for anything. Deep down, even when we are lost and God is distant, we know the truth that “In Him we live and move and have our being” [ACTS 17:28a]. Despite knowing that “In His hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind” [JOB 12:10], proud people will not confess their need of the LORD God. Like brute beasts, pride keeps us from acknowledging God, just as will be true of those who must experience His wrath during the days of the Great Tribulation.

In the Apocalypse is a warning of mankind’s pride that is played out repeatedly in this day. In that day, this scenario will be exaggerated. As God’s judgements are poured out on the earth, we read, “The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory” [REVELATION 16:8, 9].

Refusal to honour God as God is the ultimate expression of man’s pride. I’ve often wondered at the account of the terror that will motivate people in that awful day of judgement. “When [the Lamb] opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand’” [REVELATION 6:12-17]?

There is a terrifying scene provided in the Apocalypse. All the lost are arraigned before the Great Assize, mankind is at last called to account for failure to receive the salvation offered in Christ the Lord. This is the scene described in REVELATION 20:11-15. “I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

I used to wonder about that final judgement—what terror people will feel! What dread, what horror, what raw fear will seize all who hear those solemn words as they are pronounced, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”

[MATTHEW 25:41].

I used to think that people would be begging, pleading, asking for one more chance; but I fear that those who are condemned at that time will shake their fists in the face of Holy God, defying Him and daring Him to act. How dare the Living God not to accept man on man’s terms! How dare God to think that the creature should respect the Creator! Thus, the Lord will be compelled to surrender mankind to their own perverted desires as He pronounces those awful words, “I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil” [LUKE 13:27]! Pride condemns us and compels us to act foolishly.

Ultimately, it is *rank unbelief* that causes an individual to refuse to obey God or even to accept His gracious offer of life. When the prophet spoke for God, inviting the king to ask what he would and assured him that God would do it to demonstrate the certainty of His Word, unbelief characterised Ahaz’ life and led him to demure from accepting God’s offer. By refusing to work together with God, Ahaz could only depreciate the faith of the nation over whom God had appointed him. Ahaz was costing the nation opportunity to grow in faith because he himself had no faith.

Are those not scathing words with which Jesus confronted the religious rulers of His day? “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words” [JOHN 5:30-47]?

Hear what the Master said! Take careful note of the fortieth verse; it was not that the religious leaders could not believe—they refused to believe. People may say that they cannot believe; but the reality is that they will not believe. When a man born blind had been healed, the religious leaders questioned him. They were especially eager to prove that Jesus, who had given the blind man his sight, was evil because He healed on the Sabbath! They asked the man how Jesus had given him sight, and he told them, “The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So, I went and washed and received my sight” [JOHN 9:11].

This man's answer was unsatisfactory because "the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue" [JOHN 9:22]. This was such a powerful threat that even the man's parents were silenced by fear that they would be excluded from the synagogue. The religious leaders placed the blind man who had been healed under a solemn oath to reject Jesus as the Christ; they asked him a second time what Jesus did. The man boldly answered, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples" [JOHN 9:27]? Note this man's answer, for it exposes the heart of wickedness that refuses to believe God even when truth has been proclaimed: "I have told you already, and you would not listen." Even when we speak of salvation, deliverance from guilt and condemnation, unbelief drives people to refuse to receive what the Lord offers.

**HERE'S YOUR SIGN!** The king wouldn't ask for a sign, but God gave him a sign all the same. "Therefore" is a key word in understanding what the text is saying. "Therefore" compels the reader to note what has gone before. "Therefore" notifies us that though God promised deliverance, the king was unprepared to allow God to be glorified in His deliverance. "Therefore" demonstrates God's love for the nation, and ultimately His love for a broken world, as we shall see. It is essential for us to tease apart the prophecy in order to grasp the significance of what God is communicating to those who look to Him.

Remember how I said that Ahaz was godless? And remember how I pointed out that this king had hired the Assyrians to attack the Syrians? The people of Israel were fed up with this king and his pro-Assyrian attitudes. It would appear from the manner in which the prophecy is delivered that the LORD is growing frustrated with Ahaz' pro-Assyrian sentiments as well. Nevertheless, in spite of Ahaz' wickedness, God chose to give a sign. The sign would not be solely for the king; it would be for all mankind.

If you wondered whether Ahaz was actually all that wicked, listen to his response after Tiglath-pileser attacked Damascus. "When King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, he saw the altar that was at Damascus. And King Ahaz sent to Uriah the priest a model of the altar, and its pattern, exact in all its details. And Uriah the priest built the altar; in accordance with all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus, so Uriah the priest made it, before King Ahaz arrived from Damascus. And when the king came from Damascus, the king viewed the altar. Then the king drew near to the altar and went up on it and burned his burnt offering and his grain offering and poured his drink offering and threw the blood of his peace offerings on the altar. And the bronze altar that was before the LORD he removed from the front of the house, from the place between his altar and the house of the LORD, and put it on the north side of his altar. And King Ahaz commanded Uriah the priest, saying, 'On the great altar burn the morning burnt offering and the evening grain offering and the king's burnt offering and his grain offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their grain offering and their drink offering. And throw on it all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of the sacrifice, but the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by.' Uriah the priest did all this, as King Ahaz commanded" [2 KINGS 16:10-16].

Did you catch that? Not only did Ahaz begin to worship as the kings of Assyria worshipped, but he introduced those pagan rites to Israel—and Uriah the priest was complicit in all this. Ahaz introduced error into Israel's worship, he desecrated the Temple and he led the priest to consent to this evil. I am not excusing the priest, but I am laying a major blame on the king. Things were going downhill when this prophecy was delivered.

Ahaz introduced structural changes to the Temple itself. These changes permitted him to conduct worship according to his own desires. Thus, we read, “King Ahaz cut off the frames of the stands and removed the basin from them, and he took down the sea from off the bronze oxen that were under it and put it on a stone pedestal. And the covered way for the Sabbath that had been built inside the house and the outer entrance for the king he caused to go around the house of the LORD, because of the king of Assyria” [2 KINGS 16:17, 18]. As an aside of considerable significance: *Admiring the godless can never result in honour to the Living God.*

**THE SOURCE** — “The Lord himself will give you a sign” [ISAIAH 7:14a]. It is important to note the source of the prophecy. We know that all prophecy originates with the LORD God. This should be self-evident; however, it helps to point to the obvious so that no one passes over it. Thus, Isaiah begins this prophecy by emphasising that this is from God Himself. Refresh your memory of Peter’s testimony concerning what is written: “No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet’s own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” [2 PETER 1:20, 21 NET BIBLE].

Perhaps Ahaz would not ask for a sign; however, a sign would be given—and that sign would come from God Himself. We are in the midst of the Advent Season. As we move ever closer to Christmas Day, we light the Advent candles and hear the Advent readings. Children realise that Christmas must be more—much more—than a day about fat men dressed in red suits, evergreen trees brought into the house and songs about horses dashing through the snow or magical snowmen. Hearing the Advent readings and seeing the Advent candles burning brightly suggests that Christmas is about Christ.

Our culture does try to masque this knowledge through a form of re-education as from earliest days we think about enriching ourselves through receiving gifts from others. We even encourage children to sit on the lap of strangers, telling them their most precious, secret longings. Then, when Christmas Day comes, children are told that a little fat man slides down the chimney to deliver the multiple gifts arrayed beneath the evergreen. That little fat man is omnipresent and omniscient—visiting every home throughout the entire world and knowing precisely whether the children are naughty or nice and gifting them on the basis of their character.

However, children who see the Advent candles and hear the Advent readings are alerted to the fact that Christmas has something to do with God Himself. He gave the message that delivered hope to a nation threatened. It was God who sent His Son to give His life as a sacrifice for sin so that no individual need ever stand condemned. When God is excluded from Christmas, there is really little reason for the season. The opening words of this brief verse that serves as our text today serves to remind us that Christmas is given by God. The hope to which we lay claim, the opportunity to reconnect with family and friends, the joy that floods over our lives are because God is at work in our lives—and He has been working for many years!

**THE SIGN** — “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” [ISAIAH 7:14b]. This is the prophecy; and this prophecy has given scholars difficulties for many years! The Hebrew behind the prophecy has given scholars some pause. When the Hebrew was translated into Greek, the Septuagint version of the Bible, the translators chose a word to translate the Hebrew that could leave no question what was meant in the prophecy. These ancient scholars chose the word *parthénos*. To those Greek speaking scholars, the Hebrew word identified a virgin, a woman who had never had sexual relations. Of course, this is precisely what we read when Matthew provides the account of Jesus’ birth.

The conflict concerning what Isaiah wrote does not arise from the Greek of the Septuagint, however; the problem for scholars is the Hebrew that underlies the Greek in this instance. Isaiah had the choice of two words he could have chosen in delivering this prophecy. He could have chosen the Hebrew word *b'êtûlâ*, which most definitely would refer to a “virgin.” However, he chose to employ the word *'almâ*. This word is probably best translated “maiden.” Therein lies the conflict for scholars; this choice of one word has caused great angst for many evangelicals. When some translations into English spoke of “the young woman” conceiving, rather than speaking of “the virgin” conceiving, churches were in an uproar.

I'll save my listeners the angst by stating categorically that I am confident that Mary was a virgin when she conceived. For the record, she was a virgin when the Son of God was born. We have not only the prophecy, of which I will have more to say, but we have the fulfillment provided in the Gospels. Matthew's account employs careful language so no one can misunderstand what took place. “The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel’

(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus” [MATTHEW 1:18-25]. Mary's child was from the Holy Spirit. The Scripture cites Isaiah's prophecy. Then, so there can be no misunderstanding, the divine writer informs us that Joseph “knew her not until she had given birth to a son.”

In the account provided by Dr. Luke, we see similar careful language. Doctor Luke wrote, “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’

“And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’

“And the angel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God’” [LUKE 1:26-35]. Here, we have the announcement delivered by Gabriel and we see Mary's surprised response to this divine announcement: “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” Quite literally, Mary's response to the angel was, “I have not known a man!” She could say without hesitation, “I have never been sexually active.”

This drives us back to Isaiah's words. The Hebrew term *'almâ*, denotes a young woman of marriageable age.<sup>2</sup> Context will determine whether the young woman under discussion is a virgin or not. In fact, the word is used elsewhere to speak of virgins. For instance, *'almâ* is translated "virgin" when Abraham's servant sought a wife for Isaac, he found Rebekah. Relating how he found her, he told her brother and father, "I came today to the spring and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you are prospering the way that I go, behold, I am standing by the spring of water. Let the virgin who comes out to draw water, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also," let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son'" [GENESIS 24:42-44].<sup>3</sup>

I note that this scholar just cited writes in his article, "There is no instance where it can be proved that *'almâ* designates a young woman who is not a virgin."<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that Rebekah is identified as a *b'êtûlâ*, translated in GENESIS 24:16 as "a maiden." However, Moses strengthens his point by stating of Rebekah that she was "a maiden whom no man had known."<sup>5</sup>

I recognise that I have already dumped a tremendous amount of information on you; however, it is important to note that Isaiah does use the definite article; it is not just any virgin that shall conceive—it is one specific virgin that shall conceive. Again, scholars wonder whether Isaiah was speaking of his own wife, which really wouldn't be reasonable since he took his son, Shear-jashub, with him when he went before the king.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE** — "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" [ISAIAH 7:14b]. It is at once a point of certainty and some confusion that Matthew identifies this prophecy as being fulfilled in the birth of the Christ. Matthew wrote,

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel'

(which means, God with us)" [MATTHEW 1:23].

Isaiah had two sons: one son was named Shear-jashub and the other son received the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Isaiah named his sons to serve as signs to Israel. In a later chapter, the prophet writes, "Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion" [ISAIAH 8:18]. These children were themselves signs in Israel; the names of these boys would testify to Israel. Roughly translated, Shear-jashub would be understood to mean "A Remnant Shall Return." Whenever people saw him or whenever they would hear his name, they would be encouraged to anticipate that though God would judge the nation, He would not abandon the nation. Similarly, whenever people saw Maher-shalal-hash-baz or heard his name, they would be encouraged because they would hear, "The Spoil Speeds, The Prey Hastens." This son would always serve as a warning that Syria and Israel would be judged and Judah would be delivered.

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<sup>2</sup> Allan A. Macrae, "1630 ׀לע," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, **Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament** (Moody Press, Chicago 1999), 672

<sup>3</sup> See, also, PSALM 68:25; PROVERBS 30:19; SONG OF SOLOMON 6:8

<sup>4</sup> Macrae, *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> For further study of the issue, consult: Robert Gromacki, **The Virgin Birth: A Biblical Study of the Deity of Jesus Christ** (Kress Christian Publications, The Woodlands, TX 2002); James Orr, **The Virgin Birth of Christ** (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1907)



In this prophecy, Isaiah was not stressing the virginity of the mother; but neither was he attempting to avoid her virginity. This is an instance of the dual fulfilment of prophecy. Prophecy often has an immediate application and a much broader application. To be certain, God was giving this godless king an authenticating sign that He would not permit Syria and Israel successfully invade Judah. However, in delivering the prophecy, the LORD God points forward to a coming deliverer for all mankind. Therefore, the child that would be born was to be identified as “Immanuel,” or “God With Us.” That Name is far too illustrious to be given to any mere man; it speaks of One far greater—God Himself.

The sign which God would give spoke of the timing—a child conceived at that moment would still be immature when the immediate threat to the nation was removed. God would deliver Judah from Syria and Israel, but what about the Assyrians? Ahaz had foolishly exposed Judah to invasion by a much more powerful adversary. No child born at that time would be safe, for world powers would rise and fall, and Judah would be sent into captivity and then return to the land as a much smaller nation. Though Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz were signs and portents, Immanuel points forward to One born at a future time and One born to have a much greater impact on all mankind. The father of Immanuel is not identified and the mother appears to be a specific individual. Moreover, Immanuel is mentioned again shortly [see [ISAIAH 8:8](#)] and in a context that reaches beyond the immediate. What you must not miss when reading this prophecy is the understanding that God is promising that the House of David cannot be deposed, neither can it lose its identity until the birth of the Son who is to be born of the virgin. Moreover, this birth must take place between the destruction of the Temple and the genealogical records that are maintained in the Temple.<sup>6</sup>

Let me make a few observations on the text. I know that have provided far more information than many will have thought necessary or perhaps even wished to have. Know that your pastor is convinced of the accuracy of the Word; he is convinced that Jesus, the promised Messiah, was born of a virgin, just as Isaiah prophesied.

Know that prophecy almost always has a dual fulfilment. The Bible requires us to have a short view and a long view. We live in light of eternity. Christ the Lord is coming again, and that coming may be momentary. However, we are responsible to lay foundations that will prepare others for a long service on this earth if the Master delays His return. We are not living for some short-term gain; we are always living in light of eternity.

What does it mean for you to read in the Word that “God is With Us?” The Name given to the child born of a virgin was “God With Us;” what does that mean for you? As you near Christmas Day with family or with friends, what impact does this knowledge have in your life? One of the grave dangers of our modern church world is that we are growing pious, but we are lacking in faith. Evidence that this may be the case is seen when we make the observance of Christmas sacred without realising the presence of the One who makes our observance meaningful. If Christmas is all about family, gaiety, feasting, giving and getting, outsiders would be correct in asking if we even know Christ.

What have you planned in your observance this year that honours the One whose birth we celebrate? What is there in your planned observance that would reveal the presence of Christ the Lord? What will you do that would convince an observer that you have been transformed by the presence of this Individual who call “God With Us?” If God is with us, surely we will be changed.

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<sup>6</sup> See Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Messianic Christology: A Study of Old Testament Prophecy Concerning the First Coming of the Messiah* (Ariel Ministries, Tustin, CA 1998), 36–37

**ISAIAH 7:14**  
**IMMANUEL**

As Christmas Day approaches, perhaps we would be well advised to hear again the plea of the Apostle to Christians. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” [ROMANS 12:1, 2].

We testify that “[God] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” [TITUS 3:5]. Let this be the time that the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit is revealed. Let this Christmas be one in which we reveal Christ. Amen.