

Immanuel - God Is With Us
Isaiah 7:14

The name Immanuel means “God is with us.” It is one of the most precious and familiar names of the Savior. It is a name that brings comfort and hope. It reminds us that God has not forsaken you.

We might be surprised that this name for the Savior was an obscure reminder from Israel’s history until the angel revealed to Joseph that his soon-to-be wife was carrying a child that was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Today we will examine the meaning of the name “Immanuel.”

God gave this name as a promise at a time of great fear. Judah was facing the threat of annihilation from enemies on every side. The account is told to us through the words of Isaiah in chapter 7:1-14.

The year was 734 BC. This is the time of the divided kingdom, at a time when Israel was at war with her fellow Jews in Judah. The nation of Israel is also called Ephraim, a reference to the tribe that was given the northern territory. The capital of this nation is Samaria, and PEKAH was the king. As all other kings of Israel, Pekah was a wicked king. But Judah’s king Ahaz was just as wicked, leading Israel into pagan practices of idol worship, even practicing human sacrifice as a form of idol worship. The northern ten tribes of Israel were threatened by Assyria and wanted Judah to join together and fight Assyria. Here is where the conflict arises. Isaiah 7:1 sets the scene by describing that King Pekah and his soldiers from Israel, along with King Rezin and his soldiers from Aram (Syria) were coming to make war against Judah and replace King Ahaz with a puppet king, the son of Tabeel (Isaiah 7:6).

This was such devastating news that when the messenger arrived with the advance warning, “the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind” (Isaiah 7:2).

The army of Judah was no match against the strength of Israel and Aram. This war meant the end of the reign of Ahaz, and the end of the Davidic dynasty. It meant the destruction of Jerusalem and the demise of the Temple and the priesthood.

The war against Judah that followed was completely devastating. 2 Chronicles 28 informs us that 120,000 soldiers from Judah were killed, and 200,000 were taken captive. No war in American history compares to this level of personal and political devastation. Isaiah 7 provides the background of this story, and the plea from Isaiah to Ahaz to turn to

the Lord for deliverance. Ahaz refused and instead turned to Assyria, which eventually conquered the entire land and placed Ahaz and Judah as his vassals. The cost of Ahaz's lack of faith was that he raided the treasuries of the Temple, but as we read in **2 Chronicles 28:21** "*Ahaz took some of the things from the temple of the LORD and from the royal palace and from the princes and presented them to the king of Assyria, **but that did not help him.***"

At the time of Judah's great despair, God gave a promise: **A Virgin will bear a son.** The promise is further explained in ISA 8:1-15, where the virgin/son prophesy is reiterated. Scholars differ on the identity of the virgin in Isaiah 7:14 and 8:1-2. Some believe that it was a wife of Ahaz. Others, believe that it was a wife of Isaiah. Perhaps the wife who bore Shear Jashub died, and Isaiah took a second wife. The name of the son born to the virgin was Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, which means, ""quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil."

However, the identity of the virgin is not the most important part of this prophesy. The Lord spoke to Isaiah for two reasons. The first was to challenge Ahaz to trust the Lord for deliverance from his enemies. The second was to put Judah on notice that *nothing would negate the promises of God! He promised that David's throne would endure forever, and even though wicked kings like Ahaz proved to be failures, God would still fulfill his promise.*

There are some important lessons, precious promises, and powerful comfort given to us through these historical events, and the promise of Messiah contained here.

The first lesson is that we learn from Judah's failure. God would deliver Judah from the two nation attack against her. Assyria would come and defeat these Israel and Aram, which the Lord called a mere "smouldering stub of firewood" (Isaiah 7:4). However, because Judah was trusting in MILITARY MIGHT, they would lose the blessing of God's complete deliverance.

Ahaz trusted in his own ways. His self effort eliminated God's blessing. The parallel account in 2 Chronicles 28 tells us that the king of Assyria brought "trouble instead of help" (28:20). The next verse says "but the king of Assyria did not help him."

Judah would be nearly overrun. The degree to which the Assyrians troubled Judah is described as "up to the neck" (Isa 8:8). In other words, the Assyrians would nearly drown Judah. Assyria would "stretch out its wings" and cover Judah.

Be careful what you wish for! Be careful where you turn for help. If we think that we can do things on our own, or if we think that the Lord's promises are impossible, we will be left to fend for ourselves and when we do, we will be disappointed.

Charles Spurgeon once said to his college of aspiring preachers, “if any of you think that you can accomplish anything for God without his help, all you will get from God is the opportunity to try!” (Spurgeon, “Lectures to my Students”).

The CHARACTERS in this story reveal an important lesson: **God will allow you to receive you what you want!**

PEKAH, King of Israel wanted *Independence from Assyria*. He wanted *Pride and greatness*.

REZIN, King of Aram wanted *Protection from Assyria*. He wanted *to be a great nation*.

ASSYRIA wanted to be the dominant world ruler. They wanted wealth, warfare and power.

ISAIAH wanted to hear the voice of God! He wanted to see Judah walk with God.

His son SHEAR-JASHUB simply wanted to know “*why do I have such a weird name!*” (Isa 7:3)

And king AHAZ wanted to be just like the other kings! He wanted to be relevant. Can’t you hear him saying, “but all the cool kings are worshiping Baal!”

It might seem strange to us that he wanted to worship Baal. When was the last time you drove by a temple to Baal! The point is that we too are tempted to seek relevance and acceptance by doing the things that the world does, and by seeking satisfaction and deliverance through the world’s methods instead of trusting in God. Many of us are concerned that our friends see us as in touch and relevant. But God is only concerned with how relevant He is in your life!

What do YOU want in life? What are your aspirations? Beware that your desires will drive your life. You WILL get what you ask for! My friend Wane Vanderwier often addresses the people who come to him for counsel with the following phrase: “You do what you do because you think what you think, and you think what you think because you WANT WHAT YOU WANT.”

If you want to be self sufficient, God will allow you to try. He will not force his presence upon you, but he will accomplish his plan - with you or without you! The disobedience of Ahaz did not prevent the Lord from fulfilling his promise to deliver his people. In fact, the promise is a foreshadowing of the ultimate deliverance through the Messiah.

Ahaz lost the opportunity to experience God’s presence. He did not experience “God with us,” even though the promise and the provision were right in front of him. He wanted to things his own way, and the Lord allowed him to do so.

What are the ambitions in your life?

Do you want to be SUCCESSFUL?

Do you want to be LOVED

Do you want to be HAPPY?

If these are the things that drive you, you will journey without God's help. We must seek our satisfaction in him.

Illus - 5 year old Suri Cruise, the daughter movie stars Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise was seen last week throwing a temper tantrum in toy store. This is a 5 year old girl with a \$130,000 Christmas wish list including a \$100,000 pony! It's hard to believe that she would want anything more, but that's the way we are wired. When we seek the things of the earth, we are NEVER SATISFIED.

Ahaz was so far from the Lord, that even when Isaiah told him that God would grant him any sign he could ask for, Ahaz refused! **Isaiah 7:10–11** *"Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."*

Our PASSIONS will rule our lives. You will get what you are looking for. King AHAZ and JUDAH would not trust in the Lord. **THEY Would not even follow God's instruction and ask for a sign!** (7:10-11)

But God's will was not thwarted by Ahaz. God gave a sign anyway, and that brings us to our next lesson.

AHAZ was faced with an important question - a TEST of his FAITH... *Would God fulfill his promise?* The promise was first given to Abraham. A special people would bring forth God's special deliverer. The Lord further described the promise to DAVID. **2 Samuel 7:11** *"The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you:"* **2 Samuel 7:16** *"Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."*

Once again, God repeats the promise through ISAIAH. This prophesy contains both a NEAR TERM part of this promise, and a FAR TERM part of the promise. In the near term, Ahaz and Judah are told to take courage because a deliverer would come. The coming destruction by Israel and Aram would not take place (Isa 7:7) *"it will not take place."* The Lord would *"will give you a sign"* (Isa 7:10).

This promise is repeated three times in the next chapters.

Isaiah 7:14 *"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."*

Isaiah 8:8 *"and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of your land, O Immanuel!"*

Isaiah 8:10 *"Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us."*

Three times the text says "God is with us." God wanted them to know that he was still

with them! He wants you to know that he is with you!

The FUTURE ASPECT of this promise remained concealed for over 700 years! There is nothing in the text to tell us that Ahaz, or Judah or even Isaiah understood that this was a promise for a future Messiah. The promise was related to them in the year 734 BC.

The promise of a virgin born deliverer is not mentioned again in Scripture until Matthew 1:22. It was God's message to JOSEPH. The angel needed a way to tell Joseph that the child his fiancée was carrying was the deliverer of Israel. And the angel reached way back into the familiar history of Judah to connect Mary's child with the deliverer promised at Judah's darkest hour. THIS CONNECTION reveals the mystery of Christ's birth! Christ was the child foreshadowed in Isaiah 7:14; 8:1-2 and 9:6-7! His birth was unique. He was the deliverer for Israel, and for the entire world!

Illus No wonder when **John Wesley** lay dying in **1791**, he roused from his sleep long to open his eyes and exclaim, "***The best of all is, God is with us!***" Then he closed his eyes and died. (Ray Pritchard, "Overcoming Loneliness," www.keepbelieving.org)

How is it that a woman can bear a child without man's help? It is because GOD is WITH US.

The name Immanuel explains why Jesus came. He came to deliver "the people walking in darkness" (Isaiah 9:2). It explains how Jesus came. God became one of us. **Hebrews 2:17** *"For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."*

He is HERE

He is WITH US

And just like King Ahaz, we can either accept his presence, or we can seek our own way, and eat of the fruit of our efforts.

It is not until the angel (Gabriel?) appears to Joseph that we learn that the prophesy of ISA 7:14 is a Messianic prophesy!

How can we experience GOD'S PRESENCE?

In your loneliness: GOD IS WITH US

In your pain: GOD IS WITH US

In your doubt: GOD IS WITH US

In your disappointments. GOD IS WITH US

In your indebtedness: GOD IS WITH US

In your temptations: GOD IS WITH US

We must decide that we want his presence more than life itself!

Lamentations 3:22–26 *"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. " "They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. " "I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." " "The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; " "it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD."*

Psalms 119:10 *"I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands."*

Matthew 22:37–38 *"Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' " "This is the first and greatest commandment."*

You must ACCEPT Immanuel.

Ahaz was warned that the God was the only one that could deliver him, and that the only way to see God's deliverance was to take the step of FAITH.

Isaiah 7:9 *"The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."*

Isaiah 8:13–15 *"The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured."*

Ahaz did not walk by faith, and therefore he never experienced God's presence.

God offered them a SIGN, but they would not believe.

God offers you a SIGN - It is JESUS. When you accept him, GOD IS WITH YOU.