

## THE TEXT OF ISAIAH 7:1-19

### NEW AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION

Now it came about in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not conquer it.

When it was reported to the house of David, saying, "The Arameans have camped in Ephraim," his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind.

Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shearjashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field, <sup>4</sup> and say to him, 'Take care, and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands, on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah. <sup>5</sup> Because Aram, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has planned evil against you, saying, <sup>6</sup> "Let us go up against Judah and terrorize it, and make for ourselves a breach in its walls, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it," <sup>7</sup> thus says the Lord God, "It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass. <sup>8</sup> For the head of Aram is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Rezin (now within another 65 years Ephraim will be shattered, *so that it is* no longer a people), <sup>9</sup> and the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.'""

Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, <sup>11</sup> "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make *it* deep as Sheol or high as heaven."

But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!"

Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good. <sup>16</sup> For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.

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. <sup>18</sup> And it will come about in that day, that the LORD will whistle for the fly that is in the remotest part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. <sup>19</sup> And they will all come and settle on the steep ravines, on the ledges of the cliffs, on all the thorn bushes, and on all the watering places.

## TEXTUAL ISSUES IN THE TEXT OF ISAIAH 7:14

Fundamental to an exegetical study on any given passage is the question of textual criticism that asks how does the passage under examination read in the various extant manuscripts. There are several different readings of Isaiah 7:14.

1. The Designation of אֲדֹנָי versus יְהוָה.

*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 (Isaiah 7:14).*

There are several manuscripts that read, “Therefore יְהוָה shall give you a sign...”

This is generally considered to be a minority reading.

2. Terms for “Virgin.”

*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 (Isaiah 7:14).*

All of the Hebrew versions of the text are consistent in using the term הַעַלְמָה to refer to “the virgin.” Both the Septuagint translation as well as the Gospel of Matthew’s quotation of the passage in Matthew 1:23 translate this with the Greek word ἡ παρθένος, though it is noted that the Alexandrinus, the Rossano and one other minor tenth century text read νεανίς (“young girl”). Because of the scarcity of this divergent reading, this author has concluded that the reading of the Massoretic Text can be held with a high degree of confidence.

3. “She will call.”

*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 (Isaiah 7:14).*

There are a number of divergent readings for the phrase which has been translated by the New American Standard Version as “she will call.”

- a. The Massoretic Reading of **תִּקְרָא** can be found in both the 2nd person feminine singular (“thou shalt call”) or the 3rd person feminine singular (“she shall call”). The Dead Sea Scrolls agree with the Massoretic reading of this passage, not only in the Isaiah Scroll,<sup>1</sup> but also in a Thanksgiving song from Qumran that refers to the coming virgin birth of the Branch.<sup>2</sup>

From the context of the Isaiah 7:14 passage, it is evident that the only female participating in the action of the verb is **הַעַלְמָה** and so we would translate the Massoretic reading as “she will call.”

- b. The Septuagint translates this phrase with **καλέσεις**, the future active indicative, 2nd person singular of **καλεω**, to call. This reading is also found in Codex D, a 5th century manuscript from the Western Tradition. This reading would be translated as “you shall call” and would necessarily have Ahaz as the one doing the naming of Immanuel.
- c. The vast majority of Greek texts of Matthew 1:23 use the term **καλέσουσιν**, the future active indicative 3rd person plural of **καλεω**, making the reading, “they

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<sup>1</sup> J. DeWard, *A Comparative Study of the Old Testament Text in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament*, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> 1QH3.

shall call.” A number of the Septuagint minuscules also contain this reading.

These textual variations bring no substantial difference of meaning to the text. Because of the combined weight of testimony from the Massoretic Texts and the Dead Sea Scrolls, one is inclined to accept the reading “she shall call” for the Hebrew text of Isaiah. This is not to dispute that the majority reading of the New Testament texts of Matthew are in error. It is merely seen as interpretive license on the part of Matthew.

## A TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT OF ISAIAH 7:1-19

And it came about in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but they could not conquer it. When it was told to the house of David, saying, “The Arameans have camped in Ephraim,” his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind.

And Yahweh said to Isaiah, “Go out to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the laundryman’s field, and say to him, “Take care, and be quiet, do not fear or let your heart be faint because of these two stumps of smoldering firebrands, because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah because of Aram, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has planned evil against you, saying, “Let us go up against Judah and terrorize it, and make for ourselves a breach in its walls, and set up the son of Ta’be-el as king in the midst of it.

“Thus says Yahweh Elohim, ‘It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass; for the head of Aram is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Rezin (now within another 65 years Ephraim will be shattered, so that it is no longer a people), and the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.’”

And Yahweh spoke again to Ahaz, saying to him, “Ask a sign for yourself from the Yahweh Elohim; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven.”

But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not test Yahweh!”

Then He said, “Listen now, O house of David! Is it too little a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God also? Therefore Adonai Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanu-el. He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good. For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you fear will be deserted.

Yahweh 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. And it will come about in that day, that Yahweh will whistle for the fly that is in the remotest part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. And they will all come and settle on the steep ravines, on the ledges of the cliffs, on all the thorn bushes, and on all the watering places.

## A MECHANICAL OUTLINE OF ISAIAH 7:1-19

And  
it came about  
    in the days of Ahaz,  
        the son of Jotham,  
        the son of Uzziah,  
    king of Judah,  
that  
    Rezin the king of Aram  
    and  
    Pekah  
        the son of Remaliah,  
        king of Israel,  
went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it,  
but  
they could not conquer it.

When it was told to the house of David,  
saying,  
    “The Arameans have camped in Ephraim,”  
his heart  
and  
the hearts of his people  
    shook  
    as the trees of the forest shake with the wind.

And  
Yahweh said to Isaiah,  
    “Go out to meet Ahaz,  
        you  
        and  
        your son Shear-jashub,  
    at the end of the conduit of the upper pool,  
    on the highway to the laundryman’s field,  
and  
say to him,  
    “Take care, and be quiet,  
do not fear or let your heart be faint  
    because of these two stumps of smoldering firebrands,  
    because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah  
    because of Aram,  
        with Ephraim

and  
the son of Remaliah,  
has planned evil against you, saying,  
“Let us go up against Judah  
and  
terrorize it,  
and  
make for ourselves a breach in its walls,  
and  
set up the son of Ta’be-el as king in the midst of it.

“Thus says Yahweh Elohim,  
‘It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass;  
for  
the head of Aram is Damascus  
and  
the head of Damascus is Rezin  
(now within another 65 years Ephraim will be shattered,  
so that  
it is no longer a people),  
and  
the head of Ephraim is Samaria  
and  
the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.  
If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.’”

And  
Yahweh spoke again to Ahaz, saying to him,  
“Ask a sign for yourself from the Yahweh Elohim;  
make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven.”

But  
Ahaz said,  
“I will not ask, and I will not test Yahweh!”

Then He said,  
“Listen now, O house of David!  
Is it too little a thing  
for you to try the patience of men,  
that you will try the patience of my God also?  
Therefore  
Adonai Himself will give you a sign:  
Behold,  
the virgin will  
be with child

and  
bear a son,  
and  
she will call His name Immanu-el.  
He will eat curds and honey by the time He knows enough  
to refuse evil  
and  
choose good.

For  
before the boy will know enough  
to refuse evil  
and  
choose good,  
the land whose two kings you fear will be deserted.

Yahweh 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.

And  
it will come about in that day,  
that Yahweh will whistle  
for the fly that is in the remotest part of the rivers of Egypt,  
and  
for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.

And  
they will all come and settle  
on the steep ravines,  
on the ledges of the cliffs,  
on all the thorn bushes,  
and  
on all the watering places.

## OBSERVATIONS FOR STUDY

A number of observations can be made from this passage, many of which will be noteworthy for use in preaching and sermon development.

### 1. A Child Motif.

There is a “child motif” that runs through this section of Israel from chapter 7 to chapter 9 and include the mention of five different children.

- Shear-jashub (Isaiah 7:3).
- Immanu-el (Isaiah 7:14; 8:8).
- Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isaiah 8:3).
- Isaiah’s children (Isaiah 8:18).
- The Royal Child (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Immanu-el stands out in contrast to the other children in that there is no father mentioned. Even the mother is not named except to refer to her as “the virgin.” In this regard, Immanu-el and the Royal Child of chapter 9 are seen to be similar. This same “child motif” is seen in the book of Hosea. This is notable because Hosea is commonly thought to have been a contemporary of Isaiah.

### 2. The Historical Background.

This prophecy did not take place in a historical vacuum. This is true of all of the prophecies of the Bible, but in this case we are given detailed information of the very real need and the situation in which it arose. From the context that is given, we learn that the promises contained in this prophecy do not speak only to issues within the four walls of

the church. The message is placed in a context that was relevant to the world affairs of that day. The implication is that it will also be a message that will be relevant to all of mankind today.

3. The New Testament Commentary.

This verse is quoted by Matthew's Gospel to be a reference to Jesus. This brings up the issue of possible dual reference of prophecy. Is such an interpretation valid? Does the Bible allow for this kind of interpretation of prophecy? Evangelical scholars are divided over this issue. The answer will affect, not only how we regard this particular text, but also how we read a great deal of the Scriptures.

4. The Significance of the sign is seen in that it was not chosen by Ahaz, but by the Lord. Because Ahaz refused to choose a sign, the Lord gave His own sign. The purpose of a sign is to produce and to confirm belief. This was true in Isaiah's day and it is also true in the case of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

## THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The passage before us is rooted in a historical context. Without an examination and an understanding of that context, the passage will lose much of its impact.

### 1. The Author.

The name of the author is identified in the beginning of the book: “The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz...” (Isaiah 1:1). In the last 150 years, liberal scholarship has brought into question the authorship of this book and has largely maintained that this is the work of at least two different men. Though a number of superficial reasons are given for this view, at the heart of the matter is that detailed prophecies are given of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Empires and such scholarship therefore has assumed that it must have been written subsequent to this time. Thus the underlying reasoning behind such the theory of multiple authorship is a presupposition that there is no such thing as prophecy or supernatural revelation.

The unity of the book was never brought into question by either Jewish or Christian scholars prior to the rise of liberalism. When a full copy of Isaiah was discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the scroll was found intact with no distinction between the first half and the second half of the scroll.

### 2. The World of Isaiah’s Day.

Isaiah’s ministry is said to have spanned the reigns of four of the kings of Judah: *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem which he saw*

during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.<sup>3</sup> The events of the prophecy of Isaiah 7 are even more specific. Ahaz was the ruler of Judah and he was facing troubled times.

On the political scene, Ahaz found his tiny kingdom threatened with enemies from the north, especially the kingdoms of Israel and Aram. The Assyrian Empire was at its zenith and the fierce Assyrian warriors had spread their reign of terror throughout most of the known world, plundering and burning wherever they went. The small kingdoms that lay along the shores of the Mediterranean were no match for these hoards and they decided that the only way they could resist the onslaught was to band together into a single alliance. Accordingly, Egypt, Aram (Syria) and the Northern Kingdom of Israel formed an alliance and asked Judah to join with them. Ahaz, the king of Judah, refused.

Tensions mounted as the confederation threatened to invade Judah and install a puppet king of their own choosing. Ahaz found himself surrounded by enemies on all sides. It was into this scene that Isaiah came with a message from the Lord. The message was that the plans of the confederacy would fail.

### 3. A Sign for Ahaz.

In the early part of the chapter, God gives a prophecy to Ahaz. He tells Ahaz what will take place in the near future. He promises that Ahaz will not be deposed by the alliance. But that is not all. The Lord also offers to give Ahaz a sign. God promises to place His signature to the promise.

Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, <sup>11</sup> “Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make *it* deep as Sheol or high as

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 1:1.

heaven.” (Isaiah 7:10-11).

God even permits Ahaz to choose what the sign will be. He says, “Ask anything you want. Make it as great a sign as you desire. Make is something whereby the greatness of My strength will be seen.” But Ahaz refuses to ask for such a sign. *But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!”* (Isaiah 7:12).

At first glance, Ahaz seems to be doing a very noble and pious thing. He gives the excuse that he does not want to test the Lord. But that is not a correct response. It is like the man who says, “I do not pray because I do not want to bother God with my problems.” The root of Ahaz’s problem was that he was trusting in the armies of Assyria rather than trusting in the Lord. It is for this reason that the reply from the Lord serves as an indictment against Ahaz at the same time that it promises salvation to his people.

Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? <sup>14</sup> 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 (Isaiah 7:13-14).

God turns to this unbelieving king and says, “Since you didn’t want a sign, I’m going to give it to the house of David.” Accordingly, He turns from Ahaz to the descendants of David. Seen in this light, the sign has nothing to do with Ahaz who has already demonstrated his unbelief. Signs are given, not to those who refuse to believe, but to those who are willing to believe. This sign is given to the people of Judah who believe God.

#### 4. The Significance of the Sign.

The sign is that a young maiden shall be with child. She shall have a son. He will be called Immanuel. But the prophecy does not end here. It goes on to tell what the sign

will signify. The sign has been given for a specific localized reason.

He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good. <sup>16</sup> For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken. (Isaiah 7:15-16).

The sign was not to end with the birth of Immanuel. It was only to begin there.

The rest of the sign was that the child would grow and develop into a young boy. Before that boy had reached the age of being able to tell the difference between right and wrong, the kings of both Aram and Israel would die.

#### 5. The Rest of the Story.

It would have been a happy story if it could have ended on this note. But that is not the case. Isaiah goes on to give Ahaz a glimpse of things to come.

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. <sup>18</sup> And it will come about in that day, that the LORD will whistle for the fly that is in the remotest part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. <sup>19</sup> And they will all come and settle on the steep ravines, on the ledges of the cliffs, on all the thorn bushes, and on all the watering places. (Isaiah 7:17-19).

Because of the sin of Ahaz, both in worshiping the false gods of the Canaanites as well as in demonstrating his unbelief of Yahweh, he is told that the Lord will bring enemies from both Egypt and Assyria who will come and make life miserable for the kingdom of Judah.

## THE FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE PASSAGE

Scholars have long maintained that the Hebrew of Isaiah is the richest and the most refined in all of the Old Testament. Isaiah 7 is a combination of historical narrative, Messianic prophecy and an oracle of woe. It has already been suggested that there is a “child motif” that runs through this section of the book:

- Shear-jashub (Isaiah 7:3).
- Immanu-el (Isaiah 7:14; 8:8).
- Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isaiah 8:3).
- Isaiah’s children (Isaiah 8:18).
- The Royal Child (Isaiah 9:6-7).

This motif serves as an organizing principle within these chapters. The chapters can be taken and understood as a single unit:

1. The first two stanzas in this unit begin with a historical prologue. The first of these is seen in the beginning of chapter 7; the second is seen in the beginning of chapter 8.
2. The flow of movement takes us on a cycle that begins with a historical prologue and ends in the shadow of the Lord and/or His judgment upon men.
3. The connecting links between the historical sections and the promise of judgments are a series of “child signs.” Each child that is mentioned has a special meaning attached to his name that forms a part of the prophecy.

This is a symphony in three parts. The person of Immanu-el dominates the first two parts, leading to the climactic conclusion that introduces the Royal Son.

Historical prologue (7:1-2)

In the presence of Shear-jashub (7:3)

Judgment on Aram and Israel (7:4-9)

The sign of Immanu-el (7:10-16).

In the shadow of Assyria (7:20-25)

Historical prologue (8:1-2)

The sign of Maher-shalal-hash-baz  
(8:3-4)

Judgment on Judah (8:5-8)

Lament of Immanu-el (8:8-10)

In the shadow of Yahweh (8:11-15)

A call to repentance (8:16-17)

The sign of Isaiah's children (8:18).

In the shadow of judgment (8:19-22)

Out of the shadow and into the light  
(9:1-5)

The Royal Son (9:6-7)

## GRAMMATICAL AND LEXICAL DATA

*A SIGN shall  
be given...*

The Hebrew word **אֵימָה** is translated as “a sign.” The word appears approximately 76 times in the Old Testament and usually refers to some outward manifestation that evidences the power of God. This does not necessarily have to be a supernatural manifestation. For example, Isaiah 19:20 refers to an altar of the Lord serving as a sign and a witness. In the same way, Isaiah speaks of both himself and his children as being used as “signs and wonders in Israel” (Isaiah 8:18).

The  
Virgin...

There are a number of Hebrew words that could have been used to describe either a virgin or a young woman.

- **בְּתוּלָה** is normally thought of as the technical Hebrew word for “virgin.” It normally signifies a young woman who is still living with her parents, though in Deuteronomy 22:19 and Joel 1:8 it is used of a married woman.
- **אִשָּׁה** is the normal word for “woman.”
- **נַעֲרָה** is the word for a young woman, with the emphasis upon her youth. Boaz uses this term to describe Ruth.<sup>4</sup>
- **עַלְמָה** is normally thought to refer to a young maiden of marriageable age.

When we examine each of the uses of **עַלְמָה** in the Old Testament, we come to the

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<sup>4</sup> Ruth 2:5.

observation that it always seems to refer to a young unmarried girl who is expected to also be a virgin. The term **עַלְמָה** is derived from the Hebrew root **עַלַּם** meaning, “to hide.” It is possible that the term **עַלְמָה** came to describe a girl who was veiled or hidden.

1. **עַלְמָה** is used of the unmarried Rebekah.

Behold, I am standing by the spring, and may it be that **the maiden** who comes out to draw, and to whom I say, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar (Genesis 24:43).

In this passage, the servant of Abraham has been sent to find a bride for Isaac. He is evidently looking for an unmarried maiden who is assumed to be a virgin.

2. **עַלְמָה** is used of Miriam.

And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, “Go ahead.” So **the girl** went and called the child's mother. (Exodus 2:8).

In this case, the young girl, Miriam, the sister of Moses, is very obviously a young unmarried virgin.

3. **עַלְמוֹת**, the plural form, is used of a type of harp.

...and Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and Benaiah, with harps tuned to **alamot**. (1 Chronicles 15:20).

Apparently, the tonal quality of these harps was such that they had been given the title of “maiden-sound.” This same usage is found in the superscription of Psalm 46.

4. **עַלְמָה** is used of a Maiden and her Suitor.

There are three things which are too wonderful for me, four which I do not understand: <sup>19</sup> The way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the middle of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid. (Proverbs 30:18-19).

This passage has been the topic of some controversy. One view sees it as a man who is

trying to win a girl's heart. The focus is upon things that are able to move in a mysterious manner. In this case, she is of marriageable age, but it thus far unmarried.

Another view sees these four categories of an example of movement that leaves no immediate visible results. Thus the eagle leaves no trail, the serpent on a rock leaves no trace, the ship leaves no lasting path and a man who lies with a woman does not leave an immediate visible result. This view ties the **עַלְמָה** of verse 19 with the adulterous **אִשָּׁה** of verse 20: This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth, And says, "I have done no wrong." Even if this view is accepted, the point of verse 19 is that the young maiden APPEARS to be a virgin both before and after the incident and leaves no outward visible trace that things are other than they appear.

4. **עַלְמָה** is used of the Maidens of Solomon's Court.

Your oils have a pleasing fragrance, your name is like purified oil; therefore **the maidens** love you. (Song of Solomon 1:3).

There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and **maidens** without number (Song of Solomon 6:8).

In both of these instances, the word **עַלְמָה** is used to describe the young women of the court of Solomon who had not yet been taken as concubines. They are seen as separate and distinct from the wives and the concubines.

In each of these instances, **עַלְמָה** refers to young women who are of an age ready for marriage, but who have not yet been married and who, by implication, are expected to be virgins. And yet, the principle of virginity is never seen at the forefront of the idea in any of these cases. It simply is not the primary issue of the word. To the contrary, the Aramaic Targum dealing with Judges 19:5 refers to the unfaithful concubine as an **עַלְמָה**.

It is of interest to note that the Ugaritic cognate *glmt* (from which comes our word *עַלְמָה*) as well as *blt* (the derivative of *בְּתוּלָה*) Are used of the goddess who was a perpetual virgin.

From Ugarit of around 1400 B.C. comes a text celebrating the marriage of the male and female lunar deities. It is there predicted that the goddess will bear a son... The terminology is remarkably close to that in Isaiah 7:14. However, the Ugaritic statement that the bride will bear a son is fortunately given in parallelistic form; in 77:7 she is called by the exact etymological counterpart of Hebrew *almah*; in 77:5 she is called by the exact etymological counterpart of Hebrew *bethulah*.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the Septuagint translated this word in Isaiah 7:14 with the Greek word *παρθένος* which ALWAYS refers to a virgin as its principle idea. The New Testament quotes the Septuagint in referring to this verse and applying it to the Virgin Mary.

The use of the definite article should be recognized as significant. We are not merely speaking of some unknown or obscure young woman in the court of Ahaz. When Isaiah refers to her as “THE virgin” he is being carefully specific in referring to a particular person.

Immanu- el
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The Hebrew name *עִמָּנוּ אֵל* (“God with us”) is used in chapters 7-8 as both a name as well as a phrase of comfort. It is seen in Isaiah 8:10 where, instead of being used as a particular name, the translators have realized that it is a promissory phrase of God’s presence.

Devise a plan but it will be thwarted;  
State a proposal, but it will not stand,  
For **God is with us**. (Isaiah 8:10).

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<sup>5</sup> Cyrus Gordon, *Almah in Isaiah 7:14*; Journal of Bible and Religion 21: April 1953; Page 108.

The fact that a meaningful name is given to Immanuel does not in itself indicate anything unique about the person who carries the name. After all, there are many people in Biblical times who were given names that were theologically significant. Isaiah's own name illustrated this point as it carries the meaning, "Salvation from Yahweh." On the other hand, the message that "God is with us" is one that was especially central to the Scriptures. Abraham was given the promise that the Lord would be a shield of protection for him.<sup>6</sup> The implication is that God would be with him to watch over him. When Moses was first confronted by the burning bush and given the mission of bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, he was told by God, "I will be with you."<sup>7</sup> The presence of God with Israel was seen in the smoking furnace by day and the pillar of fire by night. When the tabernacle was established, the presence of the Lord was manifested as moving into it. Later, at the dedication of Solomon's temple, the holy cloud moved into the temple, bearing testimony of the presence of God. All of these manifestations were in Isaiah's past, but now when the nation of Judah stood on the brink of threatened destruction and when the house of David seemed ready to lose all hope of the future, a promise was given. It was the promise of the presence of God.

This promise finds its ultimate fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the Word who became flesh and "tabernacled" among men. In a very real sense, He is "God with us."

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 15:1.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 3:12.

## A CONSIDERATION OF MATTHEW 1:22-23

If we were only to consider Isaiah's prophecy of Immanu-el without regard to the New Testament commentary, we would be inclined to see this only as a local prophecy fulfilled in the days of Ahaz. But we must also consider Matthew's quotation and commentary on this passage. In relating the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, Matthew indicates that this was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, <sup>23</sup> "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us." (Matthew 1:22-23).

Matthew states that the fulfillment of this prophecy is seen in Jesus. It is Jesus who is the son who was born of a virgin. He is the Immanu-el, the one who is "God with us." This brings us to the question of interpretation. In light of Matthew's statement, how are we to understand the prophecy of Isaiah? There are three possibilities:

1. Accept only the fulfillment of Isaiah's day.

This is the view usually taught by liberal theologians. It is also the official view of Orthodox Judaism. It is a view that denies any relation of Isaiah's prophecy to Jesus of Nazareth. The problem with such a view is that it goes directly contrary to the testimony of Matthew.

2. Accept only the fulfillment of Jesus of Nazareth.

This view would accord with the statement of Matthew in seeing a direct correlation between Isaiah's prophecy and Jesus. It is a view that has been the most

popular throughout the history of the Christian church. The problem is that the prophecy has little meaning in the historic context in which it was given.

3. A Dual Fulfillment.

This view sees the prophecy as having application BOTH to the immediate situation of the day in which it was given while also being a shadow and a prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus. It is only by holding to this view that we do justice both to the context of Isaiah as well as to the text of Matthew.

## THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The prophecy of the virgin-mother giving birth to Immanu-el has several long-reaching Biblical and Theological motifs.

### 1. The Mother-Savior Motif.

This principle takes us all the way back to Genesis 3:15 where the Prolegomenon introduces the classic struggle between the Seed of the Serpent and the Seed of the Woman.

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her seed;  
He shall bruise you on the head,  
And you shall bruise him on the heel. (Genesis 3:15).

With these words, the Lord establishes a continuing theme of conflict between the forces of Satan and the people of God, designated as the “seed of the woman.” Just as the woman was involved in the transgression, so also she is to participate in the redemption. As though her came sin, so also through her would come the Savior. Yet ultimately, the issue is not one of many “seeds” but only of a single seed as seen in the person of Christ.<sup>8</sup> It is significant that the word for “seed” is singular in the Hebrew text. It refers, not to a whole line of seeds, but to a single seed.

The story of the Old Testament is the story of the tracing of that seed, through Seth when Cain and Abel were disqualified, through Noah when the rest of the world was

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<sup>8</sup> *Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ (Galatians 3:16).*

destroyed, through Sarah and Rebekah and Leah and Tamar and Rahab and Ruth and Bathsheba. As Isaiah relates the sign of the Lord, he adds another detail to the Mother-Savior motif. It is that the mother will be a virgin. Her offspring will be a true “seed of the woman.”

## 2. The Immanuel Motif.

Although the actual name **אֱלֹהֵינוּ** (“God with us”) had not been used in the Scriptures prior to Isaiah’s prophecy, the principle of God being with His people also finds its roots in the book of Genesis. Man was created to be with and to have fellowship with God. When he sinned, that fellowship was broken and he could no longer say that God is with us.

The fellowship was restored on the basis of the covenant. Enoch was said to walk with God as a preacher of righteousness. Noah found grace in the sight of the Lord. Abraham entered into a covenant with the Lord and was promised a blessing. This same covenant was passed to Isaac and to Jacob and to the sons of Israel. It was later codified in the Mosaic Law.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, <sup>2</sup> in these last days has spoken to us in His Son... (Hebrews 1:1).

God was with man in many ways and at many different times. He walked with Enoch. He spoke to Job out of a whirlwind. He spoke to Joseph in dreams. He met Moses in a burning bush. He spoke to Joshua through an angel. He was heard by Samuel as a voice in the night. He was with Elijah in a still, small voice. He spoke to Daniel in a vision. The revelation of God through the Old Testament prophets was fragmentary. It was here a little, there a little.

The final and complete communication of God was not accomplished through any of these means. The final and complete communication of God was accomplished through His Son. He is the ultimate manifestation of God with us.

The revelation of God that came in the person of Jesus is a complete revelation. He exhibited the very person and character of God. He said to Philip on the night of the Last Supper, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.”<sup>9</sup> None of the prophets could ever make a claim like that. Their knowledge of God was always limited. But Jesus had an experiential knowledge of God because He was with God and because He was God.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> John 14:9.

<sup>10</sup> John 1:1.

## APPLICATIONS

Having examined the Scriptures with regard to Immanuel, we must now ask the question of how this will change the way in which we live.

1. Jesus the Messiah.

The first and, from a New Testament perspective, most obvious application of this passage is that Jesus is the virgin-born Son who is “God with us.” We partake in the presence of God when we receive Him in faith, trusting Him as our Lord and Savior. We apply the message of this passage when we apply the Gospel to our hearts.

2. God with Us.

The fact that God has become flesh and has made Himself known to us makes all the difference in how we now determine to live. To paraphrase the Apostle Paul, our faith is not in vain and our preaching is not vain and we are not still in our sins and we are not of all men the most miserable.

3. The Continuing Presence of God.

The message of Immanuel teaches us that God is still with us. It is a message that is just as true in this age as it was in the previous age, for at His ascension, Jesus said, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”<sup>11</sup> God is still with us. He is with the church collectively when we come together to worship Him and He is also with us individually, no matter what the situation.

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 28:20.

4. A Sign for a Secular Situation.

It is significant that the sign of the virgin birth was given as a sign of comfort to those who were facing what seemed like overwhelming troubles in a secular situation. This is not merely some mystical unseen struggle. It was given in a real situation taking place in space and time and history. The implications of this is that the Lord is able to work today in space and in time and in my modern everyday problems.

# SERMON OUTLINE

## “A Man for All Seasons”

We normally think of Isaiah 7:14 as a “Christmas passage.” Both the passage as well as the One whose coming it predicts is for all seasons.

1. God is with us when World Collide (Isaiah 7:1-2).

I’ve worked over 25 years in the field of fire-rescue and I’ve seen a lot of collisions in my day. They are never pleasant. Isaiah prophesied at a time when the world was in a state of collision. The world of his day was on a collision course with the surrounding nations. There were enemies on every side.

It was into this scene that Isaiah came. He was a man with a message. The message was from God. The message was that the enemies of God would fail.

2. God is with us in a Promise of Comfort (Isaiah 7:3-9).

God gives a prophecy to Ahaz. He tells Ahaz what will take place in the future. The collision of armies is not the end of the story. There is salvation at hand and it will not come by anything that Ahaz can do. The only part that he must play is to believe.

3. God is with us in Offering us a Sign (Isaiah 7:10-12).

The Lord does not call for a “blind faith.” Faith is required, but it is a faith that is accompanied by a sign. God offers to put His signature to the promise that He has given. In the case of Ahaz, God even permits Ahaz to choose what the sign shall be. He says, “Ask anything you want. Make it as great a sign as you desire. Make is something whereby the greatness of My strength will be seen.” But Ahaz refuses to ask for such a sign. *But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!”* (Isaiah 7:12).

At first glance, Ahaz seems to be doing a very noble and pious thing. He gives the excuse that he does not want to test the Lord. But that is not a correct response. It is like the man who says, "I do not pray because I do not want to bother God with my problems." Such a stance is the result of a heart of unbelief.

The good news is that the story does not end here. God turns from this unbelieving king and gives a promise to those who will believe. Here is the sign. A virgin will conceive and shall be with child. She will have a son. He will be called Immanuel. It is a name that means "God is with us."

4. God is with us in the Person of Jesus (Isaiah 7:13-14).

I believe that the sign of Immanuel was given as a partial fulfillment in the days of Ahaz. This is seen in the following chapter where Immanuel himself is addressed (Isaiah 8:8). But that is not the end of the story. Even though his name was Immanuel and expressed the truth that God was working in the lives of His people, there remained a further and more complete fulfillment.

That fulfillment is seen in the person of Jesus. Matthew 1:22-23 presents to us the truth that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the Immanuel. He is God with us.

What kind of problems are you facing today? You might feel as though all of the kingdoms of the world had ganged up against you. No matter how bad it feels, there is a message of comfort. God is with us. You need not wait until the Christmas season to learn this important truth. You can practice the presence of God today.

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