

# His Name: Immanuel

## Isaiah 7:14

By Phil Johnson

This morning I want to look at a text that speaks prophetically about the *birth* of Christ. It's also from the Old Testament, and it's a familiar text to most of you. Isaiah 7:14. **"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."** The name "Immanuel," of course, means "God with us." So this prophecy contains a strong hint that the Messiah who was promised to be the redeemer of Israel would be God in the flesh.

In fact, it's amazing as you review the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, how many of them speak about His deity. There's this verse. Then a couple of chapters later, following up on this same prophecy, we find another familiar prophecy about the birth of Christ. Isaiah writes this in Isaiah 9:6: **"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."** Again, the names of deity are ascribed to him.

And there's one more major prophecy about the birth of Christ in Micah 5:2. That verse *also* gives a strong hint that the Messiah would be God in human form. It says, **"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting."** So there's a trilogy of famous Old Testament prophecies about the birth of Christ. All three of them are quoted in the New Testament narratives about the birth of Christ, and all three of

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them clearly suggest that the Messiah of Israel would be no mere man, but God in human flesh.

I recently heard a famous rabbi explaining the difference between Christianity and Judaism, and in his mind it boiled down to this one major distinction: he said that although Christians worship Jesus as God incarnate, the Jewish conception of the Messiah is that He would be a mere human being. He said Jewish belief doesn't allow for God to come to earth as a human.

And my mind went immediately to these great prophecies, all of which very clearly foretold that the Messiah would be God, come to earth in human form. In other words, the Jewish Scriptures, and not merely the New Testament, spoke of the Messiah's deity. There's no question that the vast majority of rabbinical scholars who were looking for the Messiah missed the point. They couldn't fit it into their theology. It didn't seem compatible with the idea that God is transcendent—that He is far above His creation. They couldn't understand how a transcendent God could ever assume human form. So they found other ways to interpret those texts.

But the truth was nonetheless clear in the prophecies. And when Christ came, those who were open to the light of Scripture recognized Christ as God in the flesh, and they saw that as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

It's certainly true that the deity of the Messiah is one of the major theological differences between Christianity and Judaism, but I want to emphasize that this is not a difference between the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures. The Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah *did* teach that He was to be God in the flesh. The deity of the Messiah was not something the New Testament introduced for the first time. As a matter of fact, the New Testament looks back to these Old Testament prophecies to establish the fact that Jesus perfectly fulfilled what the Old Testament predicted about the Messiah.

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And that means the difference between those who believe the Messiah is God and those who insist that He is not God is the difference between faith and unbelief. It is not really a difference between authentic Judaism and Christianity. It is not a difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is the difference between faith and unbelief, period.

And that is just what the New Testament teaches. The only thing that keeps Jewish people from embracing Christ as Messiah is unbelief, pure and simple. As the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 3:3-4, "**For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar.**" Romans 10:16-17: "**they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?' So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**"

Now let's look at the first of the great Old Testament prophecies that proves the deity of Christ, Isaiah 7:14. And we're going to back up and examine it in context, starting with verse 1 of Isaiah 7.

While you are turning there, let me set the historical stage for this section of Scripture. This prophecy was given by the Lord through Isaiah in the middle of a national crisis more than 600 years before Jesus was born. It was during the reign of king Ahaz. Ahaz was an evil king who sat on the throne of Judah at the height of the Assyrian empire. Assyria was threatening to destroy the land of Judah. Judah's king, Ahaz, was a wicked man, and most of the people of Judah had turned their backs on God. It must have seemed to the few believers who remained faithful in those days that God had abandoned their nation. I think most of us can relate to what believers in those days must have felt.

Now if you remember your Old Testament history, you know that after Solomon died, the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms. A man named Jeroboam led the rebellion, and ten of

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the twelve tribes of Israel followed him and rejected the God-ordained kingly line of David. Jeroboam took those ten tribes and their territory—virtually all the territory north of Jerusalem—and set up his own kingdom, separate from the throne of David.

From that time on, there were two kingdoms. The northern kingdom, called Israel, included the ten tribes that pulled away. They forsook the Temple, the city of Jerusalem, and the kingly line God had established. And every king that ever reigned on the throne of the northern kingdom was an evil king. Not one of them was a godly ruler.

The capital city of the northern kingdom was Samaria, and therefore the whole kingdom is sometimes referred to in Scripture as Samaria. The *Samaritans*, whom we read about in the New Testament, were people of mixed race who descended from people out of the ten northern tribes. They retained elements of Jewish worship and religion, but it was all mixed with paganism and idolatry. And that is why the Jews of Jesus' day despised the Samaritans. They represented an impure race and an impure religion. And all of that was the fruit that grew from the seeds that were sown by the rebellion begun by Jeroboam in the days after Solomon died and the kingdom of Israel divided.

When Jeroboam led that rebellion, only two tribes remained faithful to the Davidic throne—Judah and Benjamin. And they formed the *southern* kingdom. They remained loyal to the throne and the line of kings who descended from the house of David. The southern kingdom is usually called Judah in the Old Testament, to distinguish it from the unfaithful tribes of Israel. Judah was a large tribe, and Benjamin was a very small tribe, so together the whole southern kingdom was simply called "Judah." It was the true kingdom established by God, in contrast to Israel, the apostate northern kingdom.

So all the rulers of Judah were descendants of David and rightful heirs to his throne. It was through that line of kings that

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the Messiah was promised. The genealogy in Matthew 1 traces the lineage of those kings. That is the genealogy of Joseph, who was the *legal father* (but not the *biological father*) of Jesus. In other words, Joseph was a descendant of David through the kingly line.

(The genealogy in Luke 3 shows that Mary was also a descendant of David, through a slightly different line, so Jesus had a dual claim to the legacy of David.)

So try to keep this straight in your thinking: the northern kingdom, Israel, was ruled by several dynasties of kings who were all evil, ungodly men. And meanwhile, the southern kingdom of Judah, was ruled by one long dynasty—all descendants of David. Some of them were godly men, but most of them were just as evil as their counterparts in the north.

So when we speak of Israel, we're talking about the evil northern kingdom. Sometimes it is also called *Samaria*, and sometimes it is called *Ephraim*, because Jeroboam, the founder of the northern kingdom, came from the tribe of Ephraim. Right here in Isaiah 7, in verses 2, 5, 8, 9, and 17, you see references to "Ephraim." That's talking about the whole northern kingdom.

And when we speak of *Judah*, we're talking about the southern kingdom, the kingdom that kept the throne of David and the Temple of Solomon but often abandoned the God of their fathers. Even though it included two tribes—Judah and Benjamin—it is normally just called Judah.

Judah represented the true kingdom established by God. Even though it was smaller and usually had much less clout than the northern kingdom of Israel, Judah a nation represented the true heirs of the covenant God had made with David.

The kingdom had been divided for more than 200 years when the prophet Isaiah came on the scene. Isaiah ministered in the

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southern kingdom during some of the most dramatic ups and downs between good and bad kings. You'll remember that Isaiah received a prophetic commission according to Isaiah 6:1 "**In the year that King Uzziah died,**" when he saw the Lord "**sitting on a throne, high and lifted up.**" Uzziah was a pretty good king (although he sinned by intruding into the priestly office), and when he died, the nation grieved his loss. He was followed by Jotham, who was also a good king and reigned for 16 years. But according to 2 Chronicles 27:2, the spiritual climate among the people of Judah was in decline even during the years of Uzziah and Jotham.

And after Jotham died, his son Ahaz came to the throne. Ahaz was one of the most corrupt kings who ever sat on David's throne. According to 2 Kings 16:3, he made the wicked kings of the northern kingdom his spiritual model, even to the point where he sacrificed his own son to a pagan god by burning the child in a fire.

Normally, there was an uneasy peace between the northern and southern kingdoms. They shared a common language and culture, and they often fought together against common enemies. But at times they were at war with one another. Obviously, they were rival kingdoms from the beginning, so even the times of peace between them were tense. And as the northern kingdom became more and more influenced by their compromise with paganism, the two nations grew spiritually and politically further apart.

Finally, God had had enough with Israel (the northern kingdom), and He prophesied judgment against them at the hands of the Assyrians. The king on the northern throne during that time was a wicked man named Pekah. Pekah made an alliance with Syria. He hoped that by combining Israel's strength with their pagan neighbors, they could resist the power of the Assyrians.

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Ahaz, the equally wicked king in the southern kingdom, took a different approach. He was trying to bargain secretly for peace with Assyria, so he refused to join the alliance with Syria and Israel.

Are you following this? You have God prophesying that the northern kingdom is going to be overthrown and the people taken captive by the Assyrians. So the ruler of the northern kingdom makes an alliance with Syria to try to ward off the Assyrians. Meanwhile Assyria is also threatening Judah, the southern kingdom, and Ahaz, king of Judah, tries to pacify the Assyrians by negotiating with them.

The Assyrian threat to the southern kingdom ultimately became so desperate that 2 Kings 16:8 says, "**Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent it as a present to the king of Assyria.**" That gives you an idea of how wicked this man was. In order to appease the evil Assyrians, he robbed all the treasures from the Temple and gave them to the Assyrian ruler as a bribe for peace. Verse 9 of 2 Kings 16 says, "**So the king of Assyria heeded him.**" The ploy worked, and the Assyrians turned their attention for the time being against Syria—a pagan nation that was part of the alliance with the northern kingdom of Israel.

Now, Israel and Syria were so angry at Judah for negotiating and purchasing peace with the Assyrians, that they gathered their armies and laid siege to Jerusalem.

And it was in the midst of that very crisis that the prophecy of Isaiah 7 takes place.

Look at the text:

**1 Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to make war against it, but could not prevail against it.**

**2 And it was told to the house of David, saying, "Syria's forces are deployed in Ephraim." So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.**

That's a very picturesque expression suggesting that all the people of Judah were filled with fear and dread. Ahaz had negotiated peace with Assyria, but now he faced a deadly threat from the north. Israel and Assyria combined had massive military might compared to the kingdom of Judah. So fear swept over the land. Scripture pictures that wave of fear like a forest full of trees being moved by a mighty wind.

Amazingly, in the middle of this national crisis, God sent Isaiah to Ahaz with a message of good news. The whole kingdom of Judah had turned away from God, and you might expect that He would turn away from them, but that is not what happened. God was not ready to abandon Judah.

And so, through the prophet Isaiah, God speaks to Ahaz. And He gives him not a message of condemnation and rebuke, like we might expect, but a message of mercy and grace. And there are three elements of this message. We'll look at them one at a time. The first is—

### **1. A PROMISE**

Look at verse 3:

**Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Jashub your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller's Field,**

**4 "and say to him: 'Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and the son of Remaliah.**

Now follow this: "**Rezin**" is the king of Syria; and "**the son of Remaliah**" is (who?) Pekah, king of Israel. And God tells Ahaz,



**"Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands."**

This is good news. Ahaz and the people of Judah do not need to fear or be fainthearted. In God's assessment, Pekah and Rezin are nothing more than **"two stubs of smoking firebrands."** They are burnt out and feeble. In the eloquent words of Matthew Henry, they are but tails of smoking firebrands, in a manner burnt out already; their force is spent; they have consumed themselves with the heat of their own anger; you may put your foot on them, and tread them out." The two kingdoms of Syria and Israel were now near expiring. Note, The more we have an eye to God as a consuming fire the less reason we shall have to fear men.

God was on the side of Judah.

Verse 5:

**'Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying,**

**6 "Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabel";**

**7 'thus says the Lord GOD: "It shall not stand, Nor shall it come to pass.**

**8 For the head of Syria is Damascus, And the head of Damascus is Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, So that it will not be a people.**

So the message he gives him is that he does not need to fear the alliance of Israel and Syria. **"It shall not stand, Nor shall it come to pass."** (verse 7).

That was good news for Ahaz, right? He had a word from the Lord, promising him that there was nothing to fear from the armies massed outside Jerusalem. God Himself would take care of that threat. Notice verse 8: **"Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, So that it will not be a people."** Within 65 years, the Northern Kingdom would be a non-entity. God had already

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decided their fate. He had already prophesied their doom. And it ultimately came to pass just as Isaiah foretold. By 721 B.C., Assyria had completely conquered the northern kingdom and taken all the inhabitants of Israel into exile, from which they never completely returned as a nation.

Notice that God is showing Ahaz nothing but grace and mercy. Although this was one of the most wicked kings ever to sit on the throne of David, God does not threaten him with overthrow but promises him safety. I want you to notice that verse 2 begins with a significant phrase: "**It was told to the house of David . . .**" Although Ahaz was a wicked man who had utterly forsaken the God of David, God had not forsaken David's line. He still dealt with Ahaz as a legitimate representative of David's house.

Remember God's promise to David when He established the throne. This was part of the covenant God made with David. Second Samuel 7:13: "**I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.**" Psalm 89 celebrates this covenant. Listen to these verses from Psalm 89:3-4:

**"I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David:**

**4 'Your seed I will establish forever, And build up your throne to all generations.'**

Starting in verse 30 of Psalm 89, we read this:

**"If his sons forsake My law And do not walk in My judgments,**

**31 If they break My statutes And do not keep My commandments,**

**32 Then I will punish their transgression with the rod, And their iniquity with stripes.**

**33 Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, Nor allow My faithfulness to fail.**

**34 My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips.**

**35 Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David:**

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**36 His seed shall endure forever, And his throne as the sun before Me;**

So God was fulfilling His promise to David here.

Israel and Syria wanted to overthrow Ahaz and set a king on the throne in Jerusalem who would be sympathetic to their alliance against Assyria. According to verse 6, the guy they chose to fill this role of vassal king was "the son of Tabel." But God would not permit Ahaz to be overthrown. This was not because Ahaz deserved God's protection, but because he represented the Davidic line, and God's covenant with David could not be broken.

If Ahaz had appreciated his own heritage; if he had known anything about the faithfulness of God, he could have taken heart because of this promise and set his faith in the power and the promises of God.

But his heart was bent toward unbelief, and therefore this message from Isaiah did nothing to encourage him. He had no faith in the Word of the Lord.

That's why there is a second part to this message. It is also an overture of grace from God. If you're taking notes, this is point two. Part one was a promise. This is—

## **2. A WARNING**

Back to verse 8:

**For the head of Syria is Damascus, And the head of Damascus is Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, So that it will not be a people.**

**9 The head of Ephraim is Samaria, And the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If you will not believe, Surely you shall not be established." "**

Here's what this means: "**the head of Syria is Damascus.**" Damascus was the capital city of Syria. "**And the head of Damascus is Rezin.**" Rezin was the king of Syria. Verse 9: "**The head of Ephraim is Samaria.**" Samaria was the capital city of the northern kingdom. "**And the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son.**" That's Pekah, king of

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the northern kingdom. Now, who were these two guys? Verse 4: **"two stubs of smoking firebrands."** They were nothing! They were already appointed to divine judgment and defeat! They were smoking, smoldering wicks, ready to be stomped out. God had already pronounced their doom. Within 65 years, the northern kingdom of Israel would no longer even exist. God had already determined it. All Ahaz needed to do was believe.

But here's the warning, at the end of verse 9: **"If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established."** I like the New International Version's translation of this: **"If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."**

That brings to mind the words of a much wiser king—king Jehoshaphat—from 2 Chronicles 20:20: **"Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper."** If you want to stand firm and overcome fear in the midst of opposition, you must have faith in the Word of God.

This, again, is a gracious warning to a wicked and undeserving man. Notice that Ahaz had not even sought the Lord in the midst of this crisis. Isaiah came to Ahaz at God's behest, not because Ahaz was seeking a word from the Lord. The good news of Isaiah's prophecy was initiated and announced by God to a man who had not even sought the Lord's favor or help. Ahaz seemed not the slightest bit interested in hearing from God on the crisis, even though the message he would have heard if he had ears to hear was a message of encouragement.

In fact, Ahaz's heart was so cold that he was utterly inclined to disbelief, as we are about to discover.

But notice once again the tender plea in verse 4: **"Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted."** All that tenderness was lost on Ahaz, because of the hardness and coldness of his own heart.

There is nothing more dangerous and discouraging than a heart of unbelief.

I want you to see how far the Lord went in encouraging Ahaz to believe His promise and heed his warning. If you're taking notes, these are the three parts of the prophetic message: a promise, a warning, and finally—

### 3. A SIGN

We pick it up at verse 10:

**10 Moreover the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying,**

**11 "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above."**

So the Lord graciously invites Ahaz to ask for a sign—any kind of sign he chooses—to confirm that this promise is true. He could have asked for some cosmic wonder, or an earthquake, or fire from heaven, or whatever he chose. This was like giving him a blank check for any kind of miracle he wanted to ask for.

I thought about this, and I know what I would have asked for. I would have asked the Lord to give me the wisdom of Solomon and at the same time restore my health and energy and sharpness of mind to what it was when I was 18 years old—or something like that. He could have asked for anything "**either in the depth or in the height above.**" Anything He wanted, the Lord would have given it to him as a sign.

But Ahaz was not interested in the Word of the Lord, and he didn't want any sign to confirm it. He probably had selfish political reasons for the negotiations he was carrying out with Assyria, and he didn't want that process interrupted. He had put his trust in an alliance with the Assyrians, and He did not want to be obligated to the God of Israel.

So he hypocritically declines to ask for a sign. Verse 12: "**But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!'**" That's nothing but pious hypocrisy. He wasn't worried about testing the Lord. I frankly think he hated God so much that he feared the thought of

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finding out that the Word of the Lord was true—even when the Word of the Lord came as good news to Him. Because he had his own agenda and his own way of life, and he didn't want to trouble his conscience with the knowledge that what God says through His prophets is true.

Isn't that exactly why most people reject the gospel, even though the gospel is good news?

In essence, Ahaz was saying, "I don't want to hear what the Lord has to say."

Isaiah was angered by this. Verse 13:

**Then he said, "Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?"**

**14 "Therefore the Lord Himself will *give* you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.**

You won't ask for a sign, so the Lord will give you one anyway. And here's the sign: "**Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.**"

I've read what a number of commentaries had to say about this verse, and I am amazed at how some commentators tie themselves up in knots trying to explain it and answer everything the critics' have to say about it. But it's not really hard to interpret at all, because it is interpreted for us by the Holy Spirit in Matthew 1:22-23. This is what the angel said in to Joseph in a dream about Mary's pregnancy: "**All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us.'**"

In other words, Jesus' birth is the fulfillment of the sign God gave to Ahaz through the prophet Isaiah.

Now the first question we might ask is, "How was this any kind of sign to Ahaz?" Ahaz was long dead when the sign was fulfilled. Some interpreters have suggested that this prophecy had two

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fulfillments—one in Isaiah's time, and then a later, second fulfillment, with the birth of Christ. And various candidates have been suggested as the child born in Isaiah's time who might have been a partial fulfillment of this promise. Some say it was Hezekiah, Ahaz's son, who became the best and most godly of all the kings of Judah. Other's have suggested it might have been the child born to Isaiah's wife, described in Isaiah 8:3, whose name was "**Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.**"

Some commentators make a great deal out of the word translated "virgin." It is the Hebrew word *almah*, which speaks of a young woman of marriageable age, like the English word *maiden*. They point out that there is a more specific Hebrew word for "virgin," *bethulah*, and if Isaiah wanted to avoid all ambiguity, he might have used that word. So, they argue, it is not clear from the context that this is a reference to the virgin birth of Jesus.

Let me reply to all those arguments: First of all, with regard to the word "virgin." The Hebrew word *almah* is used 7 times in the Old Testament, and it is always used to refer to young women who are in fact unmarried—virgins. Second, that meaning was so well established that when the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek by Jewish scholars in Alexandria, Egypt, about a hundred years *before* the birth of Christ, this word was translated into the Greek word *parthenos*, which can only mean *virgin*. So that is clearly how Jewish interpreters understood this term before the prophecy was fulfilled by birth of Christ.

Second, could this prophecy have had two fulfillments? I don't think so. I think this was a prophecy about the coming Messiah, and that's it. Hezekiah was born *before* this prophecy was delivered, so his birth could not have been a fulfillment of the sign. Besides that, he wasn't born of a virgin, and neither was Isaiah's son.

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So how was this a sign to Ahaz? Remember that the Lord had asked Ahaz to choose whatever sign he wanted, and Ahaz sinfully declined. But Ahaz refused God's gracious promise, and spurned His gracious warning. Then Ahaz also turned his nose up at God's gracious offer of a sign. So God gave him a different *kind* of sign. Instead of being an immediate miraculous omen of things to come for Ahaz's benefit alone, God gave Him a long-range prophecy that would become a sign for future generations. In effect, God made it a sign *against* Ahaz, and an omen for future generations in Israel. Ahaz would never personally see the fulfillment of the sign. But it was still a token of God's faithfulness in fulfilling His covenant with David. The Lord would graciously perpetuate David's line, in spite of the evil kings like Ahaz. And that line would eventually produce the virgin-born Messiah.

The real key to the sign lies in the name *Immanuel*. It means "God with us." Matthew gives the translation when he describes the fulfillment of the prophecy in Matthew 1:23. But I want you to notice that Isaiah also includes one other reference to Immanuel. You'll find it in Chapter 8, verse 8. Look at that for a moment. I believe this is the explanation of the sign to Ahaz.

It is a warning of judgment to come. Ahaz rejected the good news, so he gets bad news instead. The kingdom of Judah *will* ultimately be overthrown, not by the confederation of Syria and Israel, but by the Assyrians, whom Ahaz sinfully tried to make peace with. Isaiah 8:7 says,

**Now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them The waters of the River, strong and mighty; The king of Assyria and all his glory; He will go up over all his channels And go over all his banks.**

He is picturing Assyria like a mighty, overflowing river that will overwhelm and defeat Judah. Verse 8:

**8 He will pass through Judah, He will overflow and pass over, He will reach up to the neck; And the stretching out**



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**of his wings Will fill the breadth of Your land, O  
Immanuel.**

And he refers once more to Immanuel, the child of the virgin, calling the Promised land "Immanuel's land." This an obvious reference to the Messiah. And so it becomes very clear that Isaiah 7:14 has messianic significance. Now look at verse 9. Even in the midst of the threat of defeat at the hands of the Assyrians, there is hope:

**9 "Be shattered, O you peoples, and be broken in pieces!  
Give ear, all you from far countries. Gird yourselves, but  
be broken in pieces; Gird yourselves, but be broken in  
pieces.**

**10 Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing;  
Speak the word, but it will not stand, For God is with us."**

And there you see clearly the significance of the name *Immanuel*. It means "God with us. And Isaiah goes on to expand this prophecy by giving even more details about the child who was to be born in the famous prophecy of chapter 9, verse 6.

During this time of year, it is right that we pause to think about the true significance of Christ's birth. This is the real heart of what we celebrate during the Christmas season. It is summed up in a Hebrew name that means literally, "God with us." It is a promise of incarnate deity, a prophecy that God Himself would appear as a human infant, Immanuel, "God with us." This baby who was to be born would be God Himself in human form.

If we could condense all the truths of Christmas into only three words, these would be the words: "God with us." We tend to focus our attention at Christmas on the *infancy* of Christ. The greater truth of the holiday is His *deity*. More astonishing than a baby in the manger is the truth that this promised Baby is the omnipotent Creator of the heavens and the earth!

I hope you'll keep that in mind in the weeks to come. The way our society has commercialized and sentimentalized Christmas, even Christians tend to lose sight of its real meaning. God came

to earth in human form, shared in our infirmities, bore our sins and paid the price of them. That is what this sign points to, and we need to keep that clearly in view during the season that is now upon us.