

# The Stabilizing and Strengthening Power of the Incarnation

*Christmas*

By Ty Blackburn

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Isaiah 7:14  
**Preached on:** Sunday, December 17, 2023

**Providence Church**  
2146 Buford Hwy  
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

**Website:** [www.providenceduluth.org](http://www.providenceduluth.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch](http://www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch)

I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to the seventh chapter of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 7. This Sunday and then Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve, we're going to be expositing a couple of passages in Isaiah, letting God's word speak to us during this holiday season. The text this morning is actually Isaiah 7:14, and the title of the message is, "The Stabilizing and Strengthening Power of the Incarnation." The Stabilizing and Strengthening Power of the Incarnation. Isaiah 7:14 is one of the most glorious promises in all of Scripture. It's the place where God promises that a virgin will be with child and bear a son and you shall call his name Immanuel. The virgin birth of Christ. The fact that the Spirit of God would overshadow the Virgin Mary and Christ would enter the world through the womb of the Virgin, that is the doctrine of the incarnation, that is God became man. Incarnation is from the Latin root *incarne*, in and *carne*, in flesh. The doctrine of the incarnation is the enfleshment of God, the doctrine of the enfleshment of God, that is the doctrine that God became man. Christ, truly God, fully God and truly man, fully man.

And the moment of time in which that happened is arguably the most decisive moment in all history. I mean, we point to the cross as the key moment and yet the cross is the sequel to the incarnation. For Christ to die, he had to be made flesh and the moment when God entered time and space is the moment in which our salvation began to be realized. This reality that God became man, the Word became flesh, is not only essential to saving faith, I mean, to be sage, you have to believe that Jesus died for you. You have to believe that he is God's Son, that he is fully God, fully man. It's essential to saving faith, but it's not only essential to saving faith, it's foundational to the faithful Christian life. This doctrine provides strength and stability in turbulent tumultuous times. We're going to see the context in which it is given was to show us that in the storms of life, in the times of great doubt, the times of great struggle, that the fact that God entered time and space has everything to do about providing us comfort and strength and stability.

We're told there also that she would call his name Emmanuel, Immanuel is a Hebrew word which means *iman*, with us, *el*, God. Immanuel, with us, God, God with us. This is the root of the truth that gives us that stability and strength that God is with us in whatever circumstance in which we find ourselves. You find yourselves in trying times,

you find yourself suddenly overwhelmed by circumstances that were unforeseen, unanticipated, and the great strength of the incarnation is that God has come to be with you and he is with you in the moment. It's one of the promises that echoes throughout the pages of Scripture is that man in the beginning was with God in the garden of Eden, but then was separated from God, and yet the hope, the reason that we don't have to be afraid is God is coming again and once he comes again and he's with us, there is nothing to fear. God is with us. Immanuel.

Our text presents to us the promise of this incarnation and we're going to read it in context, we're going to read the whole chapter, the seventh chapter to see this promise in context. But just to give you some background, this promise was given, the events that we're going to read in chapter 7, a conversation between Isaiah the prophet and King Ahaz of Judah. This is during the period of time, redemptive history, in which the kingdom of God had been divided into two kingdoms. Remember, after the death of Solomon, the kingdom is divided between the southern kingdom and the northern kingdom, the northern kingdom called Israel, the southern kingdom called Judah. The southern kingdom is the kingdom in which Jerusalem remains and so it's the kingdom that is ruled over by the Davidic monarch, the Davidic line, that is the descendants of David. And so the promised Messiah is going to come through this line, the descendants of David. Jerusalem is the place of God's presence, the place of his temple. And so the southern kingdom of Judah is the focus of the book of Isaiah. They have departed from God and they're about to go, they're going through some tremendous affliction and it's about to get worse and King Ahaz, who turns out to be a very wicked king, in this moment finds Isaiah the prophet sent to him with a word from God. It's a word of comfort. It's a word of opportunity. Had Ahaz responded in faith, things would have been different than they turned out being. In fact, he responds in wicked, amazing unbelief. I mean, God is so kind and gracious to this evil king, and yet he adds evil upon evil in his rejection of God's goodness in this passage, and he leads Judah into a time of great suffering because of it.

What's interesting, and there's some neat relevance and resonance with what we may see in our day, because at this time, 735 BC, things have just really turned south politically and economically and culturally, that is that the 50 years from 790 to 740 BC that Uzziah, Ahaz's grandfather reigned, were some of the most prosperous times in Judah's history. Stable economy, political security, I mean, the Assyrian kingdom that tended to be the villain and the perpetual threat from 900 down to 600 BC, they were tied up with internal strife and they weren't pressing at the door of Judah or Israel. So for 50 years, they had time of great prosperity and security and that began to change around the time of the death of Uzziah in 740. And Uzziah's son Jotham died shortly after Uzziah does, and so the grandson now, Ahaz, is king and in 735 BC, he has a crisis at his door. What's happened is, I mentioned Assyria, that is A-S-S-Y-R-I-A. Assyria, and I spell it, you'll see in just a moment why, Assyria is the great military superpower of the day, a wicked kingdom known for just incredible brutality, terroristic tactics. They're brutal in the way they subdue nations and so they're hated and feared by everyone. They're feared by Israel and Judah and Moab and the Philistines and all those around. And so in 735 BC, the Assyrians are threatening again, their expansionist policies are now obvious and evident.

They're beginning to go throughout the area and to seek to subdue the kingdoms that are just north of Israel. And so, Israel and Syria, now Syria, S-Y-R-I-A, not Assyria, Syria, same area as Syria today, also called the kingdom of the Arameans, Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel, Syria is above Israel. Remember, Judah is down here. We're talking about Judah. Judah is our focus. Israel and Syria have made an alliance, and they are trying to come against Judah and the reason they are is they're trying to get together and forge a multinational alliance to stand against Assyria, the world superpower. And Judah has not gone along with that and so Israel, the northern kingdom, and Syria have come against them and are ready to invade. And the southern kingdom is in great distress. The Davidic King Ahaz is terrified. And so we're going to see, God's going to send a word to him, a word of comfort through the prophet Isaiah and clear instructions on what he needs to do, and what we're going to see basically is that he finds himself in the nation of Judah, the southern kingdom, find themselves in a time of great peril, sudden distress, and what they need to do, according to Isaiah, is trust in the Lord.

In fact, the whole message of the book of Isaiah, Isaiah's name means "salvation is of Yahweh." It's actually the inverse of Jesus' name. Jesus' name, Joshua, Yeshua, is "Yahweh is salvation," Yah, shua. Shua, salvation, Yah, short for Yahweh. Isaiah's name, is essentially shua Yah, eshua Yah, that is, "salvation is of Yahweh." Same message as Jesus' name and that's his message throughout the book. In whom will you trust? Will you trust in the schemes of men? Will you trust in human ingenuity? Will you trust in the hopes of political success, diplomatic efforts, or will you trust in the Lord? And the message of Isaiah to Ahaz in the southern kingdom is you must trust in the Lord.

And so he's going to come and offer a word of tremendous comfort that had Ahaz received it correctly, it would have been a great deliverance, but instead Ahaz is going to turn his back on what God offers. God's basically saying, "Trust in Me. You have nothing to worry about from these two kingdoms. They're just smoldering wicks and firebrands, they mean nothing. I will not let them harm you." And then Ahaz, if you read the whole story in 2 Kings 16, you read the account of Ahaz' reign, what he does, instead of trusting the Lord, he actually, remember, it's Syria and Israel against Judah, instead of trusting God that he doesn't have to worry about Syria and Israel, he sends emissaries to Assyria itself and makes a treaty with Assyria to protect him from Israel and Syria. Well, they do protect him from Israel and Syria. In fact, they destroy and devastate Israel and Syria just like God had said they would. But now the Assyrians, it's like he grabbed a tiger by the tail, one commentator said. He asks a tiger for help and he grabs him by the tail and what happens? The tiger turns on him. Assyria brings greater destruction than Israel and Syria would have. You don't trust in the schemes of men, trust in the Lord.

And in the midst of this, God gives to this wicked king a glimpse into the glorious plan of salvation, which is astounding. He tells him the plan, the first time it becomes abundantly clear, the way God is going to save is by God becoming man. He's going to become a baby. And Ahaz gets to hear that message and of course, he sadly rejects it. But we get this wonderful blessing through this and we're going to see that for us then, the application of this that we're seeing is that when you find yourself suddenly in turmoil, suddenly your life becomes more turbulent, if you find yourself suddenly just wracked by

circumstances that shake you to your core, like these people were shaking, what do you do? You turn to the Lord and you remember that he's promised that he is with you and that the incarnation itself is a powerful, powerful sign to you. It is a testimony. It is a signpost saying God is with you in this moment.

Had mentioned a little while ago, we have different experiences during the holiday season. For some, it's great times of family and others, it's difficulty. You may be experiencing the first holiday without someone you love deeply, first Christmas, and that's painful. You may be experiencing pain in lots of ways. And even if it's not that way during the Christmas season, the reality is life is pain and suffering is coming, and sudden suffering comes so quickly and when it does, what do you need to do? What do we need to do? We need to remember that the Lord is a God who came to be with us. And I love those words of Jesus, what he says at the Great Commission, how does he end it? "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." It's the incarnation that Isaiah presents to us as a signpost to encourage us.

So we're going to read the chapter with that introduction. Now let's read the chapter and you'll hear and you'll see what happens and then we're going to really try to look at verse 14. Isaiah 7:1.

1 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 [or Syria] and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not conquer it. 2 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.

What a powerful description of their fear. "Then the LORD said to Isaiah," Ahaz and the people were shaking,

3 Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field, 4 and say to him,

This is the message from God to Ahaz.

'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.

That is, the king of the Arameans or the Syrians some of your translations say, and the son of Remaliah, that is, the king of Israel. Don't be afraid of these two smoldering firebrands,

5 'Because Aram, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has planned evil against you, saying, [they've been saying this,] 6 "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," [don't be afraid because of that,] 7 thus says the Lord GOD: "It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass.

That's enough right there, it shall not happen, God says, and it doesn't. Even though he doesn't believe, God doesn't use the Arameans or Israel to come against him. He wipes them out just like he said he was going to, and because Ahaz didn't believe, the calamity came from another direction. Verse 7 again,

7 thus says the Lord GOD: "It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass. 8 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), 9 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." 10 Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, 11 "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven."

That is astounding that God did this to this man. "You ask anything you want and I'll prove My word to you." This is the prophet of God telling him that. God's speaking to him and the text says, "the LORD spoke again to Ahaz saying." Look at Ahaz.

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

This is way worse than Peter saying, "No, Lord, I will not eat." When the Lord says, "Take, kill and eat," and he says, "No, Lord, I will not eat." He knows God's telling him to do something, but he says no, because he thinks he knows better. This is way worse than that. God has directly said to him, "Ask from Me a sign," and he said, "I will not test the LORD!" He apparently knows a little bit of the Bible. The Bible does say, don't put the Lord your God at the test. You and I aren't to invent ourselves, "Hey, Lord, give me a sign." No, that's not for us to say. But when God says, "Ask from Me a sign," you know what you do? You ask for a sign because he told you to.

Look what Isaiah says next.

13 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? 14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign [even though you didn't ask for one, I'm going to give you one]: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. 15 He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good. 16 For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken. 17 The

LORD will bring on you, on your people, and on your father's house such days as have never come since the day that Ephraim separated from Judah, the king of Assyria." 18 In that day 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. 19 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. 20 In that day the Lord will shave with a razor, hired from regions beyond the Euphrates (that is, with the king of Assyria), the head and the hair of the legs; and it will also remove the beard. 21 Now in that day a man may keep alive a heifer and a pair of sheep; 22 and because of the abundance of the milk produced he will eat curds, for everyone that is left within the land will eat curds and honey. 23 And it will come about in that day, that every place where there used to be a thousand vines, valued at a thousand shekels of silver, will become briars and thorns. 24 People will come there with bows and arrows because all the land will be briars and thorns. 25 As for all the hills which used to be cultivated with the hoe, you will not go there for fear of briars and thorns; but they will become a place for pasturing oxen and for sheep to trample.

Listen, the idea of curds and honey is the food of poverty and he's saying, you are going to be impoverished, and chapter 8 is going to go on, we're not going to take time to read it to tell you more of the desolation that is going to come because of Ahaz's unbelief.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer and ask his blessing on his word.

*Father, we do thank You again for the preciousness of Your word. We pray now that You might cause Your word to speak to our hearts, that the entrance of Your word might give light, and in Your light we might see light, and we might be more repentant and that we might be more firm in faith and trusting in all that Christ is for us. We pray in His name, amen.*

So the idea is in the midst of a crazy world, in the midst of a frightening level of social decay and political turmoil, because they were experiencing moral decline, they were experiencing economic hardship because of all that was happening around them, and they were experiencing an imminent threat of invasion, and what God does to send them in that moment is, "Listen, you can take comfort because I am with you and you don't have to be afraid because I am with you." Now, what I want to do is take the rest of the time, I want to talk about two points in the text that help us understand how this applies to us, and that first is the situation, first point, the situation into which the promise was spoken. The promise is really contained in the name, Immanuel, God is with us, okay? The situation into which the promise was spoken, and of course, the promise also that testifies to that is the promise of the virgin birth, that God will be with us.

The situation into which the promise was spoken, I mentioned 735 BC, the southern kingdom of Judah. They are in a time of great uncertainty, great terror, and it's a terrifying time. Look at verse 2 again. The Arameans have camped in Ephraim. It was

reported to the house of David that the Arameans have camped in Ephraim, that is the Syrians have come down now and they are in Israel and Israel and Syria have amassed their armies on the northern border of Judah and when they hear that, the king, his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind. They're not just afraid, they are terrified. Terror seizes them. There are moments where terror can suddenly seize us, where the world suddenly shifts. Some of you have experienced an earthquake. You know, to think about, we don't have these things in this part of the world very much, at least in our area, Eastern United States, rarely do we have earthquakes, and if we do, we're not really even sure it's happening, but in parts of the world, they know it's happening. And my parents were in Mexico City one time and there was an earthquake and they were high up in a high rise and the world started shaking, and mom and dad trusted in the Lord, they were not as terrified as some. They were actually people who ran down to the lobby, some without clothes on. They were so afraid, rushing because fear gripped them, seized them, and they ran. The world shakes up like that, we're terrified. We can be terrified if we don't know the Lord is with us. And as Christians, we should not be terrified. That's why the Bible is continuing to say, do not be afraid.

But it was a terrifying time and the reality is we will find ourselves in terrifying times, but we're not to be terrified. In this world, you will have tribulation. You and I will find ourselves in circumstances that would terrify a person who did not know God was with him, and you will feel in your flesh that temptation to be terrified. In the midst of this terrifying time, God sent a comforting word through his prophet. You have a comforting word from God. The situation, I've really got five subpoints here. A terrifying time, a comforting word from God. Verse 3, "Then the LORD said to Isaiah, 'Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub.'" I think it's interesting, "Take your little boy with you." We don't know how old he was, probably just a few years old. And his name is Shear-jashub, that's what they named him. This is not one that I've ever seen anybody named. This is a good name for you. We've got a lot of families that are expecting babies. Here's one for you right there. Shear-jashub. It means "the remnant will remain." And his name actually is a comforting name that God will care for his remnant.

So take him with you. Take your little boy out to meet the king. Meet him on the highway to the fuller's field and say to him, and this is your message, and this is what you say, "Take care and be calm. Have no fear and do not be fainthearted." Look at that emphasis, "Take care and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands." What are you afraid of? If the Lord is with you, who is against you? Israel and Syria, the Arameans, really, you're afraid of them when God is with you? They're just two smoldering firebrands, the Lord says. Even though they have fierce anger, they're really mad at you, they're furious that you haven't united with them, they're trying to get this multinational alliance, and they're coming to punish you for your unwillingness to join it. They planned evil against you, verse 5. They're saying, verse 6, "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." They're planning to put another king in. They're going to take the Davidic king off the throne and put someone else on the throne. But, "thus says the Lord GOD, it shall not come to pass." That's the word of

comfort. He adds to it, "For the head of Aram is Damascus," that is the capital city, "and the head of Damascus is Rezin," that is the king, "(now within another 65 years Ephraim," that is the northern kingdom, Israel, "will be shattered, so that it is no longer a people)." Listen, I'm going to so devastate the northern kingdom that in 65 years, though they're going to be uprooted in the next 13 years after this, I'm going to so bring, the Assyrians are going to so disperse the Jews from the northern kingdom and so bring in other people from other places that there will be no ethnic identity in the north in 65 years. It's going to be eradicated. This is what led to the Samaritans. The Samaritans are a result of what's going to happen at God's judgment on the northern kingdom. That is all these other nations coming in who did not serve the Lord and all the people that did serve the Lord, those who didn't serve the Lord, they weren't faithful serving the Lord, but they still were the descendants of Jacob, they're spread out all over the world. And God did that. And he's saying, you don't need to be worried about it. Don't worry about them. But look at verse 9, this is the key verse really of application in the whole passage. After he says, this is 9B, here's the statement, "If you will not believe, you surely shall not last." The third point, the third subpoint, first point is the situation in which the promise was spoken, a terrifying time, a comforting word from God, a clear call to faith. Verse 9, a clear call to faith.

"If you will not believe, you surely shall not last." It's tough to translate the Hebrew of this verse. The word "believe" and the word "shall last" or "shall not last," is the same Hebrew word. It's from the Hebrew word "aman," which means, its root meaning is "firmness; stability." Its extended meaning is "truth." Something's true, reliable, information reliable, promise reliable. It's firm. You see the firm idea comes into that. And it's actually the word for faith, to believe. We get our English word "amen" from that. "So be it. May that be true." It means "true." What you've spoken is true. When we say amen, that's what you're saying.

But he says here, "If you will not be firm, you surely shall not be made firm." It's different stems of the same Hebrew verb. The first is a causative. If you will not make yourself firm in faith, if you will not be firm in faith. And then the second where it says "last" is a passive voice of the Hebrew verb. The first is an active and causative element. If you will not make yourself firm in faith, you shall not be made firm by God is the idea. He's saying that, "Listen, Ahaz, I've given you My promise, and the question is, what will you do with My promise? You're terrified. You have reason to be, humanly speaking. You're no match for the combined armies of the Arameans in Israel. You're not a match at all. No, you have no hope. But I am with you and I'm telling you, they will not harm you. In fact, I'm going to just wipe them out. But you must choose to stand firm in your faith. If you will not stand," this is the idea, "if you will not stand firm in your faith, you will not be made to stand firm at all." That's really the best translation I can give you of the passage. "If you will not stand firm in your faith, you will not be made to stand firm at all." The idea is that our faith in God, through faith, he then strengthens us. It's us knowing we have no hope, trusting in God's promise, then faith leads to faithfulness. The reason you're faithful, it's an outgrowth of faith. It's God making you able to do what he promised that he would do if you trusted him.



So here God graciously, this wicked king, God says, listen, he gives him the way of salvation, "Ahaz, what you need to do is be made firm in your faith. Firmly believe. Firmly trust. Believe that what I'm saying is true. Believe it and you will be made firm. The world can be going like this, but if you believe My word, you will be rock solid." That's what he's saying. God's kindness to this wicked king. And then he goes beyond that. I mean, the Lord comes and speaks to this guy. He, of course, knows he's not going to, God knows all things, but here's God's lovingkindness to come speak to this king. But he goes beyond it and the next point, it's not just, I've given you subpoints under number one, a terrifying time, a comforting word from God, a call to faith. D, 1D, an extravagant grace. What he does next is over the top gracious. "Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, 'Ask a sign for yourself.'" Why did he say that? Because he knows Ahaz is having trouble believing and he says, "Ask for a sign." And then make it as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven. He's saying in a sense, "Ask for anything you want. Let your mind ask for the most amazing thing. I will give it to you." God says that to him. Look at the grace of God. Look at his love for sinners. Look at his love for unbelievers who he knows even will not repent, the kindness of God drawing men to repentance. It's an extravagant grace.

But then look at an egregiously evil response is E, 1E, an egregiously evil response. Ahaz asserts self-righteousness. "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" This is a man who never cares what God has to say until this particular point and he just turns God's word around on the Lord in an amazing act of unbelief. The reality is that when people will not believe, it doesn't matter what God does, they will not believe. This is why Jesus, that powerful reality that comes out of the story of the rich man and Lazarus, remember? Sometimes we just think we can convince unbelievers. Now, we're supposed to do everything we can to persuade them. We're supposed to try, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, there's this tension. Knowing the fear of God, we persuade men. We persuade, we seek to encourage them, to draw them in. We try as best we can by the power of God's grace to persuade men but if they will not be persuaded, nothing will persuade them. Remember what Jesus says about the rich man and Lazarus? Remember the rich man and Lazarus both die. Lazarus had been the poor man begging at his gate. The rich man ignored him. The rich man ends up in the hell part of a Sheol and Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom, the place of blessing, anticipation of what heaven would be after Christ comes. And somehow at this point, as Jesus tells the story, the rich man can see Lazarus in Abraham's bosom and the rich man is in torment and he says to Abraham, "Father Abraham, please send Lazarus with just a drop of water that he might come and drop a drop of water on my tongue because I'm perishing in this heat, suffering, in agony, a drop of water would be so amazing. Just one drop of water, send him." Abraham says to him, "There's a chasm fixed between us. You can't come over, we can't come over there." The man now distressed in his own perplexity, there's no hope for him, he says, "Father Abraham, please send Lazarus to my brothers who are still alive. Tell them about this so that they will not come to this awful place." And Abraham says this, "If your brothers have the law and the prophets and will not believe, neither will they believe if a man rises from the dead." If they won't believe this book, they won't believe even if somebody rises from the dead to tell them hell is real.

Such is the nature of unbelief and we see it on display in the life of Ahaz. "I will not ask nor will I test the LORD!" He leaves this encounter and goes and begins making negotiations with the Assyrians, sends a delegation and then later meets with the Assyrian delegation himself. He's going to go around God's plan and you cannot go around God's plan. Like I said, he grabs a tiger by the tail and the worst, the end result is worse than the first. In fact, that's the sixth point, 1F, a devastating outcome. What he's describing in verse 17 now is what's going to happen. "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." The king of Assyria is coming to you. He's coming after you. This is the worst time since the kingdom separated. There have been bad times. This is going to be far worse than any before, he says. This is God's judgment now on Judah.

Now, that's the situation into which the promise was spoken, that's the amazing situation into which this incredible promise, a virgin will be with a child and bear a son, and you will call his name Immanuel, was spoken. That's point number one. Point number two, the stabilizing, strengthening power of the promise. The stabilizing, strengthening power of the promise. There's just two subpoints here. The first is a key word is the word sign that is used in verse 11 and verse 14. "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven," verse 11. Ahaz, "I will not do that." Verse 14, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign," very important word in the Scriptures, it speaks of an authenticating, certifying mark. It's used in the Scripture, though, of miraculous events that testify to something else, that certify, that authenticate. God does a miracle that authenticates something. And so what he's saying is, "Ask for an authenticating miracle to the promise that you've just heard that you're not going to have to worry about the Arameans and Israel coming down. Ask Me for a promise. Ask Me for a sign. Ask Me for whatever you want, whatever miracle you want. I'm going to give you that miracle to certify My word."

This is a word that's used a number of places, but one of the places I think that's most relevant, and you'll see it used like this, this is the way it's used most often, is of a miracle that certifies God's word. In Exodus chapter 4, when God tells Moses to go to Egypt and to tell the people of Israel that he's come to deliver them, God sent him to deliver them. Moses says in chapter 4, verse 1 of Exodus, "Why are they going to believe me when I say that God sent me? I'm going to be telling them, 'Thus says the Lord, God's going to deliver you from Egypt,' how are they going to believe that when I say 'Thus says the Lord,' the Lord really said it?" And God says, "Throw the staff you're holding in your hand, throw it on the ground." He throws it on the ground, it turns into a snake. Moses runs away immediately. God says, "Come back, Moses. Grab that snake by the tail." He grabs it by the tail, turns into a staff. He says, "This is the first sign. If they don't believe that sign, I'll give you another one. Put your hand into your cloak. Pull it out. It's leprous. Put it back into your cloak. Pull it out. It's healed. If they don't believe these two signs," then he says, "take some water out, pour it on the ground, it'll turn into blood." The signs authenticate the word. Do you see that? The miracle authenticates the word. This is the purpose of signs. This is the way that God reveals his Scripture. This is how it happens all throughout. He pours out miracles to authenticate those who speak his word,

particularly in Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus and the apostles, those three great seasons of miraculous signs, the three great giving of the word of God, the law, then the prophets, then the gospels in the New Testament.

Now think about that, the virgin birth is a sign. "I'll give you a sign." Now, the sign's going to be for him not a sign of blessing at the moment, but he gives in this moment, God gives a glimpse into the future that is glorious. He looks 735 years into the future until a virgin will conceive. And so the virgin birth is actually given as a sign. It is a miraculous event done by God to authenticate his word. And what is his word he's authenticating? I think what he's really trying to say in this particular passage is he's authenticating the promise that God is with us. The promise is his name, Immanuel, Immanuel, iman, with us, el, God. That's his promise. God is with us. And the authenticating, validating, miraculous sign of that is a virgin will conceive.

The virgin birth itself, the moment of the incarnation is a sign that we're to look to. They were to look ahead to that. God's going to do that. We're to look back to that and what he's saying is when you feel like God is not with you, look at the virgin birth. Look at the fact that God entered time and space. Look at the amazing, astounding miracle that is and let that help you to be firm in your faith because if you will be firm in your faith, if you will make yourself firm in faith, you will be made firm and able to stand. He said, if you will not be made firm in your faith, if you will not make yourself firm in your faith, you will not be made to stand and the corollary is, if you will make yourself firm in faith, you will be made firm to stand. According to your faith, so be it done unto you.

The promise is God with us. The sign, A was the sign, the word, the key word sign. 2B, the strengthening power of the promise. The promise itself is really in the name, God with us, Immanuel. And the virgin birth as the confirmation of that promise. A virgin will be with child and bear a son. I want you to think with me about this a moment, the reality of why God entered the world through this means. I mean, just think about it. It's this kind of thing we have to stop and do. God could have just sent down his Son as a full-grown man. He could have created, I mean, he created Adam as a full-grown man. Adam wasn't a baby, he was a man. And the second Adam, the last Adam could have been made a man that way too. He could have been made truly man, fully man as a grown man. But he didn't do it that way. He made him a man at the moment of conception. Why? What does that say? One thing I think that he wants us to see is for a virgin to be with child is a miracle and it recalls that the careful Jewish Bible scholar could have seen in this an interesting connection. Turn with me to Genesis chapter 3. This is the fall of man, sin enters the world. The serpent tempts Eve in these verses, she takes the fruit, eats it, gives it to her husband who also eats it, then God comes down, speaks to the man, speaks to the woman, then he speaks to the serpent. I mean, yeah, he speaks to the serpent and judges him. Verse 14, "The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed.'" That's the puzzling word that a Jewish Bible scholar should have always puzzled over when they were reading their Bible as they were watching redemptive history unfold.

"Her seed." This word "seed," the Hebrew word is "zera," means seed. It may help you to hear the Greek word, the Greek translation of the Old Testament is called the Septuagint. When they translated the word zera into Greek, it was the word sperma. Seed. In Scripture, the seed in conception, the way that the Lord has made us to procreate is the man provides the seed, the woman, of course, the egg and the womb. But the seed is with the man. The woman does not have the seed and so when they read this, how is it that the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman? How is there enmity between the serpent and the woman, yes, but between your seed and her seed, this is telling us something amazing about this one to come. This is actually what's called in theological circles, the proto-gospel, that is the first preaching of the gospel, Genesis 3:15. This is the gospel right here, right in the wake of the fall. I mean, the ink's not dry on the reporting of the fall, and here is the gospel. God is giving the gospel. He says, "This is how I'm going to save. I'm going to put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." That's the cross. The seed of the woman will come and the seed of the serpent will bruise him on the heel and he will bruise the serpent on the head. The image of a snake biting a man on the heel, the snake seeks to kill the man injecting venom and the man's foot smashes the serpent's head, that's what God is going to do. He's going to undo all that's happened in Genesis 3 when the seed of the woman comes and the careful Bible scholar's saying, "How can the woman have the seed without a man?" You see, it's fulfilled in the virgin birth of Christ. Isaiah 7:14, the first time as the Scripture unfolds, now there's something, a dot that connects way back to Genesis 3:15. Yes, and it adds to it that when this seed comes, he's not just a seed humanly, he is actually Immanuel, God with us. The fact that there is no male seed, there is no human father is God is his father. That's what was being unfolded. Isaiah is giving this great glimpse into the plan of God and giving it to the most unlikely person, wicked Ahaz.

So here is, and what he's saying is, this man will have incredible ability and power. He will be wounded as we see on the cross, but in his wounding, think about that, as the snake bites the heel, what happens? In the biting, he's smashed. In the killing of Christ, Satan was smashed. He was defeated. It was through death that Christ won the victory. So look ahead to the time when a virgin will be with child and bear a son and his name will be Immanuel, but then beyond that, it's not just the ability of this seed, it's the compassion. I mean, this is where you think about the reality. Why as a baby? Because you would think as a man, he could have come in as a man, full-grown man, and he would have been sinless and spotless, right? Spotless lamb, isn't that all that's required? Well, no, he needed to grow up and he needed to be tempted in every way yet without sin. He needed to have a perfect record of righteousness, therefore, he needed to live a human life and be tempted in all these different ways. Yes, he needed to do that. So he needed to be born, he needed to come into the world, you know, at least live here 30 years so he could be tempted in every way. He still could have come in at 15 and been 45.

Why in the womb? Why at conception? What does that say? What it says is, God sent his Son to enter into the full, listen, the full experience of our human experience, our human

life. To experience everything he was made an embryo. Think about that. God becomes flesh as an embryo in the womb, depended upon the nourishment of his mother's womb. He experiences nine months gestation in the womb. He's not missing out on anything that you and I have experienced. Do you see that? He is determined to experience everything that you and I experienced. The author of Hebrews says, "since the children share in flesh and blood, He also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is the devil." He goes on to say in 2:17, that he had to be made like his brethren in all things so that he might be a faithful high priest able to sympathize with us," Hebrews 4:15. He experienced everything you and I experience, including being delivered into this world through the birth canal. He experienced that. He came into the world as a baby dependent upon his mother. He needed to be carried and cared for and nursed and looked after, to have his diaper changed. He needed to learn to walk and to learn to talk. He needed to have his dad teach him things, his mom teach him things.

God in flesh. Fully God, truly God. And isn't that amazing? So he can feel what you feel. You say, "Is God really with us? Does He really care?" You find yourself racked with sudden tragedy, your life broken, you feel like things are shattered. If you know Jesus, you know Immanuel. He's with you. He's not going to leave you. He's shown it so clearly in the way he came into the world. He knows what it's like to experience the loss of people he loves. He knows what it's like to be rejected. He knows what it's like to be misunderstood, misrepresented. He knows what it's like to be hated and scorned, and everything he knows was always unjustly so. You and I are hated and scorned, a lot of times there's some good reason for it, isn't there? Maybe it's not mostly good, but there's always some grain of truth in it. Jesus is our great Savior and so when he says, "Lo, I'm with you always even to the end of the earth," is there ever a circumstance you will find yourself in which he is not willing to be fully there with you? He came and experienced this so that he can draw near to you and support you. That's what Hebrews 2:17 says, so he can come alongside you and come to your aid.

Now, God could have come to your aid anyway, right? He's able to do all things. But he's saying, "Listen, I want to come to your aid, not as someone who just has the ability, but as someone who has the true compassion and affection. I want to come to your aid as someone who understands you and what you're going through." You can never find yourself in an experience, no matter how tragic, no matter how horrible, in which Jesus cannot fully relate to you. The author of Proverbs said there's a friend who sticks closer than a brother. He's bone of our bones, flesh of our flesh. He clings to us. When he says Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," the promise there, he's writing to the Hebrews. They were going through a lot of affliction too, just like we've seen in 1 Peter, just like now in Isaiah 7. They're wondering, "Where is God? Is He with us? Look at our circumstances." "I will never leave you nor forsake you." He uses double negatives in both of those statements. It's literally this, "I will no never leave you. I will no never forsake you." That's his promise and the incarnation certifies it to you. He entered into everything you and I will ever experience, and he invites us to run to him and to know his love and support in every moment. That's the glory of our Savior.

Let's go to him in prayer.

*Our Father, we praise You for who You are. Lord Jesus, we marvel at all that You are as the eternal Son of God, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bones. Lord, keep opening the eyes of our hearts so that we can understand and begin to comprehend the height of Your love, the depth of Your grace. Lord, some of us are hurting in profound ways, and we thank You that You know because You're God, You know our thoughts before we think them, You know the numbers of hair on our head, You know our circumstances, our words before we speak them, because You're God, You have all knowledge. But Lord Jesus, we worship You because You know what we feel like. You know what it is to be a man in our circumstance. We marvel at Your love. Be near to us and we thank You that You will. Open our eyes to see that You are always near us. Forgive our unbelief. Make us firm in our faith. Help us to be firm in our faith so that we will stand firm. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.*