



BETHEL
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The Immanuel Principle, Part 2

Isaiah 8:9-9:1,

9 Be broken, you peoples, and be shattered;
give ear, all you far countries;
strap on your armor and be shattered;
strap on your armor and be shattered.

10 Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing;
speak a word, but it will not stand,
for God is with us.

11 For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: 12 "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. 13 But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. 14 And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of

stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 15 And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”

16 Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. 17 I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. 18 Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. 19 And when they say to you, “Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,” should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? 20 To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. 21 They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. 22 And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.

9 But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The Unenvied Christian

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul wrote these words:

1 Corinthians 15:19, “If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”

What a strange statement! Especially when you think of it in the context of evangelism. *Come to Christ and become the object of pity! Trust Christ alone and you will not become powerful, healthy, or wealthy. Rather, the world will look at you and say, “Too bad! I feel sorry for him!”* Paul said:

1 Corinthians 4:13b, “...we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things...”

What a downer! But then again, that was how Paul viewed the world. Isn't it? Actually not! Didn't Paul also say this:

Romans 8:37, “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.”

2 Corinthians 2:14, “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ...”

In fact, Christ said this:

Matthew 5:6, “Blessed [which in the Hebrew reflects a word which means, ‘to be envied’] are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

We see it in Isaiah and his treatment of the “Immanuel Principle.” Though God's people were facing certain destruction, nevertheless the Lord gave them the sign of Immanuel, which signaled both temporal as well as eternal victory, if God's people would maintain their trust in Christ! Now we will see that this principle was intended by God to be a sign of identity not only for Ahaz, but for every child of God!

“Immanuel” is a principle by which the redeemed must live.

Isaiah 8:1, “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Take for yourself a large tablet and write on it in ordinary letters...’”

The idea behind the language here was so that all could read what Isaiah was penning! Like Martin Luther when he nailed his 95 theses on the Wittenberg castle door requesting a public debate, so Isaiah here was to post this prophecy in a public place for all to read!

Isaiah 8:1b, “...Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey”

This literally reads: “speed-spoil-haste-booty” which no doubt was a Hebraism at the time describing the conquering of a nation or city. First there is the “speed” of the army in destroying a city. Then there is the “spoil” which is individually gathered. Then there is the “hasty” withdrawal of the army. Finally there is the handling of the “booty” which in war typically took the form of cattle and people/slaves.

Isaiah 8:2, “And I will take to Myself faithful witnesses for testimony, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.”

God here is detailing the destruction that awaited the Northern Kingdoms of Palestine at the hands of the Assyrians, a destruction that began in Palestine in 734 B.C. and reached its zenith in 722 B.C. with the fall of Israel. It was the news of this horrible event that Isaiah was to post in a public place for all to read. Now as his witnesses to the posting of this prophecy, Isaiah says that Uriah and Zechariah, Ahaz’s trusted priest and advisor, could vouch for his actions. Their presence was requested that they might report back to the king.

Isaiah 8:3-4, “So [the NASB makes it sound like Isaiah’s response here was in consequence to God’s call in vv. 1-2, but it wasn’t. The “so” is simply a copula and could be translated as, “Then” or “Afterwards...”] I approached the prophetess [his wife], and she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then the Lord said to me, ‘Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz; for before the boy knows how to cry out ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.”

This sounds familiar, doesn’t it? Isaiah’s wife, like the virgin of Isaiah 7, would have a son whose existence was to be a reminder of the impending doom of the nation. In fact, Isaiah was to name him the contents of the placard he earlier posted, “Speed-Spoil-Haste-Booty” - which in Hebrew is Maher-shalal-hash-baz!

Now you must see that this child is intimately linked to the “Immanuel-child” of Isaiah 7:14. The phrase, “for before the boy knows” utilizes the identical wording of Isaiah 7! We must not confine the message of “Immanuel” to the child born of the virgin. Immanuel could be and was the designation of many children and/or people in Isaiah’s day and throughout Redemptive History culminating in the birth of Christ in Matthew 1!

Isaiah 8:5-7, “And again the Lord spoke to me further, saying, ‘Inasmuch as these people [referencing Israel, the Northern Kingdom] have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah, and rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah [recall that Israel- rather than trusting God- forged an alliance with the

wicked nation of Aram in their attempt to withstand the threat of Assyria]; now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates [one of the rivers that flowed through Assyria], even the king of Assyria and all his glory; and it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks.”

How vivid! God pictures the rising threat of Assyria as a large river about to crest! Shiloh was the water supply for Jerusalem via the Gihon Spring that ran out of it and so represents the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and so God. The Euphrates at the time was a large river in Assyria. Accordingly, because Israel refused to trust God on account of the impending threat of Assyria, but rather forged an alliance with Aram (rather than Judah), they would be destroyed by the Assyrians. Using the metaphor of water, Israel rejected the gentle, quiet waters of Shiloh/Judah. As a result, they would drown and be devastated by the raging waters of the Euphrates!

And yet, Israel wouldn't be the only nation impacted by the flood, Judah also would suffer great loss on account of their disbelief.

Isaiah 8:8, “Then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through, it will reach even to the neck; and the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.”

There is a mixing of metaphors here. Think of a flood victim floating in the water barely keeping his head above the rising tide- that would be Judah! Or, a large bird of prey overshadowing the land and so terrorizing the inhabitants. In both cases the victim does not die, but they certainly are traumatized. And such would be the impact to Judah on account of the Assyrians when they attacked the Northern Kingdoms, trauma, terror, fear, dread, and panic!

Notice with me a very important point: Isaiah/God directs this prophecy to “Immanuel.” You mean the child born to the virgin in Isaiah 7 or Isaiah's son in Isaiah 8:3-4? NO! Here “Immanuel” references ALL the people of God. This brings us to the identity of Immanuel.

Isaiah 8:8, “then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through, it will reach even to the neck; and the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.”

Throughout the book of Isaiah there is a contrast between the formal, people of God who had rebelled against the Lord and the genuine servant of Christ who maintained their trust in Him. Here the focus is on the genuine servant of Christ, the remnant, whom Isaiah identifies as, “Immanuel.” Did you get that? Immanuel is not simply the child born of the virgin in Isaiah 7 or of the prophetess in Isaiah 8. Immanuel is a reference to any and all servants of Christ who on account of their trust in God face insurmountable difficulties. And though they falter and even fail, in the end they overcome on account of the Christ who is with them! With this, our understanding of the “Immanuel Principle” is crystalized. The child born to the virgin indeed was and is Immanuel, a sign of the covenant presence of God with His people! But now get this, WE, the genuine servant of Christ are the object of both the world's as well as the religious' scorn and the ones who refuse to give in to the critic's call to, “Curse God and die!” They also embody this sign and so the principle!

Isaiah 8:9-10, “Be broken, O peoples, and be shattered; and give ear, all remote places of the earth. Gird yourselves, yet be shattered; gird yourselves, yet be shattered. Devise a plan but it will be

thwarted; state a proposal, but it will not stand, for God is with us.”

Of all people and from all outward appearances we truly are most to be pitied! For unlike the wealthy, strong, and powerful, we who trust in Christ have become the scum of the earth. Ours is NOT the lot of the successful worldling, listen to how Asaph spoke of them:

Psalm 73:4-7a, “For there are no pains in their death; and their body is fat. They are not in trouble *as other* men; nor are they plagued like mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; the garment of violence covers them. Their eye bulges from fatness...”

This typically is not a description of the genuine servant of God. Rather we, Immanuel, are described in the Bible as “a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.” So what benefit is there in being a servant of Christ? Well, unlike with the wicked, God draws near to us, strengthens us, upholds us, protects us, and encourages us! That is the essence of the Immanuel Principle! Upon our person this sign has been placed—a sign which says that this world is not our home, we will be acquainted with toil, hardship, and grief, yet through it all God is with us!

Do you understand the implication and so the significance of this? Will you this day embrace this sign, “Immanuel”—NOT for this afternoon or even this week, BUT for now and throughout the rest of your life? Will you take up this mantle, this cross, this standard? Will you allow it to be your identity?

You say, what does this mean? It means that we understand that this world is not our home and therefore not our friend. With Christ we are going to be men and women of sorrow. Once and for all we cast off the expectation that God intends to give us heaven in this state of sin and misery. In and through it all things we have the assurance that Christ is with us and will never forsake us such that we look to Him alone for our well-being, strength, comfort, hope, and security!

Now if we adopt this principle as the governing paradigm of our life, it will dramatically affect the way we live. In fact, Isaiah picks up on this as he describes The Confession that arises from Immanuel!

Isaiah 8:9, “be broken, O peoples, and be shattered; and give ear, all remote places of the earth. Gird yourselves, yet be shattered; gird yourselves, yet be shattered.”

In contrast to the gaiety and frivolity of the false religion that had swept through Israel and Judah, God called His people to a life of mourning over sin and so poverty of spirit on account of Immanuel! This world is not our home, it is not heaven! Stop thinking like it is!

We laugh at Peter who on the Mount of Transfiguration endeavored to build a tabernacle (Matthew 17:4) thinking that this experience was where God would have him to live and so worship. And yet we are no different! Peter, like we, must understand that these “high” moments are just that, high moments. Rather he and we are to live in this land of sin and misery with the consolation NOT that better days are just around the corner, BUT that in and through all things God is with us! So we do not live by dramatic signs or miracles or experiences; these are not the basis of our faith! We look to Christ alone! In fact, notice how this relates to our will.

Isaiah 8:10, “Devise a plan but it will be thwarted; state a proposal, but it will not stand, for God is

with us.”

There it is again, Immanuel, “In the midst of the storm, God is with us!” Yet notice the nature of the storm referenced here. Verses 9-10 represent the call that God gave His rebellious people infatuated with the teaching, practices, and claims of false religion. In contrast, we His people must live differently- which in verse 10 involves the submission of our will to that of God’s plan and purpose for our lives. Again, look at the text, Isaiah tells his countrymen:

- “Devise your sinful plan!”
- “State your self-pleasing proposals!”

Yet get this: because God is with you, they will not stand! They will never stand- to the praise of the glory of God! We could summarize this point, and so *the mind of Immanuel*, using the words of James.

James 4:13-15, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, *you ought* to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.’”

That’s the attitude and will of those on whom this sign has been embossed, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that!” This is the heart and soul of Immanuel.

John 6:38, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

Isaiah 8:11, “For thus the Lord spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people...”

The false teaching and false religion that had pervaded Judaism at this time was the opposite of the life of Immanuel. Now we could go to great lengths in describing this false religious system (in fact, just look around. Christendom has taken on this false religion not in part but in whole). Yet we need not speculate; God had a specific “outlook” in mind. What were the proponents of this false religion saying?

Isaiah 8:12, “You are not to say, ‘*It is a conspiracy!*’ In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, and you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of *it.*”

How many times have you heard the suspicion that there is an organized conspiracy which is behind all things and so controls our future and well-being? Such thinking is rampant in the world and the church! And it creates a fear which the Christian ought not to have!

That which controls man and his destiny is NOT the futile desires of a speck of dust we call a world leader, BUT the Almighty wisdom, power, and prerogative of God! Listen to the word of God.

Proverbs 21:1, “The king’s heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.”

Psalm 2:2, 4, "The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed [yet what does God do?]... He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them."

Family of God, the Immanuel Principle brings with it the assurance that the plans of the God who is with us can never be altered or thwarted! As such, we need not fear or be dismayed at the nations, their plans, or their doings. In the words of Joshua, because of Immanuel we are called to this:

Joshua 1:9b, "...Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Truly in light of the "One who goes with us," we ought never to live in fear of man. Rather, we must live in the reverence and fear of God!

Isaiah 8:13, "It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread."

The emblem of "Immanuel" which has been tattooed on your person is a mark which proclaims the sovereignty and glory of God over all of life. It makes us say with the Psalmist.

Psalm 118:5-6, "From *my* distress I called upon the Lord; the Lord answered me *and set me* in a large place. The Lord is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

The pressures of life can be so stifling that it makes it hard to breathe at times, as if we were living in a small place with the walls crashing in on us! Yet if you will fear the Lord alone, you will live out your days as if you had been placed in a large and spacious room- no fear, no sense of confinement, no walls closing in upon you!

Do you understand the significance of the Immanuel Principle in your life? Sin and the world may cast us into the fire, but we are assured that "another walks with us whose appearance is as the Son of God!" (Daniel 3:25)! Accordingly, we need not fear man, the future, or any other threat! Rather, we must fear God!

The Immanuel Principle also affects our hope.

Isaiah 8:14-17, "Then He shall become a sanctuary [this is the glory of Immanuel- in Christ we have a sanctuary into which we enter by faith. Yet without faith/trust, this sanctuary will have quite the opposite effect...]; but to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many will stumble over them, then they will fall and be broken; they will even be snared and caught. Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples [both of these words, "bind" and "seal" denote the idea of making something unchangeable. IOW, our good in life does not come as we change God's laws, say for worship or living. Rather, our good comes as we submit ourselves to God's word. In light of this, what ought we to do? Notice...]. And I will wait for the Lord who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob; I will even look eagerly for Him."

Because God is with us, the child of God is called to wait upon Him. Yet this will not be easy.

- First, “waiting on God” involves faith over time. In other words, it denotes a life of abiding trust as God brings us down life’s dark paths. Again you must see; this will not be easy!
- Second, notice the One in whom we put our trust... at times it will appear that He is “hiding His face from us!” In other words, while He is with us in and through all things, nevertheless His face is not easily seen. We must wait on Him... wait on Him... wait on Him. In time, the mist will clear and we will behold the glory of His face- but once again, it typically will be in the eleventh hour!

The genuine child of God is described here as one who “looks eagerly for Him.” He wrestles and fights and does not give up in his pursuit of God. And this is another result of the Immanuel Principle in our lives. We do not give up after a brief glance in God’s direction. Rather, we cultivate the disposition that we will wrestle with God until He blesses us with a greater portion of Himself!

The Immanuel Principle also relates to our authority.

Isaiah 8:19-20, “And when they say to you, ‘Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people consult their God? *Should they consult* the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.”

God is with us. Yet faith alone will not allow us to see Him. Our faith must be informed, directed, and moved by His word. Now don’t misunderstand. Simply reading the word is not what is in mind here. “To the law and to the testimony” is a call to cultivate a life that submits to the word in and through all things. And that most likely is why we struggle at this point.

Let me tell you something, orthodoxy is not very difficult. Read a good systematic theology and you can attain orthodoxy in a month. It is not hard! What is most difficult is orthopraxy- living out the word in one’s life. This will involve your entire life! I cannot tell you how important this is when it comes to the health of your soul. The Immanuel Principle would have us cultivate a heart and so a life that doesn’t just know God’s word, but submits to it! This truly must be our passion.

Ezra 7:10, “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

Long before we ever desire to wax eloquently around the fellowship table, we must labor and strive to embody what we read!

The Immanuel Principle also relates to our countenance. Isaiah begins by speaking of the person not living by Immanuel but the religion of man.

Isaiah 8:21-9:1a, “And they will pass through the land hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their God as they face upward. Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and *they will be* driven away into darkness. But there will be no *more* gloom for her who was in anguish...”

In contrast to the moralist and the religious, the genuine child of God who submits to the Lord will not be characterized by doom and gloom. Rather, they will have a countenance of joy which knows that in and through all things “it is well with their soul!” This may sound like a contradiction of point number 1 above, but it is not. Yes, because God is with us, we live in brokenness over our sin and spiritual mourning. Yet we do not stay here. Rather with each sin discovered, we gaze upon the cross and there we behold our forgiveness. As a result, the more we see of our sin, the more we are filled with joy in knowing the forgiveness of God!

That is what the “Immanuel Principle” is all about! How must we respond? The words of Amy Carmichael come to mind:

*“Lord crucified, O mark Thy holy cross- Immanuel!!
On motive, preference, all fond desires,
On that which self in any form inspires,
Set thou that sign of loss.
And when the touch of death is here and there, laid on a thing most precious in our eyes,
Let us not wonder, let us recognize, the answer to this prayer.”*

This is the Immanuel Principle: In the midst of the trial and tribulation of a sinful world, God is with us! And so, though the world would say, “Curse God and die!” we do not listen nor are we dissuaded. Rather we place our hope and confidence in Christ alone! May God give us the grace so to do!

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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