

# Isaiah and the Infant Immanuel

Isaiah 7:14; 9:6

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## ISAIAH AND THE INCARNATION OF IMMANUEL

### INTRODUCTION

Central to the Christmas miracle and mystery is the eternal truth that God became man. The eternal Creator God became man, and that forever. Though the glorious Christmas story is related primarily in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, numerous other passages refer to the blessed event.

Isaiah (740—680 B.C.) prophesies concerning the birth of the Savior more than any other OT prophet. His revelation of the virgin birth—"a virgin shall conceive"—and deity joining humanity—"unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given (9:6)—are promises that were fulfilled centuries later. A study of these two important truths will bear rich benefits.

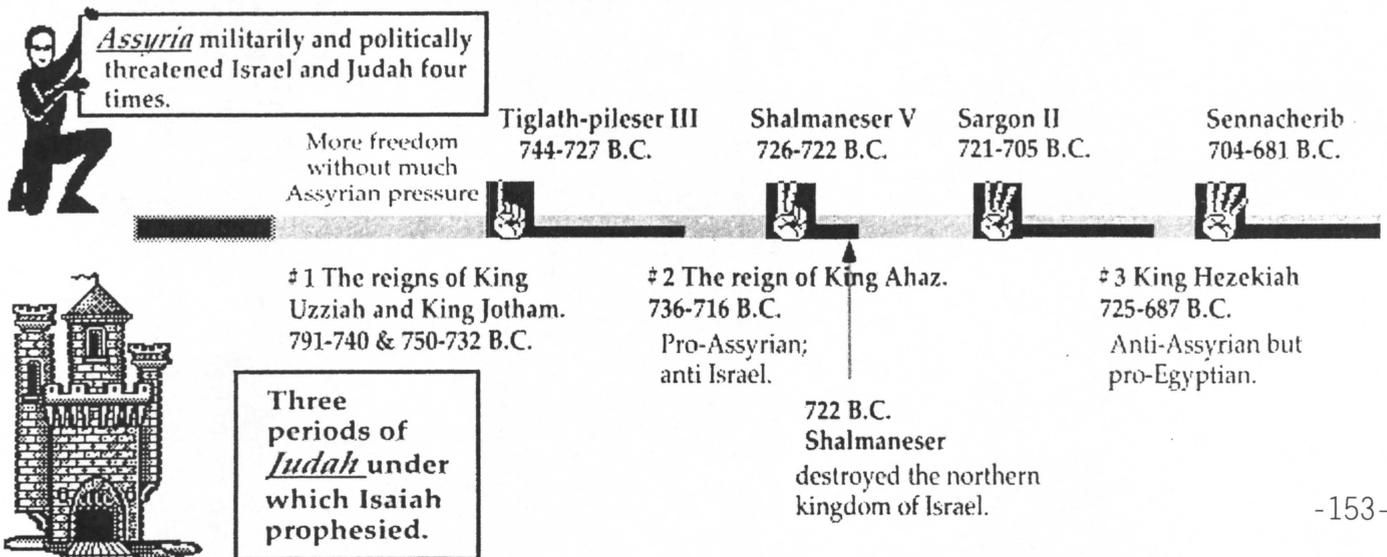
#### 1A. The Miraculous Conception of the Savior:

Isa 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.

##### 1b. The background of the prophecy:

The event recorded in Isaiah 7 took place in the year 734-733 B.C. King Ahaz of Judah had difficulties with his neighbors to the north. Israel, with its capital in Samaria and ruled by Pekah, and Syria with its capital in Damascus and ruled by Rezin, demanded of Ahaz that he join a coalition of nations to fight against the dominant power of the day, Assyria ruled by Tiglath-Pileser III. Ahaz was neither godly nor spiritual but politically smart. He realized that the coalition would not stand against the formidable Assyrian army, thus he declined the invitation. This brought about the second Syro-Ephraimite incursion against the southern kingdom. Syria and Ephraim joined forces again to topple King Ahaz.

In order to get Judah to join the coalition, Pekah and Rezin hatched a plot to overthrow Ahaz and replace him with a puppet king that would bring Judah into the coalition. Part of their conspiracy was to deploy Syrian troops in Samaria. Ahaz, receiving information about this plot, became fearful. He started to make secret overtures to the Syrian king, hoping thus to remove the threat posed by Pekah and Rezin (2 Ki. 16:7-8). He trusted in Tiglath-Pileser rather than the Lord.



In the context of Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah reminds Ahaz that God had made a covenant with David and promised that a Davidic ruler would one day sit upon the throne of David and that forever (2 Sam. 7:12-17). The Lord asked Ahaz to ask for some supernatural sign "either in the depth or in the height above" (7:11). Ahaz' hypocritical response was that he did not wish to tempt the Lord. This prompted God to turn to the nation of Israel to give them a sign. The sign involved the virgin birth of Christ.

2b. The views concerning the virgin:

Isa 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.

Various views are held on the meaning of the sign. Who is the virgin? Who is her son?

- 1c. Fulfillment in Isaiah's day:  
Primarily liberal theologians argue that the promise was fulfilled in Jeremiah's day. The problem with this view is that it goes directly contrary to Matthew's testimony (Mt 1:22-23).
- 2c. Dual fulfillment:  
This view sees the prophecy as having application both to the immediate situation of the day in which it was given, while finding complete fulfillment in the virgin birth of Jesus. The immediate fulfillment would be the birth of Isaiah's son or that of Ahaz. After his father died, Hezekiah instituted one of the greatest revivals in Israel's history (2 Ki. 18:4-6; 2 Chron. 29). Others suggest that the virgin is Isaiah's second wife. Ultimately the prophecy finds complete fulfillment in the birth of our Savior.
- 3c. The only true fulfillment is in Jesus Christ.  
This view accords with Matthew's statement and was the most popular throughout history.

Perhaps the most significant commentary ever written on Isaiah (although regrettably never translated into English) is by Moritz Drechsler, *Der Prophet Jesaja* (Berlin: Gustav Schlawitz, 1851). Drechsler's learned opinion is worth noting:

If one should ask concerning the fulfillment of the sign, the Holy Scriptures themselves give us the answer. In Matthew 1:22-23 in reference to the conception and birth of Jesus Christ, it is said that all this happened so that the word of our prophet would be fulfilled. Jesus Christ is the Son and the *almah*, "for before Joseph took Mary, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost" (1:18). Indeed, Jesus Christ is in the most clear and emphatic sense Immanuel insofar he is God and man in one person. In His deity He took upon human nature in perfect union. Thus He becomes the perfect exemplar of all the grace of the Father, indeed He is this grace Himself (288, translated by this writer).

Merrill F. Unger, both in his *Bible Handbook* (Moody, 1996, 313) and *Commentary on the Old Testament* (AMG Publisher, 2002, 161-163) lists a number of reasons why this sign constituted a prophecy of the miracle of the virgin birth of Christ. It might be helpful to rephrase and amend some of Unger's salient points.

3b. The prophecy concerning Mary:

- 1c. It is a sign given by the Lord Himself to a wicked prince. Now God will give him a sign unasked. No one but God is necessary for its execution.
- 2c. It was given to the house of David ("to *you*" plural, not to Ahaz).
- 3c. It involved a miraculous sign, no mere human baby of the day, and embraced making the sign "deep as Sheol" or making it "as high as heaven" (7:11, which implies a unique and stupendous miracle).
- 4c. It concerned the continuation of the House of David until the preeminent sign of the ages should be realized.
- 5c. It concerned "a virgin" (*almah*). The context necessitates such a one and the inspired words such to be true (Mt. 1:22-23, *parthenos*). The word *almah* describes a young woman of marriageable age (Gen. 24:43). The word is never employed of a married woman. In fact, Luther offered to give a hundred golden Guilden to anyone who would show that *almah* ever referred to a married woman. In characteristic fashion, Luther added that the Lord alone knew where he would get them.

The Septuagint (circa 250 B.C.) translates *almah* as *parthenos*, which only can mean "virgin." The word *bethula* does mean virgin, but apparently *almah*, a young single woman, expresses better, as Drechsler notes, "an instrument of weakness and helplessness which God chose as His instrument of His deliverance" (293). The mother of the prophecy is both unmarried and a good woman. When this fact is understood, it becomes apparent in all history that there is only one of whom this can be predicted namely, Mary, the mother of our Lord.

- 6c. The word *almah* is preceded by a definite article, a detail of the greatest importance in identifying the woman. Drechsler's astute observations are worth noting:
  - This definite article, in its immediate and customary meaning, refers in its basic usage to a certain and intended individual (Individuum). The prophet directed his focus on a certain intended virgin. Though the individual is not known to Ahaz and those in the vicinity, it is known to the Spirit who speaks through the prophet, who makes a demand on the hearers, before anything else, in all situations, to receive the Word in humble faith. The definite article is used simply because it was the Lord for all eternity that decreed an event like this should happen. There is just one virgin and none beside her (287).

Isaiah is in a vision when he speaks of a virgin with a child. One is reminded of the words of Balaam, "I see him but not now; I behold him but not nigh" (Num. 24:17a).

- 7c. His very name "Immanuel," meaning "*with us [humanity] is God [deity]*" involves the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the "miracle of the ages." The breath of the child is surrounded with mysteries and the supernatural. Again in Isaiah 9:6 the child is called God (*El*), the same word used here, a word by which Isaiah always designates deity. No individual in the OT was ever called Immanuel.

Scholars have long observed that Isaiah is the richest and most refined in all of the OT. Isaiah 7 is a combination of historical narrative, messianic prophecy and oracle of woe. The observant reader will notice that there is a "child motif" that runs through Isaiah 7-9, the prediction of the virgin birth.

- Shear-jahsub (7:3)
- Immanu-el (7:14; 8:8)
- Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:3)
- Isaiah's children (8:8)
- the Royal Child (9:6)

Before considering Isaiah's other prophecy relating to the birth of Christ, it would be well to note the interesting structure of this section. (See page 8). The person Immanuel dominates the first two parts, leading to the climactic introduction of the Royal Son.

## 2A. The Marvelous Character of the Savior:

Isaiah 9:6 For 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.*

In Isaiah 9:1-6 Immanuel is pictured as the deliverer of His people. Isaiah prophesies of:

- (1) Immanuel as the Great Light (:1-2);
- (2) Immanuel as the Great Liberator (3-5);
- (3) Immanuel as the Lord (6-7).

- 1b. The person of the gift: 9:6a  
 For 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.*

Isaiah prophesies of an infant who is born and a gift that is given, to be the ruler of the world (Luke 1:30-33).

- 1c. The born child:  
 The child born speaks of Christ's humanity. The gift of the son speaks of His deity. Seven centuries later the angel confirmed the fulfillment of this prophecy for the shepherds:

Luke 2:10-12 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring **you** good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

<sup>11</sup> For **unto you** is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

<sup>12</sup> And this shall be a sign **unto you**; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Three times in this passage "to you" (*min*) appears.

Drechsler knows that the prophecy here reaches a crescendo of joy. Among Orientals the birth of a child, especially that of a son, brought total joy. Now a child is born whom the world longed for.

2c. The given son:  
The term "son" suggests the infant's deity (Psa. 2:7). He is an undeserved gift on which man has no claim (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 6:23).

3c. The royal rule:  
Christ's kingly rule and dominion of the earth (Isa. 22:22) are mentioned in contrast to the oppressor's yoke on Israel's shoulders (9:4). The world does not need a better philosophy of government or a more perfect system of legislation but a person with character, wisdom and ability to rule for God over men.

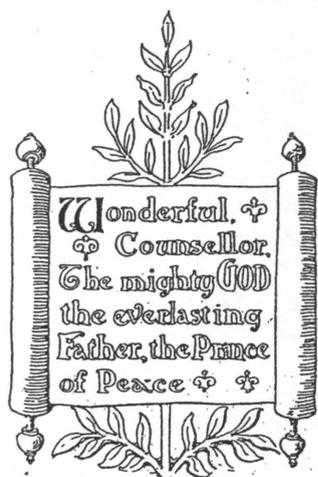
2b. The perfections of the person:  
Four titles underscore the son's deity and humanity. The "his name" is a Hebrew idiom. He would not actually bear these names but He deserves them because they are characteristic of His person and work.

1c. Wonderful Counselor: (*Pele yoetz*)  
The Hebrew permits these two names to be separate; however, there appears to be a parallel and symmetrical structure throughout the verse. The term "wonder" in the abstract suggests wonder through and through (Jud. 13:18). His very person is a wonder. Literally, Christ is a wonder of a counselor. This ruler's wisdom would transcend all human wisdom (11:2) with no need of human advice (Isa. 28:29).

2c. Mighty God: (*El gibbor*)  
In Isaiah *El* is used of God and only of Him. Here the composite name speaks of "God the mighty Hero or Warrior," a character He will manifest at the Second Advent against His foes (Rev. 19:11-15).

3c. Everlasting Father (*Avi ad*)  
He is, literally, the Father of eternity. The idea is that He is eternally existent, that He fathered all the ages of eternity, including time, space and the material world (Heb. 11:1c "the evidence of things not seen"). The Semitic idiom suggests that He who possesses a thing is said to be the father of it. Some also maintain that the term, eternal Father, refers to the nature of His rule.

The quality of fatherhood is defined by the word eternity. The Messiah is an eternal Father. If this is correct, the meaning is that



He is One who eternally is a Father to is people. Now and forever He guards His people and supplies their needs. "I am the good shepherd," said our Lord, and thus expressed the very heart of the meaning of this phrase. What tenderness, love, and comfort are here! Eternally—a Father to His people! (Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 1996, 339).

4c. The Prince of Peace (*sar shalom*)  
 In His military prowess He is the true David and in His peace He is the real Solomon. As Unger notes, the "Messiah will be 'The Peaceful Prince' par excel lance (Isa. 11:6-9; Hosea 2:18; Micah 5:5) as He reigns on His earthly throne (Mt. 25:34) during the kingdom, the age of peace (Isa. 26:3; 53:5; 54:10; 66:12; Rev. 20:4-6)" (*The Commentary*, 668).

3b. The perpetuity of His rule: 9:7  
 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

Christ will rule on the throne of David. His kingdom will increase through peace rather than through war. His rule will be eternal, outlasting the millennium and merging into the eternal rule of the Lamb (Rev. 20:1, 3).

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May we follow the advice of Ortlund:

Look at Jesus. As the Wonderful Counselor, he has the best ideas and strategies. Let's follow him. As the Mighty God, he defeats his enemies easily. Let's hide behind him. As the Everlasting Father, he loves us endlessly. Let's enjoy him. As the Prince of Peace, he reconciles us while we are still his enemies. Let's welcome his dominion (Raymond Ortlund, *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners*, Wheaton, IL Crossway Books, 2005, 99).

ISAIAH 9:6

For 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.

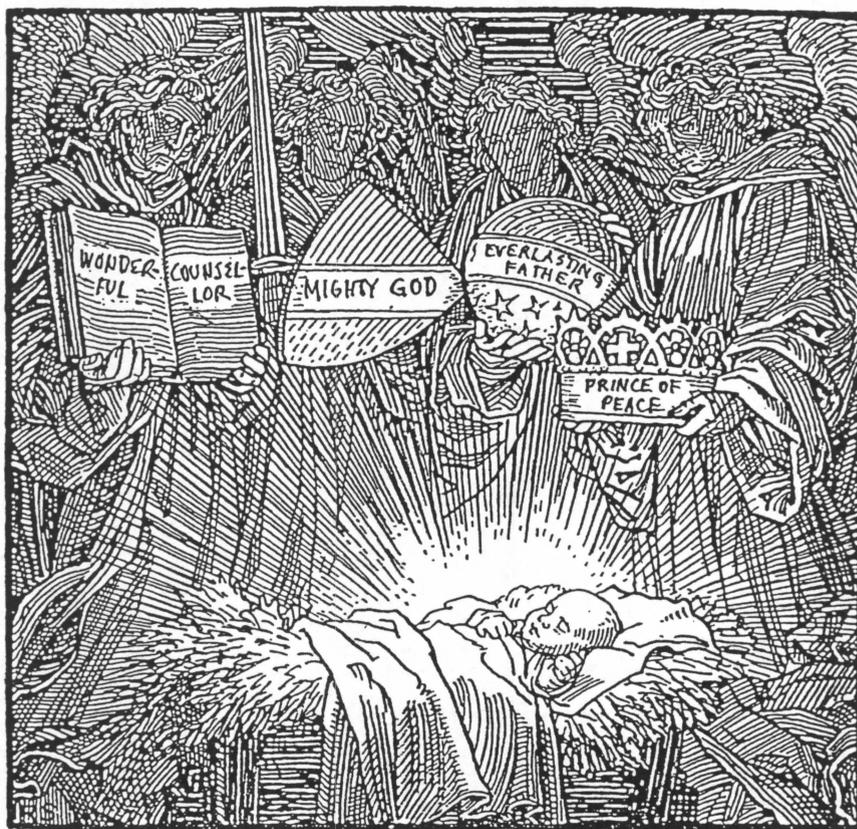
CHILD  
HUMANITY

SON  
DEITY

WONDERFUL	COUNSELOR
MIGHTY	GOD
EVERLASTING	FATHER
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For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given;  
 And the government will be upon His shoulder.  
 And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor,  
 Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
 Of the increase of His government and peace There  
 will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over  
 His kingdom, To order it and establish it with  
 judgment and justice from that time forward,  
 even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts  
 will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)



כִּי־יֵלֵד יֵלֵד־לָנוּ בֶן נִתָּן לָנוּ וְתָהִי הַמְּשָׁרָה עַל־שִׁכְמוֹ  
 וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פֶּלֶא יוֹעֵץ אֵל גִּבּוֹר אֲבִיעֵר שֶׁר־שְׁלוֹם:  
 לַמְּרֻבָּה הַמְּשָׁרָה וּלְשְׁלוֹם אֵין־קֶץ עַל־כֶּסֶף  
 רִוּד וְעַל־מְנוּלְכָחוּ לְהַכִּין אֶתָּה וּלְסַעֲדָה בְּמִשְׁפָּט  
 וּבְצַדִּיקָה מִעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם קִנְיָת יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה־זֹאת:

3. The connecting links between the historical sections and the promise of judgments are a series of "child signs." Each child that is mentioned has a special meaning attached to his name that forms a part of the prophecy.

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



Historical prologue (7:1-2)		
	In the presence of Shear-jashub (7:3)	
	Judgment on Aram and Israel (7:4-9)	
	The sign of Immanu-el (7:10-16).	
	In the shadow of Assyria (7:20-25)	
Historical prologue (8:1-2)		
	The sign of Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:3-4)	
	Judgment on Judah (8:5-8)	
	Lament of Immanu-el (8:8-10)	
	In the shadow of Yahweh (8:11-15)	
A call to repentance (8:16-17)		
	The sign of Isaiah's children (8:18).	
	In the shadow of judgment (8:19-22)	
	Out of the shadow and into the light (9:1-5)	
	The Royal Son (9:6-7)	