

God With Us

By Mary Kane

My Christmas tree, covered in sparkly lights and homemade ornaments, is up in my living room. I've baked two batches of delicious Christmas cookies and my house is decorated with Christmas cheer. This year my husband did most of the Christmas shopping for our family. I've been busy sewing costumes and creating scenery for two different Christmas shows at our school. Our sons are both due home from college by the end of the week. I can honestly say at fortysomething years old, the thing I look forward to most about Christmas is not the food, the gifts, or the decorations but the time spent with my family. Family is the greatest gift of Christmas. How appropriate that God gave His greatest gift of Christmas within the confines of a family. Think of it. Jesus did not need to come to earth as a baby born to loving parents. He could have come as a great military officer, a political leader or a distinguished Rabi but He came as a baby. Born in a small town in Israel, the humble stable became Holy ground as once again God came to walk with man upon the earth.

Before we begin our study, please take a moment to go before the Lord and ask Him to forgive you of any known sin and to fill you again with His Holy Spirit. Please sign your initials in the blank when you have finished praying.

Today our focus is on Isaiah 7:14. To gain background and contextual information please read Isaiah 7:1-14.

Who was king at this time in Judah's history?

What immediate trouble had come to Ahaz?

Rezin, the king of Damascus and Pekah, the son of the King of Israel had come to attack the land of Judah (at this point in history the kingdom of Israel had been divided into the northern and southern kingdoms).

What does God promise Ahaz concerning the attack on Judah in verse 7?

God promised Ahaz that the attack would not be successful.

In order to encourage the wicked King Ahaz to put his trust in the Lord, God offers Ahaz an amazing privilege.

According to verse 11, what was that privilege?

How did Ahaz respond to God's offer of a sign?

Prior to this event Ahaz had not been seeking or inquiring of the Lord, therefore God sent His prophet to speak to Ahaz about the two kings. God further blesses Ahaz by giving him the opportunity to ask for a custom-made sign, extra assurance that God would do as He said He would. Amazingly, Ahaz rejects God's generous offer; Ahaz was not interested in having faith in God. One of my resources stated that Ahaz was simply did not want to trust in God—chilling words for a cold December evening.

God, in His infinite wisdom and patience offers a sign anyway. Please record in the space below the sign that God offered:

This verse is probably is one of the most famous Christmas verses from the Old Testament. Like you, I had read this verse countless times. Many times at Christmas Eve church services and Christmas Day celebrations I've heard this verse proclaimed in isolation from the rest of Isaiah 7, but I must confess this is the first time that I've become aware of the context in which God placed this verse in scripture. I had expected Isaiah 7:14 to be couched right alongside other Old Testament Christmas-like verses such as "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God," and "For unto us a Son is given, for unto us a Child is Born!" I was confused and perplexed as to why these Yuletide greetings were couched within a threat of war. Suddenly it hit me—we are the Ahaz in this account of scripture. While we are busy, drawn into our own affairs, completely engrossed in our own destructive plans without a thought of God, He bursts onto the scene with an amazing offer of deliverance and grace. We would not listen to His Word or to His prophets so He had to send us a sign.

Like most prophetic verses, this prophecy contains a "near" and a "far" prophecy; one for the present or near future (immediate or historical fulfillment) and one for the distant future (messianic fulfillment). The fulfillment of both of these prophecies was completed as follows:

The near prophecy: the near prophecy referred to a royal birth in the family line of Ahaz. A child was to be born in the house of Ahaz and by the time the child was old enough to be weaned, Judah would be delivered from the two invading kings. Blue Letter Bible (BLB) records the following in reference to the near prophecy:

"the woman, then a virgin, about immediately to become the second wife, and bear a child, whose attainment of the age of discrimination (about three years) should be preceded by the deliverance of Judah from its two invaders."

The far prophecy: the far prophecy obviously refers to the birth of the Messiah which was fulfilled by the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem many years later. Please read the following quote from BLB concerning the far prophecy "its fullest significance is realized in "the woman" (Gen 3:15), whose seed should bruise the serpent's head and deliver captive man."ⁱ

Please record any thoughts or insights you have received concerning the near or far prophecy.

Now we shall turn our attention to verse 14 and unearth a few blessings from deep inside this passage of Scripture.

Please fill in this missing word from the verse below:

“Therefore, the Lord Himself will _____ you a sign:”

The Hebrew word for *give* used in this verse is *nathan* which means “to give, to entrust, to bestow.” God trusted us with this sign. Usually when something is entrusted to someone’s care, action needs to be taken in order to care for the item. God has given us a sign that needs to be acted upon.

What action do we need to take concerning the sign that God has given us?

A few other words in our verse are worth a deeper look. The first word is *owth*, the Hebrew word for *sign* which means a “distinguishing mark, a miracle, proof, a remembrance, a warning.” In general, what do *signs* do? They point out things that someone does not want us to miss. God wanted to make sure that we did not miss the way He provided for us to spend eternity with Him therefore He gave us a Sign. Jesus is that miraculous sign. *Owth* also means miracle. God is a God of miracles. Do you need a miracle in your life? You can have one—Jesus.

Each definition of the *owth* gives us instruction in how to live our lives as Christians. How can we apply the definitions of *owth* to our lives?

- **Remembrance:** Don’t forget Him. In every decision, action or choice include Jesus.

- **Distinguishing mark:** Don't miss Him. Look for Jesus in the present situations of your life. What is He trying to say to you during this advent season?
- **Proof:** Don't doubt Him, He is the only way!
- **Warning:** Don't disregard Him. Embrace His truth for your eternal destination and your immediate issues.

The second word is *ben* the Hebrew word for *son*. *Ben* is derived from *banah* Hebrew for build, rebuild, establish, make permanent, to be built up. A son was the hope of every Hebrew family. Every man wanted a son who would carry on the family name, build the family, receive the family inheritance and provide for him in his old age. Jesus is the Son of Hope for the human family. Jesus makes "permanent" our right standing with God, He builds the church, and "rebuilds" our lives so we can glorify God.

The third word is *name*, in Hebrew *shem* which means "name, reputation, fame, glory." What is God known for? What is He famous for? To answer that question we must look at the next part of His name, *Emanuel*. The literal translation of Emanuel is *el Emanuel* which means "God, God with us." What is God famous for? He's famous for being with His people. Another part of *Emanuel* is the small preposition *em* means "with, against, between. He is between us and every other person with whom we come into contact. He is with us and every situation we face. He is against every enemy we face. Emanuel—God with us and that gives us great cause to give Him glory!

Please describe how God is with you in your present situation.

In closing, as you go into the Christmas season and the New Year please know that God is with you, beside you, above you, over you and under you as you walk out your journey with Him upon this earth.

Merry Christmas.

By Mary Kane

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ⁱ Jamieson, Robert; A.R. Fausset; and David Brown. "Commentary on Isaiah 7." . Blue Letter Bible. 19 Feb 2000. 2011. 13 Dec 2011.

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