

ISA 7:10 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." [12] But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" [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: 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] And it will come about in that day, that 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] And 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.

ISA 7:20 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.

ISA 7:21 Now it will come about in that day that a man may keep alive a heifer and a pair of sheep; [22] and it will happen that 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] And 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.

Immanuel *Isaiah 7:10-25*

King Ahaz stands at the water pool outside of the city of Jerusalem, wondering how he can protect his city from the impending disaster that seems to him unavoidable. Israel and Aram (Syria) are breathing hot down his neck at his own northern border in the territory of Ishmael. Having made an alliance with the wicked and more powerful kingdom of Assyria, king Ahaz is now confronted by the prophet Isaiah with a choice. Are you going to trust God or are you going to trust man. The last words spoken in verse 7:9 are, "If you will not believe, you surely shall not last."

With this warning fresh in his ears, and the good news promise that God will not allow Judah to come to an end at the hands of his Israeli brothers, God comes to Ahaz one final time in patience and in peace. We pick up the story in **verse 10**.

The Sign

God tells Ahaz to **ask a sign for himself** so that he might know that God is telling the truth. This sign could be as "deep as Sheol or high as heaven." God is giving tremendous freedom and being gracious in the extreme to king Ahaz here. Let us ask ourselves, **what is a sign? A sign is a marker that God gives to direct a person's faith toward an unfulfilled eschatological¹ reality.** Spiritual signs function the same way that physical signs do. Most signs are not the reality themselves, but they surely and truly point in the proper direction of the reality. As we look at the story, this is what we find. Rather than obeying God and asking for a sign, Ahaz responds by saying, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" Pious words. It sounds like something a good Christian would say. But listen to how God responds. "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?" Obviously God wasn't pleased with the pietism of Ahaz.

What is going on here? Why is God so angry? First off, in disobeying God, Ahaz has rejected Jehovah *as his God*. This is the meaning of the change in terminology between verse 11 and verse 13 from "your God" to "my God." And this is why both the prophet and God get so irate. In not obeying God in his one last chance, Ahaz has committed himself to total ruin. E.J. Young is surely right to conclude, "This was serious; to clothe the refusal with the hypocritical guise of not wishing to tempt the Lord was despicable in the extreme." King Ahaz shows his own hatred for God has as much passion as Satan does (we will see

¹ Eschatology is the study of "last things." This is different from popular culture's understanding of eschatology which is the study of the *future*. Something may be eschatological in Scripture while not necessarily being future to a twentieth century reader.

the similarity between Ahaz and Satan in a moment). His words were nothing but a mockery of the God who so patiently held out his hand to the king of Judah.

We should look for a moment at exactly what Ahaz was doing in his response because I feel this confuses some people. Why did Ahaz respond by saying he would not tempt God? Isn't it true that we are not to tempt God? This comes from **Deuteronomy 6:16**, ""You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah." How did Israel test God at Massah? At Massah, we learn from **Psalm 95:9** that they "tested and tried [God], though they had seen what [he] did." This is the key. Israel had already had sign after sign in the **ten plagues** of Egypt, in the **pillar of cloud and fire**, and in the **crossing of the Red Sea**. Though they had signs, *they did not believe*. So, they tested God by asking for *another* sign. Their hearts are revealed when it is said of them, "**the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'**" (**Ex 17:7**). This is the exact opposite of what God told Ahaz to do. Ahaz is to ask for a sign *because he has seen no sign*. The sign is to be a means of creating and increasing his faith in God. It is a most gracious offer.

In using the Scripture to respond to the prophet, Ahaz does it as a means *to sin*. We see the same thing happening in Jesus temptation by Satan, where ironically the same Deuteronomy passage is quoted. Satan had asked Jesus to throw himself down from the cliff. To bolster the appeal of the temptation, Satan makes sure that Jesus remembers the Scripture and how it says that the angels would not allow any harm to come to Him. Like Ahaz, Satan is misquoting Scripture in order to justify sin. This is one of Satan's most commonly used strategies in the church. Why? Because so many people are so ignorant of their bibles that the easiest thing in the world to do is dupe ignorant foolish people by using religious terminology. Such a warning ought to wake us all up to make sure we know our bibles as well as we can. We don't want to be like Satan! In response to Satan's misquoting of Scripture, Jesus quotes **Deut 6:16 properly**, "**you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.**"

Can you see how signs that are **used to confirm faith** are good and just and they do not test God in the least – especially if these are signs that God has himself established such as the rainbow or the Lord's Supper or baptism? But signs that are **used as a means of making God prove himself to you** because you have no faith in the first place, these signs *do* test God and they are a great sin. **Think about how you may do this in your own prayers, asking God to show you something because you just don't trust him for the future without some sign.**

Application

I got to thinking how very often we actually do the very thing that Ahaz does here. Far too often Christians use spiritual terminology to justify their sin. We must all be fearfully aware of how serious this is. How many times have we heard from "Christian" homosexuals in our own day that Christ taught us not to judge others, therefore we are not to judge their own behavior? (The same could be said of virtually any sin out there in our day). At least one letter a week in the major newspaper says such things. It sounds pious and Christian, but these are words coming from a forked tongue. Or what about a Christian how refuses to deal with tough portions of Scripture because somehow "God wants us to be unified. To 'fight' about irrelevant theology is to break God's heart." This is nothing but king Ahaz raising his ugly head in our own day. Friends, we must never use God's own word against him. It is extremely dangerous to quote God's holy word back to him so that you may justify your own sin. This is to play Russian roulette with your own eternal soul, as Ahaz was himself about to find out.

9:17-25

After Ahaz's rejection, we see something that I think is most interesting. Though Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign, it is in God's mind to provide one anyway! No longer will the sign be gracious to Ahaz however. God's sign will be of judgment to Ahaz, though still a sign of

grace to a few people in the nation – those of faith. God’s patience has run out with both Ahaz and the unbelieving nation of Judah. God will not destroy Judah through Israel. God will not go back on his word. Instead, the sign will serve to show Ahaz that the destruction that will come will be by the king’s own hand. In the meaning of the sign, [God is going to use Assyria, the very nation that Ahaz had made a covenant with and corrupted the temple worship because of, to destroy Ahaz.](#)

In naming the sign “[God with us,](#)” Ahaz is actually to see *why* God needs to be with them. It is because unless he *is* with them, there will be utter destruction from what is about to come upon the people. This begins to play itself out in [verse 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.](#)”

The day of the Lord comes back into view, and it is right at the door. How horrible it will be when this door is opened. Historically, this vision takes place in [734 BC](#) ([though the eschatological motif of the “Day of the Lord” has yet to take place. See other sermons](#)). It takes only two years for Aram (Syria) the pretend conqueror to be overthrown by Assyria ([732 BC](#)). Just 10 years later and Israel is overthrown ([722 BC](#)). And finally Judah herself is all but devastated in [701 BC](#). Judah is not taken over completely, and so Hezekiah (and later Josiah) comes to power and his reforms stave off the final conquest that takes place in [586 BC](#). Yet, Isaiah promises that nothing like this devastation has ever come upon Judah since she became a separate country after the days of Solomon.

In brilliant poetic fashion, Isaiah then drives the point home with vivid word pictures so that Ahaz and the rest of the leaders of the house of David will get the point. “[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. And 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](#)” ([vs. 18-19](#)). Israel’s old arch enemy Egypt will come crashing down upon Judah, and so will the very nation that she sought out to save her. “[The armies of their enemies will blanket the land like swarms of bees and flies...Assyria and Egypt are insects trained to swarm at their master’s \(God’s\) command. \[They will be\] swarming, suffocating, and inescapable.](#)”² Like flies that infest putrid meat or bees that sting their enemies, so will these nations be to God’s people. They will be everywhere, so that one cannot even go into the mountains or the ravines to hide and escape from them. Even the very watering places that Ahaz sought to protect will be destroyed.

“[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 of the hair of the legs; and it will also remove the beard](#)” ([7:20](#)). Of importance to keep in mind is the constant biblical idea that it is God and not chance or luck or human power that is the ultimate hand behind world affairs. Mighty Egypt and the upstart Assyrians are but God’s puppets. It is God and not Ahaz who is going to hire out the king of Assyria to do his bidding. And she is nothing but a “[razor which God takes up temporarily to clear Palestine of its inhabitants, as a man shaves unwanted hair from his body.](#)”³ The crass language ought to show each of us that, though image bearers and the most special of all creation on the one hand, man are still powerless and indeed worthless stubble when we sin against the Mighty One of Israel. It is no more difficult for God to remove us than for a man to shave his body with a blade. And God is not afraid to do so. [Keep yourselves in check, dear friends. Do not let the ways of the nations trouble you. It is God who makes them do his bidding. And do not let yourself get caught up thinking that you are great and powerful, for God topples the proud with but the tiniest movement of his little finger.](#)

² Oswalt, *Isaiah*, p. 215-16.

³ Webb, *Isaiah*, 64.

One last time "THE day" is mentioned. "It will come about in that day that a man may keep alive a heifer and a pair of sheep; and it will happen that 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. 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. People will come there with bows and arrows because all the land will be briars and thorns. And 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" (7:21-25). In this way, the destruction will be complete. You ought not to understand curds and honey here as being akin to the land flowing with milk and honey, as if God is saying that it won't be all that bad for the remnant of Judah that is left in the land. Rather, this is the monotonous food of poverty. And yet, the abundance of milk produced (because there are so few left in the land), will still allow the remnant to eat food that is somewhat desirable. God will still preserve his remnant and be good to them beyond anything that they deserve.

But, the land will still be laid basically waste. Where there were a thousand vines valued at a great price, there will now be only briars and thorns, for there will not be enough people in the land to take care of it. These folks will have to rely upon bows and arrows for their main supply of food, because farming will become impossible. This is not a situation to relish, having your food, your wealth, and your happiness taken from you. This is God's punishment for the nation of Judah because her king, her representative, utterly failed to trust God. In the end it is God who is going to mock Ahaz by handing him over to his best friend. And the people of Judah will go into captivity because of her great sin against God.

7:14-16

At this point you may be wondering why we have skipped the vital verses 7:14-16. I have done it to show you an important point. Because this passage is quoted in Matthew as being about Christ, I wanted to make it clear how the context of this prophecy must also have an *immediate* fulfillment. This is not often talked about and it is sometimes even denied. It is in the birth of this sign child that God promises to Ahaz and the rest of the "house of David" that Aram and Israel will be forsaken, though not all of them.

Verse 16 makes the immediacy of this prophecy clear. "Before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken." Do you see how this sign must have an immediate fulfillment? This is its initial purpose. The text demands it. What is going on here is that some "woman" is going to give birth to a "boy." She will call him "God with us." At some point before this boy turns into a man (**this is the meaning of 'know enough to refuse evil and choose good'**), Israel and Aram will be destroyed. In this way, in the destruction of these two nations, Judah will then know for certain that God is going to do all that he has promised in threatening to destroy Judah at the hands of the Egyptians and the Assyrians.

Age of Accountability

And now we get to the difficult part of this text. There is basically no end to the inquiries into these three verses of Scripture. One thing I want to mention right from the start is the so-called "Age of Accountability" passage of **verse 15-16**. Many of you may have grown up with this doctrine. The age of accountability is a doctrine that teaches an age "When men become accountable for their actions. Children [therefore] cannot be accountable for their actions until they have a knowledge of good and evil, until they know to refuse the evil and choose the good."

Inherent to a doctrine like this is a denial of original sin and a denial of salvation by faith alone. **Original sin is the doctrine that Adam's sin is imputed to his race at the moment of conception, without exception.** This is taught in Romans 5, "In Adam, all die." Even infants die. Why, because they are in Adam; because they have inherited his sin. Once source I found on the internet outright admits that if original sin exists, then there is no

age of accountability. "We know that children are not sinners at birth; for if they were, there could be no such thing as an age of accountability. If babies are guilty and condemned for the sin of Adam from birth, then there is no room for them to reach a certain age before they become accountable. They are guilty and under God's wrath from birth."⁴ I must admit that I was completely mystified after having read this. Its almost like **Romans 5** does not exist, let alone the hundreds of verses on depravity, including those passages that teach that man is wicked from the womb.

A doctrine that denies such a vital truth as the sinfulness of humanity is dangerous to everyone's eternal health, because logically it implies that it is better to never hear the gospel (and to go heaven) than to hear it and reject it (and go to hell). With that said, however, I must clarify a potential implication of not having an "Age of Accountability" theology. Does this mean that all babies are going to hell (someone might conclude that)? Here we must tread carefully, teaching what Scripture teaches and not going beyond it. **We must recognize that all people who go to heaven get there because they are justified by faith in Christ. This is the only biblical conclusion. God does not pardon anyone's sin apart from faith.** There are no biblical exceptions to this.

Can infants have faith? The answer to this question is difficult to ascertain from the bible. **David** did recognize after the death of his infant child that he would go to be with the child. Whether this means merely to death or to an afterlife with him is not made clear in the text. In the New Testament we read of **John the Baptist** "leaping" in the womb of his mother when the Messiah came nearby in the womb of Mary. Perhaps this is significant in showing that infants can indeed have faith. Jeremiah and others were "known" in the womb" by God. Though talking about individual election and probably not faith, we do get the idea that God loved Jeremiah in the womb. Put together, there is some reason to think that God in fact saves infants, infants *who are in the covenant*, by granting them faith in Christ alone. We have no data either way about those whose families are not in covenant with God on this matter and so I feel it best to remain silent on the issue. **Thus, ultimately I believe we are left leaning upon the nature of God for the answer and for our own comfort.** God is just. God is holy. God is perfect love. God is wonderfully merciful. God greatly loves his people. Everything God does is by definition good and right and fair. I live by the truism "God will save all elect infants." Of this we may be certain. And in God's character and nature we must take our comfort.

Other than the obvious depravity issue, the problem with taking **Isaiah 7** as a proof text for the Age of Accountability is that the phrase "**knows enough to refuse the evil and choose the good**" has nothing to do contextually with salvation. It is simply a way of saying that the boy has grown up (in poetic language which this is after all) and that this boy is going to grow up to be a wise and good man, not that he is somehow saved until he can choose the good for himself.

The Sign: The Virgin and Immanuel

Now we are left trying to understand the sign itself. It is fascinating to me that God sends a *man* to be a sign to the people. This is most unusual. **Let us look first to the immediate fulfillment of this prophesy, then we will seek to understand the historic/redemptive application of it in Christ.** First, you must realize that Scholars are very divided over who this boy might in fact have been. Some point to **Hezekiah**, the son of Ahaz as being the boy. Hezekiah's name means "**God gives strength**," but this is not really very close to "**God with us**" (Immanuel). Other's point to Isaiah's child mentioned at the beginning of chapter 8: **Maher-shalal-hash-baz**, but his name is even farther from the meaning of Messiah. It means **Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey**. Furthermore, we have a problem finding an immediate fulfillment to this prophesy because of the nature of the mother who gives birth.

⁴ <http://www.gospeltruth.net/menbornsinners/mbs16.htm>

In the Hebrew, this woman is said to be an *alma*. It has been variously argued that *alma* means a young woman (who may or may not be a virgin) or more specifically it means only a virgin (who is almost always a young woman.) Those who seek an immediate fulfillment in a real boy obviously want to go with the former meaning, because there is only one woman in history who have given birth to a child while still a virgin (at least up to the point of artificial insemination). If the word can really mean "young woman" then it is quite possible that there is a boy who could be born who would fit this bill. Even if this is the case, we just don't have any way of knowing who this boy might be, because God simply hasn't told us.

Perhaps the most attractive option to solve the immediate fulfillment dilemma in my mind (and one that is consistent with the "virgin" language implicit in *alma*) is the one that sees the immediate fulfillment not in an individual, but in the nation itself. I want to give you reasons for why this is so. Zion has already been pictured by Isaiah as a woman in 1:8. Literally she is the "daughter Zion." This is what she was at the beginning of the book. Now, as Barry Webb puts it "in the crisis of invasion and imminent siege, she is depicted as a sexually mature woman"⁵ (an *alma* rather than a daughter). If the young woman is Zion, then her son Immanuel is the faithful remnant who will emerge from her sufferings. "That is why he is given the name *Immanuel*, 'God with us'. God will be with the faithful remnant who gather round Isaiah (cf. 8:16), not with the unbelieving Ahaz and the rebellious nation as a whole."⁶

This option explains why we don't see any particular person from this time period fitting neatly into this prophesy. It isn't in fact one person, but many - called the remnant - who are living examples that God is still with his people. It has the further advantage of being acceptable because this prophesy is poetry and poetry does not follow the same rules of 100% strict literalism as narrative does, though it often is quite literal (as Matthew demonstrates). Even more to the point, this interpretation is contextually cohesive. As we have said, Isaiah has already referred to Zion as a woman. And the remnant is a theme that is repeated over and over again, including in this very chapter and in the next. Notice 8:16 for example. Isaiah has a group of "disciples" that are gathering around him. Together, God is with both they and Isaiah.

What clinches this for me is the last chapter of this book. Isaiah 66:8-9 says,

"Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Can a land be born in one day? Can a nation be brought forth all at once? As soon as Zion travailed, she also brought forth her sons. "Shall I bring to the point of birth, and not give delivery?" says the LORD. "Or shall I who gives delivery shut the womb?" says your God.

Clearly, Isaiah sees this same Zion woman giving birth now to *many* sons in a day and God will not stop it. I see no reason why this option is not perfectly valid for explaining the immediate fulfillment of the sign to Ahaz and the leaders of Judah (the House of David).

But ultimately, as with all prophesy, there is a purpose beyond the immediate future that makes even the remnant (or Hezekiah or Isaiah's son or whomever), pale in comparison. Matthew takes his quote directly from the LXX. The Greeks translated the Hebrew "*alma*" as virgin and rightly so. There is no other word that describes this particular kind of a woman in as clear language as this.⁷

Matthew is absolutely correct to see this passage as speaking of Messiah. So he says,

⁵ Webb, p. 63.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Not even the Hebrew "bethulah" does this, for there is a bethulah in Scripture that is betrothed and one that is even married (Joel 1:8). Isaiah needs to make it clear that this woman is a virgin in the most clear language.

The Lord appeared to [Joseph] in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" --which means, "God with us" (Matt 1:21-23).

It ought not surprise us to find Jesus Christ in this passage. After all, Isaiah has just introduced us to the seed a mere 14 verses ago. If you think about the prophesy, the idea that a miraculous young boy will be a sign for the nation that God is serious about destroying, then no matter who this miracle child is - it is still going to pass away unless this boy be eternal and perfect. But how can God With Us ever pass away? Wouldn't that sort of defeat the purpose? The grace and judgment that is seen through this sign (grace in that a remnant is saved, judgment in that God is destroying Ahaz and the nation at large) will likewise pass away and people will forget what has happened to them at God's hand. So the sign must ultimately be an **eternal sign**. This in turn must point us forward past the immediate to the distant future. Matthew is perfectly justified.

There is all the reason in the world why Mary must be a virgin. If God is fully going to come to be "with us" (physically as the text suggests and not just spiritually in the remnant) then this God cannot be a *mere* man for the obvious reason that no mere man is God. By being conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin women, it is clear that Jesus Christ biologically speaking has no earthly father. Joseph is only Jesus' adopted father. Since the Holy Spirit is God, we must conclude that this virgin birth takes place so that God might truly be said to come to dwell with his people. [The virgin birth proves the deity of Christ!](#)

Yet, by being BORN from a true human woman, Jesus Christ must also be truly *man*. [The virgin birth thus proves that Jesus Christ of all the peoples of this earth was the God-man. Not even artificial insemination where a child may be born of a virgin proves deity, for still there is human, male seed that is used to create the child. No, this alone of all natural births was miraculous and wonderful.](#)

Immanuel, the Only Way to the Father

There are so many implications of this, it would take the rest of our lives to merely begin to scratch the surface. Nevertheless, let us consider a few. If Christ alone is the God-man, then by definition, all other religious leaders (especially those who desire worship) are pretenders and false teachers. This goes also for those religious leaders who try to bring Christ down the level of themselves, a mere man. Islam is plain wrong to teach that Jesus Christ was only a prophet. He was not merely a prophet. He was God in the flesh. And [Muhammad](#) was not, nor did he claim to be. The same goes for Siddhartha Gautama (the [Buddha](#)), who was a mere man and never claimed to be God. It also goes for those who claim to be Christian and yet bring Christ down only to the level of a good teacher.

The American society is simply being dishonest with the Scripture for its ever-growing insistence that there is more than one way to God because Jesus was just a man. This is not faithful to the biblical testimony and Christians must stand up for this truth at all costs. If Christ is not God, then our religion is a sham and we remain in our sins. This is not a matter of my interpretation over yours. It is a matter of what the Bible says and whether or not people are going to accept it. If you don't accept it, at least you are honest. But don't change its meaning because you want to keep the nice teacher Jesus around to help you live a good life.

Immanuel and God's Providence

The double fulfillment of this prophesy proves God's providential rule over this world. We can trust him and *everything* he says because he has given us a sign as surety of the fact. This sign is both the historical continuation of the covenant people of God in the remnant, and Son of God come in the flesh who saves his people from their sins. This is the surest cure to worry and stress about the small things in life.

Immanuel and Sin

This sign demonstrates that God is serious about sin, especially the sin of acting religious and using Christian terminology as a means of spitting in God's face. God will not hold people guiltless who do such vile acts. As for our part, we may trust also from this passage (as well as others), that we do not need to go looking for personal justice in matters such as these. It is God's to avenge and he will repay. We prove our faith in this and in everything else God's word says when we continue to love our enemies knowing and trusting that God will one day (perhaps both in this life and in the life to come), pay both us and himself back for the wrong done against his Name.

Immanuel the Suffering Servant

Finally, and I think most significantly at least in terms of pastoral application, this sign, Immanuel – God with us – shows in the most physical and tangible of ways God's love for his people. This tiny baby is not born into a great economic wealth and cultural power. Rather, he is born into great poverty at the climax of the downfall of Israel. He, will have to live through the ordeal as all the rest, suffering along with all of the rest because of the onslaught of world powers bent on dominance. Even more, this baby suffers at the very decree of God. God suffers at God's own decree. Can this be? Is it really so?

How many people in our day have such great anguish over the problem of evil? Why do bad things happen to people, is the question so often asked? Of all the answers to that question that have been posed, none is more profound than God's own answer. In Immanuel the problem of evil is overcome. How? Because God is with us during the evil times, during the suffering and travails of our souls, during the worry and the doubt, during the storm and the raging tempest, during the sickness and the famine, during the heat and during the cold, during the sin, during the ridicule, during the hopelessness, and during the fear. Not only is God with us, but this God-man actually undergoes each of these things in his own body. God does not spare *himself* from the problem of evil. And Immanuel overcomes through suffering through death and is vindicated as God raises him from the dead, for he was not deserving of any of this evil.

This is the meaning of Immanuel for those who are willing to trust in him, our Lord Jesus Christ by faith alone. Do you trust him today? Make sure you do. Believe upon him and you shall be saved.

Conclusion

This sign does not bring our gaze upon the stupendous or the powerful, but upon the tiny baby born of a virgin. It does not promise health and wealth or a better life here and now, but it does promise comfort in the midst of this life and a sure hope for the future. Let me close by quoting Charles Dennison. "This one will live through and suffer in the life of this people, in order that his people might live in him. He compels the faith of all of God's people in order that they might know that God has actually taken to himself his people's condition – human flesh – and is bound to us in our life the his world until that life is completely resolved by the glories of the kingdom of heaven. And thus, the enormity of God is matched by the enormity of his love. And that, telegraphed to you in a child."⁸

⁸ Charles Dennison, *Isaiah's Christman Children: Immanuel*, at www.kerux.com/documents/keruxv15n3al.htm