



December 2023

A Message of Life Ministries Newsletter

Immanuel

Matthew 1:23 often appears on Christmas cards. Believers the world over recognize it as fulfillment of what was then Isaiah's 700+ year-old Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 7:14: *Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.*

Unfortunately, skeptics found a way to cause many to doubt that Isaiah predicts a future virgin-birth. Specifically, they ask, "How would a birth 700 years later (after Ahaz died) persuade him?" Good question, but the bigger issue is: "Was Ahaz actually the intended audience of the prophecy?"

Many will be shocked to learn that he was not. The sign was for others, for the entire house of David (David's dynasty). Hundreds of years later Luke 1:27 and 2:4 say that Joseph, Jesus' adoptive father, was of the house of David. Thus, the following translation of Isaiah 7:10-14 distinguishes singular referents (Ahaz and you) from plural ones (House of David and y'all) by adding a superscripted ^s for singular or ^p for plural.

Moreover the LORD spoke again to Ahaz^s, saying, "Ask^s a sign for yourself^s from the LORD your^s God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above."

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

Then he [Isaiah] said, "Hear now, O house^p of David! Is it a small thing for y'all^p to weary men, but will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give y'all^p a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

Note that the first and second paragraphs use the singular you (referring to Ahaz). By contrast

the third paragraph utilizes y'all (referring to the house of David). This changes everything.

Isaiah did not announce a sign for Ahaz, but for the house of David, a plural group. The typical objection to Isaiah prophesying Messiah's birth disappears, because context does not demand that the sign occur during the lifetime of Ahaz.

Now, a closer investigation of the term Immanuel (God with us) is warranted. While in the wilderness God was present with Israel via the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire (Exod 13:21-22; 33:14-16). The Davidic Covenant speaks of God's continuing presence with the Davidic kings (2 Sam 7:9, 13-15). However, although God would not abandon Israel, He warned that rebellion could cause Him to withdraw His presence (Num 14:9; Deut 31:17b). Thus, they would face military losses. In Ezekiel 10, the glory departed; God was not with them. Soon, Babylon subjugated Judah.

Isaiah 7 offered the nation hope. A virgin (certainly one from the house of David) would give birth to a Son, about whom it could rightly be said, "God is with us." Certainly, Old Testament people pondered Isaiah 7:14's meaning. However, Jesus' birth should have awakened the nation. People should have eagerly hung onto all that Immanuel (God with us) said. Not so during His first advent, but the nation will do so—when He returns to establish His Millennial Kingdom.



Little River Baptist, Jenkinsville, SC, January 15

Ministry in 2023

Diane's first knee replacement last February required some major adjustments in our schedule. Rather than traveling extensively for ministry, we stayed close to home, other than the trips in May and August. John presented three studies at the May GES conference. Versions of those papers appear on our website (MOL316.com) under the following titles: "Repentance Unfound in John: 5/5/2023," "Free Grace in James 2, 6/7/2023," and "Do People Believe Jesus for Nothing? 5/12/2023." Our website now has nearly 800 posted messages.

John was part of the committee evaluating Bob Vacendak's PhD dissertation: "Is Assurance of Salvation of the Essence of Saving Faith in the Gospel of John?" He went to Virginia for Bob's oral defense in March. John wrote an article for *Grace in Focus*. Work on the commentary on John's Gospel continues.

John also assisted the Living Water Project in contacting Ukrainians who could assist them in producing the Living Water (Gospel of John) in Ukrainian. Today, these booklets are spreading the message of life to people under siege.

The following lists guest-speaking occasions.

Most were Sunday morning worship services.

- Little River Baptist Church, Jenkinsville, SC
- Vacendak dissertation, Liberty University Chapel at Northgate Terrace, Knoxville, TN (3x)
- Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship, Lewisville, TX
- GES National Conference, Denton, TX
- Crossroads Bible Church, Talty, TX
- Ridge Pointe Fellowship, Dallas, TX
- Fellowship North, Knoxville, TN
- Lake Phalen Comm. Ch., Maplewood, MN (2x)
- Commentary Meetings, Duluth, MN
- Lake Phalen Comm. Ch., Maplewood, MN
- Fellowship North, Knoxville, TN

Prayer Items

Thanksgiving: Diane's first knee replacement and John's cataract surgeries went well, by God's grace. Pray that Diane's second knee surgery (early February) and physical therapy is equally successful. Pray for good commentary-progress on the commentary, distributing *Living Waters*, and other ministry. Pray for the Lord to continue to provide for Message of Life's financial needs.

Lifeline

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One of three sessions at the GES Conference



Ridge Pointe Fellowship, Dallas, May 28



"Repentance Unfound," at GES, May 21, 2023

Website: www.TheMessageOfLife.com.

To subscribe for free, e-mail Diane at: mrslangprof@gmail.com or send contact information to: PO Box 726, Seymour, TN 37865.