

## Trinitarian Verses (part 2 of 4): "His Name Shall Be Immanuel"

**Description:** A discussion of the various passages in which Christians seek to prove the Trinitarian nature of God. Part 2: Is the name Immanuel a proof that Jesus is God?

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The Hebrew name "Immanuel" can be translated as, "God with us" or "God is with us." Some people believe, based on Isaiah 7:14, that because Jesus would be called "Immanuel," he must be God incarnate. Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23 are often read around Christmas. They are read as follows:

Isaiah 7:14 "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

Matthew 1:23 "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."

**First**, the prophecy states that his **name** will be Immanuel."

It does not say that "he **will be** Immanuel."

**Second**, Mary never called her child "Immanuel" as required by the prophecy. According to the Bible, she named him Jesus following instructions by the angel of God.

Matthew 1:25 "but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a son; and he called His name Jesus."

**Luke 1:30-31** "The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.'"

**Third**, when read in context, the birth and naming of the child Immanuel was to be a sign for king Ahaz that God was with his people who were about to be invaded by two rival kingdoms (Isa 7:10-16). The promise was fulfilled by God (2 Kings 16:9). The name "God is with us," means that God will support us.<sup>[1]</sup> The name makes perfect sense if the child's name was supposed to indicate to King Ahaz that God was on his side.

Isa 7:10-16 "Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, 'Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.' But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.' Then Isaiah said, 'Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread

will be laid waste."

2 Kings 16:9 The king of Assyria complied by attacking Damascus and capturing it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and put Rezin to death.

**Fourth**, Isaiah 7:14 in actual Hebrew does not say a virgin would give birth but that a young woman would conceive. The Hebrew word *almah*, used in Isaiah 7:14 means young woman or maiden, not a virgin. The Hebrew word for virgin is *b'tulah*. The RSV (Revised Standard Version) Bible is one of the few Christian Bibles that used the translation 'young woman' instead of replacing it with the word 'virgin.'

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Imman'u-el.

**Fifth**, when something is "called" a certain name, it does not mean that the thing is literally what it is called. Symbolic names are frequently used by Hebrews in the Bible. Many names would cause great problems if taken literally. Jerusalem is called "the Lord our Righteousness," and Jerusalem is obviously not God (Jer. 33:16). In Genesis 32:30, we are told that Jacob called a piece of land "Face of God." Abraham called the mountain on which he was about to sacrifice Ishmael "the Lord will provide," yet no one would believe that the mountain was God. Similarly, no one would believe an altar was God, even if Moses called it that: "Moses built an altar and called it 'the Lord is my Banner'" (Ex. 17:15). Would Christians believe that Elijah was "God Jehovah," or that Bithiah, a daughter of Pharaoh, was the sister of Jesus because her name means "daughter of Jehovah?" Do Christians believe that Dibri, not Jesus, was the "Promise of Jehovah," or that Eliab was the real Messiah since his name means "My God (is my) father?" Similarly, would they say that Jesus Bar-Abbas, who avoided crucifixion by being set free (Mat. 27:15-26)<sup>[2]</sup>, was the son of God because his name meant "Jesus, son of his Father"? Of course not.

We can conclude that reading Jesus as the fruition of a prophecy in Isaiah is only due to Matthew quoting the prophecy, rather than people actually calling Jesus Immanuel in his lifetime. Furthermore, even if his name was Immanuel, the name does not necessarily reflect the fact, as can be seen from other names linked with God (in the Hebrew forms of *El* or *Yah*) belonging to other people. Making the claim that Immanuel means Jesus God in the flesh among His people is therefore merely an example of how the Trinitarian doctrine of incarnation was forced upon the message of Jesus by "bending" prophecies.

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Endnotes:

[1] "The name Immanuel could mean 'God be with us' in the sense 'God help us.' "Interpreter's dictionary of the Bible, vol. 2, p. 686.

[2] The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible from the Westcott-Hort Greek Variants

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