

**BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE®**

Advanced Bible Study

WINTER 2021-22 | CSB



STUDY 1:

*Irrefutable: Prophecies
That Point Us to Jesus*

STUDY 2:

*How to Avoid
Life's Pitfalls*

THE PERFECT GIFT

Most of us never outgrow the childlike delight of receiving a gift, but as we become adults, we discover the joy is just as rich when we give a gift. We save for weeks and shop for just the right present, or we invest time in making or planning the gift. Then we watch with joyful anticipation as the recipient opens the gift. Seeing those smiles only increases our joy.

As much as we enjoy giving gifts, God enjoys it far more. Because He loves us so much, He gave us the greatest gift possible: Himself. Left to ourselves, we are lost; our sin keeps us from the joy of eternal life with God. But Jesus came to earth as a child, lived the sinless life we could not, and then died as a substitute for our sin. That was His perfect gift to us. But the gift does not stop there. God raised Jesus from the dead, conquering sin and death for us.

Through Jesus, God offers you the gift of forgiveness, freedom, a new beginning, and a life with Him that never ends. But to receive this gift, you must let go of your sin. Repent and put your faith in Him. Admit to God you are a sinner and ask Him to forgive you. Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Express your repentance and faith by praying something like this:

“Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of my sins. I’m sorry for all the wrong I’ve done and ask You to forgive me. I now accept Your gift of eternal life. Thank You for Your love, forgiveness, and a new life in Jesus Christ. From this day forward, I choose to follow You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Share your decision to follow Jesus with a pastor or those in your Bible study group. Get involved in a church that will help you grow in your faith. Be baptized as an expression of your faith.

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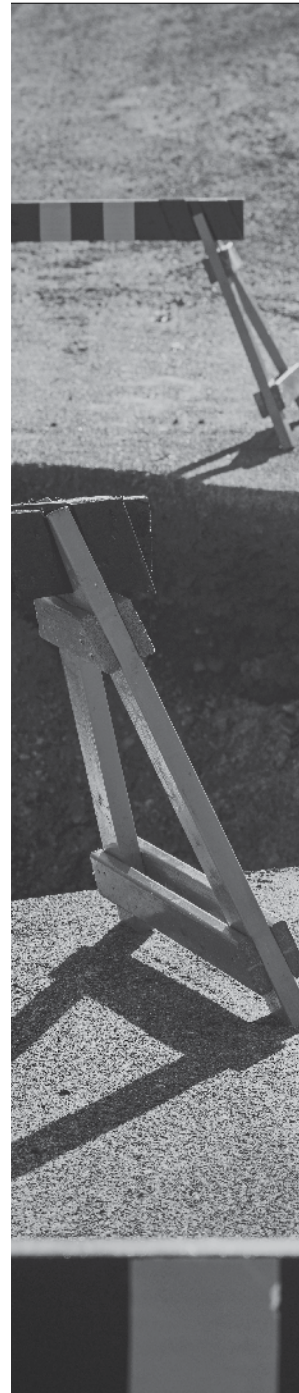
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INTRODUCTION

IRREFUTABLE: PROPHECIES THAT POINT US TO JESUS

Was Jesus of Nazareth simply a good man and an engaging speaker who was, unfortunately, misunderstood by both religious leaders and His own followers, or was He something more—much more? When we read the Old Testament in light of what the New Testament reveals about Jesus, we discover that the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus were not events that just happened. The life and mission of the Messiah was planned long before Jesus was born. By looking at just those prophecies that point to His birth, we see irrefutable evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

How This Study Supports the Discipleship Plan (p. 178):

Share Christ. The Christmas season is an ideal time to point others to Jesus Christ. We gain confidence in sharing His story as we see how His life is a part of God's grand design planned long ago. The birth of Jesus is not just a quaint story we tell at Christmas; it was prophesied centuries earlier.

SESSION 1**God with Us****THE POINT**

Jesus is Immanuel—God with us.

THE PASSAGES

Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I remember having quite a scare at my grandmother's when I was a small child. I ran and told my mother that something scary was happening outside in the dark in the back of my grandmother's house. She asked what I had heard, and I explained to her that every time I started to go in that direction I heard some shrieks and moans and other scary sounds. Knowing it was probably my cousins hiding in back of the house, she encouraged me to go and face my fears. Cousins or not, I was not about to go by myself to the dark places in back of Mama Martin's house.

Thankfully, my mother said she would accompany me and we would go together to confront my fears. All of a sudden, I had a confidence that I didn't have before. With my mother behind me, I felt I could do anything, and I also felt that my cousins wouldn't scare her. So we started walking in to the dark. A few times, I glanced back to make sure she was there, and with every step I gained more confidence. I rounded the corner and shouted to my cousins to quit trying to scare me. I wasn't afraid of them or their antics. When I turned to look back, my mother was no longer behind me!

In fact, she had not been behind me since I left the wrap-around porch. The fact that I believed she was with me had given me the confidence to confront my fears.

This session comes from two different books, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament. Both passages are about a person facing his fears. Isaiah brought a message of hope to Judah as Assyria pressed for control in the region, while Matthew described Joseph's courage in confusing circumstances. In both cases, the cure for their fear was the presence of Immanuel, which literally means God with us.

THE SETTING

The events of Isaiah 7:14 took place in Judah, the southern portion of the divided kingdom, during the reign of King Ahaz (735–715 BC). While he reigned on the throne of Judah, Ahaz participated in much evil, including sacrificing to foreign gods on the high places (2 Kings 16:4) and even offering his own son as a sacrifice (v. 3). He had access to the prophets Isaiah and Micah, yet his reign was anything but godly.

The most challenging problem he faced was the impending invasion of Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria. He debated whether he should align himself with Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, King of Israel to try and stop the advancements of Assyria.

In this context, the prophet Isaiah brought him a clear message of hope and a clear encouragement to seek help from the Lord, not from other powers. Sadly, Ahaz put his trust in humanity instead of in God, which resulted in Assyria's domination. Evidence of Ahaz's failures included his having a Syrian altar built in the temple (v. 11) and his being banished from burial in the royal tombs (2 Chron. 28:27).

The events from the Book of Matthew took place over 700 years after the failure of Ahaz. Though Isaiah's prophecy had a near-fulfillment in a child that extended the Davidic dynasty after Ahaz, its ultimate fulfillment came in the events of the

birth of Jesus Christ. He was the one who would both restore the line of David and extend it forever. A special child would be born to a young woman of Israel who would be the Savior of the world. He would fulfill Isaiah's prophecy in ways that most people had never imagined. He would be born of a virgin and would be fully God and fully man.

STUDY THE BIBLE

Isaiah 7:14

¹⁴ Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.

The virgin birth was foretold hundreds of years before Jesus' birth. Interpreters often jump from this passage to its clear fulfillment in the New Testament in Matthew 1:18-25, but it is important to first see this passage in its fulfillment in the time of Isaiah. Isaiah 7:1-3 set the stage for the prophetic announcement that Messiah would come into the world through the virgin birth. The events surrounding the prophecy "took place during the reign of Ahaz" (v. 1).

The grandson of Uzziah, who had reigned in Judah for 42 years, Ahaz had a tumultuous reign in the Southern Kingdom, partly as a result of his own personal and moral failures, and partly because of poor decisions he made as a leader.

As the king of Judah, Ahaz had set a poor moral standard. He had participated in the vilest idolatry by sacrificing his own child to the gods (2 Kings 16:3). He seemed more in line with the kings of Israel in the north than he did the kings of the south. He burned incense on the high places surrounding Jerusalem and worshiped pagan gods (v. 4). With such a poor spiritual background in relationship to Yahweh, one might expect that his decision-making process would be flawed, and it was.

The poor decision surrounding the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 involved a threatening situation from his neighbors. Ahaz

got word that two of his formidable enemies, Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel, were aligning themselves for an assault on his kingdom. King Ahaz met with Isaiah the prophet, who encouraged the king to stand firm in his faith and not fret over the attack that was planned against him (Isa. 7:4-9).

God spoke to the king and invited him to ask for a sign, even if that sign were as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven (vv. 10-11). Ahaz disobeyed by refusing to ask for a sign, and the Lord chided the king for trying His patience (vv. 12-13).

In response to this disobedience, the Lord gave Ahaz a sign in Isaiah 7:14 anyway. This sign may have spoken both to his own time and to a future time when the Messiah would accomplish His ultimate fulfillment.

In verse 14, Isaiah proclaimed, **The Lord himself will give you a sign.** Ahaz was tempted to align himself with Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria in order to combat the two smaller enemies to his north, Israel and Aram. This would invite disaster upon his kingdom, because Assyria was far more capable and dangerous to his people. Isaiah desired for Ahaz to trust in the Lord to protect them from his neighbors to the north. So God gave the king a sign that He would be with Judah. That sign would come with the birth of a son.

In the typical manner of announcing a birth (Gen. 16:11; Judg. 13:3,5), Isaiah announced the *sign* would be that **the virgin will conceive.** This passage has generated much discussion as it relates to the Christmas story.

The Hebrew word meant a young woman of marriageable age. The Hebrew word was used of a woman who is not a virgin (Gen. 24:43; Ex. 2:8; Psa. 68:25; Prov. 30:19; Song of Sol. 1:3; 6:8). It would certainly be assumed that the woman would be a virgin, but sometimes the emphasis is just upon the young age of a woman. It could have been a young woman, but it could also have been a virgin. The Greek translation of the Old Testament would later render this translation as the Greek

word for *virgin*, which specifically indicated that the woman was with child having had no sexual relations with a man. When quoting this passage in the New Testament, Matthew also included the Greek word for *virgin* (Matt. 1:22-23). In fact, the use of this word through the communication of the angel convinced Joseph not to put Mary away or divorce her because she had not been unfaithful to him.

Who is this woman who would conceive a special child? Some interpreters believe Isaiah, in the short term, was referring to “the prophetess,” who gave birth to his youngest child, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, mentioned in Isaiah 8:1-3 and connected with Immanuel (Isa. 8:8).

Others would say this was the wife of Ahaz, who birthed King Hezekiah. Hezekiah would trust in the Lord in ways that Ahaz never did, and he won a victory over the forces of Assyria without help from any other country (2 Kings 18-19). God was with King Hezekiah in a most powerful way and He helped the king overcome his neighbors and He especially helped with the brutal forces of Assyria.

Though in the short term, Isaiah’s child or Hezekiah may have delivered Judah, his birth was not a miraculous birth, nor was he the ultimate fulfillment of this passage. The virgin who would conceive is a reference to Mary, who would give birth to a Son who would be named **Immanuel**.

The name *Immanuel* is a compound word that literally means “God with us.” This is what Judah needed to hear as their neighbors surrounded them and threatened them. God was with them in their trials. He was with them in their battles. And though the current king of Israel was far from God and leading the country in the wrong direction, another would be born who would bring them back to where they needed to be.

In addition, One would be born in the future who would assure them that God had not abandoned His people. That Son was Jesus Christ, who truly brought the presence of God

to man. As the God-man, Jesus was fully God and fully man, and His birth was assurance that God would not abandon His people, even if attacks came from Israel, Aram, or even Assyria. God assured Judah of His presence with them in the successor to King Ahaz but ultimately in Jesus Christ.

What are some lasting truths from Isaiah 7:14?

- ▶ Our trust must ultimately be in the Lord and in His presence with us through our battles.
- ▶ We sometimes look to others to provide for us things that only God can provide.
- ▶ The birth of Christ brought hope to the nation of Judah and to the whole world.

Matthew 1:18-19

¹⁸ The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ So her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

God fulfilled His promise through Mary's pregnancy.

Matthew began his gospel, written primarily to the Jews, with a genealogy of Jesus Christ, tracing his birth from Abraham to Joseph (Matt. 1:1-17). It was important for Matthew to demonstrate that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy as a King in the line of David through the tribe of Judah. Therefore, he spent the first part of his gospel tracing Jesus' lineage through Abraham and David.

After the genealogy, Matthew turned to the story of Jesus' birth through the eyes of Joseph. He wrapped this story in the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 (Matt. 1:23). After tracing Jesus' lineage through forty-two generations, Matthew then described the

circumstances of Jesus' birth. The name **Jesus Christ** is in the emphatic position in this passage, emphasizing it not as a story primarily about Joseph or Mary or wise men but about the Child who was born to be King.

In verse 18, Matthew began his account of Jesus' birth **after his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph**. This was a one-year engagement period known as betrothal, though it was more binding than what engagement is thought to be today. It could only be terminated by death or divorce. Joseph and Mary had made that commitment to go through this one-year process leading to marriage, but something happened along the way.

This happened **before they came together**, which was a reference to sexual relations. Certainly, a couple betrothed to each other were not allowed to participate in sexual relations prior to the completion of their marriage ceremony.

Prior to consummating their marriage, Joseph discovered that Mary **was pregnant**. Certainly, this would have created a great dilemma in his mind. He planned to marry this woman, but now he discovered she was having a child who was not his. What he did not yet know was that this child was **from the Holy Spirit**.

The Bible is remarkable in its restraint when describing the events of the virgin birth of Christ. It does not contain crass or overly detailed descriptions of how this happened as did other fanciful tales of virginal conceptions. Neither did it describe any human and divine coupling in physical sexual relations.

Instead, Matthew spoke of this as occurring by the power of the Holy Spirit, whom Scripture earlier described as giving life in creation (Gen. 1:2) and bringing life out of dead bones (Ezek. 37:1-14). The Spirit brought the life of God into the womb of Mary and fulfilled the ancient prophecy of Isaiah 7:14.

In verse 19, the news that Mary was with child created a dilemma for Joseph. Matthew described him as **a righteous man**. He abided by the law of God and could not shirk his

duties according to the law. The law outlined clear penalties for adultery, which Mary's apparent unfaithfulness would have been even during betrothal: it required that both guilty parties must die by stoning (Deut. 22:13-24).

According to the holiness codes of the law, this was done to "purge the evil" from the camp of Israel (v. 21). However, because Joseph was righteous, he also had compassion on Mary during this time. The law also permitted divorce in the case that the woman had become "displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her." In that case, he was to "write her a divorce certificate, hand it to her, and send her away from his house" (Deut. 24:1). This was not a requirement but a concession, however.

Have you ever been caught between compassion and law? This is what Joseph faced when he heard the news that his betrothed was pregnant with a child. Neither death nor divorce was optimal, but Joseph decided upon the latter, and in doing so he **decided to divorce her secretly**. He would give her the certificate, send her on her way, and they would cut their losses.

His desire was to **not ... disgrace her publicly**. He did not want to make a public spectacle of her. When Joseph's sense of right and wrong collided with his compassion for Mary, he originally chose to divorce her quietly and to send her away without any sort of public spectacle. In doing this, Joseph would represent a theme Jesus highlighted in His Sermon on the Mount, that true righteousness is characterized by compassion and mercy (Matt. 5:6-7, 21-26, 38-48).

What Joseph did not know and would soon discover is that God fulfilled His promise to send a Messiah through Mary's pregnancy. Though some interpreters suggest that Joseph knew of her pregnancy through the Holy Spirit prior to his decision to send Mary away, the verses that follow suggest that he only discovered that through a dream which prevented him from having to send her away. She had not been unfaithful to him

but had been overshadowed by the power of the Holy Spirit to conceive and give birth to Jesus Christ (Luke 1:35). God revealed this truth to Joseph to satisfy his sense of right and wrong and his desire to live righteously.

What are some lasting truths from Matthew 1:18-19?

- ▶ Righteousness must always be measured with compassion.
- ▶ When God speaks, His words and promises have the power to save.
- ▶ God will fulfill His promises through people who are faithful to Him.

Matthew 1:20-25

²⁰ **But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.**

²¹ **She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”** ²² **Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated “God is with us.”** ²⁴ **When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He married her ²⁵ but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus.**

Our faith, like Joseph’s, must be grounded in the truth that God is with us. At first, Joseph did not know that Mary’s pregnancy was from the Lord. This happened **after he had considered these things**. His obedience to the law and his compassion for Mary collided, and by considering those things, he decided to divorce her privately to avoid public embarrassment for her.

In verse 20, however, something happened to change his thinking. **An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.** The Old Testament Joseph was known for his dreams (Gen. 37:1-11); the New Testament Joseph also would have this legacy.

Dreams played an important role in the infancy narratives of Matthew's Gospel (Matt. 2:12,13,19,22); the only other dream Matthew mentioned was the one that caused Pilate's wife to suffer (27:19). The *angel of the Lord* was actively involved in helping people to understand God's will in their dreams since it was not the usual way God communicated (1:20,24; 2:13,19).

The angel told Joseph, **"Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife."** He could proceed confidently with the marriage to Mary. She had not been unfaithful to him; rather, **"What has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."** This was the work of God not man. The fact that the angel referred to **Joseph as son of David** reminded Joseph of his royal lineage and prepared him for the news that a new King would soon be born through these most unusual circumstances.

In verse 21, without the aid of a sonogram, the angel revealed the gender of the child. He said, **"She will give birth to a son."** Joseph knew at that point the child would not be his flesh and blood, but he would be responsible for rearing and nurturing Him. One of the first responsibilities of the father was to name his child, and so the angel told Joseph that he would **name him Jesus.** This was derived from the Hebrew name *Joshua*, and both names denote "Yahweh saves." The angel of the Lord had already indicated to Mary that the child's name would be *Jesus* (Luke 1:31), so imagine when they started the conversation of what to name the child. They both had the same name.

Why was this important? The angel revealed to Joseph that Jesus, **"will save his people from their sins."** His deliverance would not be a physical liberation from their political enemies but a spiritual deliverance from sin (Ps. 138:7). This also fit the description of Messiah as the One who would deliver people

from sin (Isa. 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:24-31). He was not a national liberator but a spiritual Savior.

In verse 22, Joseph certainly measured the angel's announcement by Scripture. He recalled Isaiah 7:14 which **was spoken by the Lord through the prophet**. Isaiah had been the voice that spoke the message, but the words were the Lord's. Interestingly, the angel used the same prophecy in the annunciation to Mary that she would have a child (Luke 1:31).

In the Greek language, the word *virgin* is clearly used, meaning the word that meant "young girl" used in Isaiah 7:14 meant more than just a girl of young age. This was a woman who had never had sexual relations with a man, but now she was pregnant through the Holy Spirit's power. The angel's message confirmed by Scripture gave Joseph the courage he needed to continue with his betrothal and marriage to Mary.

In verse 23, even though the angel instructed Joseph to *name him Jesus*, Isaiah's prophecy said **they will name him Immanuel, which is translated "God is with us."** Though *Jesus* was the child's name by birth, *Immanuel* was his name by function or role.

In verse 24, Jesus was the Messiah God was sending to bring His presence to His people—fully God and fully man. This reference to the incarnation perfectly described the ministry of Jesus. "God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16).

In keeping with Joseph's "righteous" character (Matt. 1:19), he continued to obey the Lord in the things that He did. As soon as he woke from sleep, **he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him**. He had heard the angel's announcement and the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 and realized that the fulfillment would be taking place within his own family.

Therefore, **he married** Mary. Since they were already betrothed, all that awaited was the completion of the marriage process. The Scripture did not indicate how far this was into

the betrothal process or whether this would have raised flags of concern in the community that his wife was with child so quickly. It could have happened at any time in the betrothal.

In verse 25, displaying qualities of righteousness again, Joseph **did not have sexual relations with** Mary during her pregnancy. Given this, no one could claim that the baby belonged to Joseph because even though the marriage was completed, it was not consummated at that time.

Whether this was between him and Mary or was made public knowledge, the text does not indicate. However, certainly Joseph's restraint was meant to highlight the activity of God in this most unusual pregnancy. Joseph trusted God's plan by faith, and he took steps to make sure that people saw God's activity in fulfilling prophecy and sending His Son.

The phrase, **until she gave birth to a son**, discounts the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. After Jesus was born, the couple consummated their marriage. Jesus had at least four brothers (Matt. 13:55) and an unnamed number of sisters (v. 56). Though Mary did not remain a virgin forever, she certainly was prior to the birth of Jesus.

Matthew ended this section by again noting Joseph's obedience. He named the baby Jesus just as the angel had instructed him. Jesus was not a family name but a name given by God, and Joseph obeyed the Lord completely as he recognized God's work in the life of his new family.

Long ago, God had promised Judah He would be with them through the special birth of a child to a virgin. Who would have ever believed that it would happen to them? Still, Joseph and Mary embraced their roles in God's plan for their lives by faith.

What are some lasting truths from Matthew 1:20-25?

- ▶ Our faith must be grounded in the truth of God's Word.
- ▶ Our faith must be grounded in the power of God's presence with us.
- ▶ Our faith must lead us to obedience of God's plan.

