



# SUNDAY SCHOOL DECEMBER 21, 2025

Prayer:

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Old Testament: Isaiah 7:10-16.....2**

Isaiah Gives Ahaz the Sign of Immanuel..... 2

Overview ..... 2

Biblical Context..... 2

Historical / Non-Biblical / Political Context ..... 2

Historical Timeline / Biblical Timeframe..... 3

Scholarly Metaphorical Interpretation With Modern-Day & Grant County Context ..... 3

How Should We Act and React to This Scripture Today? ..... 3

**Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25.....5**

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah ..... 5

Overview ..... 5

Biblical Context..... 5

Historical / Non-Biblical / Political Context ..... 6

Historical Timeline / Biblical Timeframe..... 6

Scholarly Metaphorical Interpretation With Modern-Day & Grant County Context ..... 6

How Should We Act and React to This Scripture Today? ..... 7

**Addendum: .....8**

Comparative Analysis..... 8

Why Emmanuel Is Sometimes Spelled Immanuel ..... 10



## Old Testament: Isaiah 7:10-16

*Context: Isaiah prophesies God's announcement of Immanuel*

### ISAIAH GIVES AHAZ THE SIGN OF IMMANUEL

Again, the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol (SHEE-ol) or high as heaven."

But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test."

Then Isaiah said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals that you weary my God also? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.

"He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted."

### OVERVIEW

This passage captures a tense moment in Judah's history. King Ahaz, facing pressure from enemy nations, refuses God's offer of reassurance. Isaiah then proclaims that a child—Immanuel—will be born, representing God's presence with His people. Before the child matures, the threat from Judah's enemies will disappear. The text mixes immediate historical meaning with long-term prophetic layers, making it foundational in both Jewish and Christian interpretation.

### BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Isaiah is confronting King Ahaz during the "Syro-Ephraimite Crisis." Two neighboring kingdoms—Aram (Syria) and Israel (Ephraim)—threatened Judah and tried to coerce Ahaz into joining their rebellion against Assyria.

Ahaz fears them. Isaiah tells him not to worry, because God will protect Judah. God then invites Ahaz to ask for a sign—an extraordinary gesture meant to strengthen a wavering king. Ahaz refuses, claiming he doesn't want to "test" God, but the refusal actually masks distrust. God responds anyway: a child will be born, and before the child is grown, Judah's enemies will be gone.

Christians later see a second, deeper fulfillment in Jesus' birth (Matthew 1:23). But in Isaiah's day, the prophecy had an immediate reference—likely to a child born in that era, representing divine presence during crisis.

### HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

Historically, Ahaz was caught in a geopolitical struggle between the rising Assyrian Empire and smaller states desperately trying to survive. Israel and Aram wanted Judah to join an anti-Assyrian coalition. Ahaz refused, prompting them to attack him to force compliance.

Archaeology and Assyrian records confirm:

- Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria was expanding rapidly.
- Smaller kingdoms often sought protection by paying tribute.
- Israel and Aram were destabilized and eventually crushed by Assyria.



Ahaz ultimately sought help from Assyria instead of God, which led to political subservience and spiritual compromise (2 Kings 16). Isaiah's message in this moment was not just spiritual—it was politically countercultural: *trust God more than empire, alliances, or fear-driven strategy.*

#### HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **735–732 BCE** – The Syro-Ephraimite War.
- **732 BCE** – Assyria conquers Damascus (Aram).
- **722 BCE** – Assyria destroys the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
- Isaiah 7 takes place **around 734 BCE**, when the threat against Judah was most intense.
- The birth of the child (“Immanuel”) symbolized a short countdown—perhaps within 2–3 years—until the threat would be gone.

This was a real historical crisis with real political consequences.

#### SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Scholars often read this passage metaphorically as a story about **trust versus fear**.

Ahaz stands for leaders (or communities) who talk about faith but rely on whatever earthly power feels most immediate—military strength, alliances, political tribes, or cultural identities. God invites trust, but Ahaz refuses under the guise of piety: “I don’t want to test God.” It’s a familiar move—using religious language to avoid genuine faith.

The sign—a vulnerable child—symbolizes something striking: **God answers fear not with force, but with presence.**

For a modern community like Grant County:

- Economic fears, population decline, industry changes, or cultural shifts can feel like “threats at the gates.”
- Communities sometimes look to strongmen, slogans, or political movements (right or left) as the “Assyrian Empire” of our time—offering strength, identity, and reassurance.
- ***But Isaiah warns: if you place ultimate trust in those powers, you may survive the moment but lose your spiritual center.***

The Immanuel sign reminds us that God works through unexpected, humble means—ordinary people, children, neighbors, quiet faithfulness—not through the grand or overpowering.

***It’s a call to avoid fear-driven decision-making in our homes, churches, and local community life.***

#### HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

##### 1. **Examine our fears honestly.**

Like Ahaz, we often make decisions from anxiety while using religious language to justify them. Isaiah invites us to name our fears and bring them to God rather than burying them in politics or self-reliance.



**2. Stay open to God's signs—even if they're not what we expect.**

God offered a sign through a child, not an army. Today, God's presence often arrives through humble voices, small acts of kindness, or emerging hope where we weren't looking.

**3. Trust God more than alliances.**

Ahaz's mistake was trusting Assyria over God. Our equivalent today might be trusting parties, ideologies, media personalities, or cultural movements as if they can save us. They may help, but they cannot be our foundation.

**4. Guard against pious excuses.**

"I will not test the Lord" sounded holy, but it masked disobedience. Sometimes Christians use spiritual language to avoid spiritual responsibility.

**5. Remember that God is with us (Immanuel).**

God's presence is not tied to national strength, cultural dominance, or political triumph. It is tied to faithfulness, compassion, justice, and humility.

In short: *this text calls us to courageous faith—especially when fear tempts us to grasp for quick, worldly solutions.*



## Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25

*Context: Matthew announces the divine origin of Jesus' birth*

### THE BIRTH OF JESUS THE MESSIAH

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit.

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly.

But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

*"Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"*

which means, "God is with us."

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

### OVERVIEW

Matthew 1:18-25 tells the story of how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. Mary is found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit, and Joseph, described as a righteous man, faces a dilemma: he can follow the law and publicly divorce her or quietly separate to protect her from shame. In a dream, an angel reassures him that Mary's conception is from God, instructs him to name the child Jesus, and identifies this event as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about a virgin giving birth to a son called Emmanuel. Joseph obeys immediately, choosing trust over fear and compassion over legalism. The passage emphasizes divine initiative, human obedience, and God's commitment to be present with humanity.

### BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Matthew opens his Gospel by tying Jesus directly to Israel's story. The genealogy in verses 1-17 establishes Jesus as the son of Abraham (the covenantal promise) and the son of David (the royal promise). With the very next verse, Matthew shifts from lineage to origin story.

Joseph's role is essential because legal fatherhood determines Jesus's Davidic status. Naming a child in Jewish custom is an act of paternity; through Joseph's naming of Jesus, the child enters the royal line.

The Isaiah prophecy cited (Isaiah 7:14) originally referred to God's sign to King Ahaz during a political crisis, but Matthew reads it typologically: the birth of Jesus is the ultimate expression of God stepping into human turmoil.

This passage also sets a theme carried through Matthew's Gospel: God's presence in the midst of difficult circumstances, revealed not in power but in vulnerability.



## HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

First-century Jewish betrothal was legally binding, more like marriage than engagement today. Breaking it required a formal divorce. If Mary was thought to be unfaithful, Joseph had legal rights to expose her publicly, which could lead to shame or even danger. His choice to divorce quietly shows mercy operating inside the constraints of the law.

Politically, Judea lived under Roman rule. Herod the Great ruled as a client king through brutality, paranoia, and heavy taxation. People longed for deliverance. Messianic expectations ranged from political rebellion to spiritual renewal. Into this tension comes a Messiah whose arrival is quiet, whose parents are ordinary, and whose mission is salvation rather than political overthrow.

Dreams also played a significant cultural role in ancient Judaism and the wider Greco-Roman world. They were widely believed to be legitimate forms of divine communication, especially for righteous individuals. Joseph's dreams become a repeated narrative device guiding the Holy Family.

## HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Around 6–4 BC:** Most scholars estimate Jesus's birth during this window, based on Herod's death in 4 BC.
- **Reign of Herod the Great:** A politically volatile period marked by Roman oversight, massive construction projects, and social unrest.
- **Matthew's Gospel written ~70–90 AD:** Matthew shapes the story for a Jewish-Christian audience wrestling with identity, tradition, and faithfulness in a post-Temple world.

## SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Metaphorically, the passage explores **how ordinary people respond when God disrupts their plans.**

Joseph represents anyone who finds themselves caught between what seems right by convention and what is right by compassion. His struggle mirrors the internal debates many people in Grant County, Indiana face when tradition and mercy collide.

- **Mary's unexplained pregnancy** symbolizes the unexpected circumstances that enter our lives and communities — economic downturns, family crises, the opioid epidemic, homelessness, or divisive politics.
- *Joseph's dilemma symbolizes how we wrestle with maintaining reputation, following established norms, or responding with grace.*
- **The angel's message** symbolizes clarity that often comes only after fear, confusion, or sleepless nights.
- **Emmanuel, God With Us** becomes a metaphor for God choosing to be present in imperfect places: small towns, strained families, churches full of people who don't always agree, and communities trying to hold themselves together.

In Grant County, where many speak openly about values, faith, and tradition, this passage quietly challenges readers: *when compassion and the law collide, or when mercy and community expectations clash, which will we choose?* Joseph shows that righteousness is not rigid obedience but relational faithfulness.

The metaphor pushes us to ask:



- *Where is God asking us to move from suspicion to trust?*
- *Where is God calling us to replace judgment with protection?*
- *Where might a quiet act of mercy restore dignity to someone others have written off?*

Joseph's obedience is quiet, unpublicized, and deeply costly. That feels very local — the kind of goodness that happens in small county communities that does not make headlines but absolutely shapes lives.

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

1. **Choose mercy over reputation.** Joseph risked his standing to protect Mary. Christian discipleship often requires choosing compassion even when it makes us look naive or unconventional.
2. **Be open to God's interruptions.** Sometimes the things that derail our plans are the very things that reveal God's presence.
3. **Listen before reacting.** Joseph waited long enough for God to speak. Many modern crises — political tension, social media outrage, community division — get worse because we react before we reflect.
4. **Embrace Emmanuel.** God is not distant but with us — in hard decisions, messy families, financially stressed households, and strained communities.
5. **Honor quiet obedience.** Not all faithfulness is public. Grant County has countless people who quietly care for aging parents, check on neighbors, volunteer at food banks, serve at the mission, or give time without recognition. Matthew elevates that kind of righteousness.
6. **See others through the lens of grace.** Joseph had every legal right to condemn, yet he chose compassion. Our communities thrive when we lean into grace rather than judgment.



## Addendum:

### Comparative Analysis

Isaiah 7:10-16 gives a promise of immediate reassurance to a fearful king, while Matthew 1:18-25 reveals that same promise fully realized in Jesus, whose birth brings not temporary relief but God's abiding presence and salvation for all.

#### 1. The Core Connection

Matthew intentionally quotes Isaiah 7:14 to frame Jesus's birth as the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to be present with His people. Both passages center on:

- A threatened future
- A fearful leader or decision-maker
- A divine sign involving a child
- God stepping into human crisis with reassurance

But they do this in very different historical moments, and Matthew magnifies the meaning far beyond its original context.

#### 2. Crisis and Fear: Ahaz vs. Joseph

##### Isaiah 7:10-16

- King Ahaz faces a political and military crisis as Syria and Israel pressure Judah.
- Ahaz refuses God's offer of a sign, masking distrust as false piety.
- The prophecy about the "young woman" (or "virgin") and her child is given to reassure Judah that the threat will collapse before the child matures.

##### Matthew 1:18-25

- Joseph faces a personal crisis when Mary is found to be pregnant.
- Unlike Ahaz, Joseph is receptive to God's message and responds with obedience.
- The child's birth is not merely a reassurance but the beginning of God's redemptive plan for the whole world.

**Contrast:** Ahaz's fear causes spiritual paralysis. Joseph's fear becomes a doorway to faithful action.

**Grant County analogy:** We know people (and whole communities) who respond to uncertainty with denial and avoidance (like Ahaz), and others who respond with quiet courage and trust (like Joseph).

#### 3. The Child as a Sign: Immediate vs. Ultimate

##### Isaiah's Child (Isaiah 7:14-16)

- The child is a **timely sign** for Ahaz.
- His birth signals that God is active in Judah's political moment.
- Within a few years, the danger from the invading kings will disappear.

##### Jesus the Child (Matthew 1:18-25)

- Jesus is the **final sign** of God's presence.





- His birth is not tied to a temporary political threat but to humanity's deepest need: salvation and God's nearness.
- Where Isaiah promises deliverance from two kings, Matthew announces deliverance from sin, fear, and separation from God.

**Contrast:** Isaiah's sign is **local and time-bound**. Matthew's sign is **universal and eternal**.

#### 4. The Name: Emmanuel in Both Passages

**Isaiah 7:**

- "God With Us" is the reassurance that Judah is not abandoned in political turmoil.

**Matthew 1:**

- Jesus is the *embodiment* of that phrase.
- God is with us not merely in national crisis but in human life, suffering, and salvation.

**Grant County reflection:** Just as the Isaiah prophecy reassured Judah during national instability, Matthew's Emmanuel reassures modern communities facing economic stress, fractured relationships, addiction, or political division. God is not with us only in church services or during Christmas pageants. God is with us in hospital hallways, food pantries, aging neighborhoods, and tough conversations.

#### 5. Human Response: Resistance vs. Obedience

**Ahaz:**

- Refuses God's sign.
- Clings to political alliances rather than trust.
- Chooses self-preservation over faith.

**Joseph:**

- Listens to God's voice in a dream.
- Takes the risk of staying with Mary.
- Obeys immediately and sacrificially.

**Contrast:**

- Ahaz's heart is closed; Joseph's heart is open.
- Ahaz tries to manage crisis on his own; Joseph allows God to reshape his life.

**Modern-day insight:** We often find ourselves choosing between the "Ahaz path" and the "Joseph path."

- Ahaz path: doing what protects our image, avoiding trust, refusing God's interruption.
- Joseph path: doing the loving thing even when it complicates our life.

Many people in Grant County find themselves right there — between protecting reputation and doing what compassion demands.

#### 6. The Nature of Salvation: Political vs. Personal vs. Cosmic

**Isaiah 7:**

- Salvation = Israel and Syria will not defeat Judah.



- It is national survival.

### **Matthew 1:**

- Salvation = “He will save His people from their sins.”
- This reaches the personal (human hearts), communal (the church), and cosmic (all creation longing for restoration).

Matthew expands and deepens what Isaiah could only hint at. The original prophecy was like a sketch; Matthew reveals the full picture.

## **7. What This Combined Reading Teaches Us Today**

- a) God steps into real crisis.

Whether the crisis is geopolitical (Judah), personal (Joseph), or local (Grant County’s mix of economic pressures, health struggles, and social divisions), God does not stay distant.

- b) God’s signs often appear quietly.

- Isaiah’s sign is a pregnant woman in a fearful city.
- Matthew’s sign is a pregnant woman in a small town.
- Not fireworks. Not political power.
- God works through vulnerable life.

*Are we being open to those quiet signs? How can we tell?*

- c) Faith requires response.

- Ahaz refuses the invitation to trust.
- Joseph embraces it.
- We get to choose which model we follow.

*What happens if we don’t respond? What is that feeling we get when we know we’ve either responded or failed to respond?*

- d) Emmanuel is not just a Christmas word.

It is a year-round theological claim: God is with us in confusion, disappointment, hard choices, and the quiet courage of ordinary people.

- e) Salvation grows deeper across the biblical story.

- In Isaiah: rescue from invading armies.
- In Matthew: rescue from the condition of the human heart.

The movement is from the outside-in — God begins by protecting His people and ends by transforming them.

## **Why Emmanuel Is Sometimes Spelled Immanuel**

### **1. It Depends on the Language**

The difference comes from **Hebrew vs. Greek**.

#### **Hebrew (Old Testament):**

- The name is spelled **Immanuel** (with an I).
- Hebrew begins the word with the letter *ayin*, which traditionally gets transliterated into English with an **I**.



### **Greek (New Testament):**

- Matthew writes the name in **Greek**, which uses the letter *eta* at the beginning.
- When Greek is transliterated into English, it often becomes an **E**, producing **Emmanuel**.

So:

- **Isaiah = Immanuel**
- **Matthew = Emmanuel**

Same name. Same meaning. Just different language pathways.

## **2. What the Name Actually Means**

Both spellings mean the same thing:

### **God with us**

- *Im / Em* = with
- *El* = God

The meaning does not change with the spelling.

## **3. Why English Bibles Keep Both Spellings**

Translators usually preserve:

- **Immanuel** when quoting or translating the Hebrew text
- **Emmanuel** when quoting Matthew's Greek text

This helps readers track the original language source.

## **4. A Simple Way to Explain It in Sunday School**

- Immanuel is the Hebrew spelling.
- Emmanuel is the Greek spelling.
- Either way, it means God is with us.

