

# The Famous Prophecy of the Virgin Birth

## Background

What was happening in Israel and Judah at the time of this prophecy? As sad as it was, Pekah had formed a military alliance with Rezin and together they attacked Judah and Jerusalem when Ahaz was the King. Here are the contemporary key players and events in this narrative;

### Assyria & Syria in the time of Isaiah

Assyria and Syria were originally two different nations although their founders, Asshur and Aram, were brothers, sons of Shem (Genesis 10:22). The Assyrians conquered Aram, as Syria was originally known, shortly before conquering the Northern Kingdom of Israel (730-720 BC). The Babylonians eventually conquered Assyria and at that time both Assyria and the remnant of Aram ceased to exist.

The Assyrian homeland encompasses areas of what are now northern Iraq, northwestern Iran, southeastern Turkey and northeastern Syria. The ruins of Ninevah, the capital of ancient Assyria, can be found in Mosul, a city in modern Iraq. Damascus, the capital of modern day Syria, was originally the capital of Aram.

### Pekah

During the time of the divided kingdom in Israel, there was a string of wicked kings who ruled in the northern and southern kingdoms. This should not be surprising; when the people of Israel first became dissatisfied with God as their king and clamoured for an earthly king, God warned them that human kings would make them unhappy (1 Samuel 8:6–18). But the people insisted, and so God gave them over to their desire. While there were several righteous kings who ruled over God's people in Judah, the number of poor rulers who led the people into idolatry would eventually bring the nation to ruin and captivity in a foreign land.

Pekah was one such evil king. He began his rule in the kingdom of Israel by assassinating the former king, Pekahiah, for whom Pekah served as his chief military officer (2 Kings 15:25). Pekah reigned for 20 years before he himself was assassinated by Hoshea ben Elah.

### Rezin

Rezin was the king of Aram, otherwise known as Rasin King of Syria – same person. He ruled from Damascus during the 8th century BC at the same time Pekah was King of Israel. In reality he was merely a tributary for King Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria.

### Ahaz

Ahaz was king of Judah and an evil man to the core. He became king at the age of 20 and reigned for 4 years with his father, Jotham, from 735 to 731 BC, and then 16 years on his own, from 731 to 715 BC. 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28 record King Ahaz's destructive practices, such as idol worship and sacrilege against the temple of the Lord. The actions of Ahaz contributed to the downfall of the kingdom of Judah, which the Lord brought about in 586 BC. Isaiah was the prophet of the Lord in the land during his reign.

## The confederacy of Rezin and Pekah

Late in his reign, Pekah entered an alliance with Rezin and attacked the southern kingdom of Judah, besieging Jerusalem. In response, king Ahaz of Judah sought help from the Assyrians who invaded and “took Ijon, Abel Beth Maakah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. He took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali and deported the people to Assyria” (2 Kings 15:29). This was the beginning of the destruction of the kingdom of Israel, which was God’s judgment for the sin and idolatry of the kings and their people (2 Kings 17:7–23).

## Hoshea

Hoshea rose up and assassinated Pekah. Like Pekah, he was a tributary king to Assyria and reigned for nine years after Pekah’s death, but refused to pay tribute to Shalmaneser king of Assyria. Shalmaneser discovered the treachery of Hoshea in refusing to pay tribute and attempting to make an alliance with Egypt to make war against Assyria (2 Kings 17:4). Shalmaneser imprisoned Hoshea then conquered the rest of the kingdom of Israel and deported its people, completing God’s judgment on the northern kingdom of Israel.

## The hypocrisy & arrogance of Ahaz

In Isaiah 7:10-12 we see how in the face of the impending invasion by the collective armies of Pekah & Rezin the Lord offered Ahaz a sign. The response of Ahaz demonstrates his astounding hypocrisy:

*Moreover, the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, “Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!”*

The reason he is not asking a sign from the LORD is because he has already made a military alliance with Assyria and would rather trust in that alliance than in the LORD God! He lied to the prophet about his motivation making himself a pure hypocrite.

## The response of Isaiah

In the face of the arrogant and hypocritical refusal of Ahaz to ask for a sign on the grounds that he did not want to “test the Lord” God moved Isaiah to utter the famous prophecy of the virgin birth:

*Then he said, “Hear now, **O house of David!** Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? “Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel”*

Pay extra special attention to the language used by Isaiah. He did NOT give this sign to Ahaz, but to the “House of David” and Jesus was indeed of the House of David and was the promised son who would sit on the Throne of David in the millennial kingdom.

## Isaiah’s prophecy of the virgin birth

This prophecy was given to the House of David and has three elements to it;

A virgin shall conceive

She shall in due time give birth to a son

His name shall be called Immanuel (in Hebrew meaning "God with us")

The detailed fulfilment of this prophecy is found in Matthew 1.23 and Luke 1.27 & 34

## The momentous importance of the virgin birth

Consider firstly the Hebrew word used in the Isaiah text. This is the word "*almah*" which is rightly translated as virgin. In strict grammatical translation, this word would be "young maiden" which taken in context unquestionably means virgin. The keeping of ones virginity until marriage in Israel was of such critical importance that if one the wedding night the girl was found to not be a virgin, the penalty was for her to be brought to her fathers door and the men of the city would stone her to death (Deuteronomy 22.13-20). That this word *almah* is correctly translated virgin is further borne out by the translation of Jerome (the Vulgate circa 400AD) and also the use of the word virgin in reference to Mary's conception (Matthew 1.23 and Luke 1.27 & 34).

Secondly, consider the biology of the blood of the developing foetus in the virgin womb. According to Dr M R de Haan of Radio Bible Class fame, the simple facts are that the blood products that form in the growing foetus over the nine months of gestation are derived from the father alone and no communication occurs with the blood of the mother due to the presence of the placental barrier.

The sin nature is passed on to us from our fathers and not our mothers and this accords with the biblical record (Romans 5.12). As such, the blood which flowed through the veins of the Lord Jesus was free from the contamination of original sin which entitled Him to be the perfect sacrificial lamb of God. Jesus not only did not sin, He was not capable of sin. For further study, consider the following scriptures: I Peter 2.22; II Corinthians 5.21; Hebrews 4.15; Luke 1.35; John 8.29; Isaiah 53.9; I Peter 1.18-19

For today, let's just focus on the name Immanuel

## The mystery of Immanuel

I Timothy 3.16

*"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: **God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.**"*

Galatians 4.4

*"But when the **fullness of the time had come**, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law .....* "

John 1.1

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, **and the Word was God** .....*

*And the **Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us**, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth"*

Matthew 1:18-23

*“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.*

*Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.*

*But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: **for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.***

*And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.*

*Now all this was done, **that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,***

*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”*

To hear radio announcer Paul Harvey tell this wonderful story of Christmas eve and the birds paste the following link you're your browser and enjoy

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## The meaning of Immanuel

Hebrews 4.15

*“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-yet he did not sin”*



