



## TEACHING LETTER 49

### **Emmanuel – God With Us**

*“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, ‘God with us’” (Matthew 1:23 NKJ).*

**T**hough I have written about the name Emmanuel before, I decided to write about Jesus, our Emmanuel, again this Christmas. It is unlikely we could mine all the depths of the meaning of that wonderful name which means God With Us.

I want us to think again how God sent Jesus to restore the fellowship with Him that we lost in the Garden of Eden. This fellowship between God and us was God’s idea; and when it was lost, it also was His plan to restore it. Now we as born-again believers do not ever *have* to feel alone. Although we may at times indeed feel alone, that is when we can remember Emmanuel.

**W**e read in Isaiah 7:14 the first mention of Immanuel. “Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

Several hundred years later, in the little town of Bethlehem, an angel spoke to Joseph in a dream about this Child. I’ll quote the passage from Matthew 1: 18-24:

*“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.’”*

Then Matthew explained: *“So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with*

*child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. . . .”*

**A**lthough the angel did not mention the name Emmanuel to Joseph, years later when Matthew wrote His account of Jesus’ birth, he (being inspired by the Holy Spirit) connected the dots from the prophecy in Isaiah 7 about Immanuel to this Jesus who was born to Mary and with whom he—Matthew--had spent more than three years as a disciple.

However, during the three-plus years Matthew and the other disciples followed Jesus, time after time they stood amazed at Him. When Jesus fed the five thousand, or walked on water, or cleansed a leper or opened blind eyes, they did not connect the dots (“He is Emmanuel.”). They often were confused about who Jesus was. Rather than understanding He was “God With Us,” they asked, “What kind of man is this who speaks to the wind and the waves and they obey Him?”

**O**thers were heard to say, “No man ever spoke like this Man!” Something was different about Him, but they did not recognize Emmanuel. Not only did they not recognize Him, but when Jesus clearly told the Priests and other leaders that God was His Father, they sought to kill Him!

For hundreds of years Israel had expected God to send the Messiah who would restore the nation of Israel and the earthly throne of David. They expected God to send a man, but they did not expect God Himself to come. The Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah – the God-With-Us idea-- was understood to be along the lines of how God had been with them throughout the centuries. They had seen Him in the pillar of cloud by day and fire

by night in the wilderness. They had seen His presence fill the Temple at its dedication. His presence dwelt over the cherubim in the Holy of Holies and was approachable by only one designated person, such as Moses or the high priest.

**F**rom our position of looking back and now understanding all God accomplished by sending Jesus, we can truly thank God He didn't just show up in a cloud! Thank God He meant He would truly be with us! Up close and personal. Fellowship restored!

Israel, however, had no point of reference to understand the permanency and the intimacy of the "God-With-Us" idea. Every person—young and old, rich and poor, religious leader and not—would one day be able to experience the infilling, abiding presence of God. Emmanuel's coming would mean not only eternal life but also the possibility of God's people never feeling distant from Him or feeling alone again.

**F**or thousands of years before Christ's birth, Israel had kept God at a very respectful and reverential distance. After all, no one could come into God's presence except the high priest and that only once a year. And he had to shed the blood of a lamb for his own sins and those of the people before he could safely enter the Holy of Holies. Sin remained the barrier between God and man.

For most of the people, God was a distant being who could not be known, seen, felt, touched or heard. No wonder the idea of "God with us" did not sink in—even when they were looking at Him. Or touching Him. Or hearing Him. The ones who met Jesus experienced Emmanuel and didn't know it. The way to fully know and fellowship intimately with God had not yet been opened.

**T**he full communion and fellowship God desired would be made possible when Jesus died and destroyed the sin barrier. This was signified when the veil in the Temple was torn in two while Christ hung on the Cross. The Way was opened for every one—not just the high priest—to enter the Holy of Holies anytime, all the time. The possibility of fellowship with God was restored.

When Jesus was about to ascend to heaven following His resurrection – He said, "Lo, I am with you always."

**W**hat did He mean? He meant, "I am Emmanuel. Always." Though we cannot see Him or touch Him, though He is seated at the right hand of Majesty on high, He is —Emmanuel still.

He meant that, because He is with us, anything He calls us to do, we can indeed do. He once had said, "Without Me you can do nothing." And since He never leaves us, we can lean on Him, trust in Him and indeed do all things through Him.

**B**ecause He is Immanuel, we need never feel alone. His Spirit dwells in us, and when we face troubles, heart ache, difficulties, grief or pain, we have His presence and His help. When we experience times of gladness and celebration, He celebrates with us. In the middle of the night—or in the middle of the day—not just at church or at religious events---but all the time, we can know He is there.

And when we may go through times without human companionship, we can know God is with us. Not just in head knowledge – but in our hearts. Feelings of aloneness do not have to reign in our lives. By faith we can grasp the reality of God's abiding presence.

**M**y prayer is that each of us would experience God's presence as never before, for we still call Him Immanuel – and we are not alone.  
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GOD'S WORD FOR TODAY

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Sonjia Hunt Ministries

[www.sonjahuntministries.com](http://www.sonjahuntministries.com)

PO Box 21

Cleveland, TN 37364—0021

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