



Teaching Letter 38

Immanuel, God With US

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel,” (Isaiah 7:14 NKJ).

God has revealed Himself to us quite often in Scripture through His names. Each name speaks of at least one facet of God’s character and of His relationship to us. “Elohim,” for example, points to God’s greatness and glory, His omnipotence and sovereignty. “Jehovah” depicts God as the One who is absolutely self-existent, the One who in Himself possesses life and eternal existence. “Jehovah” also is used together with other aspects of God’s nature in compound names, such as “Jehovah-Jireh”—the God who sees and provides. Several of these compound names appear throughout Scripture. Another name used for God is “Adonai” which means lord, master and owner.

Several hundred years before Jesus’ birth, Isaiah wrote that a baby would be born whose name would be called “Immanuel.” In the Book of Matthew we have the prophecy repeated in reference to Jesus’ birth. Matthew wrote: “. . . and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, ‘God with us’” (Matthew 1:23 NKJ).

I’ve always particularly liked the name Immanuel because of its link to Christmas. I like the season. I like Christmas carols, and we sing about Immanuel. But Jesus wasn’t called Immanuel so we could write and sing lovely Christmas carols. The meaning of Immanuel is more profound than I am capable of telling; yet it also is very simply—“God with us.”

In the Old Testament God often told His children that His presence was with them. God spoke to Joshua: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you

wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9 NKJ). God told Israel when they were in Babylon as captives: “Do not fear, O Jacob My servant,” says the Lord, ‘For I am with you” (Jeremiah 46:28 NKJ). It was when God’s people were facing especially great difficulties that God would always remind them He was with them.

God would again proclaim His presence among His people. This time God would become one of us and live among us. His presence and His angel had been with Israel to guide them in the wilderness. They had seen His presence in fire and smoke on Mount Sinai when the Law was given to Moses. His presence came down visibly upon the tabernacle and in the temple, and He had gone before Israel in the wilderness as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. In Christ, however, God Himself “became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14 NKJ).

We are not alone. It was God’s plan from eternity past—to be “with us.” He has always wanted intimate closeness with us, the ones created in His image and in His likeness. Sin, however, brought separation from God; and even though Jesus—by His Holy Spirit—now indwells us who have called on Him, we still can have occasional feelings of loneliness and aloneness.

Sadly, the holiday season that celebrates God coming and dwelling among us, can for many be one of the loneliest times. Any celebration calls for being with others to share the occasion and the joy—weddings, graduations, birthdays, and so on. If no one is present to share, things don’t seem right. Sometimes it’s even possible to be in the midst of a

celebration or a crowd and feel alone—like no one is truly “with us.”

It doesn't have to be that way, however. Jesus is Immanuel! Jesus said, “If any one loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:23 NKJ). It is such an amazing thought—the Father and the Son make their home with us—*with us!*

It is a matter of recognition. Though Immanuel walked the streets of Jerusalem and other cities, many did not recognize God With Us. The reasons varied, but the result was the same. They continued in their aloneness. It's sort of like when scientists peer into space with their telescopes. Some recognize God is there. Others see only vast emptiness and conclude we are alone in the universe. Same telescopes—different conclusions.

Though Jesus returned to heaven and is now seated at the right hand of the Father, He is still Immanuel. Even as Jesus was leaving His disciples' presence physically, He said: “. . . lo, I am *with you* always. . .” (Matthew 28:20 NKJ *italics added*). They would no longer see Him with their natural eyes. They must discern His presence with their spiritual faculties. It would now require them to exercise their faith in order to see Him, hear Him, and know His presence. If they would believe, they would know in their hearts He was with them.

It's the same with us. We experience God with us when we recognize by faith that He truly is. Jesus said to John: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to Him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20 NKJ). If we have opened our heart's door to Jesus, He has come in—fact. He has made it possible for us to fellowship with Him anytime by believing and reaching out to Him—choice.

In the very time of year when we celebrate “Immanuel,” so many feel alone. Sometimes it's the business of the season that distracts and hinders our discernment of His presence. We may get a snippet of “God With Us” time during a Christmas program. We may receive another morsel for our souls when we hear our favorite carol. Immanuel, however, came so that we could continually know His presence.

We can grow in experiencing Immanuel. I once wondered why “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52 NKJ). In my lack of understanding, I thought surely the Son of God was endowed with all wisdom and stature and favor with God and men from infancy. But I now know, Jesus submitted to the process of growth that you and I experience. He identified with us fully, though He was fully God.

Jesus experienced the feeling of aloneness—even abandonment. On the Cross, He cried out “with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ ” (Matthew 27:46 NKJ). This was an ultimate expression of aloneness, concluding a life in which people whom He loved did not fully understand Him and finally abandoned Him.

Gloriously, that was not the end of the story. Immanuel accomplished what He had come to do. When He said on the Cross, “It is finished!” (John 19:30 NKJ), He removed all hindrances and blockages to full fellowship with God. Sin could no longer separate us, and neither could feelings of aloneness reign in our lives if we by faith receive in our souls the truth of His abiding presence. My prayer is that you would know Immanuel today and experience His presence as never before, for you are not alone. **SH**

GOD'S WORD FOR TODAY

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