That Little Used Name

By Thomas Thorne
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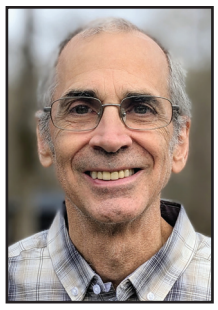

In about 700 B.C. Isaiah made the following prophecy: "*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*" (Isa. 7:14 ESV)

The LORD/God is known by many different names and titles in the Old Testament. The personal name for God in the Old Testament, as shown in Exodus 3:13-15 and 6:2-8 is YHVH (yod hei vav hei in Hebrew) or LORD (with all capital letters) as it is commonly translated. Another popular name is Elohim (Eh-lo-heem). Elohim is a word that is plural in form with a singular meaning which implies the fullness of God. We read of the "LORD of hosts" – YHVH Ze-vah-ote (2 Sam 6:18, etc.) in many places as well.

Frequently in the poetical literature, God is called El. This name is often associated with other descriptive titles such as the "Most High God" - El Elyon (Gen. 14:20), "the God of Glory" - El Ha-Cavode (Psa. 29:3), or "God is my salvation" - ʼEl Ye-shu-ah-tee (Isa. 12:2).

Yet there is one name for God that is only used twice in the entire Old Testament. That name is "Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14 and Isa. 8:8). Let's read the passage in Isa. 7:14 once again:

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isa 7:14 ESV)

The question has been asked, "It seems to plainly say in Isa. 7:14 that the son of the virgin would be called Immanuel, not Jesus or Yeshua, but Immanuel. Why don't we call Him Immanuel?" In response to that question, let's take a look at the interesting etymology (word origin) of the name Immanuel.

This word, Immanuel, is actually comprised of two words in Hebrew: Immanu Ale

• The first word – pronounced i-mah-noo (with a short i) – is spelled with the four Hebrew letters: ayin (ע), mem (מ), nun (נ), vav (ו)
• The first two letters of the first word (ayin and mem) make up the preposition "with"
• The last two letters in the first word (nun and vav) are a pronominal suffix (added letters at the end of a noun) which mean "us"
• The second word - ale - is the word for "God." Sometimes you hear this pronounced as El (short e).

So by looking at the composite parts of this name – Immanu ale - we have "with us God." Or, as translated into English, "Immanuel," - God with us. The derivation of this word is easy, but the theology of the name is profound. This word speaks of God's grace and mercy. So much so that He promises to give us His presence, and even of Himself.

The name Immanuel has come to symbolize and summarize the whole story of Biblical revelation. It promises the divine presence and the relentless movement of redemption from heaven to earth. This theme begins with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and their intimate fellowship with God and it concludes with the restoration of that fellowship upon Jesus' return as spoken of in Revelation 21:1-3, where we read:

"1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.
2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." (Rev. 21:1-3 ESV)

The name Immanuel

But what about the usage of the name Immanuel? We rarely if ever hear it used for Jesus except in an occasional song. I have two thoughts in this regard:

1. Maybe, just maybe the name and its meaning are so special they just were not meant to be used really often.
2. And secondly, every time we pray and ask for God to help us, either individually or as a group, we are in essence saying, "God be with me (or us)," or calling him Immanuel.

My name is Tom Thorne. My wife (Amy) and I moved to Marion from Denver, NC almost a year and a half ago. Amy and I are fellowship leaders of a small congregation of Believers called "Servants of the Most High God." Tom can be reached at servantsotmhg@gmail.com

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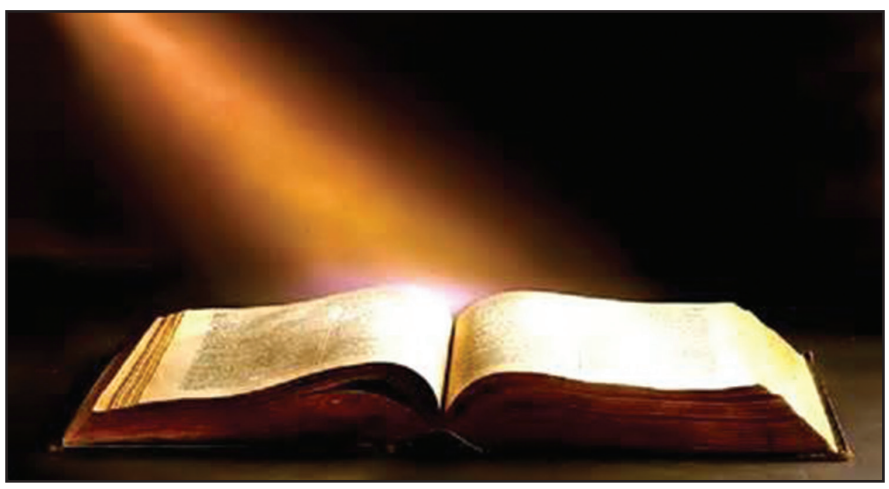

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