



Christmas always brings nostalgia. We remember days gone by, practice cherished traditions, think about when the kids were younger, or long for loved ones who once sat closer. Christmas calls us to look back and remember. Even our churches lean into tradition during this season—we sing the songs our parents sang and cherish what they cherished. This Christmas at Bannockburn, we’re creating our own nostalgia by journeying deep into the Old Testament. We’re traveling back 700 years before Jesus was born—before the manger, before the long walk from Nazareth to Bethlehem—to the prophet Isaiah. No other Old Testament prophet spoke more about Jesus than Isaiah, so much so that he’s often called “the fifth gospel” or “the evangelical prophet” because of his extensive and detailed messianic prophecies. While much of Isaiah concerns Christ’s death, these three weeks we’re celebrating His birth—the child of the virgin, the light of the world, the branch from the stump of David. This Christmas, we look again at the wonder of the incarnation. We behold God made flesh. And with tears of joy, we remember this light given for us who were dwelling in darkness. We will remember. We will celebrate.

WEEK 1

The Child of the Virgin

Isaiah 7 finds the kingdom of Judah in crisis. King Ahaz faces an existential threat as two northern kingdoms—Israel and Syria—march toward Jerusalem to destroy it. In his fear, Ahaz looks to Assyria for salvation rather than trusting in God. Into this moment of national terror and faithlessness, God offers a sign through the prophet Isaiah: a virgin will conceive and bear a son called Immanuel, “God with us.” While this prophecy had immediate fulfillment in Isaiah’s time, Matthew 1:23 reveals its ultimate fulfillment lay 700 years into the future in Jesus Christ. As you study this passage, consider how our God meets us in our moments of fear and faithlessness with His presence, and how the incarnation represents God’s ultimate commitment to be with His people! God is with us indeed!

ISAIAH 7:10-16

¹⁰ Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: ¹¹ “Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” ¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.” ¹³ And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

'Sheol - In the Hebrew Scriptures, this word is used to denote the realm of the dead. It simply means “the place of the dead” or “the place of departed souls/spirits.” It won’t be until the writings of the New Testament that the Lord will articulate more fully the concepts of Heaven and Hell.

THINKING THEOLOGICALLY

Why Does the Virgin Birth Matter So Much?

The virgin birth stands as a cornerstone of Christian faith for reasons that go far beyond historical curiosity. For nearly two thousand years, **Christians across every tradition and geography** have affirmed this doctrine as essential—not peripheral—to their faith. To dismiss it now requires assuming that the universal church has been fundamentally mistaken about a core belief for its entire existence, a level of presumption that should give us serious pause.

The doctrine also serves as a litmus test for the **reliability of Scripture itself**. The Gospel writers present Mary's virginal conception not as allegory or borrowed mythology, but as carefully documented history based on eyewitness testimony. Luke explicitly states he investigated everything carefully to provide an orderly account. If this central claim is false, it calls into question whether we can trust the Gospels on anything else they report about Jesus's life, death, and resurrection.

Theologically, the virgin birth uniquely **establishes Jesus's identity as both fully God and fully human**—the God-man who can mediate between heaven and earth. His birth from Mary proves his genuine humanity; his conception by the Holy Spirit rather than a human father proves his divinity. Without the virgin birth, we're left with either a mere human who cannot save us or a divine being who isn't truly one of us. The doctrine holds these two natures together in the mystery of the incarnation.

Most critically, the virgin birth explains **how Jesus could be truly human yet without sin**. Since the fall of Adam, every human father passes on a corrupted, sinful nature to his children—sinners beget sinners, always. But Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit rather than through Joseph, entered humanity without inheriting this curse of depravity. This sinlessness wasn't just a nice attribute; it was absolutely necessary. Only a spotless, perfectly holy mediator could stand between a holy God and sinful humanity, offering himself as the unblemished sacrifice for sin. Without the virgin birth, there is no sinless Savior. Without a sinless Savior, there is no salvation.

WEEK 1: LIFEGROUP QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTIONS

1. When you were a child, what was your favorite Christmas tradition, and what made it so special to you?
2. Think about a time when someone's presence brought you comfort during a difficult situation. What made their being there meaningful?

DIVING DEEPER

3. To capture the context of the passage, read verses 1-9 in advance. What specific invitation does God extend to Ahaz in verses 10-11, and how does Ahaz respond? What does this tell us about Ahaz's heart toward God?
4. The name "Immanuel" appears in verse 14. What does this name mean, and why is it significant that this is how the child is identified rather than by any other name?
5. Read Matthew 1:18-23. How does Matthew connect this Isaiah passage to Jesus' birth? What additional details does Matthew provide about the virgin birth that deepen our understanding of Isaiah's prophecy?
6. Throughout Scripture, God often gives His people "signs" to confirm His promises. Consider Genesis 9:12-17 (the rainbow with Noah), Genesis 17:9-11 (circumcision with Abraham), and Exodus 12:13 (the Passover lamb). How does the sign of Immanuel compare to these other signs in terms of what it reveals about God's character and commitment to His people?

7. King Ahaz refused to ask for a sign because he was pretending to be pious, yet he was actually planning to trust in Assyria instead of God. How do we sometimes mask our lack of faith with religious-sounding language or actions today?
8. God promised to be “with” His people through a child born of a virgin. What does this method of divine presence—through incarnation rather than through military victory, political power, or supernatural intervention—reveal about God’s heart and priorities?
9. Consider the reading on the previous page, “Why Does the Virgin Birth Matter So Much?” Which of the reasons stated resonates with you the most, and why is that?
10. If someone asked you, “Why would God choose to enter human history as a vulnerable baby rather than as a conquering king?” how would you answer based on this passage and your understanding of the incarnation?
11. Imagine a friend is going through a crisis and feels abandoned by God. How might the truth that Jesus is “Immanuel—God with us” reshape their perspective on their circumstances? What would you say to help them see God’s presence?
12. The incarnation demonstrates that God doesn’t just help us from a distance—He enters into our experience. What is one specific area of your life right now where you need to remember that God is “with you”? How might you actively remind yourself of His presence this week?

WEEK 2

The Light of the World

Isaiah 9 opens with a promise of light breaking into darkness. The regions of Zebulun and Naphtali—the very areas first to fall to Assyrian conquest—will be the first to see great light. This is not just political deliverance; it's the dawn of a new age inaugurated by a child born with the government on His shoulders. His names reveal His nature: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Matthew 4:12-16 shows us that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy by beginning His ministry in Galilee, bringing light to those walking in darkness. This passage challenges us to consider how the incarnation brings light into every dark corner of human existence—personally, socially, and universally—and what it means that this light comes through a child who is also the Mighty God!

ISAIAH 9:1-7

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

² The people who walked in darkness

have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep
darkness,

on them has light shone.

³ You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;

they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide
the spoil.

⁴ For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of
Midian.

⁵ For every boot of the tramping warrior in
battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ For to us a child is born,

to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his
shoulder,

and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his
kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and
forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

THINKING THEOLOGICALLY

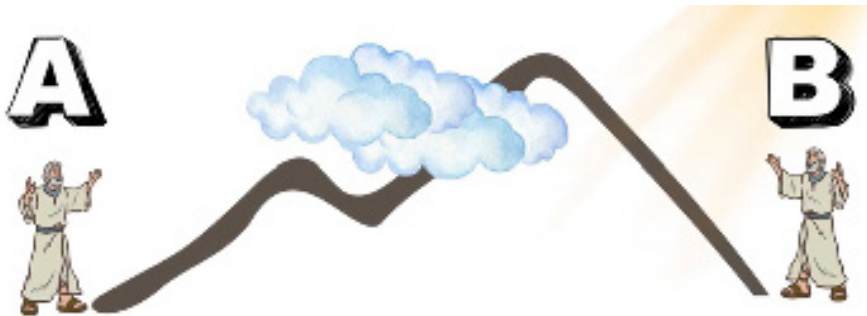
Can A Prophecy Be Fulfilled a Couple of Times?

The Bible study principle of **near and remote fulfillment** addresses how biblical prophecies can be authentically fulfilled in multiple time periods—first in a partial, immediate way, and later in a fuller, ultimate way. This interpretive framework is widely accepted within evangelical scholarship as a way to understand the complexity and depth of prophetic Scripture.

How It Works:

A prophecy is initially given to address a specific historical situation in the prophet's own time (the "near" fulfillment), but it contains elements that point beyond that immediate context to a later realization, often messianic or eschatological (the "remote" fulfillment). Importantly, evangelical interpreters emphasize that dual fulfillment should only be recognized when another inspired biblical writer explicitly applies the prophecy to a future event—keeping interpretation anchored to Scripture rather than speculation.

Think of it This Way:



A prophecy is given in the Old Testament through a prophet—let's call him Prophet A. This prophet can often see the immediate fulfillment of his prophecy within his own historical context. However, the remote fulfillment typically remains hidden from Prophet A's view. Lying beyond his temporal horizon, he sees only the first and lower peak of the mountain range.

What the principle of near and remote fulfillment teaches is that it often takes a second prophetic voice—Prophet B in the New Testament—to reveal how the original Old Testament prophecy was pointing toward a higher, ultimate fulfillment all along, a second and greater peak beyond the first.

What's crucial to remember is that both dimensions of the prophecy are divinely guided. The Lord superintends not only the initial prophetic utterance but also the later inspired recognition of its fuller meaning. Both the speaking and the revealing come from God's sovereign design.

Key Biblical Examples:

- Joel's prophecy about the Spirit's outpouring was partially fulfilled at Pentecost but points to a complete fulfillment at Jesus' return.
- Isaiah 7:14's prophecy of Immanuel had an initial fulfillment with Isaiah's own son as a sign to King Ahaz, but finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ's virgin birth.
- Hosea 11:1 originally referred to Israel's exodus from Egypt, yet Matthew applies it to Jesus, showing a remote Christological fulfillment.

Why This Matters:

This principle illuminates God's sovereignty over history and demonstrates the unity of Scripture across testaments. It shows how the Old Testament and New Testament fit together coherently, with earlier promises finding their deepest meaning in Christ. The framework respects the original historical context and meaning of prophecies while recognizing their fuller significance revealed later. It prevents both over-spiritualizing ancient texts and missing their richer applications, maintaining the integrity of both the original message to the prophet's contemporaries and the ultimate divine purpose unfolding through redemptive history. This interpretive approach strengthens confidence in biblical authority by showing how Scripture interprets itself consistently across time.

WEEK 2: LIFEGROUP QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What's the darkest place you've ever been (literally)? What was it like when light finally appeared?
2. Past or present, what are your favorite Christmas lights you've ever seen or enjoyed?

DIVING DEEPER

3. What's the darkest place you've ever been (literally)? What was it like when light finally appeared?
4. Past or present, what are your favorite Christmas lights you've ever seen or enjoyed?
5. The child born in verse 6 is called "Mighty God." What does it mean that God Himself would take on human flesh? Why couldn't God accomplish His purposes for humanity without becoming one of us?
6. Imagine someone who doesn't understand Christmas beyond presents and decorations. Using this passage, how would you explain why the birth of Jesus is called "good news of great joy" that affects all people, not just religious people?
7. This passage promises that "of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end" (v7). How should this promise shape the way Christians view current events, political turmoil, or social unrest? What hope does this offer that goes beyond any human solution?
8. Isaiah says the light has come to "those living in the land of deep darkness" (v2). Where do you see deep darkness in your community or in the lives of people around you? What is one practical way you could reflect Christ's light into that specific darkness this Christmas season—whether through words, actions, or presence?

WEEK 3

The Branch of the King

Isaiah 11 presents a vision of hope emerging from apparent death. From the “stump of Jesse”—the seemingly dead dynasty of King David—a new shoot will grow, a Branch that will bear fruit. This future king will be empowered by the Spirit of God and will rule with perfect justice and righteousness. His reign will bring such comprehensive peace that ancient enemies will dwell together, and even the created order will be restored to what it once was. This is not merely political reform; it’s cosmic renewal. The passage concludes with the nations seeking this Branch as a banner, and His resting place being glorious. As we approach Christmas, this text reminds us that Jesus’ incarnation wasn’t just about personal salvation—it was about the restoration of all things, the fulfillment of God’s kingdom promises to David, and the reconciliation of all creation under one righteous King!

ISAIAH 11:1-10

¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

² And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,

⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

⁶ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.

⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den.

⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

WEEK 3: LIFEGROUP QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever seen something beautiful grow from an unlikely place—a flower in a crack in concrete, a tree growing from a stump, or something similar? What made it memorable?
2. How would you define the word “peace” to a 5-year-old child?

DIVING DEEPER

3. Read 2 Samuel 7:8-17, and the first mention of the Lord’s promises to David. Consider also the account of the ‘last days’ of David’s line in 2 Chronicles 36:11-21. What metaphor does Isaiah use in verse 1 to describe the Davidic line and the coming king? What does a “stump” suggest about the condition of David’s dynasty at this point?
4. List below the six attributes of the Spirit that will rest on this Branch in verses 2-3. How do these attributes differ from what we typically value in political or business leaders today?
5. What specific examples does Isaiah give in verses 6-9 to illustrate the peace of this king’s reign? What pattern do you notice in how he describes these relationships?
6. Read Romans 15:12, where Paul quotes Isaiah 11:10. How does Paul apply this prophecy about the Branch to Jesus and the inclusion of the Gentiles? What does this tell us about God’s purposes in the incarnation?

7. Compare the peaceful kingdom described in Isaiah 11:6–9 with Revelation 21:1–4. What similarities do you see in these visions? How does Jesus' first coming at Christmas relate to the ultimate fulfillment of these promises?
8. Verse 3 says this king "will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears." What kind of judgment is Isaiah describing here? Why is this significant for how we understand Jesus as judge?
9. This Branch will judge "with righteousness" and "decide with justice for the poor of the earth" (v4). If someone said, "Christianity is just about getting people to heaven; it has nothing to do with justice or how we treat the poor," how would this passage challenge that view?
10. Imagine explaining to someone why Christians believe Jesus is the fulfillment of this Branch prophecy. What evidence from Jesus' life, death, and resurrection would you point to? How would you address the fact that we don't yet see the complete fulfillment of this peaceful kingdom?
11. Isaiah 11 presents a vision of a world where ancient enemies dwell in peace—the wolf with the lamb, the leopard with the goat. While we await the full realization of this kingdom, what is one relationship or division in your own life (whether