

Immanuel = God With Us
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Today we leave the Old Testament, and move to the New Testament.

In between Nehemiah building the wall in the OT and the beginning of the NT that opens with the birth of Jesus there is a span of about **400 years of silence**.

400 years when God does not speak directly to his people at all. There are no prophets speaking, there are no leaders like Moses who have a direct line to God. There is no voice in the night to anyone as there was to Samuel, and no miracles of the Red Sea parting, or manna from heaven.

There is silence. Ever experience a period in your life where God seems to be silent? I have. *Its hard...when those times come we need to learn to wait for the awesome and holy One with hope...not despair...and hold on...because he will show up for us again to speak grace and truth into our lives once more.*

And I am sure it was hard for the Israelites not to hear from God for *400 years*, to feel alone in their struggle, to be once again a conquered people under Roman rule, slaves to their whims and demands – living most of them on the edge of poverty and paying outrageous taxes to their captors.

They want a deliverer to come and rescue them from this oppressive regime. They want a Messiah to come and set things right.

AND then **God FINALLY speaks**. An angel – Gods messenger speaks. It's not with a lot of fanfare. No lightening in the sky. No email blast so that everyone knew. An angel comes to one peasant girl named Mary. And he says, "**Hail O Favored One, the Lord is with you.**"

The Lord is with you

And the angel tells Mary that she is to become pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. That she will be the mother of the long awaited Messiah. And then the angel says something to Mary that hearkens back to his original greeting...This sums it all up for me. The angel tells Mary, "**And his name shall be called Immanuel, which means 'God with us'**".

I don't know if any of you have ever looked up the meaning of your name. I have looked up the meaning of a few names of folks that are usually in our congregation.

William (Bill for short) – valiant protector

Elizabeth (Beth, Betty) – God is my promise

Douglas – Water or Stream (very erudite clan of Scottish earls)

Theresa (Terry, Terri) - means "to harvest, or harvester" and is synonymous with holiness

Gregory – watchful, vigilant

Ruth – Friend/Companion

Kenneth – born of fire, handsome one

Back in the ancient world names had meaning. They were chosen for a person by their parents based on what the parents wanted the child to be as a person – not just because they liked the sound of the name. A Name spoke about someones nature as a person – what they were like, or were destined to be.

Now before the angel visited Mary and told her that God was to be born in her womb in the person of Jesus...and that this baby name was to be named Immanuel (GOD WITH US)...there were lots of other names for God used by the people of Israel to describe the God of the OT. God was so vast and multifaceted that they had to have a lot of ways to describe him. There are at least 16 different names for God used repeatedly in the OT and many more names used once or twice.

One name for God in the OT is El Shaddai. It is used 7 times in the OT and is first found in Genesis 17:1. El means God and Shad in Hebrew is the word for breast. It connotes that God is the sustainer, the nourisher, the one who supplies for needs as a mother would her child. Remember the manna in the wilderness? Remember the quail? El Shaddai is a great name for God...the Israelites had experienced El Shaddai's provision throughout their history. But the truth is that they didn't always trust in it. They didn't trust in it because they didn't know his true nature...they didn't realize that God was WITH THEM. FOR THEM. THAT HE COULD BE CALLED UPON AT ANY MOMENT AT ANY TIME. You see I can know EL SHADDAI...Gods occasional provision...*but if I don't know that EL SHADDAI is GOD with me everywhere I go ...in every circumstance...in every valley...If I don't know him as Immanuel- GOD WITH ME...then El Shaddai is a distant reality meant only for special times and special places.* That's not the God of the NT.

His name shall be called Immanuel...God With Us....What a name!

Another name for God in the OT is **EI ELYON** which means **“The Most High God.” This is used 28 times to describe God in the OT and is first used in Genesis 14:18. It describes Gods preeminence and utter sovereignty.** El Elyon is a great name for God. This name tells me that God is all powerful and above all things. He reigns supreme and is pre-eminant. It means I need to worship him and adore him. I need to build a temple of gold that is worthy of him – just like Solomon did. I have to follow a rigorous set of rules to approach this great God – El Elyon – I have to sacrifice bulls and calves and observe ritual cleanliness procedures. I do this because I don’t know El Elyon is already with me...I have been separated from him by my own sin... I don’t hear him calling out to me ...I have not idea that his presence is so close its almost palpable...If I don’t know him as Immanuel – the one who saves me from my sin – then I will worship El Elyon in fear.

And the angel said “His name shall be called Emmanuel – God with us. What a name!

A name used for God over 2,000 times in the OT is the name Elohim. It means Judge & Creator. It is first used in **Genesis 1:1**. It is the standard Greek word for God - a being who exercises extraordinary control in human affairs and it specifically refers to the monotheistic God of Israel. Elohim created the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1:1. He is the only wise God, and exercises all kinds of control. That is good and I can accept that. The name is well suited to the Creator the One who controls all things. I know I am far from perfect. I deserve judgment and sometimes I even seek to be judged because deep down I feel that I should be punished. But what does my heart truly long for? For my Creator and Judge to BE WITH ME in trouble. Not distant and removed in controlling the affairs of my life, but WITH ME. Not far away and powerful but right alongside, walking through the thick of life with me. You see, if I don’t know that he is named Immanuel, I cannot love Elohim as I should. I can serve him out of duty and I can serve him anxiously. But I need a God named Immanuel who is with me, who takes the punishment for me as judge, so that I can trust the fact that I can throw myself on his mercy and be OK.

And the angel said, "His name shall be called Immanuel...God with us." What a name!

In the OT God is also called

EI Olam The Everlasting God, The God of Eternity, The God of the Universe, The God of Ancient Days. Olam literally means forever, eternity or everlasting.

The Hebrews understood this. They knew that God would outlast them and that he was the beginning and the end. I know this today. I believe this with all my heart. But friends, if I don't know that EI Olam is with me...if I don't know him as Immanuel, then his eternal existence is irrelevant and a vague abstraction.

And the angel said to Mary, "You shall call his name Emmanuel which means "God with us." The eternal, provider, unchanging, sovereign God is with us...now and always...that's the message of the NT. Immanuel...what a name!

The name most commonly used to refer to God by the Hebrews is used in scripture **6,828**

times. It is the most important name for God in the Old Testament but it never gets translated into our English versions of the Bible.

Whenever you see the word **LORD** in all capital letters know that this particular name is behind it.

In Hebrew the name has four letters – **YHWH** – and may have been pronounced something like **YAHWEH**. The Jews came to regard this word with such reverence that they would never speak it, in case by mistake they would use the Lords name in vain. So whenever they would come to this name in the reading of the text they would pronounce it "Adonai" which means Lord. **Most Biblical scholars think that YHWH is related to God revealing himself to Moses in the wilderness, and that the name YAHWEH means "I AM."**

I AM...This is a sacred name. This name helps me to know that God is out there. This revelation to Moses gets me thinking about a Supreme Being. But here we go again....friends if I don't know that the great I AM is with me...if I don't know that this great I AM of a God is walking and talking with me, and has taken a personal interest in my life - by entering into my world as a human being for my sake, and made himself available for me...if I don't know him as Immanuel... I may believe in a God, I may believe that he exists, but I can never fathom the truth of a personal relationship with him.

His nature, his desire, his name "shall be called Immanuel – God with us, said the angel to Mary....Immanuel...what a name!

There are so many other names for God that the Jews used..God is called **Jehovah Sabaoth – The Lord of Hosts**, The Lord of Powers. He is **Jehovah Shalom which means The Lord of Peace**. He is known as **Jehovah Jireh – the God who provides**, and **Jehovah Mekoddishkem – the Lord who sanctifies you and makes you holy**.

But nowhere in the OT do they call him Immanuel – not until the New Testament is he called this. Some experienced him close up but only a select few like Moses and David. But when the New Testament opens and the angel tells Mary – his name shall be called Immanuel – it was a name that ushered in an entirely new paradigm; never again will there be a gap between people and God. Never again will there be that distance and fear. Never again will people be unable to know his love. Never again will there be alienation and separation because of sin– because now in Jesus...God is with us. Immanuel has come.

The fact that the God of the universe would come on down

here, to our tiny planet and

... ..hang out in a dark dingy mortal world – as someone said

“bring his jammies and toothbrush and stay awhile - so we could approach him without fear, so we could understand God better, so we would begin to grasp his love and mercy on our level.... This always moves me. All these years in ministry and I still can't fully grasp that kind of love. (like becoming a dog – CS LEWIS) And we will see throughout the New Testament (as we saw in the OT too) that **the cross is very much in the plan from the beginning.** So not only does God get down on our level, but comes with the absolute intention and desire to die for us so that we can be reconciled to him.

His name shall be called Immanuel. God With Us. What a name!