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Introduction

Matthew structures his gospel like a sandwich. We have noted before that sandwich structures (called inclusions, brackets, envelopes, bookends etc) put a fence around a book, indicating that this fence is the main theme of the writer. The content sandwiched in between provides support for that theme. Here are the outer layers of the sandwich.

Look! The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will name him Emmanuel which means “God with us” (Matthew 1:22-23).

Look! I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

*I am not aware of any medically validated virgin pregnancies in humans
(Dr Amy Herring, Gillings School of Global Public Health)*

The first word of these verses, ‘look’, is imperative, meaning that the look is obligatory, because what follows is of vital importance, and of great consequence. Moreover, the action is not just about seeing but being aware, considering, and understanding what comes next.

Matthew's Emmanuel

*The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you will name him **Jesus**, because he will save his people from their sins.*

*This all happened so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be **fulfilled**: Look! The **virgin** will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will name him **Emmanuel** which means “God with us” (Matthew 1:20-23).*

In Matthew's day, Judah was still oppressed, by the Romans, and in need of deliverance by “God with us.” The Lord's answer is Jesus, who would save his people from their sins. Israel may have wished for salvation from the Romans, but Israel had to realise that they were in bondage again to sin. While the name ‘Jesus’ was given by heaven, ‘Emmanuel’, was given by men.

Virgin

‘Virgin’ (*parthenos*) comes from the Latin word *virgo*, which describes a fresh branch of a plant or tree ([Abarim Publications](#)). According to classical Greek Linguist Christophe [Rico](#), *parthenos* in Koine Greek has only one translation, and that is ‘virgin’.

Fulfilled

The prophecy is **fulfilled** in Jesus Christ, a statement often ignored, but interpretively critical. ‘Fulfilled’ (*pleroo*), means to complete: to fill a hollow, to keep a promise, to substantiate a prophecy or to accomplish a previously proclaimed objective. That is, to inflate something that came into the world flat and empty; wholly there but not yet endowed with volume and structure — like the universe or any organism that grows from a genetically complete seed ([Abarim Publications](#)).

Isaiah's Immanuel

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a **sign**.*

*Look, the **virgin** is about to conceive and bear a son, and shall name him **Immanuel** (Isaiah 7:14).*



(Lynn Prior)

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Some 700 years before Matthew wrote about the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, Isaiah prophesied a virgin birth. The concept of virgin births is often found in religious and mythical narratives, such as the birth of Romulus and Remus in Roman mythology. However, there is no scientific evidence to support human virgin births naturally. So, was Isaiah's prophecy an exception to the scientific evidence?

The background to Isaiah's prophecy was the reign of Ahaz king of Judah, when King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel marched up to Jerusalem to conquer it. Ahaz, his family, and the royal court were emotionally shaken, but the Lord reassured them that 'it will not happen'. The Lord told Ahaz to ask for a confirming sign from the Lord, or even ask for something miraculous. But Ahaz did not challenge the Lord.

In response, the Lord gave Ahaz a confirming sign, which is quoted on the previous page. He also added that before the child knows how to reject evil and choose what is right, the land whose two kings Ahaz feared would be desolate. And because of Ahaz's unfaithfulness in not trusting the Lord, He promised that He would bring on him and his family unprecedented tragedy by way of the king of Assyria (Isaiah 7:1-14).

So, before the child was grown up, an historical event took place - the two kings that Ahaz feared, were deported by the Assyrians and the Syria-Israel land made desolate. That fact of history alone indicates that the child was not the Messiah (see also Bible ref notes). Nevertheless, what did Isaiah mean by sign, virgin, and Immanuel.

Sign

The Hebrew term "sign" (*ʾot*) can refer to a miraculous event (Isaiah 7:11), but it does not carry this sense inherently. Elsewhere in Isaiah the word usually refers to a natural occurrence or an object, or person vested with special significance (see 8:18; 19:20; 20:3; 37:30; 55:13; 66:19). Only in 38:7-8, 22 does it refer to a miraculous deed that involves suspending or overriding natural laws. The sign to Ahaz involved God's providential control over events, but was not necessarily a miracle (Net Bible notes).

Virgin

Lynn Prior's question, "Wait. What? TWO Virgin Births?" demands an answer. Though the Hebrew word used here is (*ʿalmah*) it does not mean virgin inherently. The word is simply the feminine form of the corresponding masculine noun (*ʿelem*) meaning "young man".

The word *alma* only conveys age-gender. Had Isaiah wished to speak about a virgin, he would have used the word *betulah*. (In fact, although Isaiah used the Hebrew word *almah* only once in his entire corpus (7:14), the prophet uses this word virgin (*betulah*) five times; 23:4; 23:12; 37:22; 47:1; 62:5). In brief, the word *betulah* appears frequently in the Jewish Scriptures, and is the only word – in both biblical and modern Hebrew – that conveys sexual purity ([Singer](#)). The answer is simply that Isaiah 7 isn't speaking about the Messiah or a virgin birth ([Kravitz](#)).

Isaiah referred to a definite woman, and it is very likely that she was present at the prophet's interview with Ahaz. Isaiah had met him where the people wash clothes where there would be many women (7:3) (Net Bible notes). Accordingly, the Hebrew word (*ʿalmah*) is not definitive of a virgin.

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Immanuel

Because the sign of Immanuel ("God is with us") was meant to be a sign to Ahaz and the entire house of David of God's deliverance of Israel despite their unfaithfulness, we can say that it happened during Ahaz's time.

In Isaiah 8:7-8, the prophet uses the name again. He said: *So look, the Lord is bringing up against them...the king of Assyria and all his majestic power. He will spread his wings out over your entire land (Judah) O Immanuel.* Immanuel is addressed here as if he was already born and will see the judgment occur.

In sum, Isaiah 7 was true 700 years before Christ, and Matthew 1 was true too, and Matthew makes it clear that Isaiah's prophecy while totally true, was not the total story. It was but a shadow of Matthew 1, and Jesus Christ fills out all the possible meaning of the text - He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. That is understood when we remember that **God with us** in Isaiah was God's presence with the nation under judgment. **God with us** in Matthew is so much more, as we have noted He is with His people in saving them from their sins, while in Isaiah He is with His people in judgment of their sin.

I am with you (in between)

In between Matthew's 'with you' in 1:22-23, and 28:20, are two other 'with you' texts.

Not with the faithless

*Jesus answered, "You **faithless and perverse** generation, how much longer must I be **with you**? How much longer must I put up **with you**? Bring him here to me." And Jesus rebuked the demon and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly.*

*Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "**Because of your little faith**" (Matthew 17:14-20).*

You can feel the Lord's frustration here with His disciples to whom He gave authority over unclean spirits, and every sickness (10:1). It seems that His 'how much longer must I be **with you**', and 'how much longer must I put up **with you**' expresses His desire not to be Immanuel to them? Also, given that He had done so much in their presence, far from having great faith they had little faith. How bruising and withering was His *if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; nothing will be impossible for you.*

Fortunately for them He persisted and later they heard, **I am with you always**.

With the faithful

At the last supper He promised *I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new **with you** in my Father's kingdom* (Matthew 26:29).

The Lord was about to die and leave earth and His disciples, but He promised them that in His Father's kingdom completed and perfected, He would be with them once again. Then Master and disciples would be alike sharers in that joy in the Holy Spirit, of which wine--new wine--was the appropriate symbol ([Ellicott](#)).

These two in-between 'with you' texts confirm the two outer texts. The Lord is with His people to the end, whether faithful or not. Speaking of 'the end', it's time to consider what the end of the age means.

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The end of the age

Look! I am with you all the days, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

What did the Lord mean by *the end of the age*?

Age defined

Age (*aion*) means life-span, age or epoch, and describes any length of clearly defined span of time, whether one person's life or some era of certain renown. The word may also apply to the vast span of history: the ages, the times of old. In Roman times, Aion began to personify the eternal Roman rule, which made it an obvious target of the New Testament writers (Matthew 6:13, Luke 1:33, Romans 1:25). The Roman Aion even begat a female counterpart named Aeternitas (from which we have our English word eternity) who adopted the patronage of the deified Roman Emperor ([Abarim Publications](#)).

Ages were created

Jude mentioned '*Before all ages*' so that there was a period when there were no ages. Then, God through His Son **created the ages** (Hebrews 1:2), and they **were completed to perfection** at God's word (Hebrews 11:3).

Ages have a king

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory into the ages of the ages Amen (1 Timothy 1:17).

Ages have a purpose

God made promises **before the ages began** (Titus 1:2), and the wisdom of God was determined **before the ages** (1 Corinthians 2:7). Also, He granted to us salvation in Christ Jesus **before ages of times** (2 Timothy 1:9), and to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, **before all ages...**(Jude 25).

Ages are many

There are not three ages: this age, an in-between age, and the age to come. There are only two ages; "this age" and "the age to come". "This age" refers to the present age in which we now live here on the earth. And the phrase "the age to come" refers to that age which is called the "new heavens and the new earth" (Serven).

Mmm! Is it that cut and dried? [Serven](#) may see only a dichotomy of ages, as does [Gaffin](#), and quotes much scholarly support for his view but is it the only perspective?

Jewish view

The present age would be terminated by the appearance of Messiah, followed by the age to come. As the Messiah hasn't come yet, *the age to come* is still future ([Edersheim](#), [Scott](#), [Ice](#)).

Preterist view

Partial Preterists believe that the phrase "present age" or "this age" refers to the 40-year period between the earthly ministry of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. After A.D. 70 is "the age to come." Full Preterism understands 'this age' to be the Mosaic Age, and the 'age to come' as the Christian Age ([Ice](#)).



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Millennialist view

The age to come is a reference to the millennial kingdom that will commence with the second coming of Christ and last for one thousand years ([Ice](#)).

Apostles' view

Paul lived and wrote in *the present evil age* of Christ's redeeming sacrifice (Galatians 1:4). Some ages were created to end for we read of *the end of the ages* (1 Corinthians 10:11, Hebrews 9:26), which are before 'this age', and some are endless following 'this age, such as *the age and ages to come* (Ephesians 2:7, 1:21, Hebrews 6:5), and *the ages of the ages* (Galatians 1:5, 1 Timothy 1:17, Revelation 1:6, 1:18, 11:15, 14:11, 22:3-5). So there is more than just one age to come, perhaps many. And *Jude*:

Before all ages, now (the present time in which Jude lived) *and into the ages* (v25).

Serven may see only a dichotomy of ages, now and to come, but Jude clearly enunciated a trichotomy of ages - before, now, and to come. Can Serven's model be biblically justified? For if 'the age to come' is the 'new heavens and the new earth' what are the other ages that the Scriptures must include in 'the ages to come', and 'the ages of the ages' and yet are silent about?

Jesus & the end of the age

I am with you all the days, to the end (sunteleia) of the age (Matthew 28:20).

We noted above that some ages were created to end for we read of *the end of the ages* (1 Corinthians 10:11, Hebrews 9:26). The age of which the Lord spoke in Matthew 28:20 was one of those.

In fact, this is not the only time that Jesus referenced 'the end of the age'.in Matthew (see below). He had more to say about the end of the age than anyone. In His numerous parables of the kingdom of heaven, He mentioned the 'end of the age' three times. Notice that 'age' is singular, presumably the age in which He and the disciples were living. 'End' is (*sunteleia*), and is a compound word composed of (*teleos*, end), and together (*syn*). So, it does not merely mean an "end" or a "goal", but rather a coming together, a joint completion when the parts converge to the same time ([Abarim Publications](#)).The idea here is of the period of the summing up of all things (Ephesians 1:10, [Pett](#)). Some would take (*sunteleia*) to mean the great, final wrapping up of history at the end of the world.

....the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end (sunteleia) of the age, and the reapers are angels (Matthew 13:39);

Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end (sunteleia) of the age (Matthew 13:40);

So it will be at the end (sunteleia) of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous (Matthew 13:49).

Everything that causes sin as well as all lawbreakers will be thrown into the fiery furnace, while the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (13:41-43, 26:29, Luke 12:32, 22:29, Ephesians 5:5, Revelation 11:15, 12:10). It seems to me that the judgment outlined in these verses is much broader than what occurred in AD 70, which preterism asserts is 'the end of the age'.

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*When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of **the end** (sunteleia) of **the age**?"* (Matthew 24:3).

The background to this text is that following the Lord's seven-fold woe on the Pharisees, His parting words to them were: *Look, your house is left to you desolate! For I tell you, you will not see me from now until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord'* (Matthew 23:38-39). The disciples sought clarification and asked *...what will be the sign of your coming and of **the end of the age**?* (Matthew 24:3).

'Your coming' (*parousia*) and 'the completion of the age' are two expressions belonging together by sharing a single definite article ([Nolland](#)). The Son of Man's (*parousia*), His arrival and near presence synchronised with the (*sunteleia*) end of the age, both converging at the same time. The Son of Man spoke of His *parousia* three times on this day:

It will be Unannounced. *For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the **coming (parousia)** of the Son of Man* (Matthew 24:27).

It will be Unknown. *For as the days of Noah were, so will be the **coming (parousia)** of the Son of Man* (Matthew 24:37).

It will be Unexpected. *...and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the **coming (parousia)** of the Son of Man* (Matthew 24:39, 42-44).

The Lord gave many signs, not of the end of the age (24:6), but the beginning of sorrows (24:8); false Christs, wars, famines and earthquakes, persecution, false prophets, lawlessness, and world wide evangelism.

He then went on to narrate His ascension to receive the kingdom as pictured in Daniel 7 (Matthew 24:29-31), and the importance of being on the alert for His return to earth to hold people accountable (Matthew 24:29-32-25:46). The unrighteous will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous who are blessed by the King's Father, will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. This syncs with what we have already seen in chapter 13:41-43. The unrighteous thrown into the fiery furnace, while the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. That looks like the end of the age to which the Lord referred (24:14)

The age to come

'**The age to come**' has numerous synonyms that define it.

The resurrection. *The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in **the age to come** and in **the resurrection from the dead** will neither marry nor be given in marriage* (Luke 20:34-35).

Kingdom of God & eternal life. *Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the **kingdom of God**, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in **the age to come eternal life*** (Mark 10:28-30, Luke 18:29-30).

As for eternal life, the Lord said that it is knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He sent (John 17:3). In another place (Matthew 19:17-25), the Lord used eternal life as a synonym for treasure in heaven, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, and salvation.

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The age to come continued

The *kingdom of God* means that God is its central figure ([Gates](#)), and the accent falls not on “kingdom” but on “God”, that God is the king, and every aspect of His kingdom is derived from His nature, character and action ([Constantineanu, du Toit](#)). Also, the label the kingdom of God is similar to ‘the kingdom of Saul’ (1Chronicles 12:23), which points to Saul as king, as does ‘the kingdom of Ahasuerus’ (Esther 3:6). Because it is the kingdom of God there is no capability in humans to bring it about, or to bring it in, or to extend it. It always is and remains God's kingdom ([Santram](#)). As the Lord Himself said, *it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom* (Luke 12:32). And, because it isn't here, the Lord told His disciples to pray for it (Matthew 6:5).

Enemies under His feet. ‘Enemies under the feet’ is a metaphor of victory over enemies in war borrowed from the Hebrew Bible. In Psalm 110:1-2, the Davidic king is ruling in the midst of his foes until his enemies are made his footstool. In 1 Kings 5:3-5 the Lord gave him rest on every side after putting his enemies under the soles of his feet. The final example about Joshua goes further, for the warriors who had captured the enemy were invited to put their feet on the necks of these kings who were then destroyed (Joshua 10:24-27). Moreover, this progressive metaphor is borrowed in the NT to illustrate the victory of Christ over His enemies.

*God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in **this age** but also in the age to come* (Ephesians 1:20-21).

To me, this text suggests that although Christ is exalted and made very high in His ascension, it is still in ‘this age’ and ‘the age to come’ is still future.

*Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he has brought to an end all **rule and all authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be eliminated is death. For he has put everything in subjection under his feet*** (1 Corinthians 15:24-27).

This text shows both the progressive nature of defeating His enemies (*he must reign until*), the final victory (*he has put everything under his feet*), and the end (*he has brought to an end all rule*), at which end He hands the kingdom back to the Father. This is the end of the process that began with the Ascension. When this work is done and the last stronghold of opposition is removed, a tranquillised universe is presented to God the Father by the victorious Son. Again, that looks like the end of the age to which the Lord referred (24:14).

Conclusion

Look! *The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will name him Emmanuel which means “**God with us**”* (Matthew 1:22-23).

Look! ***I am with you** all the days, to the end of the age* (Matthew 28:20).

We have noted that two in-between ‘with you’ texts confirm the two outer texts above. That is, the Lord's presence is with His people, in fellowship, and proximity all of the time, whether we are faithful or not.

He is there ‘all the days’, one with us, in the totality of the 24-hour cycle whether the days are good or bad, easy or hard, every day until the end of the age.

We couldn't, and shouldn't wish for more.

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