

## 1 CHRISTMAS

## 2 Neon

- Neon is actually the fifth most abundant chemical element in the universe after hydrogen, helium, oxygen, and carbon.
- However, it is very rare on the earth and only exists as a gas.
- It was discovered in 1898, when William Ramsay and Morris Travers chilled a sample of the atmosphere until it became a liquid. Then they heated it and captured the gases that it gave.
- Neon is odorless and colorless, yet when excited electrically it glows a brilliant red color.

## 3 Neon signs

- In 1902, a Frenchman by the name of Georges Claude started a company to commercialize nitrogen. Neon was a byproduct.
- Without a market for Neon, George Claude invented one in 1910.
- He put neon in glass tubing and then electrified it and invented the Neon Sign.
- In 1923, he brought his invention to the United States and by the 1950s, Neon Signs were everywhere.

## 4 Night Lights

- Today, Neon Lights give our downtown areas their “incandescent and insomniac identity” (i.e., Time Square, New York City)
- Neon signs practically put Las Vegas on the map, making it a tantalizingly tacky desert oasis.
- Neon signs are also responsible for much of the store front advertising we see on the roadside.

## 5 Future of Neon Signs

- Some say that the day of Neon Signs is over and we don’t need them to find our destinations.
- Digital billboards, handheld computers, GPS and smart phones will be choice of the future.
- In fact, Neon Signs are now already considered a part of nostalgia, old, and no longer cool.
- For some reason, they just don’t grab us anymore.

## 6 Neon Prophets

- We might want to ask ourselves, if those classic biblical signs of the Incarnation haven’t suffered a similar wane in popularity and power.
- We might ask, for example, whether the Light of the World has become overshadowed by the LED lights of the shopping mall.

- Great time for us to be reminded that the old signs can still shine the brightest if we're willing to look.

## 7 Neon Prophets

- The prophets were, in a sense, God's original sign-makers.
- They directed the people and their rulers toward the covenant of life to which God called them.
- But like distracted drivers, the rulers of Israel and Judah too often than not ignored the neon-bright warning signs, and primed themselves for a crash.
- Isaiah's words to Ahaz, king of Judah, were all about paying attention to the signs, especially the brightest One that was yet to come.

## 8 King Ahaz

- Ahaz was one of the worst kings in Judah's history, having worshiped the pagan god Baal and, even worse, making his son "pass through fire,"—human sacrifice.
- In Isaiah 7, we see that Ahaz and his people are under threat of attack from the allied forces of Aram and the northern kingdom of Israel.
- It is a threat that made "the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people [shake] as the trees of the forest shake before the wind" (v. 2).

## 9 King Ahaz

- Yet despite Ahaz's apostasy, Isaiah tells the king that God will preserve Judah if the king chooses to be faithful, warning him, "If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all" (v. 9).
- How would Ahaz know that God's Word was coming to pass? Isaiah tells him to ask God for a sign: one as "deep as Sheol or high as heaven" (v. 11).
- In other words, Ahaz was to inquire of God for the kind of sign that's unmistakably bright and might point him in the right direction for good.

## 10 King Ahaz

- In his self-serving piety, however, Ahaz refuses to ask God for a sign, murmuring some falsely pious words about not putting God to the test (v. 12).
- Second Kings 16 tells us that Ahaz had likely already decided to deal with the threat of invasion by not only the Arameans and Israelites but also Edom by trusting in his own alliance with the Assyrian King to save him.
- Ahaz bribed the Assyrian King with silver and gold from the temple and became his vassal—even erecting an Assyrian altar in the temple (2 Kings 16:7–11).

## 11 The Sign of a Child

- Alliances and military might were the wrong signs.

- Isaiah revealed to Ahaz that God had a very different kind of sign in mind, one that would shine brighter and much longer than the constant flaring and burning out of empires.
- God himself will offer a sign, even if Ahaz refuses to see it — the sign of a child to be born whose name will be “Immanuel,” meaning “God with us” (v. 14).
- Instead of the might of armies, a helpless child will be the sign of hope for Judah.

## 12 The Sign

- Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. (Is 7:14–16 NIV)
- Isaiah is declaring that before the virgin’s child is finished as a pre-schooler, Judah’s enemies Damascus and Samaria will be plundered.
- It is an event that happened in 732 B.C.

## 13 Who was the Virgin?

- The “young woman or virgin” that Isaiah refers to is likely someone in his own time.
- Scholars debate whether the term refers to Ahaz’s wife, Isaiah’s wife or simply another young woman whom the prophet observed as he was addressing the king.
- The best possibility is that this virgin (unmarried woman) was Isaiah’s second wife who was a prophetess.
- Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the LORD said to me, “Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz [Ahaz’s enemies will be plundered]. Before the boy knows how to say ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria.” (Is 8:3–4 NIV)

## 14 The Sign of Immanuel

- The sign of Immanuel, in Isaiah’s context, was thus a short-term sign of hope for Judah and bound up more in the child’s name than in his person.
- There’s no indication here that this child will be a messiah or a savior — only that he represents “God with us.”
- The good news is that despite threatening circumstances and the waywardness of kings and their people, God hasn’t abandoned them.
- Amid real-world problems and political intrigue, God is present.

## 15 The Sign of Immanuel

- Approximately 700 years later the angel of the Lord says to Joseph (Mary’s fiancé), “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

- Matthew interprets this as a dual fulfillment of prophecy and writes, All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” — which means, “God with us.” (Matt 1:21–23 NIV)

## 16 God with us

- What does it mean that God is with us?
  - In the midst of political, economic, and financial turmoil . . .
  - In the midst of marriage, family and social turmoil . . .
  - In the midst of health problems and growing older . . .
- It is a sign, none of our enemies will triumph over us!
- It is a sign, all our fears will not become a reality!
- It is a sign, all our troubles will be swallowed up in victory!
- It is also a sign, God will do it quickly!

## 17 Alliances

- Ahaz put his trust in alliances, which ultimately destroyed him and proved unfaithful.
- Sometimes in the midst of trouble, we make alliances.
  - We put trust in money.
  - We put trust in ourselves.
  - We put trust in experts.
  - We put trust in friends.
- But what or I should say who is our deliverer?

## 18 Mighty to Save

- The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.” (Zeph 3:17 NIV)
- And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matt 28:20 NIV)

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