

INTRODUCTION 引言

Survivor is a successful reality game show. It just wrapped up another season the past week. Two teams of about ten contestants each are put in a remote location. One previous episode was even filmed in China! The players must look for food, water and shelter. They will also compete for prizes. Even a hamburger and some fries are very appealing rewards! At the end of each show, the players cast vote to eliminate one participant. The final remaining survivor will win one million dollars. The game is a snapshot of reality. Sometimes we may feel that we barely survive daily tasks. There will be unknown challenges too. Besides personal problems, there are relational, national and even international troubles. The good news is that God is in full control no matter what we face. Someone said history is His-story. All dynasties, nations, leaders and even ordinary people are like pieces on God's chessboard. He allows events to happen at the right time to accomplish His plans. God often does things in surprising ways. The Christmas story is a good example. The focal point of Christmas is of course Jesus Christ. He came into the world as a man. There are many titles for Jesus in the Bible. The one that we often mention in Christmas is Immanuel. It means "God with us." Let us have a short course on the Hebrew language. Just like ancient Chinese, written Hebrew is read from the right to the left. The word Immanuel (עִמָּנוּאֵל) can be broken down into three parts. Im (עִם) means with, Nu (נו) stands for us and El (אֵל) is God. There are two references of Immanuel in the Bible, one in Isaiah and the other in Matthew. Both prophecies are about the birth of a baby with that name. There is a common theme in the two accounts: God saves us in unexpected ways.

EXPLANATION 解釋

1. Immediate Blessing 即時的祝福 (Isaiah 以賽亞書 7:13-17)

The first prophecy about Immanuel is in **Isaiah 7:13-17**. At that time, the message gave God's people an immediate blessing. Israel was split into two nations. The northern kingdom kept the same name Israel, while the southern kingdom was called Judah. Isaiah was a prophet who served Ahaz, a southern king. This king bowed down to idols and did not worship Jehovah. God raised up enemies to discipline him. Three foreign countries are mentioned in this chapter: Israel, Aram (another name is Syria) and Assyria. Israel and Aram persuaded Judah to form an alliance to fight against Assyria. But Ahaz refused. Therefore, Israel and Aram attacked Judah. In response, Ahaz brought gifts to Assyria and asked for help. The Assyrian king thus sent his troop to destroy Aram, and later Israel. Ahaz sought help from a foreign nation and not from God. God protected His people even though their king was unfaithful to Him. God assured His rescue with the prophecy of Immanuel. Verse 14 says a virgin will give birth to a son named Immanuel. The word "virgin" means an unmarried lady. Perhaps this unknown girl would get married and conceive a baby later. Aram and Israel would be eliminated before Immanuel could eat solid food. That would be

about two years' time. Things happened just as the prophet said. But Assyria would bring more problems than blessings to Judah. Isaiah says in verse 17: **“The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah – the king of Assyria!”** Ahaz was looking for trouble by making friend with Assyria. It is like bringing a tiger into your home to catch mice. You have to keep feeding the wild animal, or else it will eat you for dinner! This foreign king would cause the biggest devastation to Judah ever since the kingdom was separated into two. Ephraim is another way to call the northern kingdom. Notice how Isaiah phrased it: **“The Lord will bring”** in the Assyrian king. On the surface, Ahaz paid for an outside military force. But God was in control behind the scene. He used Assyria to judge the northern kingdom for idol-worship. Then God used the same enemy to discipline the southern kings for their lack of faith. But for now, God brought an immediate blessing by eliminating Aram and Israel. He gave Ahaz another opportunity to return to Him. But Ahaz hardened his heart. He might give credit to himself for saving his country. The Lord is gracious to us despite our disobedience. We can easily forget God when everything is going well. It is when our career is successful, our kids have good grades, the economy is booming, and when we have a good health, a spacious house and a substantial retirement fund. We treat God like Santa Claus. We only want His present but we do not want His presence in our lives. We pray to Him only when we are in troubles. But God is not a roll of duck-tape for a quick-fix. He is not a consultant we can hire. He is not our last resort in case nothing else works. He is our Lord, Master and Boss. He will lead us if we follow Him. Through solving our problems, God proves that He is sovereign and powerful. He will come to us when we put our faith in Him.

2. Ultimate Blessing 最終的祝福 (Matthew 馬太福音 1:18-25)

God assured an immediate blessing through the birth of Immanuel in Isaiah’s time. That points to God’s ultimate blessing fulfilled 700 years later. Let us read a familiar Christmas story in **Matthew 1:18-25**. It took place in the first century. Rome dominated the world. Israel was reduced to a colonized region. Although there was no war, Jewish people did not have peace. They suffered from the oppression of the Romans. The Jews hoped that the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament would come as a warrior to overthrow the Romans. But God’s plan was to redeem them from sin. He sent His Son, Jesus. He would be born from a young couple. Joseph and Mary were engaged at that time. In the Jewish world, an engagement was as serious as a marriage. Suddenly, Mary was pregnant. Verse 18 tells us that it was not the result of a human process: **...before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit**. It was a supernatural conception. Pregnancy before marriage was punishable by death under the Jewish Law. Joseph thought of dissolving the marriage quietly. But an angel told Joseph God’s plan in verses 21-23: **21 “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us)**. Jesus came into Mary’s body. His name means “the Lord saves.” Jesus will save people from sin. He was the Immanuel. He fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy and became God’s ultimate blessing to mankind.

The couple did not fully understand the message. But they followed the instruction of the angel and got married as planned. The Bible says Mary gave birth in the manger of a stable. We have been fooled by Christmas cards all along. They portray a happy couple with a baby glowing in the crib. A manger is just a feeding trough for animals. The room could be a cave. The three people were shivering in a cold, dark night. They were surrounded by noisy and smelly sheep and cows. The condition symbolizes the sin-infested world. We now enjoy a lot of modern convenience. Some people seem to have everything, but they are not satisfied. They contact others by sending messages without making a face-to-face connection. They are stressed out because they want to beat others in school and at work. They define others by which school they attend, what are written on business cards and which zip-code they live in. People feel empty inside, isolated with others and are alienated from God. The world convinces us to fill that void with results and rewards. Try religion too if those things do not work. What they truly need is to establish a relationship with God. That is why God did not send an educator, even though knowledge can enrich our minds. God did not send a role-model either, although that may inspire us to be better people. God did not send a great doctor, because that can only extend our earthly life. But God sent His only Son, Jesus. He is the only way to reconcile with the Father. Since we cannot go to God on our own, God came to us.

3. Intimate Blessings 親身的祝福

God brought an immediate blessing to the Israelites in Isaiah's days. He gave us the ultimate blessing through Jesus. Better still, God promises us some intimate blessings through Immanuel. Remember Immanuel means "God with us." God promises us many times in the Bible that He will be with us. Let us look at some examples. (1) God will whisper to us. Jesus tells His disciples in John 14:16 **"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever."** Jesus told the twelve men that He would be leaving. He was going to the cross. But they did not know what Jesus meant. They were confused and anxious. Jesus comforted them by telling them that God would send another Helper. He was talking about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives the moment we receive Jesus. He whispers God's truth to us. He convicts us when we go astray, and guides us back when we repent. (2) God will walk before us. Moses encourages Joshua in Joshua 1:9 **"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."** Joshua would take over Moses' role and lead the Israelites into Canaan. It was a daunting task. But God would be with him. You may be venturing into an unknown territory. It can be a new job, relocation to a new city, a new relationship or a new school. Do not be afraid because God will walk before you. You will succeed if you follow Him and obey Him. (3) God will work in us. Jesus said to the disciples before He went back to heaven in Matthew 28:20 **"...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."** Jesus asked followers throughout the ages to share the gospel and help believers become His disciples. Today we call that "the Great Commission." Jesus promised to work in us. He is with you when you testify your faith to relatives, friends, classmates and coworkers. God will give you boldness to overcome shyness and the wisdom to answer questions. (4) God will also watch over us.

Psalm 23:4 provides comfort to many Christians: **Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.** God promised to be with us when we face potential danger. Perhaps you are waiting for the results of a physical check-up, an important exam or an immigration application. You may worry about the safety of your children living elsewhere. God will watch over us when we take refuge in Him. He will not make us invincible. But He will give us peace even when we go through a storm. (5) God will welcome us home when the time comes. He saves us and He will save us to the end. Revelation 21:3 reads: **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.”** Jesus has prepared an eternal place for His followers. There will be sorrow when we say goodbye to believers. But there will also be joy. God gives us many intimate blessings by being with us in all circumstances.

CONCLUSION 結論

God saves us in unexpected ways. He used a foreign power to rescue the people of Judah from its enemies. He also sent Jesus to deliver us from sin. Jesus is our Immanuel. He came into the world to be with us. He offers us hope even in a hopeless situation. Today, many people are looking for hope. The recent conflict in Israel has been going on for over a year now. It is hard for the hostages to be away from their families over the holiday season. A similar incident happened in the Middle-East in 1979. Fifty-two American workers were taken as hostages at the U.S. Embassy in Iran. They were held for more than 400 days before being released. Kathryn Koob was among them. The terrorists allowed those captives to celebrate Christmas in front of a TV camera. Kathryn sang “Away in A Manger.” The lyrics of the last stanza brought a lot comfort to the hostages: “Be near me, Lord Jesus. I ask You to stay close by me forever, and love me I pray.” Kathryn found peace in the presence of the Lord. She was away from her family, but not from God. She prayed often during that time. Besides praying for a release, she also remembered those who were less fortunate – those who suffered from severe illnesses, the homeless and those went to bed hungry. That reminded her of God’s promise in Romans 8, that no life circumstance or authority can separate us from the love of God in Jesus. Immanuel came 2,000 years ago to our midst. Jesus does not promise us a rich life or a long life. But He gives us a new life. He will be with you if you receive Him into your heart. Pray a simple and sincere prayer: “Lord, I admit that I am a sinner. I believe that Jesus is the one and only God. He died on the cross for my sins. By faith, I accept Jesus as my Savior. I will also commit my life to Jesus. I am willing to follow Him and obey Him.”

INTRODUCTION 引言

《求生者》是一個成功的實況遊戲節目。上週剛結束了另一場比賽。兩支大約十名參加者的隊伍被放在一個偏遠的地方。以前有一集甚至是在中國拍攝的！選手必須尋找食物、水和住所。他們還將爭奪獎品。就算是漢堡和薯條也是非常吸引人的獎勵！每次比賽結束後，選手們投票淘汰一名參加者。最後剩下的求生者將贏得一百萬美元。這個遊戲是現實的寫照。有時我們可能會覺得自己勉強應付日常事務。除此之外還會有未知的挑戰。個人問題之外，還有關係、國家甚至國際問題。好消息是，無論我們面對什麼事情，神都完全掌管一切。有人說歷史是祂的故事。一切王朝、國家、領袖，甚至老百姓，都像神棋盤上的棋子。祂允許事情在適合的時間發生以實現祂的計劃。神常常以令人驚訝的方式做事。聖誕節的故事就是一個很好的例子。聖誕節的焦點當然是耶穌基督。祂成為人來到這個世界。聖經中對耶穌有許多稱呼。在聖誕節我們常提到的是以馬內利。它的意思是「神與我們同在」。讓我們來上一堂簡短的希伯來文課程。就像古代的中文一樣，希伯來文是從右向左讀的。以馬內利這個字（עִמָּנוּאֵל）可以分成三個部分。Im (עם) 的意思是「與」的意思，Nu (נו) 代表我們，El (אל) 是神。聖經中有兩處提到以馬內利，一處在以賽亞書，另一處在馬太福音。這兩個預言都是關於一個同名嬰兒的誕生。這兩則記載有一個共同的主題：神用人意想不到的方式拯救我們。

EXPLANATION 解釋

1. Immediate Blessing 即時的祝福 (Isaiah 以賽亞書 7:13-17)

第一個關於以馬內利的預言出現在**以賽亞書 7:13-17**中。那時，這個信息帶給神的子民即時的祝福。當時以色列分裂為兩個國家。北國保留原來的名稱以色列，而南國則稱為猶大。以賽亞是一位侍奉南國的王亞哈斯的先知。這個王敬拜偶像，不敬拜耶和華。於是神興起仇敵來管教他。本章提到了三個外邦國家：以色列、亞蘭（又稱敘利亞）和亞述。以色列和亞蘭勸猶大國結盟來對抗亞述。但亞哈斯拒絕了。因此，以色列和亞蘭進攻猶大。作為回應，亞哈斯送禮物給亞述並請求幫助。亞述王因此派軍隊消滅阿蘭人，後來他們也佔領了以色列。亞哈斯向外國尋求幫助，而不是向神尋求幫助。雖然他們的王對神不忠心，神還是保護了祂的子民。神透過以馬內利的預言保證了祂的拯救。第 14 節說，有一個童女會生下一個兒子，名叫以馬內利。「童女」這個字的意思是未婚

的女士。也許這個不知名的女孩稍後會結婚生子。在以馬內利能吃固體食物之前，亞蘭人和以色列人就會被消滅。那大約是兩年的時間。事情正如先知所說的那樣發生了。但亞述帶給猶大的問題多於祝福。以賽亞在第 17 節說：「**耶和華必使亞述王攻擊你的日子臨到你和你的百姓，並你的父家，自從以法蓮離開猶大以來，未曾有這樣的日子。**」亞哈斯與亞述結盟是自找麻煩。就像帶一隻老虎到家裡面捉老鼠一樣。你必須繼續餵那隻猛獸，否則牠會把你當晚餐吃掉！這個外邦的王會為猶大帶來了自從王國分裂以來最大的破壞。以法蓮是北國的另一個稱呼。請注意以賽亞的用詞，他說：「耶和華必使」亞述王到來。從表面上看，亞哈斯花錢找外國軍隊幫忙。但神在幕後掌管一切。祂利用亞述來審判北國拜偶像的罪。然後，神使用同一個敵人來懲罰南方的王，因為他們缺乏信心。但就目前而言，神透過消滅亞蘭人和以色列人帶來了即時祝福。祂給了亞哈斯另一個回轉的機會。但亞哈斯卻硬著心腸。他可能會把拯救國家的功勞歸給自己。儘管我們不順服，但是主還是以恩慈對待我們。當一切順利時，我們很容易忘記神。例如當我們事業有成、孩子成績好、經濟繁榮、身體健康、有寬敞的房子、有充足的退休金的時候。我們把神看作聖誕老人一樣。我們只想要祂的禮物，但我們不想要祂的同在。我們只有在遇到困難時才向祂禱告。但神不是一卷臨時解決問題的膠帶。祂也不是我們可以聘請的顧問。祂不是我們的最後方案，萬一其他辦法都不管用。祂是我們生命的主、主宰和老闆。如果我們跟隨祂，祂就會引導我們。透過解決我們的問題，神證明了祂的主權和大能。當我們以信心仰望祂之時，祂就會臨近我們。

2. Ultimate Blessing 最終的祝福 (Matthew 馬太福音 1:18-25)

在以賽亞的時代，神藉著以馬內利的誕生保證了即時的祝福。這件事指向在 700 年之後神最終的祝福的實現。讓我們讀**馬太福音 1:18-25** 中一個熟悉的聖誕節故事。事情發生在第一世紀。當時羅馬統治世界。以色列淪為殖民地。雖然沒有戰爭，但是猶太人心中卻沒有平安。他們飽受羅馬人的壓迫。猶太人希望舊約預言的彌賽亞會以元帥的身份到來，並推翻羅馬政府。但神的計劃是要把他們從罪中拯救出來。祂差遣自己的兒子耶穌。祂將由一對年輕夫婦所生。約瑟和馬利亞當時已經訂婚。在猶太世界，訂婚和結婚一樣的嚴肅。突然，馬利亞懷孕了。第 18 節告訴我們，這不是人為的結果：**…還沒有迎娶，馬利亞就從聖靈懷了孕。**馬利亞的懷孕是一個超自然的過程。根據猶太法律，婚前懷孕可被判死刑。約瑟想要悄悄解除婚約。但是一位天使在第 21 至 23 節中告訴約瑟神的計劃：**21 「他將要生一個兒子，你要給他起名叫耶穌，因他要將自己的百姓從罪惡裡救出來。」 22 這一切的事成就是要應驗主藉先知所說的話，23 說：「必有童女懷孕生子；人要稱他的名為以馬內利。」**（以馬內利繙出來就是「神與我們同在」。）耶穌進入了馬利亞的身體。祂名字的意思是「耶和華拯救」。

耶穌會把人從罪中拯救出來。祂是以馬內利。祂應驗了以賽亞的預言，成為神對人類最終的祝福。這對夫婦並無法完全理解這個訊息。但他們按照天使的指示，照計畫結婚了。聖經說馬利亞在一個馬廄的馬槽裡生下孩子。我們一直被聖誕卡愚弄了。它們描繪一對幸福的夫婦和嬰兒床上發光的嬰兒。馬槽是動物的食槽。那個房間可能是個山洞。在寒冷的黑夜裡，三個人瑟瑟發抖。他們周圍都是吵鬧、臭氣沖天的羊和牛。那個場景象徵被罪惡污染的世界。我們現在享受了很多現代化的便利。有些人看似擁有了一切，但他們並不滿足。他們發訊息聯繫別人，但很少面對面的交流。他們感到壓力很大，因為他們想要在學校和工作中打敗別人。他們以就讀的學校、名片上寫的內容以及居住的郵區號碼來評估別人。人們覺得內心空虛、與人有隔閡、並且遠離神。世俗鼓勵我們用結果和獎勵來彌補心靈的空間。如果這些東西不起作用，也可以嘗試宗教。人們真正需要的是與神建立關係。因此神沒有差遣一位教育家，雖然知識可以增進我們的學歷。神沒有差遣一個偉人，雖然一個模範可能會激勵我們成為更好的人。神也沒有差遣一位偉大的醫生，因為那只能延長我們的壽命。神乃是差遣祂的獨生子耶穌。祂是與神和好的唯一途徑。因為我們不能靠自己的努力去見神，神就來尋找我們。

3. Intimate Blessings 親身的祝福

在以賽亞的時代，神賜下即時的祝福給以色列人。祂透過耶穌給了我們最終的祝福。更美的是，神藉著以馬內利賜給我們親身的祝福。請記住，以馬內利的意思是「神與我們同在」。神在聖經中多次應許我們，祂會與我們同在。讓我們來看一些例子。(1) 神會向我們說話。耶穌在約翰福音 14:16 中告訴門徒：「我要求父，父就另外賜給你們一位保惠師，叫他永遠與你們同在。」耶穌告訴十二個門徒祂快要離開。祂要上十字架了。但他們不明白耶穌的意思。他們感到困惑和憂慮。耶穌安慰他們，告訴他們神會差遣另一位保惠師。祂指的是聖靈。當我們接受耶穌的那一刻，聖靈就進入我們的生命。祂向我們傳達神的真理。當我們偏行己路時，祂會責備我們。當我們悔改時，祂引導我們回頭。(2) 神會走在我們前面。摩西在約書亞記 1:9 鼓勵約書亞：「我豈沒有吩咐你嗎？你當剛強壯膽！不要懼怕，也不要驚惶；因為你無論往那裡去，耶和華你的神必與你同在。」約書亞將要接替摩西的角色，帶領以色列人進入迦南。這是一項艱鉅的任務。但神會與他同在。你可能正在進入一個未知的領域。可以是一份新工作、搬到一個新城市、一段新的關係或一所新學校。不要害怕，因為神會走在你前面。如果你跟隨祂並順服祂，你就會成功。(3) 神會在我們裡面工作。在馬太福音 28:20 中，耶穌在回到天堂之前對門徒說：「...我就常與你們同在，直到世界的末了。」耶穌要求歷代的跟隨者分享福音並幫助信徒成為祂的門徒。今天我們稱這個吩咐為「大使命」。耶穌應許要在我們裡面工作。當你向親

戚、朋友、同學和同事見證你的信仰時，祂會與你同在。神會給你勇氣克服害羞和給你智慧回答問題。(4) 神也會保守看顧我們。詩篇 23:4 帶給許多基督徒安慰：我雖然行過死蔭的幽谷，也不怕遭害，因為你與我同在；你的杖，你的竿，都安慰我。神應許在我們的面對潛在危難時與我們同在。也許你正在等待身體檢查的報告、重要考試或移民申請的結果。你可能擔心住在其他地方的孩子的安全。當我們尋求神的庇護時，祂會看顧我們。祂不會使我們刀槍不入。但即使我們經歷暴風，祂也會賜給我們平安。(5) 在適當的時候，神會迎接我們回家。神拯救我們，祂會拯救我們到底。啟示錄 21:3 說：我聽見有大聲音從寶座出來說：「看哪，神的帳幕在人間。他要與人同住，他們要作他的子民。神要親自與他們同在，作他們的神。」耶穌為祂的跟隨者預備了一個永遠的住處。當我們與信徒告別時，我們會感到悲傷，但也會有喜樂。在不同的境況中，神都與我們同在，並賜給我們許多親身的祝福。

CONCLUSION 結論

神用人意想不到的方式拯救我們。祂使用外國勢力從敵人手中拯救猶大的子民。祂也差遣耶穌來拯救我們脫離罪惡。耶穌是我們的以馬內利。祂來到世上是為了與我們同在。就算在絕望的情況下，祂也能帶給我們盼望。今天很多人在尋找盼望。以色列最近的衝突已經持續了一年多。人質在假期間與家人分離是很痛苦的事情。在 1979 年，中東也發生類似事件。52 個美國人在伊朗的美國大使館被扣留為人質。他們被關了 400 多天才被釋放。凱瑟琳·庫布是其中的一個人。恐怖分子允許那些俘虜在電視攝影機前慶祝聖誕節。凱瑟琳唱了《馬槽歌》。最後一節的歌詞帶給人質很大的安慰：「恭敬求主耶穌，靠近我身旁，愛護我接受我，做主的小羊。」有主的同在使凱瑟琳感到平安。她遠離了家人，卻沒有遠離神。那段時間她常常禱告。除了祈求得到釋放之外，她還記念一些不幸的人：患有重病的人、那些無家可歸的人以及那些餓著肚子睡覺的人。這讓她想起神在羅馬書第 8 章中的應許，沒有任何生活遭遇或權柄可以使我們與神在耶穌裡的愛隔絕。以馬內利在 2,000 年前來到我們中間。耶穌並沒有應許我們富貴或長壽。但祂賜給我們新生命。如果你接受祂進入你的心中，祂就會與你同在。你可以做一個簡單而真誠的禱告：「主啊，我承認我是個罪人。我相信耶穌是獨一的真神。祂為我的罪死在十字架上。憑著信心，我接受耶穌為我的救主。我也將我的生命交託給耶穌。我願意跟隨祂並順服祂。」