

The Divine Sonship of Christ

PART FIVE

"Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"—Isaiah 7:14

"But how" it is asked, "was the birth of Christ a 'sign' to Ahaz?"

In seeking an answer to this question, it must be kept in view that Ahaz did not want a sign, and declined to ask one, and that this was not given at his request.

The birth of Emmanuel by a virgin was a sign **volunteered by the Deity**. This is important, because it suggests that a wider scope would be given to it than would have pertained to a sign requested for private uses.

The circumstance of the moment to which it had relation was a confederacy between Israel and the Syrians, to destroy Judah. This was the peril which elicited the divine assurance that the enemies of Judah should not prevail, of which the sign was the birth of Immanuel.

Now, taking the comprehensive view of this which is justified by the fact that it was a divine pledge, we can see it go beyond the days of Ahaz, and extend to all the perils that should beset the house of David. The birth of Immanuel is the guarantee that the house of David shall be delivered from all its enemies, and triumph to the ends of the earth.

The assurance of this event served the purpose of the moment, for before Christ was even born, "the land which Ahaz abhorred was forsaken of both her kings." When the virgin Mary "brought forth her firstborn son," Rezin and Pekah were rotting in the dust.

But while thus answering the purpose of the moment in affording a basis for the assurance that Pekah and Rezin should not succeed in their plot against Jerusalem, it furnished a **general pledge for all time** that God would manifest Himself in a son of David, and in him, be with Israel for the taking away of their sins and the destruction of their enemies.

The sequel of the prophecy gives it this comprehensive bearing. Days of evil are predicted (Isa. 7:17) future to the time of Ahaz, when, through the vast depopulation of the land, there would be abundance of field produce for the few survivors (v. 22).

The triumph of Assyria, not only over Damascus and Samaria (the sources of Judah's then immediate danger) but over Judah itself, is foretold—

"He shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over; he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching-out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O IMMANUEL"
(Isa. 8:8).

Then a confederacy of nations against Judah is contemplated in the indefinite future—

"Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken to pieces; and give ear all ye of far countries; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces:
"Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand; for GOD IS WITH US" (v. 10).

Here the birth of Immanuel ("God with us") is distinctly associated with the final triumph of Israel over every hostile combination.

That this is the scope of the prediction becomes more and more evident with every verse in the prophecy, which begins at the beginning of chapter 7 and extends to the end of chapter 9. Immediately after the verse last quoted (8:10), the prophet is warned (vs. 11-12) not to participate in the panic which then prevailed with regard to the hostile alliance of Ephraim and Syria. He is instructed (v. 13) to fear Jehovah, and not the enemy, who will come to nought, and there is coupled with this injunction a prophetic reason which directly lays hold on the days of Christ—

"He (Jehovah) shall be for a sanctuary; but (in the first instance) for a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and many of them shall stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared and be taken" (vs. 14-15).

Now, in Jesus (whose very name intimates the part Jehovah played in his mission), Jehovah IS a sanctuary of refuge, both in relation to present individual wants and the future salvation of Israel.

But in the first aspect of his manifestation, he became a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. His appearance among them was the occasion of the greatest catastrophe that ever befell the nation. They rejected him and were destroyed.

"They stumbled at that stumbling stone" (Rom. 9:32).

The sequel to this stumbling-stone effect of Immanuel's manifestation is indicated in the prophecy thus (vs. 16-18)—

"Bind up the testimony; seal the law among my disciples; and I will wait upon the Lord, Who hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.

"Behold I and the children whom the Lord hath given me, are for signs and for wonders," etc.

In this, we have depicted the confirmation of the promises in the death of Christ, and their establishment as a living testimony in the persons of those believing the Gospel through the preaching of the apostles; and, furthermore, the withdrawal of Christ to the presence of the Father, and the relation of Christ's brethren to the Jews, as signs, if they could but read them.

There is no speculation in these applications of the prophecy, for almost every part of it is quoted in this way in the New Testament (Heb. 2:13, I Pet. 2:8).

Then follow (8:21-22) the dreary interregnum of the times of the Gentiles, culminating (9:1-4) in the breaking in of joy upon the nation, through the supernatural breaking of the power of the enemy—

"For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood, but THIS shall be with burning and fuel of fire.

"FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN (here is the final application of the Immanuel prophecy), UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN.

"And the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father the Prince of Peace.

"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgement and with justice, from henceforth even for ever.

"The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this" (9:5-7).

Then (9:8) the prophecy reverts to the immediate danger to Judah from Rezin and Pekah's designs, showing that the scope of the sign of Immanuel with which it opens, extended to the days of the Messiah, who alone could answer to the name, and who, assuredly has been born of a virgin.

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AFTER the sign of Emmanuel (having reference to God's general and ultimate purpose with the house of David) there is introduced by a "moreover" (8:1) the sign of Mahershalalhashbaz, whose name imported ruin upon Ephraim and Syria, who were confederate against Judah.

This child was purely an omen of evil. His birth guaranteed the destruction of Judah's then active enemies, but did not, like the other, bring with him a pledge of Judah's triumph over all future perils.

He brought no indication of God being with them. His name ("In making speed to the spoil, he hasteneth to the prey") was purely a token of strife and rapine, to be directed first against Syria and Ephraim, then against Judah, and afterwards to be turned back from the house of David, on account of Immanuel, the child born, and the son given, whose name ("God with us"), should be called Wonderful, etc."

Rationalism confounds Immanuel with Mahershalahashbaz, and Josephism follows it in the mistake, from a natural desire to get rid of so potent a testimony to the miraculous conception, as is contained in the words applied to Immanuel.

The effort is unavailing. The two are distinct. Isaiah's son was a pledge of calamity; Immanuel is the "dayspring from on high"—the intervention of the Almighty—the arm of the Lord—God manifest in the flesh, for the great purpose which is the only joy of men—the purpose to take away the sin of the world, extirpate the evils, physical and political—to which it has given birth, and fill the earth with glory.

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THE Josephite denies that the genealogy of Luke is that of Christ through Mary, affirming it to be Joseph's, in the line of his father.

Of Mary he makes nothing. He declares the attempt to prove her to be of the house of David a failure. For the purpose of his argument, Mary is a stranger, and not of the house of David at all. He claims it is in Joseph that the genealogical purity centres. He says—

"He (Joseph) is of David, by father and by mother, but not so Jesus. The genealogies are given to prove the genuineness of Joseph's descent. It is in him that the two lines of David end. Christ's purity is broken by the intervention of the stranger, Mary, who is not of the house of David at all."

One would almost imagine that Joseph was to be the Messiah! Has it never occurred to the Josephite that if it was important for Joseph to be of pure Davidian descent, it was no less so for his son, who was to be heir to the throne; and that if it was necessary for Joseph to have father and mother both descended from David, it surely was as much so for Jesus who was to be the true bearer of the Davidian glory?

It would really seem that the exigencies of his theory have made him lose his bearings, and landed him at the shrine of Joseph instead of "great David's greater son."

"But (he says) you only allege—and do not PROVE—that Luke's genealogy is that of Mary."

And what does **he** do? He alleges that it is the genealogy of Joseph; he does nothing more. He asserts that his view is right, it may be said that one assertion is as good as another. In the abstract this is true, but where collateral facts are brought to bear, it makes a difference.

Now, the collateral fact in this case is that the New Testament alleges Jesus to have been born of Mary, without Joseph, an allegation which is borne out by every subsequent allusion to the origin of Jesus, and therefore if Jesus is a pure descendant of David, Mary must have been of the house of David.

Hence, on the face of it, one of the two genealogies must be that of Mary. It is for the Josephite to prove that it is Joseph's; the onus lies upon him. He asserts it is so; further he cannot go; and further the other side cannot go upon the exclusive merits of the genealogies.

The point must abide the determination of the wider and more general question whether Jesus was the Son of God or the Son of Joseph. The evidence on this question is so conclusive that all minor questions, such as that raised on the genealogy, must fall in, and take rank under the great conclusion that—

"Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh."