

The Divine Sonship of Christ

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A Consideration of Objections

PART SEVEN

Objection 1—"Luke says the angel appeared to Mary, and says nothing of an appearance to Joseph; Matthew says he appeared to Joseph, and says nothing of an appearance to Mary. This is evidence of conflicting traditions."

ANSWER: The improbability of the miraculous conception was sufficient reason why angelic confirmation of Mary's word to Joseph was necessary. It was morally impossible Joseph could otherwise have believed it.

Objection 2—"If Joseph was a 'just' man, how could he put Mary away 'privily' (secretly), rather than carry out the requirements of the Law of Moses in such cases?"

ANSWER: Joseph's intention to put Mary away 'privily' on discovering her to be with child, is in keeping with his character as 'just,' because it evinced a desire to spare Mary the disgrace of open exposure. He wished to save her unnecessary shame. Loving mercy and peace, he contemplated the quiet performance of a painful duty.

The term 'just' (**dikaiois**) as applied to Joseph comprehends the idea of kindness and uprightness. His uprightness was not compromised by his purpose to have a private separation. Had his kindness taken the form of an intended continuance of the conjugal relation, in the face of her apparent criminality, there might have been some reflection on his justice.

Objection 3—"Angels do not appear 'in dreams' (Matt. 1:20) and miracles do not appear 'in dreams.' The record is not in keeping with the general scriptural picture."

ANSWER: Dreams have not been uncommon in the history of divine communication—

"If there be a prophet among you, I, the Lord, will speak to him **in a dream**" (Num. 12:6).

"Your young men shall see visions; your old men shall **dream dreams**" (Joel 2:28).

Suspicion of "miracles in dreams" is a little obscure. If the appearance of angels in a dream is a miracle, and if this is to be made a ground for rejecting Matt. 1:11, then we must reject Daniel, for it is recorded (Dan. 7:1)—

"Daniel **had a dream** . . ."

—and in the dream, the miracle of revelation was performed in its highest form, for in his dream Daniel had communicated to him by angels (vs. 10 & 16) a complete disclosure of the world's future history.

So also with Nebuchadnezzar's secret (Dan. 2:19)—

"The secret was revealed to Daniel in a **night vision**."

Paul is an example of the same thing. Information in dreams was frequent in his experience—

"A vision appeared to Paul in the night. There stood a man of Macedonia, etc." (Acts 16:9).

"Then spake the Lord to Paul **in the night by a vision**, Be not afraid, but speak, etc."

(Acts 18:9).

"The night following, the Lord stood by him and said, Be of good cheer, Paul, etc."

(Acts 23:11)

"There stood by me this night the angel of God, etc." (Acts 27:23).

The case of Joseph is therefore no exception.

Objection 4—"*It was said (Isa. 7:14), 'And shall call his name Immanuel.' But Matthew records (1:21), 'Thou shalt call his name Jesus.' How can this be reconciled of the same person?"*

ANSWER: "Jesus" and "Immanuel" are coincident terms. Jesus means "God shall be the Saviour," and Immanuel means "God with us."

To be the Saviour, He had to be "with us," in the manifestation of Himself in a son of man. Therefore, being Jesus, he was necessarily Immanuel.

Objection 5—"*The appearance of the wise men is fanciful and meaningless. It has no scriptural precedent or parallel. It stamps the record as unauthentic. Who were they? Where did they come from?"*

ANSWER: The appearance of the wise men, or magi, on the scene was no doubt a little wonderful, but it does not follow that it did not take place.

Our ignorance of the nature and reason of their advent from the East is not to be allowed any weight against the recorded fact that they did journey to the birthplace of the Messiah. It was rather fitting than not that the birth of so great a personage should, in the providence of God, be signaled by the homage of the wise men divinely guided to his cradle.

Who these wise men were we are not informed. It is not necessary to speculate. They had heard of the Jews and their Messiah. They were possibly themselves of Jewish descent. Whoever they were, God—Who went before the Tabernacle in the wilderness in a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night—evidently guided their path by meteoric sign to the locality of the great wonder predicted by Isaiah (9:4).

This can only be denied by those who do not believe. Dogmatic expletives prove nothing.

Objection 6—"*Jesus is always called, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' How could this be so if he was born at Bethlehem, and it was so recorded? Men were named for their birthplace.*"

ANSWER: Jesus, though born in Bethlehem, is called "Jesus of Nazareth" because he was brought up and lived at Nazareth. This is natural. If there is anything as against Matthew's narrative (of his birth at Bethlehem) in the fact that he is invariably styled "Jesus of Nazareth," you are bound to discredit Micah, who predicted his birth at Bethlehem (5:2).

Objection 7—"*The birth of Jesus does not fit in with the date of the death of Herod. There is no historical record of any 'taxing' or 'enrolment' at this time.*"

ANSWER: Chronological difficulties (especially such as involve a discrepancy of only a year or two) can have no weight against facts, considering that chronology itself is so obscure (for various reasons) that nothing definite to a year can be predicated on it.

The knowledge of parties living at the time that the disputed chapters were written (even granting for a moment that they are interpolations) is infinitely more valuable than the most carefully worked out deduction of a present-day critic; and surely the writer of Matthew is at least as much to be trusted as the profane writers of the same period.

The Augustine enrolment which took Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, and fulfilled a prophecy, was naturally an important event from the evangelist's point of view, while to the ordinary historian it might be a matter of executive routine calling for no special record.

It has to be remembered at the same time that only the merest fragment of Roman writings have come down to our time, and that if any considerable portion had been preserved, we might have had confirmatory testimony to the occurrence of the taxing.

Objection 8—"*Hosea 11:1 is clearly a HISTORICAL reference to natural Israel coming out of Egypt under Moses (see context). Yet the writer of Matt 1 mistakenly applies it as a PROPHECY of Christ. This is clearly unsound and strained.*"

ANSWER: Hos. 11:1 doubtless referred to the exodus of Israel, but there is such a thing in prophecy as a double (or twice repeated) application of the same words.

When Jesus came from Egypt at the death of Herod, the words "Out of Egypt have I called My Son" were certainly fulfilled, and it is not for us to say that this application did not come within the intended scope of the words when delivered.

Objection 9—"*The slaughter of the babies of Bethlehem is nowhere mentioned in history, either Jewish or Gentile, not even by Josephus. How could such an event in Herod's reign be passed over, if it really occurred?*"

ANSWER: The slaughter of the babyhood of Bethlehem doubtless occurred, notwithstanding the omission of all mention of it from the writings of contemporary historians. Many things have happened of which history has preserved no record. In every history, things are mentioned which are omitted in other histories, but their credibility is not necessarily invalidated.

The historian Matthew mentions this incident because it had an intimate relation to the central theme of his narrative, in which other writers had no interest. This is sufficient to account for his recording it where others are silent.

Objection 10 — "*Matt. 2:23 says, 'He came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.' There is no such statement in any of the prophets.*"

ANSWER: The fact that none of the prophetic writings extant contain the prediction "He shall be called a Nazarene" does not exclude the possibility of its having been contained in some of those which have not come down to our time.

The occurrence of a mythical citation would be inconsistent with the Josephite view of Matt. 1 & 2, for had the writer of these chapters been a forger, he would have taken care to avoid such a direct evidence of the fraud.

Objection 11—"*Luke's record of the birth of Jesus is entirely different from Matthew's. How can this be so if they are both true records of the same event?*"

ANSWER: The difference of Luke's narrative from that of Matthew, in the particulars of the birth of Christ, is certainly no argument to be used by one who rejects Luke. The difference is actually an argument in FAVOR of both.

Luke's narrative was written long after Matthew's. It was prompted by the inferior attempts of "many" to "set forth in order" the things believed by the Christians. Coming after them, it would necessarily be more complete than the other. The details of Matthew he omits, as a gospel already well-known and long-established, and supplies other details ascertained by himself by enquiry.

If both had been the work of the forger, they would have been marked by those features and resemblances, the absence of which this objection uses against them. Or if one had been true and the

other false, the false narrative would have been run in the mould cast by the genuine, for the sake of credibility.

If both are false, it is singular they are dissimilar, and strange the forgers did not finish their work by accomplishing a similar work with Mark and John.

But the truthfulness of both is confirmed by the circumstances that dissimilarity of incident is united with substantial identity of narrative—a peculiarity that always characterizes two truthful accounts of the same thing.

After all that can be said in a kind of controversy so elastic and interminable, it remains to be repeated what has already been said—

That the divine sonship of Jesus rests on grounds too broad and deep to be overturned by even a successful attack on the records of the miraculous conception in Matthew and Luke.

But every discerning reader must feel in view of the evidence that no such an attack can be maintained.

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