

THE 'VIRGIN' BIRTH

1. The teaching that Jesus was born of a 'virgin' is not in accordance with Biblical fact. This teaching is based, in the last analysis, upon a mistranslation. The facts concerning this mistranslation are well known to scholars.

2. There are 3 Biblical texts usually cited in support of the teaching:

- (a) Isaiah 7:14 (in Old Testament) (written about 750 B.C.)
- (b) Matthew 1:23 (in New Testament) (written after 40 A.D.)
- (c) Luke chapter 1 (do.) (do.)

The real significance of Luke will be demonstrated in a separate pamphlet.

3. ISAIAH 7:14 — Isaiah did not predict that a 'virgin' would conceive. To attribute such a prophecy to him is to grossly misrepresent the meaning of his words. The idea of 'virgin' birth was common among Gentile nations such as Greece and Rome: it was foreign to the Hebrews. Such a prophecy would have been totally inconsistent with the Hebrew attitude to childbirth as revealed in both the Old and New Testaments. No necessity existed for such a birth.

4. The prophet Isaiah recorded events around the time 750 B.C. Ahaz was king of Judah in those days. The kingdom was under attack from two enemies, Ephraim and Syria, at the time, and Isaiah told King Ahaz that within a relatively short period – the time it took a young woman to bring forth a child and rear it to a tender age – his 2 enemies would be defeated. The historical context of the seventh chapter of Isaiah makes this quite clear.

5. Isaiah's word for 'young woman' was mistranslated out of Hebrew into Greek. It was carried over from Greek into Latin and then, through Latin, into English. The Hebrews were aware of the Greek mistranslation quite early. The names of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotian will no doubt mean little to you. These were the men who, before 200 A.D., had provided the Greek-speaking world with corrected Greek translations of the Hebrew Old Testament. Aquila's translation appeared over 1800 years ago. Each of these scholars translated Isaiah 7:14 correctly as 'young woman'.

6. Ancient records show that the mistranslation was also known to leaders of the catholic church at least 1800 years ago. But the church, in matters of faith, moves slowly. Sometimes it moves too slowly. In fact, by the year 1947, it had hardly moved at all. It was in 1947, you will remember, that a wandering goat caused a shepherd to discover some very ancient manuscripts of Isaiah. And those Dead Sea Scrolls (as they came to be known) confirmed the Hebrew version of Isaiah 7:14.

7. From the point of view of scholarship, the Dead Sea Scrolls made the theological position no longer tenable. The churches moved with alacrity. By 1949 there was a translation issued in the name of Monsignor Knox which showed that the Hebrew word in Isaiah 7:14 referred to age and not chastity. Protestants were a little slower. Their version, with the corrected rendering, came out in 1952. One wonders, however, if we would have had to wait a further 1800 years for the correction if the Dead Sea Scrolls had not been discovered.

8. MATTHEW 1:23 — The English translation records Matthew as saying that a 'virgin' conceived. If the translators are correct then Matthew has actually misquoted Isaiah. He has also recorded as being fulfilled a prophecy that was never made.

The truth is simple. The translators use a Greek version of Matthew's gospel. There is ample evidence that Matthew actually wrote in Hebrew and quoted the Hebrew of Isaiah. He never said a 'virgin' conceived at all. (What he did say, was that Jesus was not the son of Joseph.) And what became of Matthew's gospel written in Hebrew? A number of copies are known to have existed in the very earliest times. The situation was summed up neatly by the historian Gibbon when he said that these Hebrew versions have been "most unaccountably lost". Most unaccountably lost? Perhaps so. Perhaps they may have been lost in some remote library in Palestine. Perhaps, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, they may have been stored away in some isolated cave somewhere.

But perhaps, in that case, the theologians and priests of catholic christendom had better see to it that the asses and goats of Palestine and Syria are kept well tethered and well tended in the days to come!

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