

## ASK THEE A SIGN

© Eddy D Field III

In the days of the Divided Monarchy, the people of God were so wicked that God through His prophets told them that He would send the Assyrian army to conquer the Northern Kingdom, and to invade the Southern Kingdom, even laying siege to the great city of Jerusalem. Pekah, king of Israel, hoping to repel the Assyrian invasion, made an alliance with Rezin, King of Syria. These two kings demanded of Ahaz, King of Judah, that he join their alliance. He refused them, however, so the two kings plotted to conquer his kingdom, and place their own man on his throne. King Ahaz feared their power, and so was tempted to make an alliance with another nation. God commanded Isaiah the prophet to tell King Ahaz that the plan of his enemies would fail, and that he must trust in God. Ahaz doubted, however, so Isaiah told him to ask God for a sign that would prove God's protection. He said, "Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above." (Isaiah 78:11) The king declined the offer, saying, "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD." It is a terrible sin to doubt God, as it is to make demands of Him, as the children of Israel did, when they, traveling to Mount Sinai, doubted that God would provide for them food and water, and demanded that He do so. (Exodus 17:7) Later, Moses wrote in the law, "Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah." (Deuteronomy 6:16) So, Ahaz appealed to this law in refusing to ask God for a sign. Yet, to ask God for a sign is not a sin in itself; it depends upon the spirit in which the request is made. Gideon asked for a sign so that his faith might be strengthened, so God gave him one. (Judges 6:37, 39) Ahaz refused to ask God for a sign, not because he was a righteous man who did not wish to violate the law of God; rather, he refused because he had his heart set on making an alliance with another nation, and a sign from God would have been a witness against him. Isaiah said to him, and to the royal court, "Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?" (Isaiah 7:13) Here the prophet exposes the hypocrisy of the king. He said he would never put God to the test, but he had been testing God for years by oppressing his subjects, and, what is worse, rebelling against God.

Ahaz refused to ask God for a sign, but God would give him one anyway, and it would stand as a witness against him. Isaiah said:

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings. (Isaiah 7:14, 16)

A virgin would conceive a child, a son. This would be, of course, an unprecedented miracle, and the child conceived would be extraordinary. The child would be called *Immanuel*, which means, *God with us*. Some have said that this child was Hezekiah, son of Ahaz; others that he was the son of Isaiah. He cannot be Hezekiah, because Hezekiah, when Ahaz's enemies laid siege to Jerusalem, would not have been a child not yet having come to the age of discretion, knowing good and evil, but rather a full-grown man. Nor could he be the son of Isaiah the prophet, for the prophet's wife was surely no virgin, having already bore him children. Neither would a child born to these men be out of the ordinary, and so could not be sign of anything at all. Saint Matthew,

however, records in his Gospel, that Mary, betrothed to Joseph, was with child while yet a virgin. (Matthew 1:22, 23) Although the child was named *Jesus*, He is called *Immanuel*, for He is God with us, not simply as one who looks after His people, but as one who is the Son of God incarnate. As Saint John wrote in his Gospel, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

Let us rejoice that God cares for us, His people. Let us be glad that, because He loves us, He sent His Son into the world to be one us, to live for us, and to die for us.

Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.