

*What is the meaning of Is. vii, 8-9? The passage is addressed to Achaz, who is told, "If you will not believe, you will not continue." How is this fulfilled? It does not seem to be fulfilled in Achaz. If the subject is changed to the house of David, there is no indication. Achaz is mentioned in verses 3 and 10.*

The words quoted are in the plural, whereas the words addressed to Achaz (vii, 4, 5, 11) are in the singular; there is therefore an indication of a change of subject, and the words quoted are addressed either to the house of David (cf. vii, 2, 13, 17) or (as I should think rather more likely) to the people in general (vii, 2, 17). The warning seems quite general.

Some further notes may be helpful. (1) *The text.* After "believe," the Hebrew has *ki* ("because," etc.), which does not seem to make sense; probably we should read *bi* ("believe me," or better, "trust me": see below). *k* and *b* are very similar in Hebrew. (2) *The translation.* "Be established," confirmed, supported, is better than "continue." (3) *The play on words.* The two verbs are almost identical in writing and pronunciation, being in fact different conjugations (Hiphil and Niphil) of the same Hebrew verb, though the two conjugations (as sometimes happens) have rather different meanings. The word *amen* comes from the same root. (4) *The historical context.* The northern kingdom (Israel) and Syria (= "Aram," capital at Damascus) had combined against the southern kingdom (Judah) and King Achaz (742-725 B.C.). God promises an early deliverance (vii, 16: viii, 4) in the form of an Assyrian invasion of the two attacking kingdoms. But upon vii, 14ff. I have already commented in an answer in *SCRIPTURE* (July 1947). (5) *fides, fidelitas, fiducia* (faith, faithfulness, trust or confidence) should be carefully distinguished in Holy Scripture, though it should be no less carefully noted that the second and third presuppose the first. In the Old Testament the great mysteries of the Christian faith, the Blessed Trinity, Incarnation, etc. had not been revealed, so that the emphasis is mainly on *fidelitas*, though with much encouragement *fiducia*; there can hardly be said to be a Hebrew word for *fides* as such. In the New Testament our Lord chiefly requires *fiducia* in Himself, to which *fides* however is essential. In St. Paul there is mainly question of a living faith, *fidelitas*, but in I Cor. xiii, 13 we have faith distinguished from hope and charity, which must therefore be *fides* as such, as indeed is illustrated by the preceding verse.

C. LATTEY, S.J.

*What is the explanation of Jn. i, 51? "Amen, Amen I say to you, you shall see the heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man?"*

Our Lord's first words to Nathaniel (Jn. i, 47ff.), surprising him with the hidden knowledge they manifested, awakened such deep faith

in him that he at once acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah—such is the meaning here of the words “Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel.” Our Lord then replied that this faith would be further confirmed both for him and those with him by future experience, “Amen, Amen I say to you (plural), you shall see the heavens opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

This answer is couched in language recalling Jacob’s vision at Bethel, Gen. xxviii, 10–17. Every Israelite was familiar with the account of this vision with its “angels ascending and descending,” a pledge to the Patriarch of God’s protection and an assurance that He would be with him on his journey and in the future: “Neither will I leave thee till I have accomplished all that I have said.” Gen. xxviii, 15. Probably our Lord in referring to this vision applies it to Himself, namely the Apostles would see that divine protection, which Jacob’s vision signified, extended in such an extraordinary manner to Himself during His earthly life that the divine character of His mission would be made manifest. They would see such continuous signs during His ministry that they would be made to feel that the heavens were, metaphorically, opened and that the angels were ascending and descending in the service of the Son of God.

Another interpretation, which is adopted by a number of commentators, was put forward by Maldonatus. He refers the passage to the Last Judgment when the appearance of our Lord in the clouds of heaven surrounded by Angels will make it manifest that He is indeed the Son of God, cf. Matt. xxvi, 63ff. This interpretation has the advantage of taking the words literally but the context would seem to indicate some signs in the nearer future. The verse is fully discussed in *The Gospel of St. John* by His Eminence Cardinal MacRory. 7th ed. Dublin. 1923.

R. J. FOSTER.

“*What is known of the Star of Bethlehem?*”

All that is *known* of the Star is to be found in St. Matthew’s Gospel (Matt. ii.): (i) It appeared “in the East” (sc. either “to us in the East” or “in the Eastern sky”); (ii) It appeared some time (perhaps more than a year) before the visit of the Magi; (iii) There is no suggestion that it accompanied the Magi on their journey to Jerusalem, the implication of Matt. ii, 9, 10 being that they had not seen it between their departure from home and their arrival in Jerusalem; (iv) It seems to have moved its position in the sky during the short journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and then to have stood still over the place where the child was.

There are three possible interpretations of the Gospel evidence.

A. The star was a comet. In *The Oracles of Jacob and Balaam*, pp. 97 sqq., the late Fr. Eric Burrows accepts this view and argues that the star is to be identified with Halley’s comet which, as we know from