

Chapter 12



The Confederacy

Three different political confederacies are brought to view in Isaiah chapters 7 and 8. Two of them are historical and are past. One of them is prophetic and lies in the future. This future confederacy is forecast by Isaiah to be a trap, a fearful trap, that will result in failure. And the text projects that it will negatively impact a class of those living at the time of its implementation. Does Isaiah's forecast reflect divine inspiration? The question relates to the fundamental nature of Scriptures--are they transcendent and inspired or not?

The first confederacy is found in Isaiah 7:1-9. There God gives counsel to the Kingdom of Judah (the two-tribe kingdom). At the time, Pekah, king of Israel (the ten-tribe kingdom) confederated with Rezin, the king of neighboring Syria (a pagan power) to war against Judah. The Lord declared that He was against this confederacy because Israel allied with a foreign nation (Syria) against her sister nation (Judah). Furthermore, since Israel and Syria were relying completely on their national strength, the effort would fail--the two nations would be overtaken by another power, Assyria. Some 65 years later, this did happen.¹ The fulfillment of this is recorded in 2 Kings 16:1-9 and 2 Kings 17:22, 23.

The confederacy of Isaiah 7:1-9 met its fulfillment about 700 years before Christ's first advent. However, the sign that was to provide assurance from the Lord to Ahaz (king of Judah) that this confederacy would fail was the promise of the miraculous birth of a child called Immanuel (God with us) found in Isaiah 7:14.² It is this text, cited by Christians, which forecasts the virgin birth of Christ (Immanuel). Interestingly, the prophecy of the virgin birth of Immanuel states that before the child (Immanuel) "shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good" (Isaiah 7:16), the confederate powers (Israel and Syria) that Ahaz dreaded would be forsaken of both her kings--the confederacy would fail.

As noted, the first confederacy failed when Assyria attacked Israel and Syria. However, this leaves a serious time discrepancy of some 700 years regarding the sign of the failure, the

predicted birth of Immanuel.

The time discrepancy is critical, as it presents a textual problem which is fundamental to the interpretation of Scriptures--it goes to the root nature of Biblical documents: are Scriptures inspired and transcendent, or are they merely social documents reflecting the hopes, fears and local concerns of the people involved at the time of their writing? (Proponents of modern grammatico/historico/form-critical textual analysis cite the above circumstance as *prima facie* evidence, along with textual word translation, that the forecasted birth of Immanuel does not predict the virgin birth of the Messiah at all--it was written only as a reflection of the fears of the people at the time of the first confederacy. Particularly, it cites the superstitious forecast of a young woman giving birth to a child who is then named Immanuel [God with us] and offered as a sign, an omen, that would hopefully ward off the impending political challenge and threat presented by the confederacy of Israel and Syria against Judah.)

The time discrepancy problem of the forecasted birth of Immanuel has substantial merit--either it is resolved by denying the inspiration of Scriptures or by seeing the birth of Immanuel in the prophetic context of a larger picture of history. It is the larger picture of history that addresses the question of the inspiration of Scriptures. And it is the larger picture of history that is presented in this chapter. It will be demonstrated that the 700 year time discrepancy in the birth of Immanuel is of major importance in supporting the transcendent character and divinely inspired nature of Scriptures.

Assuming that the inspired transcendent character of the Scriptures is present and valid, the question arises: If the early confederacy was not fully supported by the sign of the failure of that confederacy (The sign was the birth of Immanuel with an associated serious time discrepancy), then what does the birth of Immanuel foreshadow?

Does it point to another confederacy in history that does fulfill the condition of the text? This chapter asserts that there is a record of just such a confederacy. The second great confederacy of Isaiah is found in the period depicted in Isaiah 7:10-25 and Isaiah 8:1-8. This was the period in which Christ was born and was followed by the rise of the Christian Church. A review of predictive confederacy texts follows.

Textual Analysis

In the days of Ahaz the son of Jothan, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but they could not conquer it. When the house of David was told, "Syria is in a league with Ephraim," his heart and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind. (Isaiah 7:1,2 KJV)

"Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal: Thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus (not heaven), and the head of Damascus is Rezin (not the Lord); and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim (the ten-tribe kingdom) be broken, that it be not a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria (not heaven), and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son (not the Lord). If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.

"Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord. And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? 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 (Syria and Israel) that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings (Rezin and Pekah). (Isaiah 7:1-16 KJV)

"Moreover the Lord said unto me. Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man's pen concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz. And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. And I sent unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bore a son. Then said the Lord to me. Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz. For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria.

"The Lord spake also unto me again, saying, Forasmuch as this people (Israel) refuseth the waters of Shiloah (the protective host of heaven) that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son (glory in their national government); now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: and 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." (Isaiah 8:1-8 KJV)

Information regarding Judah's King Ahaz is found in II Kings 16:3-9 and II Chronicles 28:2-6. At the time Ahaz reigned (755 - 716 B.C.), the nation of Assyria was gaining power. Both Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Syria (country of Israel's northern border) were afraid, and desired to enter into a mutual defense pact with Judah (the Southern Kingdom) for everyone's protection. Judah, however, refused. Israel and Syria, therefore, decided to make war against Judah in order to depose Ahaz and set up a puppet king in his place who would be more cooperative. (Isaiah met with Ahaz "at the end of the conduit of the upper pool" [Isaiah 7:5] to counsel the king concerning this plot to unseat the Davidic dynasty).³ Although Isaiah counseled Ahaz that the plot would not succeed, Ahaz doubted.

Ahaz turned to Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria for help and protection. Tiglath-pileser was happy to use the pretext of coming to the rescue of his threatened vassal to implement his own policies. (Ahaz had to pay the price for this protection by recognizing the Assyrian state religion - the introduction of an Assyrian-type altar into the temple along with Assyrian cult practices [II Kings 16:10-16], and the payment of heavy tribute.) In a series of campaigns between B.C. 754 and 752, the whole of Syria and Palestine was conquered by the Assyrians. Reliefs in the Central Palace at Nimrod show Tiglath-pileser leading troops in the siege of a city. The Assyrian armies were more diversified than previously, and new types of arms and equipment had been added for attack in the open fields and for the siege of fortified areas. The result was that Tiglath-pileser crushed his foes. (An Assyrian relief from Calah shows exiles of Ashtaroth of Syrian Aram-Damascus in B.C. 752 after its conquest, and traces of the Assyrian conquering fires and destruction were found in excavations at Hazor (stratum V) and Megiddo (stratum IV). All Syria east of the tributary Phoenician coast, including Galilee, Gilead, Jezreel, and Sharon, except for Mount Ephraim, became parts of the Assyrian Empire. Judah's fate was similar, and Edom, Philistia, and much of the Negev was lost to Judah (II Kings 16; II Chronicles 28).

That is, though ancient Judah was not to suffer defeat by the confederacy of Israel and Syria, she was, nevertheless, also to be brought under tribute to ancient Assyria. And, as we shall see, the spirit of this confederacy did not end with that of ancient Israel and Syria.

The high points of this confederacy, some of which are still unfulfilled, fall into sequence as follows:

1. The overthrow of both ancient Israel and Syria by ancient Assyria, as a divine judgment especially upon Israel for confederating against her own brethren, the kingdom of Judah (Isaiah 7:2-9).
2. "The birth of a man-child (Immanuel) to a virgin, for "a sign" to "the house of David." (Isaiah 7:15,14)
3. The birth of a son (Maher-shalal-hash-baz) to the prophet himself, "for signs and for wonders" in Israel. (Isaiah 8:18)

4. The overthrow of Israel to occur before Immanuel could learn to differentiate evil from good, and before Maher-shalal-hash-baz could say "my father, and my mother." (Isaiah 7:16; 8:4)

In amplification of this cluster of events, several facts stand out in self-interpretation:

(1) "Immanuel," by virtue of His virgin birth and his name, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23), is designated as representing Christ. This is how this reference has been interpreted by New Testament writers. (2) He was born for a sign that the unholy alliance between Israel and Syria was to come to naught. (3) The lands, Israel and Syria, which Judah abhorred, were to be forsaken of both their kings - conquered by the king of Assyria - before Immanuel was to be able to refuse evil and choose good, and before Maher-shalal-hash-baz was to be able to say "my father and my mother."

But the simple historical fact that these two kingdoms were overthrown centuries (700 years) before Christ was even born, brings a significant time-discrepancy. For those who maintain that the Scriptures are inspired, the integrity of this text is reconciled only by the conclusion that all four nations (Judah, Israel, Syria, and Assyria) involved in this historical action, were typical of four others that were to arise sometime following Immanuel's birth; for after His birth, Israel and Syria were to be conquered by Assyria.

Necessarily, then, there must be found in the Christian dispensation (the age of Immanuel) an ostensible Christian power (Israel) confederated with a pagan power (Syria), to the end of dominating a differing Christian group (Judah). And the only such confederacy in the Christian era was the union of church and state (Rome) which ruled during the Middle Ages, and which sought absolute control of all in the Apostolic tradition.

Religious Christian absolutism emerged in support of church catholicity as one 'corpus mysticism' of Christ against schematics.⁴ This occurred when Saint Augustine approved the use of civil force of the imperial government to suppress activities of the Donatist villagers in the hilly hinterland of Augustine's diocese. The diocese consisted of village churches and the private chapels of wealthy landowners in the valley.

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