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JESUS IS IMMANUEL -
GOD WITH US

by
D. B. KNOX

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THE PROTESTANT FAITH

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I have received a letter from a listener who has had a discussion on his doorstep with a Jehovah's Witness who denied that Jesus was God, and he has asked me to give him the reasons for believing, as he always has believed, that Jesus is true God.

Now, of course, it is well known that Jehovah's Witnesses, although they say they accept the Bible, deny that Jesus is fully and truly God - deny that He is Immanuel or God with us, as the prophet puts it. Christians have always believed that Jesus is their Lord and God: they accord to Him the full worship due to God alone. In worshipping Jesus the first Christians who were also Jews, did not believe that they were changing from the religion of the Old Testament, which clearly teaches that there is only one God. They continued to believe that in Jesus of Nazareth God has become Man; that Jesus was the Christ or Messiah whose coming was promised in the Old Testament, and who the prophet Isaiah calls "The Everlasting Father". In Jesus God has come into relationship and fellowship with us. And this makes all the difference, of course, to our view about the world and the view about our relationship with God, to think that God Himself has become man, has lived with us, overcome our great enemy the devil and his temptations, lived the perfect life, died and risen again for the forgiveness of our sins so that through His Spirit we are now

in eternal relationship with Him - a relationship which will not be broken by death. This is the Christian faith; this is what we believe the Bible teaches; and what the apostles preached. Jehovah's Witnesses, although they accept the Bible, deny that Jesus is God in this sense, and my listener friend, in writing to me, asked me to give reasons why we should continue to believe that Jesus is the true Son of God - God the Son - God come among us to be our Lord and to be our Saviour. Well let us see what the Bible has to say on this subject - a most important subject for every Christian to be well assured in his own mind about. And first I draw your attention to the fact that the Bible teaches clearly that Jesus' life did not begin, as ours does, at birth, but that He was alive and in existence in eternity in Heaven before His birth at Bethlehem, so that when He came into this world as a child at Bethlehem He did not exist for the first time then, as we do. An example of this Bible evidence of Jesus' pre-existence before His human birth is His prayer on the evening before His crucifixion: "Father, glorify me with the glory that I had with you before the world was". Another reference to Jesus' life before His birth at Bethlehem is St Paul's words to the Corinthians that "though Christ was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich". St Paul is referring to the riches of our Lord's Heavenly life

before He entered into the poverty of His existence in Galilee - a poverty which He accepted for our sakes that we might become rich, eternally rich, through His life for us. St Paul is plainly referring to the fact that Jesus lived in Heaven before He came on earth. St John in the beginning of His gospel also refers to this fact when he says "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God". Then St John goes on to say "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten Son of God full of grace and truth". Thus St John in beginning his Gospel about Jesus Christ speaks first of all of His existence from eternity and then goes on to refer to His becoming flesh and living among us. Jesus Himself when talking to the Jews (in the eighth chapter of this Gospel) said that He existed before Abraham. His words are "Before Abraham was, I am": not merely I was, but I am.

From these verses it is plain that the Bible teaches that Jesus existed before His birth at Bethlehem. This is the first fact to recognize in assessing the religion of the Bible. But who was this pre-existent person who was born at Bethlehem? Either He was an angel or God. There are no other possibilities. Now Jehovah's Witnesses acknowledge that Jesus existed before His birth, but they say that He was an angel: a sort of super

angel. This is a most unsatisfactory as well as an unbiblical concept. Unsatisfactory because why should an angel become man? What is the purpose of it all? The Bible clearly teaches that it was God who became man in order that He might be our Saviour and be in fellowship with us through forgiving us our sins. It was God's purpose for man from eternity that he should be in fellowship with God. Sin came in and made this fellowship impossible. But God's purposes are not overthrown. God Himself brought them to completion by Himself entering our life, overcoming our sin, saving us from it through forgiveness, and bringing us into fellowship and transforming the moral character of our life through giving us His Spirit. An angel cannot bring us into fellowship with God, nor forgive us our sins, which is the basis of that fellowship, nor dwell in our hearts by His Spirit. Only God Himself can do this for us, and this is what the Bible teaches, that Jesus was not only pre-existent but He is God with us. This is the great truth of the Christian Gospel, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself", I quote St Paul's words to the Corinthians. Not that he sent an angel to us while still remaining up in Heaven Himself; for what would be the purpose of that? what value would that be for us? The Bible is quite clear that Jesus is not an angel but was God Himself become man for our sakes. Let us look at some of the evidence for this second

point, that Jesus was not only pre-existent but was truly God. First of all there are those words that Jesus used to the Jews that I have already quoted "Before Abraham was I am". This title "I am" was used by the Lord God in Exodus chapter 3 where we read that when Moses asked the name of God, God replied that Moses should tell the Children of Israel that "I am" had sent him. God's self designated name was "I am": He is the eternal God, the "I am". It was to this that our Lord was referring when He said "before Abraham was, I am". By these words He was stating that He was divine. The Jews who heard Him recognised the claim but rejected it and wished to stone Him for by these words Jesus claimed to be divine.

Let us remember too Jesus' words to Thomas. Thomas you may remember had doubted Jesus' resurrection but when he saw Him for himself he acknowledged the truth and said "My Lord and my God". Instead of reproving Thomas, Jesus accepted this worship of Thomas and blessed him for it.

Then again, when Jesus gave His final commission to the apostles he told them to baptize the nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. He was not telling them to change their religion; to give up believing in the one God which the Old Testament so clearly taught, but He was telling them that that name of Jehovah whom they had worshipped

from their youth was not to be known by them simply as Jehovah, but as Father, Son and Holy Spirit - one God still - for Jesus speaks in the singular, the name, not the names of Father, Son and Holy Spirit - one God Jehovah, but now to be known more fully as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One God in three persons as we say. Now that term Son, the middle term, plainly refers to Jesus Himself. He is the Son, so He consistently taught. By putting Himself within that Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit as His disciples were now to think of God, He once more plainly taught that He was Himself divine - fully God as Father and Holy Spirit are God.

St John begins his gospel with a similar testimony to the full Godhood of the Lord Jesus Christ: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God". Now it is plain from what St John says later that by "the Word" he means Jesus Christ, and yet he here clearly describes Him as not only "with God" but "God!".

There are many passages where Old Testament passages which refer to Jehovah are applied by the New Testament writers to Jesus, showing that they identified Jesus with Jehovah. And it is clear that the whole of the New Testament is united in affirming that Jesus of Nazareth the one whom they knew, whom they had spoken to, whom their hands had handled, as

St John puts it in his letter, was the Divine Son of God = God with us = God become man for our sakes; One whom we may worship fully with our allegiance with the worship that is only right to give to God. It would be most improper for us to worship and honour an angel. Thus when the writer of the Book of the Revelation falls down before the angel he receives a stern rebuke "See thou do it not: worship God". We dare not worship angels, only God is entitled to our worship. The Bible condemns the worshipping of angels but sets before us the worship of Jesus, for the whole of the New Testament is united in affirming that Jesus is worthy of this divine honour because He is God; fully and truly God with us as the prophet put it. What does all this mean? Simply this: that God has come into fellowship with us in a most remarkable way by taking our nature and we may enter into His presence through Christ who is our Saviour and our Lord. This fellowship with Him is God's divine purpose for us for eternity, which we may begin to enjoy now if we give our hearts and our lives to Jesus Christ as our Lord, the one who for our sakes died and rose again and who is now at God's right hand. He is there on our behalf because He is both God and man. As man He stands there in Heaven for us; as God He receives our worship and enters into relationship with us through His Spirit. It is a mystery, of course, which we cannot understand fully, but which we can experience

clearly as we accept the Bible's testimony to this most remarkable fact that our Creator has become our brother and our Lord.

How do we personally stand ourselves with regard to this great fact, because we will be judged by our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, as to whether we have given our lives to Him following His example, accepting His Lordship, trusting in His salvation.

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