

Chapter 7

Isaiah 9:5-6

For a child is born unto us, a son is given unto us... --Isaiah 9:5
(Jerusalem Bible)

As was stated in the conclusion to Chapter 6, Isaiah chapters 7-12 is a well-defined section of the Book of Isaiah, and it forms the broader context of Isaiah 7:14. Since the birth of a significant child is mentioned in both 7:14 and 9:5-6, and since 9:5-6 is within the context of 7:14, it is important to examine this text. This examination also draws Isaiah 11 into the picture. Isaiah 11 is in this same context of chapters 7-12, and the material in Isaiah 11 is most important because it is acknowledged by all to be a messianic passage, where the "Branch" who comes forth from the stump of Jesse is King Messiah.¹

Initial Observations on Isaiah 9:5-6

There are a number of observations regarding this passage that can be made with relatively little disagreement.

First, it is this "child" who is born, this "son" who is given to Israel, who is responsible for the joy and the deliverance from oppression and war described in verses 9:1-4.

Here [in v. 9:5] comes the third in the series of verses opening with *kî*, "for," clauses [vv. 3, 4, and 5]. There is joy *because* God has delivered from oppression, and he does that *because* he has brought an end to war. But how will he do *that*? This verse [9:5] supplies the answer. It lies in the coming of a person...²

Second, this "child," this "son," was from the line of David.³

1 Since Albrecht Alt, and Gerhard von Rad, it has become relatively common to interpret Isa. 9:1-6 as an accession oracle for one of Judah's kings. With this interpretation, it is generally argued that the names of the child are patterned after the Egyptian practice of constructing throne names based on the belief that their kings were divine. Such liberal views, however, do not reflect a high view of Scripture and are not addressed in this book. For a concise critique of this approach to Isa. 9:1-6, see Paul D. Wegner, "A Re-Examination of Isaiah IX 1-6," *VT* 42 (January 1992):103-112.

2 John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), p. 244; emphasis original and brackets added.

3 T. K. Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1880), I:47, points out that "strictly speaking there is no mention of the Davidic origin [of the child in 9:5]..." (brackets added). It is true that the "child," or "son," of 9:5 is not explicitly called a son of David. However, the description of him in v. 6 could hardly be applied to one who was not a son of David: "He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this" (*NASB*). Cf. 2 Sam. 7:16, 19, 29.

Third, he is not only a son of David, but he will be a king and sit on the throne of David.

Interpretations by Jewish Scholars

There are several different Jewish interpretations of this passage.

The Targum of Jonathan

The Targum seems to take the child to be the Messiah. Isaiah 9:5-6 are paraphrased as follows:

The prophet said to the house of David, For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and He has taken the law upon Himself to keep it. His name is called from eternity, Wonderful, The Mighty God, who liveth to eternity, The Messiah, whose peace shall be great upon us in His days. The greatness of those who do the law shall be magnified, and to those, that preserve peace. There shall be no end to the throne of David, and of his kingdom, to establish it and to build it in judgment and in righteousness from henceforth, even for ever. By the Word of the Lord of hosts this shall be done.⁴

Unfortunately, the Targum is not entirely clear in its interpretation of this passage. J. A. Alexander points out that some have suggested that the Targum applies at least some of these names in verse 5 to God himself, while others cite the Targum "as a witness in favour of applying all the names to the Messiah."⁵

The Talmud

The Talmud has the following discussion of this text:

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Let Hezekiah, who hath eight [shemoneh] names, come and mete out punishment to Sennacherib, who hath [likewise] eight. Hezekiah, as it is written, For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called [i] Wonderful, [ii] Counsellor, [iii] Mighty, [iv] Judge, [v] Everlasting, [vi] Father, [vii] Prince, and [viii] Peace.⁶

It is evident that Hezekiah is here taken as the child, but it is also clear that the Talmud takes all the names in this verse to apply to Hezekiah. But can they? Nosson Scherman in the ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah includes a summary of Abenezra's explanation of how they all can apply to Hezekiah:

He is called *wonderous* because he merited Hashem's miracles during his reign. His wisdom

4 *The Chaldee Paraphrase on the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. C. W. H. Pauli (London: London Society's House, 1871), pp. 30-31. The same translation is also given by *Sefaria* (https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Isaiah.9?lang=bi). Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), I:332, cites a slightly different translation of the Aramaic text for verse 5 by J. F. Stenning, *The Targum of Isaiah* (1949): "And there was called His name from of old, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, He who lives forever, the Messiah, in whose days peace shall increase upon us."

5 Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1870), I:203.

6 b. Sanh. 94a. This tractate was translated by Jacob Shachter under the general editorship of Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein, *Soncino Babylonian Talmud*; taken from www.come-and-hear.com/sanhedrin; brackets original.

earned him the title of *advisor*. He was *mighty* in that he brought about the continued dominion of the Davidic dynasty at a time when it was under threat [the word אֱל, although commonly used as a Divine Name, can also be used for those who possess temporal power]. *Eternal* expresses the permanence of the Davidic dynasty, and Hezekiah was called Prince of Peace because his reign was a time of peace.⁷

There are two major problems with this explanation.

First, the Davidic line or dynasty is indeed eternal, but that does not explain how Hezekiah could be called "eternal."

Second, this explanation by Abenezra also fails to adequately account for the name, אֱל גִּבּוֹר (*’el gibbôr*). By way of further explanation of Abenezra's view, Scherman inserted his own comment that אֱל "can also be used for those who possess temporal power." It is true that אֱל can be used of men.⁸ However, *El* in Isaiah is always used of the God of Israel.⁹ Moreover, John Davis points out that

No other human representative of God, equipped though this representative be by the Spirit, no judge, no prophet, no king, not even Moses, is ever called 'Mighty God'.¹⁰

William L. Holladay writes similarly:

The second name can be nothing other than a title for God. Isaiah is referring to *God* here in 9:6 by this title, and any attempt to water down the meaning of the phrase to apply it to a human king (such as the translation in the *New English Bible*, "in battle God-like") is simply inadmissible.¹¹

But as E. J. Young writes,

Isaiah 10:21, however, settles the question, for it states that a remnant of Jacob will return to *’el gibbor*. In verse 20 it had been asserted that the remnant of Israel would no longer lean upon its own staff, but would lean upon Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel in truth. This is the thought then summed up in the statement [in v. 21] that the remnant of Jacob would return to *’el gibbor*. In other words, from the context itself, we see that the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and *’el gibbor*, are one and the same.¹²

7 Nossou Scherman, *Isaiah*, in *The ArtScroll Series: The Later Prophets with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings*, gen. ed. Rabbi Nossou Scherman (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2013), p. 79; brackets original.

8 Jack B. Scott, "אֱלָהִים," *TWOT*, 1:41, lists "God, god, mighty one, and strength" as the various meanings of אֱלָהִים. *BDB*, p. 42, states that it can be "applied to *men of might and rank*," and lists Ezek. 31:11 as an example: "mighty one of the nations."

9 F. Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols., in vol. 7 in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols., C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975; original publication date 1877), 1:252.

10 John D. Davis, "The Child Whose Name Is Wonderful," in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, Centenary Commemoration Volume of Princeton Theological Seminary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 103.

11 William L. Holladay, *Isaiah: Scroll of a Prophetic Heritage*, 1978, p. 107, cited by Wegner, "A Re-Examination of Isaiah IX 1-6," p. 110.

12 Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 1:336; brackets added. Wegner, "A Re-Examination of Isaiah IX 1-6," p. 110, agrees: "The most convincing reason for

As stated in Chapter 6, subsection "Chapter 10," it would seem unlikely that Isaiah would use in so near a context, and one that deals with the same general subjects, the same expression in 9:5 with a meaning different from what he intended in 10:21. The conclusion therefore is firm: אֱלֹהֵי גִבּוֹר is a divine title in Isaiah 9:5.

Rashi and Radak

Rashi and Radak both argue that the child to which reference is made here is Hezekiah.¹³ They also apparently concluded that not only were אֱלֹהֵי גִבּוֹר ('ēl gibbôr), "mighty God," and אָבִי־עַד ('ābī 'ād), "everlasting father,"¹⁴ divine names or titles that could not be applied to Hezekiah, but so too were the first two words in the sequence, פְּלִא (wonder) and יוֹעֵץ (counselor). Therefore, on their view, none of the titles except "prince of peace" refer to the child in this text. The other titles refer to God who, according to their interpretation of the verse, calls the child "the prince of peace."

The translation of Rashi's commentary on the name of the child given on the Chabad.org Web site is as follows:

The Holy One, blessed be He, Who gives wondrous counsel, is a mighty God and an everlasting Father, called Hezekiah's name, "the prince of peace," since peace and truth will be in his days.

Here is Young's own translation of Radak's commentary:

The God, who is called and who is Wonder, Counsellor, the mighty God, the eternal Father, calls his name the Prince of Peace.¹⁵

It might be noted in passing that there is a difference of opinion among scholars as to whether פְּלִא and יוֹעֵץ constitute one title or two. It seems that Rashi and Radak also differed on this question. If two, the title would simply be "Wonder (or Wonderful), Counselor..." If linked together to form one title,

interpreting this part of the name as 'mighty God' referring to Yahweh is that in Isa x 21 this is how it is interpreted." Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:252, states that "El gibbor was a traditional name of God, which occurs as early as Deut. x. 17, cf. Jer. xxxii. 18, Neh. ix. 32, Ps. xxiv. 8, etc."

- 13 Davis, "The Child Whose Name Is Wonderful," p. 95, traces this view from Rashi to modern times: "This explanation was given by Solomon Jarchi [Rashi], Abenezra, and David Kimchi [Radak] during the Middle Ages, by Luzzatto in the middle of the nineteenth century, and yet more recently in Jewish circles by the orientalist James Darmesteter (*Les Prophètes d'Israël*, 1892, p. 60), the historian David Cassel (*Geschichte der jüdischen Literatur*, 1873, 1ste Abth., 2ter Abschnitt S. 182, Anm. 4), and by Professor Barth (*Beiträge zur Erklärung des Jesaias*, 1885, S. 15 ff.); and it lives among the rabbis (J. H. Schwarz, *Geschichtliche Entstehung der messianischen Idec des Judenthums*, S. 39; Hirsch, *Das Buch Jesaia*)."
- 14 According to Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:338, discovering the exact meaning of אָבִי־עַד is difficult. עַד signifies *perpetuity* or *duration* (BDB, p. 723; Carl Schultz, " 'ad, TWOT, II:645). Reasonable translation suggestions include "everlasting father" (e.g., Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 247), "eternal father" (e.g., Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:253), and "father of eternity" (Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:339). Young also suggests that this title signifies one who eternally is a father to his people. Thus this would qualify as another divine title.
- 15 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:332, translated this from Louis Finkelstein's (1895-1991) publication of *The Commentary of David Kimchi on Isaiah* (1925), p. 62.

it would be something like "Wonder of a Counselor" or "Wonderful Counselor." Delitzsch and Alexander take the words as two separate titles, while Young and Oswalt take the two words together as a single title.¹⁶

Davis argues for what he calls an "attractive theory," namely, that there is a symmetry of construction in the list of titles. In the three titles that are always taken to consist of two words, the first word of the pair is in the construct state before the second word. If "wonder" and "counselor" are taken as two nouns in the construct state, then the same symmetry of construction applies to all the (four) titles.¹⁷

However, since there is a difference of opinion on whether the first two words constitute one title or two, and since that issue is not critical to the overall interpretation of the verse, I accept, without further discussion, Young's translation, "wonder of a counselor" or "wonderful counselor," linking the first two nouns together to form a single title.

Samuel David Luzzatto

Despite the views of Rashi and Radak, Jewish scholar S. D. Luzzatto (1800-1865), like the Talmud and a number of commentators before him, originally considered all the terms as names of the child. He took "mighty God" and "eternal Father" as hyperboles, arguing that one would not expect to find attributes of God in this verse but rather characteristics of the child.¹⁸ But he found it impossible for a human child, Hezekiah, to be called *el gibbor*, like God himself is called in 10:21.¹⁹ So rather than taking Rashi's approach, he linked all the titles together and considered them one "word," forming the proper name of the child out of the attributes of God.

"A wonderful thing is counselling he who is the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."²⁰

Or, as Delitzsch translates Luzzatto's name for the child:

"God the mighty, the eternal Father, the Prince of Peace, resolves upon wonderful things."²¹

It is, of course, true that biblical names can be formed by combining declaratory clauses, as with Isaiah's sons. Names can also be formed using attributes of God, as with the names Isaiah ("Yahweh is salvation"), Daniel ("God is Judge" or "God is my Judge"), and many others. These components in

16 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:251-52, argues that פְּלֵא יוֹעֵץ are two separate titles. Taking the same view, Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:204, states that joining the two words to mean "wonderful counsellor" is "ungrammatical." In response to Alexander's claim, Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:334, n. 76, states, "The relationship of these two words is the same, I believe, as *pere' 'ādām* in Gen. 16:12. Why Alexander should call this construction ungrammatical I am at a loss to understand." Both Young and Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 247, suggest the translation "wonder of a counselor" or "wonderful counselor."

17 Davis, "The Child Whose Name Is Wonderful," pp. 98-100. In "wonder of a counselor," "father of eternity," and "prince of peace," each title consists of two nouns in the construct state. Concerning "mighty God," Davis argues that "a noun not infrequently stands in the construct state before its adjective or, as the matter is sometimes stated, before an adjective treated as an abstract noun (Is. xvii. 10, xxii. 24, xxviii. 4, xxxvi. 2; Ps. lxxiii.10, lxxiv. 15; Prov. vi. 24)."

18 This summary is taken from Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:248-49.

19 Ibid.

20 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:332, translated this from Luzzatto's book, *Il Profeta Isaia volgarizzato e commentato ad uso degl' Israeliti* (Padova, 1855). Young suggests that the thought is, "God the Strong, the Eternal Father, the Prince of Peace resolves upon something wonderful," which is close to how Delitzsch translates Luzzatto's name for the child.

21 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:249.

9:5, though, would not be attributes of God so much as names of God, as Delitzsch points out:

But even granting that such a sesquipedalian name were possible, in what an unskilful manner would the name be formed, since the long winded clause, which would necessarily have to be uttered in one breath, would resolve itself again into separate clauses, which are not only names themselves, but, contrary to all expectation, names of God!²²

Also, "the title of 'Prince of Peace' belongs to the child and not to God according to the unmistakable context."²³

Finally, Young points out some grammatical problems with this "sesquipedalian name":

On this construction the first word *pele*², "wonderful," constitutes the object, and is emphasized, whereas the remainder of the sentence forms the subject of the participle *yo'etz*, "counselling." It is of course true that names are composed of sentences in the Old Testament, but one may well wonder why such a sentence as this should constitute the name of the Child.²⁴ Why should the participle be employed instead of the imperfect? And if the purpose of the prophet, as this name would suggest, was to stress God's wisdom, why does he heap up epithets which do not contribute to that object?²⁵

A few modern scholars have also interpreted the titles in 9:5 as a single theophoric name for the child.²⁶

Jewish Translations

Two prominent translations of Isaiah 9:5-6 have every word from "wonder" to "peace" hyphenated and transliterated rather than translated.

The Jewish Bible 1917:

For a child is born unto us, a son is given unto us; and the government is upon his shoulder; and his name is called Pele-joez-el-gibbor-Abi-ad-sar-shalom; that the government may be increased, and of peace there be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it through justice and through righteousness from henceforth even

22 Ibid.

23 John D. Davis, "The Child Whose Name Is Wonderful," p. 97.

24 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:333, has the following footnote (n. 75) at this point: "Cf. Ps. 88:12; 119:129. In the Bible the word *pele*² is employed of what God, never what man, has done. The accent [on *pele*²] is *T^elisha*, one of the weakest of the disjunctives" (brackets added).

25 Ibid., I:332-33.

26 These are not examined at length here. Briefly, Holladay (*Isaiah: Scroll of a Prophetic Heritage*, 1978, p. 108-9, cited by Wegner, "A Re-Examination of Isaiah IX 1-6," p. 109, takes the middle two elements (only) to be theophoric and joins them together with an implied verb: "Planner of wonders; God the war hero (is) Father forever; prince of well-being." However, Wegner (pp. 110-11) argues against connecting the middle two elements and suggests that the whole name be divided into two parallel units, each containing one theophoric element, similar to the Masoretic accents (see the subsection, "The Accents," later in this chapter). He takes the following to be the name of the child: "Wonderful planner [is] the mighty God; the Father of eternity [is] a prince of peace" (brackets original). These two interpretations are open to several of the objections cited for Luzzato's view. In fact, Wegner admits that his name for the child "appears to be somewhat awkward." His attempt to overcome this objection is not convincing.

for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts doth perform this.

The *Jerusalem Bible*:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given: and the government is upon his shoulder: and his name is called Pele-yo'ez-el-gibbor-avi-'ad-sar-shalom, for the increase of the realm and for peace without end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice: from henceforth for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts performs this.

It is difficult to say whether the long, hyphenated, transliterated words in these two translations are simply intended to group the four (or five) names together to make it clear that they all apply to the child, as per the Talmud, or whether they signify a single name for the child constructed from the individual words. Based on Luzzatto's work in 1855, the latter cannot be dismissed, but it would seem unlikely.

The *Jewish Bible 1985* offers a somewhat ambiguous translation:

For a child has been born to us,
A son has been given us.
And authority has settled on his shoulders.
He has been named
"The Mighty God is planning grace;
The Eternal Father, a peaceable ruler"--
In token of abundant authority
And of peace without limit
Upon David's throne and kingdom,
That it may be firmly established
In justice and in equity
Now and evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of Hosts
Shall bring this to pass.

One is not sure how to take this translation. It certainly does not reflect the view of Rashi and Radak. Is it a variation of Luzzatto's interpretation of the Hebrew text? It seems unlikely that a modern translation would reflect an old, minority view. Yet this translation does seem to apply all eight words to God and then combine them to form the name of the child. The result is every bit as "sesquipedalian" as Luzzatto's and subject to the same objections noted in the previous section, "Samuel David Luzzatto."

However, due to the stature of Rashi and Radak, it would seem that their view--that all but "prince of peace" was applied to God in 9:5--laid the foundation for the modern Orthodox Jewish interpretation of this verse. The *Stone Edition* (2012) clearly reflects their view:

For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us, and the dominion will rest on his shoulder; the Wondrous Adviser, Mighty God, Eternal Father, called his name Sar-shalom [Prince of Peace]; upon the one with the greatness in dominion and the boundless peace that will prevail on the throne of David and on his kingdom, to establish it and sustain it through justice and righteousness, from now to eternity. The zealousness of HASHEM, Master of Legions, will accomplish this! (Brackets original)

Similarly, Nosson Scherman in the ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah writes,

God, to Whom the appellations of this verse are directed, called Hezekiah *Sar-shalom*, Prince of Peace, because there will be peace and truth during his reign (*Rashi*). Although this is the plain explanation of the verse, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 94a) expounds that all the appellations in this verse refer to Hezekiah. Our commentary will follow the plain sense of the verse.²⁷

Whether this interpretation is "the plain sense of the verse" is discussed at length in the following section. The point here is that this view is the common view of Orthodox Jewish scholarship today.

The Referent of the Titles: Preliminary Issues

The first step in determining the meaning of Isaiah 9:5-6 is a grammatical analysis of the names or titles listed in verse 5. How many, if any, refer to the child?

As already mentioned, both the Talmud and Abenezra, and possibly the Targum of Jonathan, refer all the names to the child. Rashi and Radak refer only "prince of peace" to him. But as Chapter 3 emphasized, the approach to biblical interpretation practiced by both Rashi and Radak was to seek the *peshat*, the plain, literal meaning of the text intended by the human author and determined by a careful grammatical exegesis of his text. Does the grammar of verse 5 support their conclusion?

This rather complex issue is investigated in this section and the following section, "The Referent of the Titles: Is Hezekiah the Child in Isaiah 9:5-6?"

The Accents

The accentual system developed by the Masoretes is very intricate. Only those aspects relevant to the interpretation of Isaiah 9:5-6 are reviewed here.

The original purpose of the accents was to regulate the public reading of the Hebrew text.²⁸ Although the system of accents was subsequently modified to accommodate chanting or singing,

...according to their original design they have also a twofold use which is still of the greatest importance for grammar (and syntax), viz., their value (a) as *marking the tone*,²⁹ (b) as *marks of punctuation* to indicate the logical (syntactical) relation of single words to their immediate surroundings, and thus to the whole sentence.³⁰

27 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 79.

28 *GKC*, § 15b. Much of the introductory material in this section is taken from §§ 15b-p.

29 William R. Harper, *Elements of Hebrew by an Inductive Method*, 15th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), p. 25, draws the following distinction: "The term 'accent' is used of the sign marking the syllable which receives the stress of voice; the term 'tone' is used of the *stress* of voice" (emphasis original). Thus the tone syllable is the syllable that is stressed in pronunciation.

30 *GKC*, § 15b (emphasis original). However, a caution is added in footnote 2: "At the same time it must not be forgotten that the value of the accent as a mark of punctuation is always relative; thus, e.g., '*Athnâch*' as regards the logical structure of the sentence may at one time indicate a very important break (as in Gn 1⁴); at another, one which is almost imperceptible (as in Gn 1¹)" (italics original).

A. B. Davidson describes the second use as "signs of logical interpunction" and as such are "guides to the sense, being a kind of commentary."³¹ Moshe Greenberg is more specific in describing this second use: "...they indicate the breaks and connections between the words of the sentence."³² As William Harper puts it, "...they show the relation sustained by each word to the other words in a clause or sentence....to separate or join the several words of a sentence."³³

Thus as marks of punctuation, accents are subdivided into two kinds:

- *Disjunctive*: those that *separate* a word from the following word; sometimes referred to as a *pause* or *stop*; different disjunctive accents vary in strength or power in the degree of division or pause; they are divided into four ranks called by Harper³⁴ *Emperors* (strongest), *Kings*, *Dukes*, and *Counts* (weakest), originally called *Imperatores*, *Reges*, *Duces*, and *Comites*, respectively, by Christian Hebraist Sam. Bohlius (1611-1689)³⁵
- *Conjunctive*: those that *connect* a word to the following word with which it is closely bound syntactically; sometimes referred as *continuation marks*; conjunctive accents generally unite only words that are connected in sense, for example a noun followed by a genitive or a noun with an adjective. There is no variation in strength or power in different conjunctive accents

Words with the closest connection between them are connected by a *Maqqēph*, a horizontal stroke or "hyphen" between the upper part of two words. Two, three, or four words can be so connected. Words connected in this way are regarded as one and thus have only one accent, and that on the last word.

There are two examples in the eight title words of 9:5: אָב־יָעַד (father everlasting) and שֶׁר־שָׁלוֹם (prince of peace).

All verses end with a *Sôph Pāsûq* (:). In addition, two important disjunctive accents, both Emperors, play a special role in every verse:

- *Sillûq*: , on the tone (stressed) syllable of the last word of the verse before the *Sôph Pāsûq*; thus it represents a full stop
- *'Athnâch*: ^ on the tone (stressed) syllable of the word that divides the verse into usually two logical parts, namely, the last word of the first part of the verse

Verse 9:5 reads as follows:

בִּי־יֵלֶד יֵלֶד־לָנוּ בֶן נֶתַן־לָנוּ

31 A. B. Davidson, *An Introductory Hebrew Grammar*, rev. John Edgar McFadyen, 23rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), p. 38.
 32 Moshe Greenberg, *Introduction to Hebrew* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 133.
 33 Harper, *Elements of Hebrew by an Inductive Method*, p. 27.
 34 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
 35 Cited by *GKC*, § 15f, n. 1. Although these four categories of disjunctive accents would seem to simplify the situation somewhat in certain situations, *GKC* goes on to state that they can be a "source of manifold confusion" and "had better be given up." *GKC* simply lists all the disjunctive accents in descending order of their disjunctive power, following Wicks (§§ 15f-i).

וַתְּהִי הַמְּשָׁרָה עַל־שִׁכְמוֹ
וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ
פֶּלְא יוֹעֵץ אֵל גְּבוֹר אָבִי־עַד שֶׁר־שְׁלוֹם:

The first part of the verse up to the *'Athnâch* is:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders;³⁶

Note that in this translation the semicolon after "shoulders" corresponds to the *'Athnâch*, ending this first clause. The second clause begins with two Hebrew words translated by the *NASB* as "and His name will be called..." The next eight words are used for the names or titles. The following table shows the accent on each word.

Table 1

English	Hebrew	Accent	Nature of Accent
Wonder	פֶּלְא [ֹ]	<i>Telišha gedôlâ</i> (Great Telišha): disjunctive	"Count": weakest pause between this word and next
Counselor	יוֹעֵץ	<i>Pašhtâ</i> : disjunctive	"Duke": second weakest pause between this word and next
God	אֵל	<i>Mûnach</i> : conjunctive	Connected with the next word
Mighty	גְּבוֹר	<i>Zâqêph qâtôn</i> : disjunctive	"King": second strongest pause between this word and next
Father	אָבִי	None; connected by <i>Maqqêph</i> to next word	
Eternal	עַד	<i>Tiphchâ</i> : disjunctive	"Duke": second weakest pause between this word and next; before <i>Sillûq</i>
Prince	שֶׁר	None; connected by <i>Maqqêph</i> to next word	
Peace	שְׁלוֹם	<i>Sillûq</i> : disjunctive	"Emperor": strongest pause; always before a <i>Sôph Pâsûq</i> (:), the verse divider

36 *NASB*. The tense of these verbs is discussed in the next subsection, "The Contested Verbs."

To represent the eight names with the appropriate disjunctive or conjunctive accent on each word, the following symbols are used:³⁷

Disjunctive Emperor:		Conjunctive:	(-)
Disjunctive King:			
Disjunctive Duke:		<i>Maqqēph</i>	-
Disjunctive Count:			

Since the accent represents the relationship between the word it is on and the next word, the effect of these eight accents can be represented this way:

Wonder | Counselor || God (-) Mighty ||| Father-Eternal || Prince-Peace ||| :

This shows how the Masoretes interpreted the word groupings.

- Due to the conjunctive accent on "God" and the two uses of *Maqqēph* connecting the words "Father" and "Eternal" and the words "Prince" and "Peace," the titles "Mighty God," "Father Eternal," and "Prince [of] Peace" are definitely construed as three names consisting of two words each.
- The accent on "Wonder" (*Telišha gedôlā*), representing the relationship between "Wonder" and "Counselor," would seem to be slightly ambiguous. This weakest of disjunctive accents could imply that the two words constitute one name constructed with two weakly connected words or simply that they represent two separate names.³⁸
- There is a major break (*Zâqēph qātōn*) between "God Mighty" and "Father Eternal," which indicates that the Masoretes saw a strong distinction between two different types of names separated by this strong disjunctive accent.

This last point agrees with the conclusion drawn by Delitzsch:

The accentuators seem also to have shrunk from taking *el gibbor* as the name of a man. They insert intermediate points, as though "eternal Father, Prince of Peace," were the name of the child, and all that precedes, from "Wonder" onwards, the name of God, who would call him [the child] by these two honourable names.³⁹

Therefore, the Masoretic accentuation would imply, according to Delitzsch, the following interpretation:

And the wonderful of a Counselor, the mighty God, calls his [the child's] name Eternal-Father, Prince of Peace...⁴⁰

If this conclusion is correct, none of the views discussed above agree with the accents--neither the

37 Note that these symbols and this graphical technique in which they are used were developed for this book; they are based on a similar method used by Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:250, n. 1.
 38 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:333, sees little ambiguity: "The Masoretic accentuation supports the position that there are four names." Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 246, n. 19 agrees: "The accentuation of the MT supports the combining of 'Wonder' and 'Counselor.'"
 39 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:249 brackets added.
 40 *Ibid.*, p. 250; brackets added.

Talmud, Rashi/Radak, nor Luzzatto. This is significant because neither does the traditional Christian view correspond to the accentuation. Thus neither of the two major competing views, Rashi/Radak vs. traditional Christian, can cite the accents in its favor.⁴¹ It would seem the Masoretes stand alone in their view of the names in 9:5.

The Contested Verbs

Verse 9:5 has five verbs and the time of those verbs (past, present, or future) intended by Isaiah is critically important to the interpretation of this verse. For example, with reference to the first two verbs, "born" and "given," Nosson Scherman in the ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah writes,

Isaiah cannot be referring to a child or son that will be born at a later time because the prophecy clearly states יָלֵד, **has been born**, and נָתַן, **has been given**. Both are in the past tense, clearly indicating that whomever the prophet was referring to had already been born.⁴²

If a past-tense interpretation of these two verbs is a simple fact, as implied by the above citation, then there would be a strong case that the child referred to was the already-born Hezekiah. But the situation is not quite as simple as this comment implies. In *GKC*, the standard Hebrew grammar, the following is stated:

While the Hebrew verb, owing to these derivative forms or conjugations [stems in addition to the Qal], possesses a certain richness and copiousness, it is, on the other hand, poor in the matter of *tenses* and *moods*. The verb has only two *tense*-forms (*Perfect* and *Imperfect...*), besides an *Imperative...two Infinitives* and a *Participle*.⁴³

The two verbs cited by Scherman, יָלֵד and נָתַן, are both perfects, and it is certainly not the case that perfects are always past time. Citing *GKC* again:

The perfect serves to express actions, events, or states, which the speaker wishes to represent from the point of view of completion, whether they belong to a determinate past time, or extend into the present, or while still future, are pictured as in their completed state.⁴⁴

The third of these three uses of the perfect verb is described in *GKC* as follows:

To express *future* actions, when the speaker intends by an express assurance to represent them as finished, or as equivalent to accomplished facts...⁴⁵

One example of this use of the perfect verb, according to *GKC*, is the *perfectum propheticum*, the "prophetic perfect":

This use of the perfect occurs most frequently in prophetic language (*perfectum propheticum*). The prophet so transports himself in imagination into the future that he describes the future

41 Delitzsch, *Ibid.*, p. I:250, n. 1, gives the accentuation that would be expected if only the name "Prince of Peace" were intended as the name of the child, as per the view of Rashi and Radak.

42 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 78.

43 *GKC*, § 40a; emphasis original and brackets added.

44 *Ibid.*, § 106a.

45 *Ibid.*, § 106m; emphasis original.

event as if it had been already seen or heard by him...⁴⁶

The first example of the prophetic perfect *GKC* cites is גָּלָה, a Qal perfect, in Isaiah 5:13, which the *Jerusalem Bible* translates in the past tense, "Therefore my people are gone into captivity..." and the *Stone Edition* in the present tense, "Therefore, my people is being exiled..." However, there is no captivity at the time Isaiah pronounces this "woe," so it is a future event. Yet Isaiah uses the perfect verb because in his mind he views it as an accomplished fact.

Similarly, as all would agree, the birth of the child described in Isaiah 9:5-6 is a singularly striking and important event in the life of the nation. If, then, it *is* a future event, and if in Isaiah's mind he "so transports himself in imagination into the future that he describes the future event as if it had been already seen or heard by him" (to use the words of *GKC*), then he very likely would use the perfect verb. Therefore, the use of the perfect verb for יָלַד and נָתַן by no means settles the issue of whether the birth of the child had already occurred at that point in time or whether it was still future to Isaiah's statement. Other considerations must be taken into account to decide that issue.

In light of this, one cannot help but notice a curious inconsistency in the ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah 9. With regard to the perfect verbs in 9:5, a dogmatic but, as demonstrated, inaccurate claim was made, as already cited:

Isaiah cannot be referring to a child or son that will be born at a later time because the prophecy clearly states יָלַד, *has been born*, and נָתַן, *has been given*. Both are in the past tense, clearly indicating that whomever the prophet was referring to had already been born.⁴⁷

However, in its introductory paragraph to 9:1, the following is stated:

Although the events depicted in this chapter had not yet occurred, the prophet records them in the past tense [Hebrew perfect], for it is typical of prophecies that the future is so vivid and sure to occur that it seems like an event that has already taken place.⁴⁸

The existence and use of the *perfectum propheticum*, or prophetic perfect, could not be better stated. However, this same commentary claims that one supposedly *can* state that the perfect verbs used in 9:5 give absolute certainty that the event had already occurred.

The Referent of the Titles: Is Hezekiah the Child in Isaiah 9:5-6?

The Conclusion Based On the Verbs

In all, there are five finite verbs in Isaiah 9:5-6, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2

46 Ibid., § 106n; emphasis original.

47 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 78.

48 Ibid., p. 77; brackets added. This conclusion about the meaning of the perfect sense in 9:1-4 is certainly correct. Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 1:246, states that "it is unnatural to take any one of the prophetic preterites [perfects], commencing with *hicbid* in vers. 1 [8:23], in any other than a future sense" (brackets added).

Verb	Parsing	Root, Meaning, Comments
יִלֵּד	3rd person masculine singular Pual perfect ⁴⁹	יָלַד : to bear, bring forth, beget Subject is "child" (masc. noun) requiring 3ms verb
נָתַן	3rd person masculine singular Niphal perfect	נָתַן : to give, put, set Subject is "son" (masc. noun) requiring 3ms verb
וְתִהְיֶה	3rd person feminine singular Qal imperfect with prefixed ו	הָיָה : to be, become, come to pass Subject is "government" (fem. noun) requiring 3fs verb; verb apocopated from תִּהְיֶה
וַיִּקְרָא	3rd person masculine singular Qal imperfect with prefixed ו	קָרָא : to call, proclaim, read Indefinite personal subject (GKC, § 144d)
תַּעֲשֶׂה	3rd person feminine singular Qal imperfect	עָשָׂה : to do, make Subject is "zeal" (fem. noun) requiring 3fs verb

The first two verbs in Table 2 are in the perfect verbs, as just discussed. It has yet to be determined whether Isaiah used the perfect verb to describe an event that actually did take place in the past, or whether he used it in the sense of a prophetic perfect to describe an event that is yet future, though viewed by him as an accomplished fact. The remaining verbs seem to determine the issue.

The last three verbs, *to be*, *to call*, and *to do*, are in the imperfect verb. Except for a desire to use the perfect verb as the first two verbs in order to describe a future event that in the author's mind is so certain of occurrence that he depicts it has already having occurred, the imperfect verb would have been the verb he normally would have used as the first two verbs to describe a future event. So now the question of why Isaiah used the perfect verb for the first two verbs and then switched to the imperfect verb for the last three verbs must be addressed.

Here is the general description of the imperfect verb according to GKC:

The imperfect, as opposed to the perfect, represents actions, events, or states which are regarded by the speaker at any moment as still continuing, or in the process of

49 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:329, n. 67, points out that Moritz Drechsler, *Der Prophet Jesaja* (1849) was "probably one of the first" to parse יִלֵּד as a passive Qal rather than a Pual. Both the Niphal and Pual stems are passive, the Niphal sometimes described as *simple passive* and the Pual as *intensive passive* (J. Weingreen, *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew* [Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1939], p. 100). However, some grammarians believe that a few verbs that are Pual perfect *in form* are actually examples of a passive Qal (Weingreen, pp. 150-51). GKC, § 52e, calls this a "convincing suggestion" by Böttcher. However, whether יִלֵּד is a true Pual or a passive Qal does not materially effect the meaning or translation of the verse.

accomplishment, or even as just taking place.⁵⁰

Greenberg describes it this way:

The imperfect aspect [sense] expresses action or state as unaccomplished, continuing, or customary. It corresponds generally to English present or future...⁵¹

However, the imperfect verb also can serve in the sphere of past time, present time, or future time. Since the argument in the ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah was intended to place the birth of the child in the past, viz., prior to the giving of the prophecy, it is important to note the following two uses of imperfect verbs in the sphere of past time that are given by *GKC*:⁵²

- To express actions, &c., which *continued* throughout a longer or shorter period, e.g. Gn. 2⁶ a *mist went up* continually (יַעֲלֶה)...
- To express actions, &c., which were *repeated* in the past, either at fixed intervals or occasionally (the *modus rei repetitae*), e.g. Jb 1⁵ *thus did* (יַעֲשֶׂה) *Job continually* (after each occasion of his sons' festivities)...

It is difficult to see how either of these two uses of imperfect verbs could describe the action signified by the three verbs, *to be*, *to call*, and *to do*, in these clauses and in this context. That leaves these two uses of the imperfect in the sphere of the present or future, neither of which supports the argument for the birth of the child in the past.

However, it should also be noted that the third and fourth verbs, *to be* and *to call*, have the prefixed *waw* (or *vav*), ך. This points to an important use of an imperfect verb that follows one or more perfect verbs in a narrative passage. *GKC* gives this description of the imperfect verb used in this way:

The *imperfect* with the *wāw consecutive*...serves to express actions, events, or states, which are to be regarded as the temporal or logical sequel of actions, events, or states, mentioned immediately before. The *imperfect consecutive* is used in this way most frequently as the *narrative tense*, corresponding to the Greek *aorist* or the Latin *historic perfect*. As a rule the narrative is introduced by a perfect, and then continued by means of imperfects with *wāw consecutive* (on this interchange of tenses...)..⁵³

GKC refers to this use of the imperfect as an "interchange of tenses" because the imperfect verbs used in this way with *waw-consecutives* take on the same time signature as the preceding perfects. Thus the *waw-consecutive* is also called the *waw-conversive*.

Also note Greenberg's comment:

In the narratives, the two aspects [tenses] of Biblical Hebrew are employed in the following sequence: If past events are being narrated, the first verb is normally in the perfect, but the

50 *GKC*, § 107a.

51 Greenberg, *Introduction to Hebrew*, p. 49; brackets added.

52 *GKC*, §§ 107b, e; emphasis original.

53 *GKC*, § 111a; emphasis original.

consecutive verbs in the line of the narration--each standing at the head of a clause and linked by ו ["and"] to the preceding clause--appear in the so-called *imperfect with waw-consecutive*, or *imperfect consecutive*.⁵⁴

Based on this use of imperfects as waw-consecutives, J. A. Alexander presents the following argument regarding the verbs in 9:5:

The Vav conversive renders the futures [imperfects] וַיִּקְרָא and וַיִּתְּנֵהּ perfectly equivalent, in point of time, to the preterites [perfects] יָלַד and נָתַן; so that if the latter refer to an event already past, the former must refer to past time too, and *vice versa*. The verse then either represents Hezekiah as unborn, or already invested with the regal office, at the date of the prediction, neither of which can be historically true. The attempt to escape from this dilemma, by referring the first two verbs to something past, and the two next to something future, is a direct violation of the laws of Hebrew syntax.⁵⁵

If the syntax and verb forms of 9:5, then, imply the same time references in all four verbs, there is a serious problem for the view that Hezekiah is the child.

- If all four verbs refer to *past* events, Hezekiah must now already be reigning (based on the third verb), which is obviously untrue since Ahaz is still on the throne.
- If, on the other hand, they all refer to *future* events, Hezekiah would not yet have been born when this prophecy was given (based on the first two verbs), which is also untrue since he had already been born.⁵⁶
- Therefore, neither option works for Hezekiah, so he cannot be the child in this prophecy.

So what is the correct interpretation of these four verbs in 9:5?

- Since Ahaz was still on the throne, *no child* already born (making all four verbs refer to *past* time, including the government on the child's shoulders) can meet the requirements of this verse.
- Therefore, the four verbs cannot describe *past* events and must describe *future* events.⁵⁷
- All four verbs, then, must refer to a child to be born in *future* time.

As noted, the two perfect verbs and the following two imperfect waw-consecutive verbs must all focus on the same point of time. Grammatically, the two possibilities are past and future. But if the known facts about Ahaz prohibit the four verbs describing events in the past, then they must describe events in the future. However, the only way for all four verbs to refer to *future* events is to take the two perfect

54 Greenberg, *Introduction to Hebrew*, p. 74; italics original and brackets added.

55 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:203; brackets added.

56 See Chapter 4, the section, "The Birth of Hezekiah in the Three Post-Thiele Harmonizations."

57 There is an additional argument that the four verbs must describe future events. John Davis, "The Child Whose Name Is Wonderful," p. 95, citing Dillmann, points out that the events of 8:23 and 9:3-4, which form the setting for the birth of the child, cannot refer to historical events. This point is noted later in this chapter in the section "The Identity of the Child."

verbs as examples of what *GKC* calls *perfectum propheticum*, which *GKC* regards as common in prophetic literature:

The prophet so transports himself in imagination into the future that he describes the future event as if it had been already seen or heard by him.⁵⁸

Thus, if in Isaiah's prophetic view he intended to express *future* actions with an explicit assurance of their occurrence, he would portray them as accomplished facts and would use these verbs because *in form* they describe events in the *past*. At the same time the verbs refer to specific, prophesied *future* events. This is the meaning of *perfectum propheticum*. Isaiah would expect his listeners and readers to understand this idiom based both on their current situation, viz., Ahaz reigning and Hezekiah already born but not reigning, and also on the prophetic details specified in the prophecy, just as I did in this section. And of course in the day and age of the prophets, the people would be familiar with prophetic modes of speech.

The Four Names: Rashi's View

In addition to the verbs in 9:5, there are other serious problems in taking the child to be Hezekiah.

It has been noted earlier in this chapter that the Masoretes (section "The Accents"), Rashi and Radak, and Luzzatto (section "Interpretations by Jewish Scholars") all found difficulty attributing some of the names in 9:5 to Hezekiah, a mere man. The Talmud alone applied all "eight names" to him. Since the view of Rashi and Radak forms the basis for most modern Orthodox Jewish interpretation and translation of 9:5-6, only their view is discussed here.

Here again is the translation of Rashi's commentary on this verse given on the Chabad.org Web site:

The Holy One, blessed be He, Who gives wondrous counsel, is a mighty God and an everlasting Father, called Hezekiah's name, "the prince of peace," since peace and truth will be in his days.

On this view all the names except "prince of peace" are applied to God, with only the last name applied to Hezekiah. Rashi's view is reflected in the translation in the *Stone Edition*:

For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us, and the dominion will rest on his shoulder; the Wondrous Adviser, Mighty God, Eternal Father, called his name Sar-shalom [Prince of Peace]...⁵⁹

The following note accompanies this verse:

This wondrous salvation took place in the days of the child of Ahaz, the righteous king Hezekiah, whom God -- the Wondrous Adviser, Mighty God, Eternal Father -- called "Prince of Peace."

Similarly, Nosson Scherman in the ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah writes,

God, to Whom the appellations of this verse are directed, called Hezekiah *Sar-shalom*, Prince

58 GKC, § 106n.

59 Stone Edition, Isa. 9:5; brackets original.

of Peace, because there will be peace and truth during his reign (*Rashi*). Although this is the plain explanation of the verse, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 94a) expounds that all the appellations in this verse refer to Hezekiah. Our commentary will follow the plain sense of the verse.⁶⁰

There are serious objections to this interpretation.

First, one would not expect to find attributes of God in this verse but rather descriptive names of the child.⁶¹ Young gives the reason for this: "...in this context we expect to find attributes of the Child and not of God, inasmuch as it is the Child who is the agent in bringing about the peace described."⁶² Similarly, Alexander states, "...a long enumeration of titles belonging to God himself is utterly irrelevant in speaking of a name which should be borne by Hezekiah."⁶³ Moreover, it should be noted that this objection is valid regardless of who the child is.

Second, it makes the clause beginning with **פְּלִא** (*wonder*) to **אָבִי-עֶד** (*father everlasting*) the subject of the verb **וַיִּקְרָא** (*to call*). However, the word **שְׁמוֹ** (*his name*) "cannot be separated from the name itself by the subject of the sentence."⁶⁴ Alexander McCaul gives a more detailed explanation of this objection:

It is contrary to the idiom of Scripture to put **שְׁמוֹ**, referring to the person named, before the namer. In the Bible elsewhere **שְׁמוֹ** is always put between the *namer* and the person or thing named. See Gen. xvi. 15; xxi. 3; xxii. 14; Exod. ii. 22; Ruth iv. 7 [*sic*; 17]; 1 Sam. iii. [*sic*; i] 20; 2 Sam. xii. [24,] 25.⁶⁵

Davis explains how really strong this point is:

In Hebrew the word 'name' cannot be separated by the subject of the sentence from the name itself. There is no exception to this rule. Cocceius demonstrated the fact (*Consideratio responsionis Judaicae*, cap. vi. 14); and since his day, the middle of the seventeenth century, this interpretation of the name [of the child] has had no standing before a court of scholars.⁶⁶

To see what is at issue here in more graphic terms, it will be noted from the texts cited by McCaul that the idiomatic pattern is this:

60 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 79. It should be emphasized, as noted above in the section "The Talmud," that the third of the three great Jewish Medieval commentators, Abenezra, did not take this view. Alexander McCaul, *Lectures on the Prophecies Proving the Divine Origin of Christianity* (London: John W. Parker, 1846), p. 66, provides an English translation of Abenezra's comment on this issue: "There are some who say that *Wonderful, Everlasting Father*, are names of God, and that the name of the child is *Prince of Peace*, but that which is correct in my opinion is, that all these are the names of the child." How Abenezra applied the four names to the child is explained earlier in this chapter in the subsection "The Talmud." It is also interesting to note that while Abenezra applied all the names to Hezekiah, Abravanel applied all of them to God. Both were Jewish Medieval commentators.

61 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:248-49, points out that Luzzatto also made this observation.

62 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:332.

63 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:203.

64 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:332.

65 McCaul, *Lectures on the Prophecies*, p. 66; emphasis added and brackets added.

66 Davis, "The Child Whose Name Is Wonderful," p. 96; brackets added.

a personal pronoun (or part thereof). For perfects, it is a personal affirmative (a pronominal *suffix*), and for imperfects a personal preformative (a pronominal *prefix*).⁶⁹ The Qal imperfect verb in 9:5, יִקְרָא (its root meaning *to call*), has a 3rd person masculine singular inflection making its implicit subject "he." However, a verb can, of course, have an explicit subject in the clause in which it occurs, and the verb must match it in person, gender, and number. In this case, though, יִקְרָא is not connected to an explicit subject, as is also the case in Exodus 2:22; Ruth 4:17; 1 Samuel 1:20; 2 Samuel 12:24, 25 from McCaul's examples. This could mean that the subject of the verb here is actually to be taken as "he": "...and he called his name..." (or using future time: "...and he will call his name..."). But in this case there is also no antecedent in the preceding context of 9:5 that identifies the "he."

However, in the section, "Peculiarities in the Representation of the Subject," GKC points out that "the indefinite personal subject (our *they*, *one*, the French *on*, and the German *man*) is expressed--(a) By the 3rd person singular masculine..." He cites Isaiah 9:5 as an example.⁷⁰ The personal subject here is best taken as indefinite since there is no antecedent for the "he" of the verb itself. Therefore, Alexander suggests,

The verb יִקְרָא [*to call*] may agree with יהוה [*Yahweh*, as subject], or be construed indefinitely--*he* (i.e., any one) *shall call his name*-- which is equivalent to saying *they shall call his name*, or in a passive form, *his name shall be called*.⁷¹

In the idiomatic pattern above, the indefinite personal subject, "one," is used for the subject (the "Namer").

It should be noted that three out of four of the common Jewish translations translate this verb with an indefinite passive:

Jewish Bible 1917: "And his name is called..."

Jewish Bible 1985: "He has been named..."

Jerusalem Bible: "and his name is called..."

These translations apply all four names (or all eight words) to the child.

Was Hezekiah a "Prince of Peace"?

On the view proposed by Rashi and Radak, God, identified by the first three names, calls Hezekiah "prince of peace." Even if the verb times and idiomatic word order of Isaiah 9:5 were not decisive against this interpretation, it would remain quite difficult to accept the name "Prince of Peace" for Hezekiah.

Why, according to Rashi, did God call Hezekiah "prince of peace"? As noted in the previous section, "The Four Names: Rashi's View," he stated that God called Hezekiah Prince of Peace "since peace and truth will be in his days." However, Alexander makes the following observation:

69 GKC, § 144a; see also §§ 40b, c. A simpler summary can be found in Weingreen, *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew*, pp. 57, 76.

70 GKC, § 144d.

71 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:203; brackets added. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:331, n. 70, writes, "Probably better to construe impersonally than to take God as subject"; he translates it as passive voice.

Neither actively nor passively could he [Hezekiah] be called, at least with any emphasis, a Prince of peace. He waged war against others, and was himself invaded and subjected to a foreign power, from which he afterwards revolted.⁷²

But if Hezekiah is the child, there is more that 9:5-6 attributes to him than the title, "prince of peace," or even all four names. These are taken from the translation in the *Jerusalem Bible*:

- "the government is upon his shoulder"
- "for the increase of the realm and for peace without end"
- "upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom"
- "to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice"
- "from henceforth for ever"

compares these descriptions and accomplishments of the child to the reign of Hezekiah:

In no sense can Hezekiah be called the Prince of Peace. In no sense, literal or figurative, can it be said of him, that "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it from henceforth even for ever." Hezekiah's reign was neither peaceful, nor prosperous, nor eternal. Instead of the increase of his government having no end, the misfortunes and calamities which happened in his reign, were almost without parallel. In his days the ten tribes were carried into captivity. The kingdom of Judah was all but destroyed by the Assyrians, and he himself received the melancholy tidings that all his treasures should become the spoil of a foreign conqueror, and that his own posterity should be slaves in the palace of the King of Babylon. He never reigned over the kingdom of David, which included all the twelve tribes. He did not even reign in peace over Judah. He did not increase, but lost the little power which he possessed. He did not reign for ever, but after a life of calamity he died in grief, and left his dominions to another. He cannot therefore in any sense be said to have fulfilled the words of the prophet.⁷³

In view of the known facts of Hezekiah's reign, it is somewhat astonishing that the ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah makes the following statement:

Hezekiah, this righteous king, therefore enjoyed boundless peace while he reigned on the throne of David...⁷⁴

Summary and Conclusions

This section, "Is Hezekiah the Child in Isaiah 9:5-6?" can be summarized as follows.

- The first two verbs in 9:5 are perfects; the second two verbs are imperfects with waw-consecutive, also called waw-conversive.
- Thus all four verbs reflect the same point in time, either past or future with respect to the point of time of this text.

72 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:203; brackets added.

73 McCaul, *Lectures on the Prophecies*, p. 63.

74 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 79.

- In view of all the statements made about the child in 9:5-6, neither option, past or future, works for Hezekiah.
- Therefore, Hezekiah cannot be the child in this prophecy.
- Since Ahaz is still on the throne, *no child* already born can meet the requirements of this verse.
- Therefore, the four verbs cannot describe *past* events and must describe *future* events.
- All four verbs, then, must refer to a child to be born in *future* time.
- The only way for all four verbs to refer to *future* events is to take the two perfect verbs as examples of what GKC calls *perfectum propheticum*.
- Thus, if in Isaiah's prophetic view he intended to express *future* actions with an explicit assurance of their occurrence, he would portray them as accomplished facts and would use these verbs because *in form* they describe events in the *past*. At the same time the verbs refer to specific, prophesied *future* events.
- According to idiomatic biblical Hebrew, שם or שמו (*name, his name*) cannot be separated from the name itself by the subject of the verb.
- Therefore, none of the four names can be the subject of the verb וַיִּקְרָא and are rather the accusative predicate of the verb.
- Thus, all four names are the names by which the child will be called.
- According to the pronominal prefix on the verb, the subject of the verb could be simply "he." Lacking an antecedent, however, the preformative could also be taken as an indefinite personal subject, translated either as "*they shall call his name*" or as a passive, *his name shall be called*."
- The life and reign of Hezekiah is inconsistent with the description "prince of peace."

In short, Hezekiah cannot be the child, and all four names apply to the child.

The Identity of the Child

Briefly stated, the Targum of Jonathan is correct: Isaiah 9:5-6 is messianic and the "child" or "son" is the Messiah.

The passage is also considered messianic, in a sense, by the talmudic Sages in Sanhedrin 94a. makes this observation:

It [the Talmud] applies the words [of Isaiah 9:5-6] to Hezekiah, says, that God wished to make him the Messiah, thereby implying that to the Messiah the passage primarily and properly

refers.⁷⁵

But what is the evidence for the conclusion that Isaiah 9:5-6 is messianic with the child being the Messiah? There are several lines of evidence.

First Line of Evidence

First, the text states that "the government is upon his shoulder" and that this child will sit "upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom."⁷⁶ Thus, he will be a king of Israel from the line of David. No king from Ahaz to Zedekiah was the Messiah. Second, since the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, to this day there has not been a Davidic king ruling over Israel. The next king expected is the Messiah.

But these two observations are not sufficient in themselves. In addition, the reign attributed to this child is "for the increase of the realm and for peace without end, upon the throne of David" and this Davidic king's purpose for that realm is "to order it, and to establish it...from henceforth for ever."⁷⁷ That can describe only the Messiah and his reign. Oswalt makes the following observation:

...*there will be no end*. Again, it becomes clear that Isaiah has an eschatological figure in mind. This person will not be a king among kings in Israel. Rather, he will be the final king, the king to end all kings.⁷⁸

However, an objection to this argument must be answered. Consistent with his view that the child refers to Hezekiah, Rashi argues that עולם here means not *forever* but only until the end of Hezekiah's life.⁷⁹ Though the word can be used in several different senses,⁸⁰ all four major Jewish translations render the phrase containing עולם as a description of an everlasting reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom:

<i>Jewish Bible 1917:</i>	"from henceforth even for ever"
<i>Jewish Bible 1985:</i>	"now and evermore"
<i>Jerusalem Bible:</i>	"from henceforth for ever"
<i>Stone Edition:</i>	"from now to eternity"

Concerning the usage of עולם in Scripture, Alexander makes this point:

The word עולם, though properly denoting mere indefinite duration, and therefore frequently applied to terms and periods of time, such as the length of human life, is always to be taken in its largest meaning, unless limited by something in the context or the nature of the case; much more in such an instance as the one before us, where the context really precludes all limitation by the strength of its expressions. To explain *for ever* here, with Jarchi [Rashi] and Grotius, as meaning till the end of Hezekiah's life, is simply ludicrous, unless the other phrases, both in this verse and the fifth, are mere extravagant hyperboles. The Masoretic interpunction requires this

75 McCaul, *Lectures on the Prophecies*, pp. 62-63; brackets added.

76 *Jerusalem Bible*.

77 *Ibid*.

78 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 248.

79 "from now and to eternity: The eternity of Hezekiah, viz., all his days" (Chabad.org Web site).

80 *BDB*, pp. 761-63.

phrase to be connected with what follows--"from henceforth and for ever the zeal of Jehovah of hosts will do this"....but most interpreters suppose it to qualify what goes before, and take the remaining words as a short independent proposition. The difference is little more than one of punctuation. Both constructions make the reign of the Messiah an eternal one.⁸¹

Young makes the same observation on the use of עולם:

עולם denotes indefinite duration. When applied to human life it should be taken in its fullest sense unless specifically restricted. Here the context makes clear that the kingdom is everlasting in nature. It is inconceivable that a kingdom founded in justice and righteousness, ruled over by One who bears the names of v. 5, which will increase peace without end, should be thought of as in any sense having only a temporal duration.⁸²

The ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah uses the *Stone Edition* as the English translation of the Hebrew text. Its comment on the phrase, "from now to eternity," is this:

To eternity is merely a figure of speech, meaning as long as Hezekiah lives. See I Samuel 1:22 for a similar use of this term.⁸³

1 Samuel 1:22 does employ עולם, and the *Stone Edition* renders the verse as follows:

But Hannah did not ascend, as she told her husband, "When the child [Samuel] is weaned, then I will bring him, and he shall appear before HASHEM and shall settle there forever."
(Brackets added)

The *NASB* also translates עולם in this verse as "forever." However, the context here is completely devoid of any hint that Samuel's longevity will be anything more than that of a normal man who becomes a prophet of the Lord. By contrast with Isaiah 9:5, there is no sequence of spectacular names implying something extraordinary about Samuel. Also, the birth of the child in Isaiah 9:6 is "for the increase of the realm and for peace without end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom."⁸⁴ Therefore, the basic hermeneutical principle cited above would indicate that in 1 Samuel 1:22 עולם should indeed be taken as nothing more than the duration of Samuel's life, that is, a figure of speech, while in Isaiah 9:6 the duration of the rule of this child over the Davidic kingdom is truly forever, there being much evidence in the text itself that עולם is not used as a figure of speech.

Second Line of Evidence

Second, there is evidence that 9:5-6 is messianic from the immediate context of 8:22-9:4.⁸⁵ Verse 8:22 talks about distress, darkness, gloom, and anguish. But it will end. 9:1 states that the people who walked in darkness will see a great light. According to 9:2 there will be much gladness and rejoicing.

81 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 1:206; brackets added.

82 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 1:344, n. 87.

83 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 79. Rashi also mentioned 1 Sam. 1:22 in his comment on "eternity."

84 *Jerusalem Bible*.

85 These verses are discussed in considerable detail in the next section, "Does Isaiah 9:1-4 Refer to Sennacherib?"

Then in verses 3, 4, and 5 there follows a sequence of three explanations of how this change comes about. Each verse begins with כִּי , *for* or *because*:

- *For* thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midyan.
- *For* every shoe of the stormy warrior and every garment rolled in blood shall be burnt as fuel of fire.
- *For* to us a child is born, to us a son is given...⁸⁶

Thus, Isaiah gives three reasons for the great joy depicted in 9:2:⁸⁷

- *From verse 3*: Each oppressor down through history (the Assyrians in that day, or the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans in the future), used the staff and the rod on the shoulders of this oppressed nation of Israel. However, the nation will be delivered from the oppressor by God's hand, just as God delivered Gideon from the Midianites in days long ago.⁸⁸
- *From verse 4*: The result will be characterized by a lasting, universal peace. No longer will the government have to issue military uniforms, nor will the paraphernalia of war be needed. All remembrance of war can be tossed into the fire, for they will be useless and outmoded.
- *From verse 5*: The flow of the passage then moves to 9:5-6. Verse 5 begins with כִּי (*for*), giving the best reason of all for rejoicing before the Lord--a child is born, a son is given to Israel, and a new leader assumes the throne of David. It is he who will implement this deliverance and this universal peace, and the nation of Israel will be the primary beneficiary of this work (v. 2).

This deliverance from war has never yet occurred, and it is the Messiah and only the Messiah who will bring it about. It will occur when he assumes the throne of David and reigns over his kingdom forever.

Third Line of Evidence

Chapter 6 argued that Isaiah 7-12 forms one section of the Book of Isaiah and is the broader context of Isaiah 7:14.⁸⁹ Thus it is also the context of 9:5-6, thereby contributing material relevant to the interpretation of 9:5-6, as it will for 7:14.

The Targum of Jonathan recognizes Isaiah 11 as Messianic. Verse 1 is paraphrased as follows:

And a King shall come forth from the sons of Jesse, and from his children's children the Messiah shall be anointed.⁹⁰

86 These three citations are taken from the *Jerusalem Bible*.

87 This summary and much of the wording is taken from the one given by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), pp. 162-63.

88 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:200, makes this comment on verse 3: "This promise [in v. 3] was not fulfilled in the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon...which bore no resemblance to the victory of Gideon; nor in the destruction of Sennacherib's army...the benefits of which events were only temporary..."

89 See the section, "The Broader Context of Isaiah 7:14 in Chapter 6."

90 *The Chaldee Paraphrase on the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. Pauli, C. W. H.

Also as noted in Chapter 1 of this book, Rabbi J. H. Hertz called Isaiah 11 "the greatest and most famous of all the Messianic prophecies."⁹¹ Therefore it is important to examine this passage carefully to see if there are any links or similarities to 9:5-6.

First, notice that 11:1 describes a descent or birth from the line of Jesse or David.⁹² The two words used, חֹטֵר, meaning *branch* or *twig*,⁹³ and נֹצֵר, meaning *sprout* or *shoot*,⁹⁴ both describe a new growth from the stump of Jesse. The text specifically adds that the "branch shall grow out of his [Jesse's] roots."⁹⁵ This branch by almost universal agreement is the Messiah.⁹⁶ Isaiah 9:5-6 also described the birth of a child from the line of David. The parallel between these two passages within the same general context thus suggests that the child born in 9:5-6 as a king from the line of David is also the Messiah.⁹⁷

Second, the word for stump, נֹצֵר, means stump in the sense of that part of a tree remaining above ground when a tree is felled.⁹⁸ According to Gleason Archer, this drastic event when the Davidic dynasty was "felled" occurred at the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar in 587, making Zedekiah the last Davidic king at the felling of the tree.⁹⁹ This, then, is a figure for the state of the Davidic line when the child, the branch or sprout, the Messiah, is born. Therefore, 11:1 describes a descent or derivation of a Davidic king who is the Messiah from a reduced and almost extinct family.¹⁰⁰ In turn, the following comparisons can be made.

Whereas:

- As 11:1 describes the terrible conditions being experienced by the people of Israel *by pointing to the state of the Davidic line*.
- So too 9:3-4 describes those terrible conditions *by pointing to the people themselves*.

Then:

91 J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 2nd ed. (London: Soncino Press, 1981), p. 1023. See also Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2 vols., 5th ed. (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1886), II:723-24, for an extensive list of passages in the Talmud in which Isa. 11 is messianically interpreted. However, according to Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:248, Abenezra strangely takes the twig or shoot in 11:1 to be Hezekiah. However, when Isaiah gave this prophecy, Hezekiah was already born, and the house of Jesse or David from which Hezekiah sprang was certainly not in the condition described in this passage.

92 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:249, cites a number of views advanced by scholars as to why the name Jesse was used instead of David.

93 *BDB*, p. 310.

94 *Ibid.*, p. 666.

95 *Jerusalem Bible*; brackets added.

96 Other messianic passages using the same figure are Jer. 23:5-6 and Zech. 3:8, harking back to Isaiah's use of this image in this verse.

97 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:378-79, n. 1, points out that in the phrase, "and there shall go forth" in 11:1, the verb, *to come forth* or *to go forth*, נֹצֵר, "connects the following with what precedes; 10:33, 34 should be compared with Dan.

2:34, 35. נֹצֵר is used of human genealogy, Gen. 17:6, but here, as also in Job 5:6; 14:2, it is taken from the realm of plant life. Isaiah's purpose is to show that the kingdom has sunk to so low a point that there must be a new beginning."

98 Radak's explanation as cited by Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:249.

99 Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *Isaiah*, vol. 2 in *The Biblical Expositor*, 3 vols., gen. ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Co., 1960), p. 136.

100 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:249.

- As the child, the Messiah, in 11:1 restores the line of David and as king "shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked" (11:4) so that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (11:9)..."¹⁰¹
- So too the child of 9:5-6 breaks the yoke of Israel's burden and the rod of their oppressor (9:3) and then destroys the weapons of war (9:4), in that way introducing "peace without end."¹⁰²

Again, the parallel between these two passages suggests that they both depict the conditions that are overcome by King Messiah when he establishes the messianic kingdom on earth and also the resulting characteristics of Messiah's rule.

Based on these three lines of evidence, then, there is good reason to accept the conclusion of the Targum of Jonathan: Isaiah 9:5-6 is messianic, and the child is the Messiah.

Does Isaiah 9:1-4 Refer to Sennacherib?

It was noted earlier in this chapter¹⁰³ that the views of Rashi and Radak laid the foundation for the modern interpretation of Isaiah 9:5-6, at least within Orthodox circles. The primary component of that view is that the child in this text refers to Hezekiah. One point in common between this Jewish interpretation and the standard Christian view that the child is the Messiah is to take יְהוֹשִׁעַ in 9:5 in the sense of *for*, making the birth of the child the cause of the great light, joy, and broken yoke of the oppressed described in 8:23-9:4.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, as an added argument to support the view that the child was Hezekiah, section 8:23-9:4 is taken as a description of the effect of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah, his siege of Jerusalem, and the subsequent divine destruction of his army in answer to the prayers of Hezekiah and Isaiah.¹⁰⁵

Interpretation and Translation of Verse 8:23

In examining this interpretation of 8:23-9:4, 8:23 is the key verse. There are numerous difficulties with this verse,¹⁰⁶ but not every issue needs to be addressed here. Those that are significant are examined in this section. Before discussing the details, however, one can get a rough idea of some of the difficulties in this verse by comparing two very different translations, the *Jerusalem Bible* and the *NASB*:

For there is no weariness to him that is set against her; at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zevulun, and the land of Naftali and afterwards he afflicted her more grievously by the way of the sea, beyond the Yarden in the Galil of the nations. (8:23, *Jerusalem Bible*)

101 *Jerusalem Bible*.

102 *Ibid*.

103 See the section "Interpretations by Jewish Scholars" in the Chapter.

104 All four modern Jewish translations and all Christian translations take יְהוֹשִׁעַ in 9:5 in this sense.

105 See Kgs. 19:14-37; 2 Chron. 32:20-21. Incredibly, Radak suggested that the "merit of Hezekiah" was the reason God destroyed the army of Sennacherib (cited positively by Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 78).

106 See, e.g., Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 231, notes 13, 14, 15, and 16, William S. LaSor, "Galilee," *ISBE*, II:386, and especially J. A. Emerton, "Some Linguistic and Historical Problems in Isaiah VIII. 23," *JSS* 14 (Autumn 1969):151-175.

But there will be no *more* gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make *it* glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. (9:1, NASB)

Two important (and correct) points that these two translations do have in common is that (1) the verse consists of two sentences, separated in both translations with a semicolon and that (2) the second sentence contains two clauses. The second sentence is the important one here, so the difficulties with the first sentence are not addressed.

As my foundation for this investigation of the significant issues in 8:23, I cite the following statement by J. A. Emerton:

Before considering the difficulties of the verse [8:23], it may be noted that there is no evidence in the ancient versions for a Hebrew text different from that of the Masoretes.¹⁰⁷

Issue 1

Do the two parallel clauses in the second sentence refer to the same region? According to Alexander,

The same region is described in both clauses, namely, the northern extremity of the land of Israel. This is designated, first, by the tribes who occupied it, then, by its relative position with respect to the Jordan and the sea of Tiberias.¹⁰⁸ This part of the country, from being the most degraded and afflicted, should receive peculiar honour.¹⁰⁹

That the two clauses describe the same region is the most straightforward interpretation. It is natural to take what first occurred and then what subsequently would apply to the same region. However, although the two clauses describe the same general area of the northern extremity of Israel, clause two does seem to make one reference to the east side of the Jordan River, the phrase "the other side of Jordan"--the east side, whereas both Naphtali and Zebulun are the northernmost territory of Israel on the west side. By contrast, the other two phrases, "the way of the sea"¹¹⁰ and "Galilee of the Gentiles,"¹¹¹ refer to the west side of Jordan in the land of Naphtali and Zebulun. For this view, it can

107 Emerton, "Some Linguistic and Historical Problems in Isaiah VIII. 23," p. 152; brackets added.

108 This sea has a number of names. In the New Testament it is generally called Sea of Galilee (Matt. 4:18; 15:29; Mark 1:16; 7:31). It is also called Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1; Roman texts and Jerusalem Talmud), Sea of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1), and Sea of Kinneret, sometimes spelled Chinnereth, (Num. 34:11; Josh. 11:2; 13:27).

109 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:196. Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:243-44, and Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:323, also argue that the two clauses describe the same region.

110 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:244, identifies "the way of the sea" as "the tract of land on the western shore of the sea of Chinnereth." A few scholars take the "sea" to be the Mediterranean. For example, R. B. Y. Scott, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, vol. V in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols., gen. ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), V:230, describes "the way of the sea" as "the ancient caravan route to the sea [at Acco] from Damascus...The territory traversed by this road, broadly speaking, corresponds to that taken by the Assyrians in 733-32, which included Zebulun and Naphtali (II Kings 15:29)" (brackets added). However, most commentators take the "sea" to be the Sea of Chinnereth (Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:323, n. 52).

111 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 239, describes "Galilee of the Gentiles" (or nations) as "the area between the Sea of Chinnereth and the Mediterranean north of the Jezreel Valley." Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:323, n. 53, adds additional information: "Galilee of the Gentiles (or circuit of the nations) is the northern boundary of Palestine, in which there was a large mixed population (cf. 1 Kings 9:11; Josh. 20:7; 21:32). It was most remote from Judah and next to the foreign lands and so subject to heathen influences." In later times, Naphtali and Zebulun were called Upper Galilee and Lower Galilee, respectively. According to LaSor, "Galilee," II:386, "there is some evidence that a portion of the land E of the Jordan system was also included in Galilee," but by far the most common use of Galilee in Scripture refers to the

also be argued that the phrase, עֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן, usually translated, "beyond the Jordan," refers, if so translated, to the east side of Jordan.¹¹²

However, if all three phrases in clause two are in apposition to Naphtali and Zebulun in clause one, due to the phrase "Galilee of the Gentiles," then it could be argued that "beyond the Jordan" would likely be the west side of the Jordan at roughly the same northern tip of Israel, thus making all three phrases in clause two a reference to the west side of the Jordan. But that is not my view.

So with Alexander, I would argue that the two clauses, roughly speaking, do in fact refer to the same area, namely, the northernmost territory of Israel on both sides of the Jordan. In clause two, both the phrases that describe the part of Israel west of the Jordan and the phrase that describes the part east of the Jordan do in fact refer to the northern extreme of the nation of Israel. But why would Isaiah include that area east of the Jordan in clause two? Note 2 Kings 15:29 and 1 Chronicles 5:26 for a possible answer:

In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon and Abel-beth-maacah and Janoah and Kedesh and Hazor and Gilead and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria.¹¹³

So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria, even the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away into exile, namely the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them to Halah, Habor, Hara and to the river of Gozan, to this day.¹¹⁴

In Tiglath-pileser's campaign south into Israel in 732 after the fall of Damascus, he devastated both sides of the Jordan in this northernmost part of Israel. 2 Kings 15:29 lists mostly sites on the west side, but it also includes Gilead¹¹⁵ on the east side. According to J. Skinner, the phrase "beyond Jordan" in

west side of Jordan.

- 112 The word עֵבֶר, a masculine noun, which, according to *BDB*, p. 719, has the basic meaning "*region across or beyond, side.*" When used with Jordan, and in the sense of *region across or beyond*, this word is used to refer to the land east of the Jordan 36 times and only 9 times to the land west of the Jordan. *BDB* lists Isa. 8:23 with the group of verses referring to the east side of the Jordan and Deut. 3:20, 25 with those referring to the west side. Thus, the most common interpretation and translation of this phrase is "beyond the Jordan," referring to the east side of the river. However, עֵבֶר can also mean *side*, e.g., 1 Kgs. 4:24 (Heb. 5:4), "this side of the river" (cf. also Exod. 25:37). Thus Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:196, translates the expression in 8:23 "the bank of the Jordan," keeping the reference to the west side of the river. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Prophecies*, 2nd ed., 4 vols., trans. Theod. Meyer (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1858), II:73, notes that several scholars take this view but that it is contrary to the *usus loquendi*. It is best to take the phrase as referring to the east side of the Jordan.
- 113 LaSor, "Galilee," II:386, points out a difficulty with this verse: "The repetition of the conjunction 'and' [in the Hebrew text] is significant, for it connects the first seven names and sets them apart from the next phrase; in other words, it names them as constituting 'all the land of Naphtali.' This, however, creates...[a] problem, for while it places Galilee in Naphtali...it also places Gilead in Naphtali--which is not in accord with the boundaries of Naphtali given in Josh. 19:32-34" (brackets added). C. F. Keil, *The Books of the Kings*, vol. 1 of vol. 3 in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols., C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975; original publication date 1873), I:395, connects only the last name, "Galilee," with "all the land of Naphtali": "הַגָּלִילָה [the Galilee]...is more precisely defined by the apposition 'all the land of Naphtali...' (brackets added). This seems to avoid the problem. *GKC* does not comment on this syntactical structure in 2 Kgs. 15:29.
- 114 *NASB*.
- 115 According to William S. LaSor, "Gilead," *ISBE*, II:468, "Gilead,' as used in the OT, is a rather imprecise term." However, it is on the east side of the Jordan.

clause two of Isaiah 8:23 refers to "the land of Gilead," and he cites 2 Kings 15:29.¹¹⁶ 1 Chronicles 5:26, in contrast to 2 Kings 15:29, lists territory on the east side of Jordan. The northern territory of Israel on both sides of the Jordan was incorporated into the Assyrian Empire with most of its Israelite population carried into captivity and with Hoshea left as Assyria's vassal king in Samaria with only the hill country west of the Jordan.¹¹⁷

The summary statement by Emerton is appropriate:

The verse [8:23] refers to Zebulun and Naphtali and to certain regions in the northern part of Israel, and it must be asked whether it is possible to find an historical occasion that especially concerned these tribes and regions. Despite differences of opinion about the meaning of the two verbs and about the time to which the second refers, it has long been agreed by most commentators that the general historical background is to be seen in the campaigns of Tiglath-pileser III against Syria and Israel in 734-732 B.C.¹¹⁸

Similarly,

The historical background of Isa. viii. 23 is thus Tiglath-pileser's annexation of the northern part of Israel c. 732 B. C.¹¹⁹

Before concluding this issue, mention should be made of Rashi's interpretation of the second part of this verse. He believes it refers to three stages of the exile of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.¹²⁰

- "By way of the sea": Naphtali, who dwelled near the sea of Tiberias, the Kinneret
- "Beyond the Jordan": the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan
- "The region of the nations" ["Galilee of the Gentiles"]: the rest of the Ten Tribes from the entire land

In Rashi's commentary,¹²¹ he cites 2 Kings 15:29 for the first exile, 1 Chronicles 5:26 for the second exile, and 2 Kings 17:4 for the third and final exile. However, as discussed above, both 2 Kings 15:29 and 1 Chronicles 5:26 almost certainly refer to the same exile of the northernmost parts of Israel at the close of Tiglath-pileser's campaign of 734-732. Moreover, there were only two exiles at the hands of Assyria: Tiglath-pileser's in his campaign of 734-732 and Shalmaneser's in his three-year siege of Samaria (725-723), putting an end to the northern kingdom. Finally, "Galilee of the Gentiles" certainly does not refer to the rest of the Ten Tribes and this final exile at the fall of Samaria in 723/722. It refers to the northernmost region of Israel west of the Jordan, which had been part of the Assyrian empire

116 J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1896), p. 73.

117 Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 332. J. A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, vol. 9 in *The New American Commentary*, 41 vols., gen. ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), pp. 82-83, agrees that the deportation described in 1 Chron. 5:26 was that conducted by Tiglath-pileser in the campaign of 734-732. See also the annals of Tiglath-pileser in *ANET*, pp. 283-84. It might also be noted that neither this deportation by Tiglath-pileser nor the deportation by Shalmaneser at the fall of Samaria in 723/722 was complete. Even during Josiah's reign Israelites were still present in the former territory of Israel all the way up to the area of Naphtali; see 2 Chron. 34:6, 9, 21.

118 Emerton, "Some Linguistic and Historical Problems in Isaiah VIII. 23," pp. 153-54; brackets added.

119 *Ibid.*, p. 156.

120 This summary of Rashi's view is taken from Scherman, *Isaiah*, pp. 75-77; brackets added.

121 Translation of Rashi's commentary on the Chabad.org Web site.

since 732 and was not part of Shalmaneser's campaign.

Although I think Rashi was wrong in his interpretation of the second clause in 8:23, a most important point must be emphasized. In commenting on Rashi's view of three exiles, Emerton makes the following statement:

He writes of three Assyrian invasions in the period, those of II Kings xv. 29 (Tiglath-pileser), I Chron. v. 26 (Pul and Tilgath-pilneser), and II Kings xvii. 4 (Shalmaneser); and he identifies the former and the latter events of Isa. viii. 23 with the second and third of these invasions. In fact, I Chron. v. 26 is probably a confused conflation by the Chronicler of the invasions of Tiglath-pileser (otherwise known as "Pul") and by Shalmaneser; but, obviously, Rashi cannot be blamed for failing to anticipate the conclusions of modern critical scholars.¹²²

This is a very telling statement, but against Emerton, not Rashi. Even if Rashi were alive today, he would not accept the "conclusions of modern critical scholars." Rashi believed the Bible.

Issue 2

The second issue is the significance of the ה (the Hebrew letter *hē*, English *h*) at the end of אֶרֶץ (a form of אֶרֶץ, *'eret*, *land*), used before both Zebulun and Naphtali. The ה ending here is generally taken to be a *he locale*, and much could be said about its history in the Hebrew language and its meaning. A brief summary must suffice here. Pre-biblical Hebrew had three case endings for nouns: nominative (ending in *u*), genitive (ending in *i*), and accusative (ending in *a*). In biblical Hebrew the nominative and genitive case endings had disappeared. The old accusative ending survived as the (usually toneless) הַ (*āh*) ending, but not to designate the direct object of a transitive verb. Rather, it is a *locative* ending designating *motion towards an object* or *motion to a place*, or, in a weaker sense, *the place where*. It is when the locative ending has reference to a place that it is called the *he locale*.¹²³

GKC lists Isaiah 8:23, together with several other verses, and states that the endings on those verses "might be explained as accusatives."¹²⁴ If the two endings on *land* in 8:23 are accusatives, as GKC suggests, then they are locative endings. Since they both refer to a *place*, Zebulun and Naphtali, the endings are correctly identified as *he locales*. However, the *he locale* endings do not prevent the noun from being used as the direct object of a transitive verb, and both the *Jerusalem Bible* and the *NASB* treat the word *land* in that way.¹²⁵

122 Emerton, "Some Linguistic and Historical Problems in Isaiah VIII. 23," p. 162.

123 This summary is based on GKC, §§ 90a, c, f, h; Weingreen, *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew*, pp. 66-67; and Harper, *Elements of Hebrew by an Inductive Method*, p. 137.

124 GKC, § 90f.

125 Alexander, Young, and Oswalt also translate the verb הִקְלָה (*hēqal*) as transitive and אֶרֶץ (*land*) as its direct object.

Note that this noun אֶרֶץ (*land*) is in the construct state in both of its uses in this verse, the first with the noun Zebulun and the second with the noun Naphtali. Thus "land of Zebulun" and "land of Naphtali" each form one compound idea in the structure of the sentence. Emerton, a modern grammarian (1969), points out a difficulty: "There is, of course, no difficulty in having *he locale* at the end of a noun in the construct state, but it is not easy to find a distinctive force for it in the present context." He points out that some commentators try to overcome this problem by attributing the idea of motion to the verb *hēqal* (e.g., bringing shame "on" or "to" the land), but this does not quite work. Emerton continues: "*Hēqal* takes the accusative [a direct object], and the particular use of *he locale* proposed is contrary to Hebrew usage.

He lightly afflicted the land of Zevulun, and the land of Naftali (*Jerusalem Bible*)

He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt (*NASB*)

Issue 3

A third significant issue is the meaning and time of the two parallel verbs **הִקְלָה** and **הִכְבִּיד** used by Isaiah to describe the former and latter times for the region referred to in the two clauses of the second sentence of the verse. Both verbs are the Hiphil stem. This is the *causative active* verb stem, which means the subject of the verb causes the action or result described by the verb (e.g., compare the Qal stem of **גָּדַל**, "he was great," with the Hiphil, "he has made great" or "he magnified").

- **הִקְלָה** : third person masculine singular Hiphil perfect of **קָלַל**. According to *BDB*, the basic meaning of **קָלַל** is *to be slight, to be swift, to be trifling*.¹²⁶ For the Hiphil stem **הִקְלָה**, *BDB* gives two definitions: (1) *to make light, to lighten*, and (2) *to treat with contempt, to bring contempt, to bring dishonor*; Isaiah 8:23 is listed under definition (2).¹²⁷ There is no obvious explicit subject of the verb, so the translation could be "he caused to be dishonored the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali" or in better colloquial English, "he degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali."
- **הִכְבִּיד** : third person masculine singular Hiphil perfect of **כָּבַד**. According to *BDB*, the basic meaning of **כָּבַד** is *to be heavy, to be weighty, to be burdensome, to be honoured*.¹²⁸ For the Hiphil stem **הִכְבִּיד**, *BDB* gives three definitions: (1) *to make heavy* (a yoke), (2) *to make heavy, to make dull, to make unresponsive* (the ears), and (3) *to cause to be honored*; Isaiah 8:23 is listed under definition (3).¹²⁹ Again, there is no obvious explicit subject of the verb, so the translation could be "he caused to be honored the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles."

(1) The Meaning of the First Verb in 8:23

Earlier generations of scholars were able to explain 'arsāh [**אַרְצָה**, *land* with the *he locale* ending] as a direct object, because they believed *he locale* to be a relic of the accusative case ending, but their explanation must now be rejected in the light of the Ugaritic texts, where the directive ending *h* is distinct from the accusative case" ("Some Linguistic and Historical Problems in Isaiah VIII. 23," p. 152-53; brackets added). However, Emerton admits that in some places the "*he locale* has lost its distinctive force" and then cites *GKC*, §§ 90f, g, who states that in some texts this ending "can be regarded only as a meaningless appendage." Thus it would seem possible that **אַרְצָה** (*land*) with the locative ending can in fact be used as a direct object.

126 *BDB*, p. 886.

127 *Ibid.*

128 *Ibid.*, p. 457.

129 *Ibid.*, pp. 457-58.

Many commentators follow *BDB* and take **הִקְלֵ** here to mean "to bring into contempt," "to bring into dishonor," or something equivalent like "to degrade," in this case the region of Israel specified in the first clause.¹³⁰ However, since the verb can also be used in the sense of *to make light*, others take the verb to mean "to lightly afflict" that region. Rashi and Radak took the verb to mean that, and the *Jewish Bible 1917* and the *Jerusalem Bible* both translate the verb "to lightly afflict." The two alternative translations, "to degrade" and "to lightly afflict," are further discussed in the next section dealing with the second verb.

(2) The Meaning of the Second Verb in 8:23

A number of scholars also follow *BDB* for the second verb and take **הִכְבִּיד** here to mean "to cause to be honored"¹³¹ or, as some prefer, a simpler equivalent, "to glorify" or "to make glorious,"¹³² in this case the region of Israel specified in the second clause. Combining this view with the first view of the first verb produces what the *NASB* has:

But there will be no *more* gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make *it* glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.¹³³

However, since the second verb can also be used in the sense of *to be heavy* or *to be burdensome*, others take the verb to mean "to afflict more grievously" that region. Combining this view with the second view of the first verb produces what the *Jerusalem Bible* has:

For there is no weariness to him that is set against her; at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali and afterwards he afflicted her more grievously by the way of the sea, beyond the Yarden in the Galil of the nations.¹³⁴

This way of interpreting the two verbs, of course, stems back to Rashi with his phrases, "dealt mildly" and "dealt harshly."¹³⁵

With Rashi's view of these two verbs, and those views that stem from it, the verse contrasts the severity of two afflictions. Curiously, the *King James Version* also translated the verse in this way. According to Rashi, the two afflictions were the exile of Zebulun and Naphtali under Tiglath-pileser and then the exile of the entire Ten Tribes by Shalmaneser. Rashi argues that in the first exile, Assyria under Tiglath-pileser "dealt mildly" in that he exiled only the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, whereas in the final exile, Assyria under Shalmaneser "dealt harshly" because he exiled the remainder of the Ten Tribes.¹³⁶

According to the view reflected in *BDB* and the *NASB*, the verse contrasts two different treatments of

130 E.g., Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:196, Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 73, Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:309, Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 231, E. Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 2nd ed. (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1857), p. 79, and Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:57.

131 E. g., Alexander, Skinner, Young, and Oswalt, Henderson, and Cheyne; see footnote 125.

132 E. g., Alexander, Skinner, and Young; see footnote 125.

133 The *Jewish Bible 1985* translates the verbs essentially as the *NASB*.

134 The *Jewish Bible 1917* translates the verbs essentially as the *Jerusalem Bible*. The *Stone Edition* adds commentary to its translation but otherwise takes the verbs as the *Jerusalem Bible*.

135 Translation of Rashi's commentary on the Chabad.org Web site.

136 Ibid.

the northernmost region of Israel. At first it is treated with contempt or dishonor, while later it will be made glorious. More details on this interpretation are forthcoming. The problems with Rashi's view are discussed first.

Problem 1: Both clauses of 8:23 refer to the northernmost region of Israel, as argued in "Issue 1." As Emerton observes,

Isa. viii. 23 mentions only the northern region, and says nothing about Samaria and the southern part of the kingdom. The failure of the verse to mention the main object of Shalmaneser's attack tells very strongly against the theory that there is an allusion to his campaign.¹³⁷

For this northern region of Israel there was only one exile. As already argued in "Issue 1," it occurred during Tiglath-pileser's campaign south into Israel in 732 after the fall of Damascus. When the northern region of Israel was taken into exile, it became incorporated into the Assyrian Empire, and there was no way to afflict it--more grievously or otherwise--at some later point. Once it is acknowledged that both clauses of sentence two in verse 8:23 point to the same northernmost region of Israel, as they clearly do, the verbs cannot distinguish two different exiles of differing severity.

Problem 2: To take the two verbs when used together to refer to two degrees of affliction is contrary to their usage. Alexander makes the following observation:

The English version [King James Version] supposes a contrast not only between **הַקָּל** and **הַכָּבֵד**, but between these two and the subsequent deliverance. This requires **הַקָּל** to be taken in the sense of *lightly afflicting*, as distinguished from **הַכָּבֵד**, to *afflict more grievously*. But this distinction is unauthorized by usage.¹³⁸

Concerning their usage, the Hiphil stem of the second verb, **כָּבַד**, can be used in the sense of *to make heavy*, as in "to make heavy a yoke,"¹³⁹ but apparently not when these two verbs are used together, as they are in Isaiah 8:23. There is one other verse where they are used together, namely, Isaiah 23:9, and **כָּבַד** is used in the sense of "honor" in contrast with "contempt." The *Jerusalem Bible* translates the phrase containing these two verbs as follows:

...to bring into contempt [**לְהַקֵּל**] all the honourable [**וְכָבְדֵי**] of the earth. (Brackets added)

In Jeremiah 30:19 the Hiphil stem of **כָּבַד** has "a similar thought and usage" as in Isaiah 8:23.¹⁴⁰ Again, its meaning is *to honor*, and again the *Jerusalem Bible* renders it in that sense, actually using the word "glorify":

137 Emerton, "Some Linguistic and Historical Problems in Isaiah VIII. 23," p. 166.

138 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:196; brackets added.

139 E.g., Isa. 47:6; 1 Kgs. 12:10, 14 = 2 Chron. 10:10, 14.

140 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 231, n. 16. In this verse it is parallel to **צָעַר**, meaning *to be or to grow insignificant* (BDB, p. 858).

I will also glorify them [וְהִכְבַּדְתִּים], and they shall not be small [וְלֹא יִצְעָרוּ]. (Brackets added)

Problem 3: The immediate context of 8:23 strongly supports the meaning of *contempt* and *honor* as the sense in which the two verbs are used. Verse 8:22 refers to people who experience distress and darkness, gloom and anguish, with darkness mentioned twice. Then 9:1 refers to people who *had* walked in darkness but *now* see a great light. Clearly, they must be the same people as in 8:22. Verse 8:23 is the transition.¹⁴¹ In this verse the people in the northernmost regions of Israel pass from one condition to another. In view of the preceding verse (8:22) and following verse (9:1), these two conditions in 8:23 must be from the condition in 8:22 to the condition in 9:1.

- Their first condition, described in 8:22 primarily by darkness, must then be characterized by the first verb in 8:23. Its meaning therefore should be something like *to bring contempt, to dishonor or to degrade*.
- Their second condition, described in 9:1 as having a great light shine upon them, must then be characterized by the second verb in 8:23. Its meaning therefore should be something like *to honor or to glorify*.

As discussed at some length under "Issue 1" above, verse 8:23 is limited to the peoples in the northernmost regions of Israel. Because they were the first to be dishonored, they also will be the first to be glorified. As Oswalt writes,

It is a part of that grace that the source of the light will be in the very part of the land which first felt the lash of Assyria--the area around the Sea of Galilee. God never permits a humiliation for which there is not a corresponding exaltation planned.¹⁴²

However, once the prophecy of the great shining light for the people in northern Israel is given in 9:1, the text then broadens in 9:2 to include additional blessings on the whole nation.

(3) The Times of the Two Verbs in 8:23

Emerton points out a problem with taking the second verb in 8:23 to mean *to glorify*.¹⁴³ He admits that linguistically there can be no objection. However, *both* verbs, הִקְלָ and הִכְבִּיד, are perfects. From this he argues that they must refer to the same point in time, either both in the past or, as prophetic perfects,¹⁴⁴ both in the future. Almost certainly the first verb describes the condition of the people in northern Israel as a result of the devastation of that region by Tiglath-pileser in 733 or, more likely, 732, an event which could have been in the past when Isaiah wrote this text. The problem then,

141 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:183, writes regarding this continuity, "The Hebrew and English text differ here in the division of the chapters. A better arrangement than either would have been to continue the eighth without interruption to the close of what is now the sixth [Hebrew text] (or seventh [English text]) verse of the ninth chapter, where a new division of the prophecy begins" (brackets added).

142 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 239. E. Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 80, makes the same point: "That he [Isaiah] should precisely have selected Zebulun and Naphtali on this occasion [in 8:23], may be accounted for, on the ground that these tribes were the first that suffered from the invasion of the Assyrians, 2 Kings xv. 29" (brackets added).

143 See his discussion in "Some Linguistic and Historical Problems in Isaiah VIII. 23," p. 157.

144 For a definition and discussion of prophetic perfects, see subsection "The Contested Verbs" of the section "The Referent of the Titles: Preliminary Issues" in this chapter.

according to Emerton, is that there is no historical background to which "made glorious" could apply. So he concludes that the two verbs cannot both refer to past events. But since the historical background to "dishonored" or "brought into contempt" is most likely a past event, neither can both verbs be prophetic perfects and point to future events. Therefore, so the argument goes, *to glorify* cannot be the meaning of the second verb.

There is one historical scenario that would easily answer Emerton's argument. Chapter 5 argued that the attack on Jerusalem by Rezin and Pekah was likely in 734 and that Ahaz's appeal to Tiglath-pileser probably occurred shortly after the attack began, which of course was before any action by Assyria against either Syria or Israel. However, Isaiah's meeting with Ahaz in chapter 7 was most likely prior to the attack on Jerusalem. Now if the material in 8:11-9:6 was delivered by Isaiah together with that in chapter 7, then *both* events in 8:23 were future to Isaiah, and two prophetic perfects would be quite in order. Of course, it is not known when the various materials in chapters 7-12 were delivered and assembled in writing by Isaiah, so an alternate option must be sought.

Young takes the first verb as an ordinary perfect referring to the past and the second verb as a prophetic perfect.¹⁴⁵ With regard to such an interpretation, Emerton considers it "most unlikely that two perfects in such close proximity are to be understood to denote totally different times."¹⁴⁶ This may or may not be the case, and of course "most unlikely" does not mean "never." Emerton continues:

Nor is the difficulty overcome, as some commentators suppose, by the explanation that the verse refers to a past event and to a future one as if both were past; the intended explanation does not solve the problem, but merely states it in other terms.¹⁴⁷

Presumably, he means that the problem of two perfects in the same sentence referring to different times still remains unsolved. But consider these points:

1. The arguments in the previous section make it quite likely that **הַקְבִּיד** in 8:23, a verse that deals with the northernmost region of Israel, means "to cause to be honored" or "to glorify."
2. No known historical event corresponds to the statement in the verse that "the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles" became honored or glorified.
3. Therefore Isaiah is prophesying an event that will occur in the future.

As long as one accepts the existence of predictive prophecy in the Bible, there would seem to be no problem with Isaiah giving a single prophetic vision that combines together two sequential events separated in time, one past and one future, but linked together in their content. It would be quite legitimate for Isaiah in a case such as this to use two perfect verbs to create the image of certainty for the vision as a whole by putting it in past time. Whether this is using one normal perfect and one prophetic perfect or two normal perfects within a single prophetic vision that contains a past and a future event is quite immaterial. Therefore, either of the following two translations can be considered accurate as long as the proper interpretation of the vision is applied to them.

But there shall be no gloom to her that was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the latter time hath he made it

145 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:323, n. 51.

146 Emerton, "Some Linguistic and Historical Problems in Isaiah VIII. 23," p. 157.

147 Ibid.

glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.¹⁴⁸

But there will be no *more* gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.¹⁴⁹

Issue 4

This issue deals with the subjects of the two verbs הִקְלָה and הִכְבִּיד used in 8:23. However, as noted in issue 3, there is no obvious explicit subject for either verb. Thus, since the verbs are both 3rd person masculine singular, they could be translated with a "he," as was done by the ASV and NASB:

...he degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali...he will glorify the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles

If the meaning of the two verbs is "dishonor" and "glorify," Yahweh would be the implied subject if "he" is used here. The alternative to an explicit "he" would be an indefinite personal subject in a passive construction (rather than the active "they"):

...Zebulun and Naphtali were degraded...the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles will be glorified

Henderson summarizes as follows:

The verbs may be regarded as impersonal, and rendered passively; or יְהוָה [Yahweh] may be understood, which seems preferable, as the writers of Scripture always resolve events into the will or operations of God.¹⁵⁰

The ASV, NASB, *Jerusalem Bible*, and a number of commentators¹⁵¹ translate 8:23 using "he." However, Alexander and other commentators take a third option, viz., that the two time signifiers are the subjects. Alexander translates the verse as follows:

As the former time degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, *so the latter glorifies* the way of the sea, the bank of the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.¹⁵²

The two time signifiers are as follows:

- כְּעֵת הָרִאשׁוֹן : this breaks into four parts. (1) The first letter כּ on the first word is one of the three inseparable prepositions, and generally means *as* or *like*. (2) The remainder of that word is עֵת a feminine noun meaning *time*. (3) The second word begins with the article הַ (*the*). (4)

148 Isa. 9:1 (Heb. 8:23), ASV; underscoring added.

149 Isa. 9:1 (Heb. 8:23), NASB; underscoring added.

150 Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, p. 79; brackets added.

151 E.g., Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:243, Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, I:309, and Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 231.

152 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:196; emphasis added.

Finally, ראשון is a masculine singular adjective meaning *former, first, chief*.¹⁵³

- אחרון : this breaks into two parts. (1) It begins with the article ה (the). (2) The word אחרון is a masculine singular adjective meaning *coming after or behind*.¹⁵⁴

As Delitzsch has stated, כעת הראשון and אחרון "are both definitions of time."¹⁵⁵

To take the time signifiers as subjects of the two verbs, as Alexander translates the verse, does not alter the basic point of the sentence, namely, to contrast the two sequential conditions of northern Israel. However, there seems to be no compelling reason to do so here. "He" seems to be the best interpretation, with Yahweh the likely implied subject.

Conclusions on 8:23

Based on the analysis in this section, something like the following translation captures the meaning of Isaiah 8:23:

But there shall be no [more] gloom to her that was in anguish. As in the former time he degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, so afterward he will glorify the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.¹⁵⁶

As noted in the discussion of "Issue 3" above, 8:23 is the transition verse from 8:22 to 9:1-4. Verses 8:21-22 describe the distress and darkness, the gloom and anguish into which Tiglath-pileser had plunged the northernmost region of Israel. But 8:23 states that although these people are now dishonored and treated with contempt, these same people will be honored or glorified. 9:1-4 gives the

153 BDB, p. 911. According to GKC, § 132a, an adjective that serves as an attribute of a substantive or noun generally stands after the substantive, as here. However, it also agrees with the substantive in gender and number. Here, עת (time), the noun modified by the adjective, is feminine. However, BDB does note that although mostly used as a feminine noun, it can also be used as a masculine noun (BDB, p. 773). Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 231, n. 15, cites another explanation (without committing himself), but it requires amending the text.

154 BDB, p. 30.

155 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:243.

156 This translation of the first sentence was taken from the ASV (brackets added); the second sentence of the verse is my translation based on the analysis given in this section. Like the rest of the verse, the first sentence also has a number of grammatical issues, but it was not necessary to pursue them here. Nevertheless, a brief comment is in order. Skinner writes, "This sentence is an enigma" (*The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters I-XXXIX*, p. 73). However, the NASB, Alexander, Delitzsch, Cheyne, Young, and Oswalt all give a translation similar to the ASV. By contrast, Rashi, the *Jerusalem Bible*, and the *Stone Edition* take the word מוער to mean *weariness* instead of *gloom or darkness*, which leads to a much different interpretation of the sentence: "For there is no weariness to him that is set against her" (*Jerusalem Bible*). The "him" here is taken as the king of Assyria by Rashi and the people of the Ten Tribes by Radak. Admittedly, the word מוער is a *hapax legomenon* occurring only here. Nevertheless, BDB, p. 734, lists it as a masculine noun meaning *gloom*--no other alternatives are offered. Delitzsch comments, "The meaning is, There is not, i.e. there will not remain; a state of darkness over the land...which is now in a state of distress; but these very districts which God has hitherto caused to suffer deep humiliation He will bring to honor by and by..." (*The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:243). Young gives the following paraphrase of the sentence: "For to the land to which there is now distress there will not always be darkness [מוער]" (*The Book of Isaiah*, I:322; brackets added). Thus, this sentence flows consistently into the next sentence of this verse and verses 9:1-4, as interpreted in this section and the following section.

details.¹⁵⁷ Those people in that region of Israel who now walk in darkness will see a great light. They will be the first, but this blessing will expand to the rest of the nation. Their gladness will greatly increase because the yoke of their burden will be broken and there will be an end to war. This is done on a national scale.

Who will perform this great work? Ultimately, of course, it is God, but the *וְיָ* (*for*) at the beginning of the next two verses, 9:5-6, make it clear that all this is brought about by the birth of a child to the nation of Israel. It was argued in the previous section, "The Identity of the Child," that this Child is the Messiah of Israel. Verse 9:6 continues what the Messiah will do for Israel into the eschatological future: his government of peace will continue forever.

An additional comment is in order. In some prophetic visions that describe several sequential events, there may be time gaps between those events in the fulfillment of the prophecy that are not apparent in the prophetic text itself. This phenomenon is called "prophetic perspective" or "prophetic foreshortening." Exegesis of the prophetic text itself in general cannot identify the time gaps. They become apparent only upon fulfillment of the prophecy. In the case of Isaiah 9:1-4, and based on New Testament data, the honoring or glorifying of the area of Galilee took place at the first advent of the Messiah:

Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. *This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:*

"THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI,
BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES—
"THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT,
AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH,
UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED."¹⁵⁸

It must be concluded then, that the remaining part of Isaiah 9:1-4 about putting an end to war will be fulfilled at the second advent of Messiah.

This, of course, is a Christian view, but it extends only to the timing of the events of the prophecy in 9:1-4. That the entire prophecy simply describes sequential events related to the coming of the Messiah can be argued without reference to New Testament documents or events, and simply from the exegesis of the text from 9:1 through the description of the child in 9:6, as was done at some length in this chapter. It might also be noted that according to Delitzsch,

The Zohar was not the first to teach that the Messiah would appear in Galilee, and that redemption would break forth from Tiberias; but this is found in the Talmud and Midrash (see *Litteratur-blatt des Orients*, 1843, Col. 776).¹⁵⁹

Finally, it should be emphasized that the hermeneutical principle of prophetic perspective or foreshortening was not invented to "handle" messianic passages from a Christian standpoint. The phenomenon is seen in completely non-messianic prophecies. One of them is the prophecy of the

157 The verbs in these verses continue the pattern in 8:23: they are perfects.

158 Matt. 4:12-16; NASB.

159 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:244, n. 1. Unfortunately, I do not have access to the sources Delitzsch cited. However, Franz Delitzsch is acknowledged as a Rabbinic scholar in both Jewish and Christian circles.

destruction of Tyre in Ezekiel 26:7-14. A careful examination of this text indicates a two-stage punishment for Tyre. Verses 3-4 refer to "many nations" participating in the destruction of Tyre. Then verses 7-11 describe Nebuchadnezzar's utter destruction of the city on the mainland. But he was not able to capture the island fortress where most of the city had retreated (cf. 29:17-20). However, verse 12 seems to begin a second stage of the destruction of Tyre. In verses 7-11 the pronouns are third person singular, referring to Nebuchadnezzar; in verse 12 and following the pronouns are third person plural. This second stage described in verses 12-14 is the utter destruction of the island fortress. The important point to note, however, is that there is no indication in the text of any significant lapse of time between these two stages of the judgment on Tyre. Yet that lapse was two centuries! It was Alexander the Great who completed the destruction of Tyre by constructing a causeway out to the Island for his troops.

The Traditional Jewish View Since Rashi

As pointed out at the beginning of this section, "Does Isaiah 9:1-4 Refer to Sennacherib?" the traditional Jewish view is that Hezekiah is the child in 9:5-6. As an argument to support this view, verses 9:1-4 are interpreted in terms of Sennacherib's campaign against Judah in 701. The previous subsection, "Interpretation and Translation of Verse 8:23," discussed several important issues in the exegesis and interpretation of that verse. On that basis, therefore, it is now possible to examine the Jewish interpretation of 9:1-4.

Verse 9:1

Commenting on the sentence, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light" (9:1, *Stone Edition*), the ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah states the following:

Isaiah foresees the miraculous downfall of Sennacherib and the Assyrian army, and declares that the people of Jerusalem whose lives had been darkened by the siege and the resulting famine have seen the *great light* of God's salvation with the downfall of the Assyrian conqueror (*Rashi*). Alternatively, the prophet sees the spiritual light of Torah that will shine during the reign of Hezekiah (*Abarbanel*).¹⁶⁰

There are a number of serious objections to Rashi's interpretation of 9:1.

First, chapters 7 and 8, the context leading up to 9:1-4, deal with Tiglath-pileser and his second western campaign of 734-732. Ahaz, not Hezekiah, was king in Judah at this time. Sennacherib reigned from 705 to 681, and it was in 701 that he besieged Jerusalem, just over 30 years after Tiglath-pileser's campaign. There is no textual evidence that 9:1 shifts forward from Tiglath-pileser to Sennacherib's time. In fact, the next point argues strongly against such a time gap in the flow of the text from 8:22 to 9:4.

Second, Rashi's view disregards the context. The flow of thought from 8:22 to 8:23 to 9:1 is discussed in the previous section, "The Meaning of the Second Verb in 8:23." Briefly, 8:22 refers to people who experience distress and darkness, gloom and anguish, with darkness mentioned twice. 9:1 refers to people who have walked in darkness but now see a great light. These must be the same people. Who are they? The transition verse, 8:23, describes the people in the northernmost region of Israel (Zebulun and Naphtali) passing from one condition to another. In view of the preceding verse (8:22)

160 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 77.

and following verse (9:1), these two conditions must be from the condition in 8:22 (darkness and gloom) to the condition in 9:1 (seeing great light). Therefore, it is quite clear from the flow of thought that the people who first see the great light are the people of the northernmost region of Israel, not Judah, much less Jerusalem. At the conclusion of Tiglath-pileser's campaign in 732, it was Zebulun and Naphtali that were devastated by him and the first part of Israel to be annexed to the Assyrian Empire. In the future, then, they will be blessed to be the first in the nation to see the light and joy brought by the birth of the child.

Third, the campaign of Sennacherib in 701 had no effect whatever on the territories of Zebulun and Naphtali, the focal point of 8:23, the verse immediately preceding 9:1. They had become part of the Assyrian Empire in 732, and the rest of Israel under King Hoshea fell to Shalmaneser in 723 or 722. Sennacherib came to the throne in 705 and was the enemy of Judah, not Israel, whose government had already fallen. There is simply no way to place Sennacherib in 8:22-9:1-4.

Verse 9:2

The ArtScroll commentary summarizes Radak's interpretation of the clause, "They rejoiced before You like the joy of harvest time":

The harvest was always a time of great rejoicing, when people expressed their gratitude to God for the new crop. Comparing the future celebration to that of a farmer at the harvest, the prophet foresees the people rejoicing before God in the Holy Temple and praising Him for His miracles.¹⁶¹

Radak is certainly correct in interpreting this statement as a figure. The joy referred to in this verse was not due to a harvest; it is simply compared to that joy. However, again according to the ArtScroll commentary, Radak takes the phrase "exult when they divide the spoils" not as a figure, but as the actual joy the people experienced when they divided the spoils of Sennacherib's decimated army. This view overlooks the fact that both expressions begin with אֲשֶׁר (as). A comparison is being made in both cases. Although Rashi still takes these people to be Hezekiah's people, he nevertheless compares their joy with that of Israel when they divided the spoils of the Egyptian army destroyed during the exodus. Delitzsch summarizes the verse as follows:

It would be a joy over blessing received, as the figure of the harvest indicates; and joy over evil averted, as the figure of the dividing the spoil presupposes; for the division of booty is the business of conquerors.¹⁶²

Verse 9:4

The *Stone Edition* translates this verse as follows:

For all tumultuous battles are fought with an uproar, and the garments wallow in blood, but [Sennacherib] became a blaze and was consumed by fire. (Brackets original)

First, "Sennacherib" is not in the text; it is simply inserted by the translators.

161 Ibid.

162 Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:246.

Second, this is a complete mistranslation. Compare the other three important Jewish translations:

For every boot stamped with fierceness, and every cloak rolled in blood, shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire. (*Jewish Bible 1917*)

Truly, all the boots put on to stamp with
And all the garments donned in infamy
Have been fed to the flames,
Devoured by fire. (*Jewish Bible 1985*)

For every shoe of the stormy warrior and every garment rolled in blood shall be burnt as fuel of fire. (*Jerusalem Bible*)

The Christian NASB translation is the same:

For every boot of the booted warrior in the *battle* tumult,
And cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire.

In verse 3 the Lord ends the oppression and breaks the yoke on Israel. But how will he do this? Verse 4 gives the answer: by destroying every vestige of war (throwing the soldier's boots and garments into the fire) and thus putting an end to warfare. As Delitzsch points out,

The prophet names the boot and garment with an obvious purpose. The destruction of the hostile weapons follows as a matter of course if even the military shoes, worn by the soldiers in the enemies' ranks, and the military cloaks that were lying in *dâmim*, i.e., in blood violently shed upon the battle-field, were all given up to the fire.¹⁶³

Third, there is a serious grammatical problem with the translation of the *Stone Edition*. According to Alexander, it changes one proposition into two, changes the subject in the verse, and interprets "fire" in an unnatural way. He has the following comment on this:

According to Jarchi [Rashi], Kimchi, Calvin, and Grotius, this verse [9:4] contains two distinct propositions, one relating to the *day of Midian* or to wars in general, and the other to the slaughter of Sennacherib's army or the deliverance of the Jews from exile. The sense would then be that while other battles are accompanied with noise and bloodshed, this shall be with burning and fuel of fire. But this construction, besides assuming a change of subject, of which there is no intimation in the text, departs from the natural and ordinary meaning of the words. The *fire* mentioned in the last clause has been variously explained as a poetical description of the Assyrian slaughter (Jarchi, Kimchi, Aben Ezra, Grotius), or of the angel by whom it was effected (Abarbenel)...¹⁶⁴

The issue related to the word "fire" is further developed in the next point.

Fourth, the translation in the *Stone Edition* is clearly designed to support the interpretation that Sennacherib is behind all the experiences described in 9:1-4. Again referring to Radak, the ArtScroll commentary summarizes his interpretation of this verse as follows:

163 Ibid., p. 248.

164 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 1:202; italics original and brackets added.

The victory over Sennacherib will be different [from all those "tumultuous battles...fought with an uproar"]. There will be no clashing swords, no tumultuous noise, no blood, for the Assyrian army will be miraculously consumed by fire.¹⁶⁵

There is an obvious problem here. the *Stone Edition* has, "...but [Sennacherib] became a blaze and was consumed by fire" (brackets original). But Sennacherib did not die, only 185,000 men in his army died. Moreover, those men were not "consumed by fire" either. In the morning, "all of them were dead bodies."¹⁶⁶

To solve this problem, "fire" must be interpreted in a poetic sense. However, the whole phrase, "for burning, fuel for the fire" hardly lends itself to a "poetic" sense.

To conclude this section, it would seem there is no reason to conclude that 9:1-4 has anything to do with Sennacherib, and there is no reason to force such an interpretation except the goal to take the child in 9:5-6 to be Hezekiah. The descriptions of 9:1-4 flow into 9:5-6, making the child the one who will bring about the great events of 9:1-4. This chapter has argued that Hezekiah cannot be the child ("Is Hezekiah the Child in Isaiah 9:5-6?"), and that the child is, in fact, the Messiah of Israel ("The Identity of the Child").

Did God Plan to Make Hezekiah the Messiah?

It was noted above in the section, "Interpretations by Jewish Scholars," that in b. Sanhedrin 94a the Talmud attributes all eight words in 9:5 to Hezekiah. Rashi and Radak also argued that the child was Hezekiah but interpreted the verse in such a way that only the title "prince of peace" was given to him; the previous titles referred to God, who, in this interpretation, named Hezekiah the prince of peace.

However, in the same folio, another discussion begins this way:

Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end. R. Tanhum said: Bar Kappara¹⁶⁷ expounded in Sepphoris,¹⁶⁸ Why is every mem in the middle of a word open, whilst this is closed?--The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to appoint Hezekiah as the Messiah, and Sennacherib as Gog and Magog; whereupon the Attribute of Justice¹⁶⁹ said before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Sovereign of the Universe! If Thou didst not make David the Messiah, who uttered so many hymns and psalms before Thee, wilt Thou appoint Hezekiah as such, who did not hymn Thee in spite of all these miracles which Thou wroughtest for him?" Therefore it [sc. the mem] was closed.¹⁷⁰

According to this view God had planned to make Hezekiah the Messiah but did not do so because Hezekiah wrote no psalms commemorating the miracles God worked on his behalf. All this is deduced from the presence of a closed *Mêm* (the name of the Hebrew letter corresponding to English *m*) rather than the expected open *Mêm* in the middle of the word לְסִרְבָּה (first word in verse 9:6, *to the*

165 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 78; brackets added.

166 2 Kgs. 19:35.

167 A Jewish rabbi of the late second and early third century.

168 A village in central Galilee.

169 "The attributes of Justice and Mercy are often hypostasized and represented as interceding with the Almighty"; editorial note on this folio in the *Soncino Babylonian Talmud*.

170 b. Sanh. 94a; brackets original. This tractate was translated by Jacob Shachter under the general editorship of Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein, *Soncino Babylonian Talmud*; taken from www.come-and-hear.com/sanhedrin.

increase). The open *Mêm* is expected because Hebrew has two forms for the letter *Mêm*. If it occurs as the last letter of a word, the "closed" form is used: ם ; if it is the first letter of a word or occurs within the word, the "open" form is used: מ .

The ArtScroll commentary on Isaiah summarizes Rashi's view regarding the closed *Mêm*:

The Talmud...maintains that the peculiar closed or final *mem* [ם] in the middle of the word לְסִרְבָּה... implies that an aspect of his life was "closed," i.e., that it did not lead to the desired result (Sanhedrin 94a). *Rashi* offers three explanations: (1) The closed *mem* indicates that Hashem's plan to make Hezekiah the Messiah, who would bring the final redemption, came to an end without being fulfilled. (2) The Divine plan to end the suffering of Israel for all time was aborted when Hezekiah did not become the Messiah. (3) The closed *mem* alludes to Hezekiah's failure to sing God's praises for decimating the Assyrian army, i.e., Hezekiah kept his mouth sealed, instead of opening it in song.¹⁷¹

None of this, whether the discussion in the Talmud or Rashi's three possible explanations of that discussion, is exegesis. There is not the slightest exegetical clue, nor is it possible even to conceive, that Isaiah intended any of this in the autograph of the consonantal text. Alexander observes,

In nearly all editions and manuscripts, the first letter of the word מַרְבֵּה presents the form ם, an orthographical anomaly mentioned in the Talmud, and perhaps very ancient, but not to be regarded as a relic of Isaiah's autograph, and therefore involving some mysterious meaning.¹⁷²

I suspect Rashi would acknowledge that here he was further developing the midrashic interpretation in the talmudic passage cited at the beginning of this section (b. Sanhedrin 94a). As pointed out in the section on Rashi in Chapter 3, although his commentaries consisted mostly of *peshat* (literal) interpretations, they also included midrashic interpretations.

Concerning the closed *Mêm*, it is almost certainly the result of a subsequent scribal (copy) error that got into the text at some point. Also, it was probably recognized as such by the Masoretes, since they marked the word as a *Kethîb* (a word with a suspected error) and placed the *Qerê* in the margin (what the Masoretes considered the original and correct word). Oswald suggests that

...this is evidently only a dittography,¹⁷³ since the preceding word ends with *-îm* and this one begins with the same letters.¹⁷⁴

171 Scherman, *Isaiah*, p. 79; brackets original. The ArtScroll note continues, "*Sfas Emes* [the most important work by Hasidic rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, 1847-1905] explains Hezekiah's failure to do so. His faith in God was so great that he was not surprised by the miracle; it did not increase his faith at all. However, he was faulted for not inspiring his people to sing in praise; that would have strengthened *their* faith" (emphasis original; brackets added). One wonders about this explanation. There is a natural tendency not to criticize heroes of Israel. However, if there is clear sin noted in the Bible, as for example in David's case, it cannot be minimized or explained away. In this case with Hezekiah, there is no sin or "fault" recorded in Scripture related to his not writing any victory psalms.

172 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:208.

173 The duplication of letters in copying or printing; one of the types of errors defined in textual criticism.

174 Oswald, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 241, n. 7.

The Four Names: A Divine Messiah?

This chapter has argued the case for the following conclusions regarding Isaiah 9:5-6:

- Hezekiah cannot be the child.
- All four names apply to the child.
- The child is the promised Messiah of Israel.

However, if all four names or titles in 9:5 apply to the Messiah, what does this say about the nature of the Messiah? Is he simply a man, the traditional Jewish belief? Or is he divine? If the child is the Messiah and all four names apply to him, this question cannot be avoided. However, it is beyond the scope of this book to address this issue in detail. This chapter was designed primarily to establish simply that 9:5-6 is a messianic text and that the child is the Messiah. However, a few brief comments can be offered here.

According to the exegetical investigation throughout this chapter, the four names can be translated as follows:

- Wonder of a Counselor
- Mighty God
- Father of Eternity
- Prince of Peace

The first and third names certainly imply attributes or characteristics of deity, and the second name explicitly calls the child God, which, of course, is why Rashi and Radak did not apply these three names to the child. Here is a brief summary of these three names.

- *Wonder of a Counselor*: The two words are used together referring to God in Isaiah 28:29:¹⁷⁵ "He is wonderful in counsel."¹⁷⁶ The word "wonder" used in verse 9:5 is "great enough in meaning to denote the wonders wrought by the God of Israel (Ex. xv. 11; Ps. lxxvii. 14, lxxviii. 12; Is. xxv. 1; cf. Judg. xiii.18..."¹⁷⁷
- *Mighty God*: This is explicit. As argued in the section, "The Talmud," early in this chapter, the conclusion is virtually inescapable that this is a title of deity, as in Isaiah 10:21.
- *Father of Eternity*: Despite many alternatives offered by commentators,¹⁷⁸ the more likely meanings are "father of eternity" in the sense of possessor of eternity¹⁷⁹ or, perhaps better, "father of eternity" in the sense of "one who is eternally a father to his people."¹⁸⁰ The Hebrew word **אב** does not always mean *eternity*, but can have that sense.¹⁸¹ Here it is very likely used

175 "Counselor" is the participle form in 9:5 and the noun form in 28:29 (*BDB*, pp. 419-20).

176 *Jerusalem Bible*.

177 Davis, "The Child Whose Name Is Wonderful," p. 98.

178 Strangely, *BDB* suggests "*father (i.e. distributor) of booty*" (p. 723; italics original), although "everlasting father" is also included as a possibility.

179 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:204.

180 Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, p. I:338. In n. 80 he argues against Alexander's view. Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I:253, argues that the title implies both "possessor of eternity" and "the tender, faithful, and wise trainer, guardian, and provider for His people even in eternity."

181 Davis, "The Child Whose Name Is Wonderful," p. 105; e.g., it is used in the sense of eternity or forever in Isa. 57:15; Ps. 111:3, 10; 112:3, 9.

in the sense of "eternal" or "eternity" since it applies to the child, and the child, according to verse 6, will reign on the throne of David forever--"from now to eternity" (עולם).¹⁸² Of course, it was also considered a divine title by Rashi and Radak.

So the end result of all this analysis of Isaiah 9:5-6 is a significant problem, or better, an enigma, that needs some sort of explanation. Isaiah describes a Messiah who is a son of David but who is also called God and shares divine attributes with him. How is this to be explained?

Before attempting an explanation, an important point noted by Davis should be observed. This question does not concern the Messianic king alone.

The underlying conception of identity with Jehovah and possession of his attributes, yet distinctness from him, comes to the front elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures.¹⁸³

The primary example other than the Messiah is the Angel of Yahweh. Davis continues,

Mention is made of an angel, and under the circumstances it is proper always to think of the same angel, who is distinguished from Jehovah, and yet is identified with him (Gen. xvi. 10, 13, xviii. 2, 33, xxii. 11-16, xxxi. 11, 13; Ex. iii. 2, 4; Josh. v. 13-15, vi. 2; Zech. i. 10-13, iii. 1, 2), who revealed the face of God (Gen. xxxii. 30), in whom was Jehovah's name (Ex. xxiii. 21), and whose presence was equivalent to Jehovah's presence (Ex. xxxii. 34, xxxiii. 14; Is. lxiii. 9). The angel of the Lord thus appears as a manifestation of Jehovah himself, one with Jehovah and yet distinguishable from him. How these things could be is not explained; but the idea was familiar.¹⁸⁴

The same is true of this passage in Isaiah dealing with the Messiah. Isaiah did not offer an explanation; he simply set forth what the Lord revealed to him.

The Messiah, a descendant of David, is simply given a unique divine name and spoken of as the possessor of divine attributes. No explanation is offered, no theory advanced. It is enough to know that in the days of the prophets the conception of identity with, yet distinguishableness from, Jehovah was present in Hebrew thought and was consistent with the pure monotheism which was taught in Israel.¹⁸⁵

From the Christian standpoint, the New Testament documents constitute divine revelation subsequent to the Tanakh. Just as there was progressive revelation throughout the Tanakh,¹⁸⁶ so the New Testament continues the development. The concept of distinct persons in the Godhead, or the doctrine of the Trinity, is a New Testament development, which offers an explanation for the relationship between the Angel and Yahweh and also for certain messianic passages in the Tanakh, such as Isaiah 9:5-6. But these issues cannot be pursued further in this book. The primary purpose of this book is to determine the meaning intended by Isaiah in 7:14 when he delivered the prophecy, and apart from New Testament revelation.

182 *Jerusalem Bible*.

183 Davis, "The Child Whose Name Is Wonderful," p. 107.

184 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

185 *Ibid.*

186 E.g., the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:1-3, 7; 15:17-21; 17:7-8; et al.) is further developed in the Mosaic or Sinaitic covenant (Exod. 19:3-6; 20:22-23:33; 24:7-8; et al.), the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:12-17), and finally the new covenant (Isa. 55:3; 61:8-9; Jer. 31:31-40; 32:36-41; 50:4-5; Ezek. 16:59-63; 37:21-28).

Rashi's Motivation

A few closing words should be offered on the character, integrity, and scholarship of Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchaki (Rashi) and Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak). It is easy for Christian scholars who take the traditional messianic view of Isaiah 9:5-6, and who present strong exegetical arguments to support that view, to provide oversimplified reasons why Rashi and Radak seemed to twist grammar to make the first three names refer to God and to make the child the historical character of Hezekiah, despite the Targum of Jonathan and possibly the Talmud.

For example, McCaul writes that Jewish commentators after the tenth century were forced to abandon the interpretation that all four names applied to the child "by the pressure of controversy."¹⁸⁷ Alexander is more explicit:

The doctrine that this prophecy relates to the Messiah, was not disputed even by the Jews, until the virulence of antichristian controversy drove them from the ground which their own progenitors had steadfastly maintained.¹⁸⁸

More recently, Oswalt gives this explanation:

Medieval Jewish commentators, combatting the prevailing messianic claims of Christians, argued that all this [the text of Isa. 9:5-6] was simply in recognition of the birth of the crown prince, Hezekiah, and was only a simple royal birth hymn.¹⁸⁹

This basic question is examined more thoroughly in a broader setting in the section, "Michael Rydelnik on Rashi," in Chapter 3. Based on that material, I would simply offer the following personal opinions here.

Rashi and his successors were scholars and grammarians of the highest order and were devoted to the Hebrew Scriptures as the word of God. It was their goal to determine the *peshat*, viz., the plain, literal sense of a text. From what I have read, I believe they pursued this goal with integrity. Did the controversies with Christians in those medieval centuries affect their conclusions? No exegete can achieve 100% detachment from emotional issues. This would be especially true when the emotions ran high in the controversy with Christians during the lives of Rashi and Radak. However, Rashi himself wrote that the plain, literal meaning of a text is what refutes Christian claims, which were generally based on an allegorical method of interpretation. Did Rashi's own theological positions influence his exegesis? Again, no exegete can avoid this influence completely. At times, the influence can even be subconscious. But again, based on what I have read, I believe that in the exegesis of a given text, Rashi honestly strove for *peshat*. Did he achieve it in every case? Once again, no exegete, no matter how scholarly or how thorough, can always achieve complete and perfect success in determining the author's intent in a given text. Would Rashi deliberately put forth a certain interpretation that he knew was wrong? No, I do not believe that.

Finally, in the case of Isaiah 9:5-6, the main argument that makes Rashi's interpretation of the four names virtually impossible--namely, the Hebrew idiom concerning the word order that admits of no exceptions in the Hebrew Bible--was first discovered and researched by Cocceius, who lived 500 years after Rashi. What if that feature of Hebrew idiom had been known in Rashi's time? As I said

187 McCaul, *Lectures on the Prophecies Proving the Divine Origin of Christianity*, p. 66.

188 Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, 1:204.

189 Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, p. 245; brackets added.

earlier in this chapter, Rashi believed the Bible.