

## Isaiah 9:6<sup>1</sup>

### Overview

Motivation: “Why give gifts at Christmas?” Answer: “Because God did.” Christmas commemorates God's gift to us of his own son, John 3:16.

This gift is anticipated in Isaiah 9:6. The four titles there given to our Lord enable us to meditate on his wonderful person, and appreciate the nature of God's great Christmas gift to us.

We will set the historical context, then expound the titles.

### Context

#### ***8:5-8, 21-22, The Historical Threat***

Key elements:

- Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser 3 was invading the Levant.
- Rezin king of Syria and Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel, formed a coalition against TP3. Fearing an adversary on their flank, they opposed themselves to Judah.
- Judah (Ahaz) appealed to TP3 for help. He wiped out the neighbors, but then marched against Jerusalem.

In the midst of this disaster, the political leadership of the nation had decayed, as reflected in 3:1-4. The key positions in government were left unfilled, and the kingship devolved upon inexperienced, immature children.

#### ***9:1-2, Promise of a New Day***

In the context of this disastrous international situation, Isaiah offers a promise of hope.

**1 lightly afflict.**--Better, “humiliated,” referring to TP3's invasion of the north around 734-733 BC. Isaiah uses the Israelite names of two of the northern tribes, who would have been in his path, to emphasize that the land is essentially Jewish when TP3 arrives.

**more grievously afflict.**--Better, “honored,” “treated heavily” as opposed to “treated lightly” earlier in the verse. Now Isaiah assumes that Assyria has come through. The names are those of the Assyrian provinces in the area:

- way of the sea: the province of Dor, along the Mediterranean coast
- beyond Jordan: Gilead, in transjordan
- Galilee of the Gentiles: province of Megiddo, west of the Dead Sea.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on notes from 12/23/1973 at Woodbury, NJ, later presented at WIBC on 12/25/1988.

To this Gentile-dominated land, God will bring special honor.

**2 darkness ... light.**--Isaiah is contrasting the future promise with what the people have already experienced in 8:22, “darkness ... dimness ... darkness,” three different words describing the lack of any hope.

### **9:3-7, Threefold Promise**

Note the repetition of “for” at the beginning of vv. 4, 5, 6. Isaiah promises that God will replace the oppression of the Assyrian overlord with victory, peace, and righteous government. Each of these is desirable, but requires the next to make it enduring.

### **9:4, Victory**

**Broken the yoke ... rod ... staff.**--These are all instruments of oppression.

- “yoke” indicates the burden they were forced to bear.
- “rod” *ma++eh* is a club, here directed toward their shoulders.
- “staff” *šebe+* is the only Hebrew word translated “sceptre” in the AV, and reminds them of the authority that Assyria exerted over them. , , the second (commonly used for “scepter”) the authority that humbled them, the third the pain and suffering.

**Day of Midian.**--The oppression then was much as under the Midianites. Josh 6 records how they would ravish the country at harvest time; recall that Gideon was threshing his grain in a winepress to hide it from the Midianites (6:11). Judg 7-8 records how Gideon won a great victory over them, not by military might, but with a small army of 300 who trusted in the Lord.

But victory can be transitory, as we see in Iraq. Absence of war is no good unless one also does away with the means to make war.

### **9:5, Peace**

The translation is confused. ASV is better:

For all the armor of the armed man in the tumult, and the garments rolled in blood, shall be for burning, for fuel of fire.

The point is that all the weapons will be destroyed. The insurgents won't find 155mm howitzer shells sitting around from which to make IED's.

But enduring peace requires more than just the absence of weapons. The corrupt nature of the human heart will lead to more violence if something isn't done to impose a positive rule.

### **9:6a, 7, Government**

Israel's government has failed, so God will provide one of his own.

**A child is born, a son is given.**--We should note two things about these titles.

## God's Christmas Gift, Isa 9:6

First, recall from 3:4, 12 the curse of child leaders. God turns even his judgments into a means of blessing. He doomed the nation to immature leaders, but one day would send a “little child” to “lead them,” the Messiah, 11:6.

Second, the parallel between “child” and “son” is likely intended to remind the readers of the twofold character of the promised king.

- As “child,” he would be the descendant of David.
- As “son,” he would fulfill the promise of 2 Sam 7:14 and Psa 2:7, and rule with divine authority.

Isaiah more fully develops this parallel between the human and divine nature of the promised king in the titles to follow.

**The government shall be upon his shoulder.**--We are to recall v. 3, “the staff of his shoulder.” Frequently, Isaiah reminds the people of the Assyrian burden on their shoulder (10:27; 14:25), which he will take away, and replace it with the authority to rule (here and 22:22, of Eliakim, “the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder”). Instead of the people bearing the burden of an oppressive overlord, the promised ruler will bear the burden of caring for them.

**7 no end ... for ever.**--God promises that this joyful rule will endure forever.

### 9:6b, Titles

How many names area there? Four, or five?

The AV distinguishes five names, separating “Wonderful” and “Counselor.” In Hebrew, the first bears the accent Telisha, a weak disjunctive, but this can be used to mark apposition, as in Gen 1:12 (“grass, herb yielding seed after his kind”), Isa 7:1 (“Ahaz, the son of Jotham”), 45:18 (“YHWH, the creator of the heavens”), and especially 13:4 (“a sound, a roar”).

In favor of four names, it is noted that this would give four two-part names, in each of which one emphasizes the king's deity, and the other his humanity:

**Wonderful** counselor, **God** of might, father of **Eternity**, prince of **Peace** (**Young**)

In addition, Isaiah associates “wonder” and “counsel” elsewhere:

- 25:21 “thou hast done **wonderful** things; thy **counsels** of old are faithfulness and truth.”
- 28:29, “the LORD of hosts, which is **wonderful** in **counsel**.”

But the disjunction is still important: the first title is not “wonderful counselor,” but “a wonder, a counselor,” or “a wonder, who is a counselor.”

Each name

- describes a position in the court, showing how this coming child will provide a comprehensive rule;
- articulates his deity, and

- describes his work.

The court positions are all reflections of the lost positions of 3:1-4.

## **Wonder, Counselor**

**Court Position.**--In today's society, we are apt to think of a counselor as a psychologist. In the Bible, the title describes a member of the court, one who advises the king. Recall 2 Sam 15:12, Ahithophel, David's counselor. It is used in this sense in 3:3. Ahaz had no wise counselor, but this promised child-king will be such a counselor.

But whom will he counsel, since he is to be the king? He can only counsel one above himself. According to Ps 2, he serves at God's pleasure, and so we must understand that this promised king of Israel will be a counselor in the divine court.

**Deity.**--He is not only a counselor, but he is described as “a wonder, a counselor.” This title is the name taken by the angel of the Lord in Judg 13:18, after he had announced to Manoah and his wife that they would produce the deliverer Samson:

And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it *is* secret?

Manoah understood that the one they had seen was a manifestation of the Lord (v. 22, “we shall surely die, because we have seen God”).

In fact, if the king is to be the Son of God, as Nathan promised David, only one who is God can be his counselor. Isa 40:13-14 reports,

13 Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or *being* his counsellor hath taught him? 14 With whom took he counsel, and *who* instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?

**Work.**--We are contemplating the promised divine king. Yet he is to be a counselor to God. What does this mean? How does he counsel God?

The precise nature of his counsel may not have been clear to Isaiah. But from our vantage point, it is likely that this prophecy concerns our Lord's intercessory work for us. When he returned to the Father, he asked the Father to send the Spirit to empower and guide us (John 14:16), and he continues to intercede for us (Heb 7:25). He is active in heaven's court, continually representing his people there on the grounds of his redemptive work.

## **Mighty God**

**Court Position.**--The title is *el gibbor*. *Gibbor* is the warrior hero, the “mighty man” of 3:2, the champion like Joab who could lead the nation's armies in battle and secure victory.

**Deity.**--The child king comes not just as *gibbor* “warrior,” but as *el gibbor* “God the warrior.” This is a common title for God throughout the OT:

- Deut 10:17 “a great God, a mighty, and a terrible,” *ha)el haggadol, haggibbor, wehannorah*.

## God's Christmas Gift, Isa 9:6

- Isa 10:21, “The remnant shall return, *even* the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God,” *el gibbor*, exactly as here
- Jer 32:18, “the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, *is* his name,” *ha)el haggadol, haggibbor*

Every nation wants a king who is strong and able to protect it against enemies. George Bush knew this when he landed in a fighter plane on the USS Lincoln on 2 May 2003 to mark what he hoped was the end of the Iraq war. But human warriors have a way of being overtaken by a more powerful foe. No one will be able to defeat this king, for he is God, *el*, the powerful creator.

**Work.**--This king will himself be a warrior. We see him in this role in Rev 19, returning from heaven upon a white horse and calling the birds of the air to feast upon the bodies of his slain enemies.

### ***Everlasting Father***

**Court Position.**--One of the positions that Israel had lost was “the ancient” (3:2), the man of great experience. The Hebrew word in 3:2 is usually translated “elder.” Kings can profit from the advice of older, more experienced men, and Rehoboam failed to keep Solomon's kingdom together because he preferred the advice of younger men over that of his older advisors (1 Kings 12:6-8). Jehoram (2 Kings 6:21) and Joash (2 Kings 13:14), though wicked kings, yet esteemed Elisha's experience and called him “father.” Of Eliakim it was said that he “shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem,” suggesting that in addition to experience, his fatherly character manifested itself in patient, tender care for the people.

Ultimately, God took the old, wise men away, the fathers of the nation. This ruler, though a child, yet will himself have the wisdom and experience of a father.

**Deity.**--Even the oldest, wisest of fathers pass away. But this one is called “everlasting father,” literally “father of eternity.” As the Arabic proverb says, “Only God lives forever.”

**Work.**--“Father” here describes, not his role with in the trinity (where he is Son, not Father), but his role toward his people. The king will himself care tenderly and wisely for his people. Concerning wisdom, Col 2:3 tells us that “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in him. We see his tenderness reflected in his words to his disciples in John 13:33, “little children, yet a little while am I with you.”

### ***Prince of Peace***

**Court Position.**--The prince was also among those taken away in ch. 3, for children took their place. According to 1 Kings 4:1-6, each prince was responsible for some area of the kingdom. Today, we might call them his “cabinet,” each responsible for a different department. They were the administrators, who made each part of the government work.

**Deity.**--In 1 Kings 4, we have princes responsible for various departments: the temple staff, the royal chronicles, the army, the royal household, tribute from subject nations. This prince is responsible for peace. Throughout the OT, only God can bring lasting peace.

## God's Christmas Gift, Isa 9:6

- Ezekiel 34:25 And **I will make with them a covenant of peace**, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.
- Ezekiel 37:26 Moreover **I will make a covenant of peace** with them;
- Isaiah 54:10 For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall **the covenant of my peace** be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.
- Compare the frequent references throughout the Pentateuch to the rest that God would give his people in the land.

We should understand that “peace” *shalom* in the OT is not just the absence of war, but wholeness and well-being, what Eph 1 calls “every spiritual blessing.”

**Work.**--This peace is finally achieved only in the Millennium, when God's rule is established throughout the world. With this title our vision of the promised child-king goes beyond this present age and extends to his future kingdom.

## Conclusion

This is the gift that God gave us at Christmas—a child of David, the son of God, come to rule over us.

- As the Wonder, the Counselor, he has redeemed us, and pleads his finished work before the Father.
- As God the Warrior, he defends us against our enemies.
- As the Father of Eternity, he cares for us with tenderness and wisdom.
- As the Prince of Peace, he will one day usher in the promised age of well-being.

As we give our gifts to one another, let us not fail to thank God for his unspeakable gift.