

REV Bible: Isaiah 9:6 Commentary

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For a child will be born to us,^a
a son will be given to us,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will call his name
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty Hero,^b
Father of the Coming Age,^c Prince of Peace.

a [6]

Lit. “has been born.” The verse is written in past tense

b [6]

Or, “Mighty God,” or, “God is mighty”

c [6]

Or, “Everlasting Father,” or, “the Father is Everlasting”

“For a child.” In reading [Isaiah 9:6](#), it is important to know that there are several ways that this verse can be understood, and two of those ways are articulated in the commentary below.

[Isaiah 9:6-7](#) gives us the reason why “there will be no more gloom for those who were in anguish” ([Isa. 9:1](#)), and the people who walked in darkness will see a great light ([Isa. 9:2](#)), and people will rejoice ([Isa. 9:3](#)), and the yoke of their burden and the rod of their oppressor will be broken ([Isa. 9:4](#)), and garments used in war will be burned ([Isa. 9:5](#)). It is because the Messiah will come and rule the earth in righteousness forever ([Isa. 9:6-7](#)).

“a child will be born.” The Hebrew text reads, “a child has been born...a son has been given.” The Hebrew verb about being born is a perfect passive and is most literally translated, “has been born.” Although some scholars say this prophecy is about Hezekiah, and it may reflect upon him in part, it is more completely about the Messiah. It is common in the Hebrew idiom to write about something that will happen in the future as if it had happened in the past, and this is referred to by many scholars as the idiom of the “prophetic perfect.” Also, the prophetic perfect occurs very often in prophecy. The only one who could literally and completely fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and so the translators are justified in seeing the past tense here as a prophetic perfect even if it does reflect somewhat on Hezekiah who was instrumental in delivering Judah from Assyria. The Jews thought that [Isaiah 9](#) applied to Hezekiah, and it is important to note that [Isaiah 9:6](#) is not quoted in the New Testament nor was it used to prove that Jesus was somehow God until into the New Testament era.

The prophetic perfect is used extensively in prophecies that apply to the Messiah (cp. [Isa. 11:1-12](#); [52:13-14](#); [53:4-10](#)).

“And he will call his name.” The phrase “he will call” is the translation of a third-person masculine singular verb in the Masoretic Hebrew text and the Qumran texts of Isaiah. The Septuagint has the verb in the passive voice, “he will be called.” However, since we have multiple witnesses in the Hebrew text of the reading of Isaiah, there is no reason to assume the Greek translation is correct. The most logical choice for who would name the child was Yahweh, his Father. *Young’s Literal Translation* has the verb in the active voice. Yahweh sent Gabriel to tell Joseph what to name the child in Matthew and Luke. Also, only God, the Father, could name His Son the names in [Isaiah 9:6](#).

“and the government will be on his shoulders.” [Isaiah 9:6-7](#) is one of the many verses in the Old Testament that portray the Messiah as being born and then growing up to destroy the wicked and rule the world in righteousness without saying anything about his death, resurrection, ascension, or the Great Tribulation and Battle of Armageddon. There are many Scriptures in the Old Testament that speak of the coming of Christ and God’s vengeance on the wicked as if they were going to happen at the same time (cp. [Isa. 9:6-7](#); [11:1-9](#); [61:1-3](#); [Micah 5:2](#); [Zech. 9:9-10](#); [Mal. 3:1-3](#); [4:1-3](#)). Those many Scriptures, along with the fact that there are no clear Scriptures that portray the two comings of Christ, are the reason that at the time of Christ people did not think that Christ would die (cp. [Matt. 16:21-22](#); [Luke 18:31-34](#); [24:19-21](#), [44-46](#); [John 12:34](#); [20:9](#)). [For more on Scriptures that directly connect the coming of Christ with him conquering the earth, see [commentary on Isa. 61:2](#)].

“Mighty Hero.” The phrase is usually translated as “Mighty God” in most English Bibles. Actually, “mighty god” would not be a bad translation if people realized that in the Hebrew language, the word “god/God” (*Elohim*; also *El*) had a much wider range of application than it does in English. People familiar with Semitic languages know that a man who is acting with God’s authority can be called “god.” Although English makes a clear distinction between “God” and “god,” the Hebrew language, which has only capital letters, cannot. Hebrew only would have GOD, no matter if it referred to the Father or a person acting with divine authority. Thus, a better translation of [Isaiah 9:6](#) for the English reader would be “mighty hero,” or “divine hero.” Both Martin Luther and James Moffatt translated the phrase as “divine hero” in their Bibles. For an alternative explanation of the name, see below under “Father of the Coming Age.”

[For more on the flexible use of “God,” see the [commentary on Heb. 1:8](#).]

The phrase in [Isaiah 9:6](#) that most English versions translate as “Mighty God” is *el gibbor* in the Hebrew. That very phrase, in the plural form, is used in [Ezekiel 32:21](#) of “heroes” and mighty men. The NIV translates the phrase in Ezekiel as “mighty leaders,” and the KJV and NASB translate it as “the strong among the mighty.” The Hebrew phrase, when used in the singular, can refer to one “mighty leader” just as when used in the plural it can refer to many “mighty leaders.”

There is no justification in the context of [Isaiah 9](#) for believing that this verse refers to the Messiah as part of the Trinity. It refers to God’s appointed ruler. The opening verse of the chapter foretells a time when “there will be no more gloom for those who were in anguish.” All war and death will cease, and “every boot of the tramping warrior...and the garments rolled in blood...will be fuel for the fire” ([Isa. 9:5](#)). How will this come to pass? The chapter goes on: “for to us a child is born” ([Isa. 9:6](#)). There is no hint that this child will be “God,” and reputable Trinitarian scholars will assert that the Jews of the Old Testament knew nothing of an “incarnation.” For them, the Messiah was going to be a man anointed by God. He would start as a child, which of course *Yahweh*, their eternal God, could never be. And what a great ruler this man would grow to be: “the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty Hero, Father of the Coming Age, Prince of Peace.” Furthermore, “he will reign on David’s throne ([Isa. 9:7](#)), which could never be said of God. God could never sit on David’s throne. But God’s Messiah, “the Son of David,” could (cp. [Matt. 9:27](#)). Thus, a study of the verse in its context reveals that it does not refer to the Trinity at all, but to the Messiah, the son of David and the Son of God.

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see [Appendix 10](#), “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see [Appendix 11](#), “What is the Holy Spirit?”].

“Father of the Coming Age.” The Hebrew text should be understood as referring to Jesus Christ without making him be God or equal to God. Trinitarians correctly deny that Jesus is the “Everlasting Father.” It is a basic tenet of Trinitarian doctrine that Christians should “neither confound the Persons nor divide the Substance” (Athanasian Creed). So, Jesus cannot be the “Everlasting Father.” Yahweh, the Father God, is the “Everlasting Father.”

There are several ways to understand what the Hebrew text is saying here. One is that the translation in this context is “Father of the Coming Age.” Another possible meaning is “Everlasting Father” as a theophoric name that brings glory to God. In that same light, another way to understand the phrase is “The Father is Everlasting,” because the present tense “to be” verb, “is,” can be understood.

The Hebrew word translated “age” (or “everlasting” in most Bibles), is *`ad* ([#05703](#) אד) and refers to something that lasts a long time or forever, or something that endures for an age or ages, and that can be of the past or future. Thus, when [Habakkuk 3:6](#) speaks of the mountains that will be shattered at some point in the future, they are called “the ancient mountains” in some translations (cp. NAB; NET), or by hyperbole, “the everlasting mountains” (cp. KJV). Of course, when it refers to God it means everlasting, and the coming Age is everlasting as well, although if this verse in Isaiah only had in mind the first phase of the future reign of Christ, then Age-long or even “long enduring” would be more accurate.

Since the Word of God shows the two ages, the present evil age and the Messianic Age to come, a very possible translation in the context of [Isaiah 9:6](#) is that Jesus will be called “father of the [coming] age.” In the culture of the Bible, anyone who began anything or was very important to something was called its “father.” For example, because Jabal was the first one to live in a tent and raise livestock, the Bible says, “he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock” ([Gen. 4:20](#)). Furthermore, because Jubal was the first inventor of musical instruments, he is called, “the father of all who play the harp and flute” ([Gen. 4:21](#)). Scripture is not using “father” in the sense of literal father or ancestor in these verses, because both these men were descendants of Cain, and all their descendants died in Noah’s flood. “Father” was being used in the cultural understanding of either one who was the first to do something or someone who was important in some way.

The Messiah will be the one to establish the age to come, raise the dead into it, and rule as king in it, so he could well be called “the father of the coming age.” Adam Clarke, the noted Methodist minister and author of *Clarke’s Commentary*, has in his commentary for [Isaiah 9:6](#) that what is usually translated “everlasting Father” should be “the Father of the everlasting age” which is also an excellent translation.

[For more on the use of “father,” see [commentary on Genesis 4:20](#).]

The “Coming Age” is not generally understood by Christians because orthodox doctrine is that when a person dies his soul goes to heaven and lives there forever with Jesus. But the Bible says that Jesus will come back to earth, fight the Battle of Armageddon, conquer the earth, and reign on it as king. At that time the earth will be restored to a pristine condition like the Garden of Eden, and it will be called “Paradise.” That “age” is the Coming Age; the Messianic Age.

Another Biblical Unitarian possibility for the interpretation of [Isaiah 9:6](#) is that the “name” “Mighty God” is a “theophoric name” (a “God carrying” name). In the Hebrew culture, the names given to people mean something. This is true throughout the Old Testament. Theophoric names are given to

people to declare a truth about who God is or what God's relationship is to the person or to Israel (and by extension, humankind).

In studying theophoric names, it is clear that the name is not a declaration of the essence or character of the person who has the name. For example, the name Jehu, which was the name of the King of Israel who wiped out the worship of Baal from the Northern Kingdom of Israel ([2 Kings 10:18-28](#)) means "He is Yahweh," but of course, Jehu was not Yahweh. Bithiah, a daughter of Pharaoh, means "daughter of Yahweh," but she was not a literal daughter of Yahweh. Furthermore, Eliab was not a co-Messiah with Jesus just because his name means "My God is my father." The point of the theophoric name was to bring attention and glory to the one who had the name.

The theophoric name that is translated as "Mighty God" in many English versions can also be understood and translated with the present tense form of the "to be" verb, "is," and be translated as "God is mighty." In that translation, the Hebrew *el gibbor* does not mean the person bearing the name is the Mighty God, but it points to the fact that God is mighty. Another possible understanding of the name could be "God is a Mighty Warrior," as was proved in the destruction of the Assyrian army ([2 Kings 19:35](#)). A parallel to that thought would be [Exodus 15:3](#): "Yahweh is a man of war." It is worth noting that the name "Gabriel" is built from the word *gever* (strong man, hero) and *el* (God) but no one thinks that the angel Gabriel is the "strong man God." Instead, they correctly think that Gabriel means "God is my strong man," or "strong man of God," or something similar.

The name "Everlasting Father" is also a theophoric name. The name "Everlasting Father" is given to a human being as a reminder that the one true God is a Father to us. He cares for us and always has our well-being in mind. There are Jews living in Israel today who are called by that name, just as there are Jews living in Israel today who are called "Immanuel" (and none of those people believe they are the Everlasting Father or an incarnate God). Furthermore, as was stated above, even Trinitarians deny that Jesus is the "Everlasting Father" because it is an important part of Trinitarian doctrine that the "Persons" in the Godhead cannot be confused, and so the Son is not the Father even in Trinitarian doctrine.

One more point about these theophoric names being given to a person is that [Isaiah 9](#) seems clearly to apply at least in part to a person born in the days of Isaiah the prophet, most likely to King Hezekiah of the House of David. In Hezekiah's days, Yahweh proved Himself to be a Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God, and an Everlasting Father.

When it comes to understanding [Isaiah 9:6](#) and the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, it is worth mentioning the Septuagint translation of the verse because of its influence in supporting the belief that Jesus of the New Testament was "the angel of the Lord" in the Old Testament. The Jews who translated the Septuagint did not believe the Messiah would somehow be God in the flesh, but neither did they follow the Hebrew text that we have today.

The translation of the Septuagint of [Isaiah 9:5](#) (which is [Isaiah 9:6](#) in the English versions) done by Sir Lancelot Brenton is: "For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, whose government is upon his shoulder: and his name is called the Messenger of great counsel: for I will bring peace upon the princes, and health to him."³ The word that Brenton translated as "Messenger" is the Greek *angelos*, which is often translated as "angel." Because of that, some early church fathers appealed to [Isaiah 9:6](#) to show that Jesus was the Great Messenger/Angel of God, because the Son revealed to mankind the plans or counsel of God. It is also important to note, however, that the early church fathers were subordinationists. Although they believed Jesus was somehow God, they did not believe he was "co-

equal” with the Father, which is what modern Trinitarians teach. Instead, they believed Jesus was the messenger of God and the announcer of God’s will. They thought Jesus could be called “god,” but “god” with a small g. His existence was derived from and subordinate to the one true God, the Father. Thus, from a modern Trinitarian point of view, the early Church Fathers were not truly Trinitarians and were in fact heretics. In contrast to Trinitarians or subordinationists, Biblical Unitarians believe that Jesus is the Son of God, a fully human being created by God.

[For more information on the prophetic perfect idiom, see [commentary on Eph. 2:6](#), “seated.” See also the [commentary on Isa. 11:1](#). For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see [Appendix 10](#), “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father while “the holy spirit” refers to the gift of God’s nature, see [Appendix 11](#), “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more information on the Coming Age and Jesus’ kingdom on earth, see [Appendix 3](#), “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth. For more on the earth becoming a “Paradise,” see [commentary on Luke 23:43](#), “Paradise.” For more on theophoric names, and the name Immanuel, see [commentary on Matthew 1:23](#). For more on the early Church Fathers being subordinationists, see *The Restitution of Jesus Christ* by Servetus the Evangelical (A.K.A. Kermit Zarley), Chapter Two: “Church Christology in the First Millennium.”]

a)

L. Brenton, *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament*, 1:844.
