

**MISCELLANEOUS
BIBLICAL STUDIES**

CHAPTER TWENTY

**A BETTER INTERPRETATION
OF ISAIAH 9:5–6a (MT & LXX)
“HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED”**

Thomas F. McDaniel, Ph.D.

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A BETTER INTERPRETATION OF ISAIAH 9:5b–6a

Isaiah 9:5b

וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פֶּלֶא יוֹעֵץ אֵל גְּבוּר אָבִיעַד שֶׁר־שָׁלוֹם

NKJ (9:6b)

And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The seven Hebrew words which make up the name of the messianic child are variously transmitted and translated. The Septuagint has only one name based upon the initial words אֵל יוֹעֵץ פֶּלֶא, which were apparently read in reverse order as אֵל יוֹעֵץ פֶּלֶא. The *Vorlage* used by the Septuagint translators in 9:6b does not match the MT. It apparently read

וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ אֵל יוֹעֵץ פֶּלֶא
אָבִיעַד עַל שְׁרִים שָׁלוֹם וְשָׁלוֹם לְמוֹ

which became in the Septuagint (9:5b)

καὶ καλεῖται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ
μεγάλης¹ βουλής ἄγγελος²
ἐγὼ γὰρ ἄξω εἰρήνην ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄρχοντας
εἰρήνην καὶ ὑγίειαν αὐτῷ³

and his name is called
“Messenger² of Great¹ Counsel,”
for I will bring peace upon the princes,
peace and health to him.

There is nothing in Septuagint for the MT גְּבוּר “mighty,” and the εἰρήνην καὶ ὑγίειαν “peace and health” is a doublet for the single שָׁלוֹם in the MT. The MT אָבִיעַד “everlasting

Father” was read as **על אביא**, “I will bring upon,” followed by a plural **שָׂרִים** “princes” for the MT singular **שָׂר**.

In contrast to the Septuagint, the Targum has four names:

- **מִפְּלִי עֵיִצָּא** “Wonderful Counselor,”
- **אֱלֹהָא גִבְרָא** “Mighty God,”
- **קַיָּים עֶלְמַיָּא** “One Living Forever,” and
- **מְשִׁיחָא** “Messiah,” followed by the modifying clause, **דְּשְׁלָמָא יִסְגִי עֵלְנָא בְּיוֹמוֹהִי** “whose peace shall be great upon us in his days.”

The Vulgate also has four names: *Admirabilis consiliarius*, *Deus fortis*, *Pater futuri saeculi*, and *Princeps pacis*. Similarly, the RSV, NAS, NAB, NIV, NIB, NLT, and NJB have four names: “*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*,” or the like. These translations read the **פְּלֵא** “wonderful” as an adjective which precedes the noun **יוֹעֵץ** “counselor.” Normally in Hebrew an adjective follows the noun it is modifying, although there are exceptions with the adjective preceding the noun, as in Isa 28:21, **זָר מַעֲשָׂהוּ**, “his strange work” and **נִכְרִיהָ עֲבֹדָתוֹ** “his strange deed.”⁴ Consequently, other translations (including the NKJ, ASV, WEB, YLT) read the **פְּלֵא** as the initial noun/ name and have five names: “*Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace*” (KJV) or “*Wonderful, Counselor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace*” (DRA).

Instead of the traditional four or five names—composed of one or two words each—the original Hebrew text of Isaiah 9:5b–6a probably had only three names composed of three

words each, namely,

- פְּלֵא יוֹעֵץ אֱל “Wonderful Counselor of God,”
- גְּבוֹר אֲבִי עַד “Mighty One of the Eternal Father,”
- שֵׁר שְׁלוֹם לָם “Reconciling Prince of Peace.”

There are two reasons for reading the names in this way. First, there is the Septuagint’s αὐτῶ at the end of the verse (coming after the ὑγίειαν “health”). It is a translation of the לָם (read as לָמוֹ “to him”) of the לְמַרְבֵּה in 9:6a (MT). Older commentators (cited in BDB, 916) considered this unusual לְמַרְבֵּה—having a final ם rather than the normal medial ם—to be a dittography of the לָם on the preceding שְׁלוֹם “peace.” The Septuagint translator obviously read the לָם as a separate word which concluded the verse.

The second reason for reading three names with three words each in 9:5b–6a is the Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll’s reading of the verse compared to that of the Aleppo Codex.

ALEPPO CODEX

שֵׁר-שְׁלוֹם: לְמַרְבֵּה

QUMRAN SCROLL

שֵׁר חֲשׁוֹנֵי לְבַרְכָּה

The Qumran text has a definite article which is lacking on the MT שְׁלוֹם. The final ך and the initial/medial ך are quite distinct. The space between the לְבַרְכָּה and the שֵׁר חֲשׁוֹנֵי matches the space between separate words, indicating that the Qumran scribe read two words here but wrote an initial/medial ך rather than a final ך. This לְבַרְכָּה/לְבַרְכָּה is not the defective spelling

of the well attested preposition לָּ “to him/to them” (which lay behind the Septuagint’s αὐτῶ). Rather it is a long lost lexeme meaning “to reconcile,” a cognate of the Arabic verb لَام (lām), which in Form 3 means “to reconcile,” and the noun لِيْم (li‘m) “peace, concord, agreement, unity” (Lane 1893: 3007; Wehr 1979: 1001).

Isaiah did not envision a messianic war lord, but a reconciling prince of peace. The best commentary on this translation comes in Isaiah 11:1–9. There the reason for the messianic name, “Wonderful Counselor of God,” is spelled out: “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.” This counselor would be hailed as a hero, “the Mighty One of the Everlasting Father.” The language here hints of the military model, “he shall smite the earth.” But the heroic imagery was immediately redefined. This hero’s weapons would not be those of violence or war, but would be those of diplomacy and judicial power. He would smite the earth with “the rod of his mouth and the breath of his lips.” His defense would be the garments of righteousness and faithfulness.

His third title, “the reconciling Prince of Peace” speaks of his political agenda, the full reconciliation of all human and earthly relationships. All too often the imagery of the “Peaceable Kingdom” (spelled out in 11:6–9, “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb. . . and a little child shall lead them. . . they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain”) is taken so literally its fulfillment must be projected into the end of time.

Such literalism would have the Messiah be of no earthly or historical benefit. But when read as poetic hyperbole, the vision remains earthly and sets the new political and social agenda. The peace of the Messiah would not be built by war. All violence will come to an end by the dynamics of reconciliation, with the poor being treated rightly and the meek being judged with equity. The messianic titles in Isaiah 9:5b–6a, and their commentary in 11:2–9, were the poetic prophetic precedent for Paul’s affirmation, “in Christ God was reconciling the world . . . and entrusting to us the ministry of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:19).

NOTES

1. The lexeme פִּלְאִי “wonderful/great” appears as a *Niph^cal* plural participle in Job 42:3 (נִפְלְאוֹת), which was translated in the Septuagint as the doublet μεγάλη καὶ θαυμαστά “great and wonderful.”
2. The translation of מַלְאָךְ as ἄγγελος “messenger” appears also in Job 20:15, where חִיל בָּלַע וַיִּקְאֵנוּ מִבֶּטְנוֹ יוֹרְשָׁנוּ אֵל “he swallows riches but will vomit them up; God will expel them from his belly,” became in the Septuagint πλοῦτος ἀδίκως συναγόμενος ἐξεμεσθήσεται ἐξ οἰκίας αὐτοῦ ἐξελκύσει αὐτὸν ἄγγελος, “wealth unjustly collected shall be vomited up; a messenger will drag him out of his house.” (The οἰκίας “house” for the MT בֶּטֶן “belly” reflects a confusion of בֶּטֶן and בָּטֵן [Est 1:5], like the variants הִטָּה / הִתָּה “to seize” and הִטָּה / הִתָּה “to err.”) Note also Psalm 8:5 and 97:7 where

אלהים was translated as ἄγγελος “messenger, angel.”

3. The αὐτῶ coming after the ὑγίειαν “health” is a translation of the לם of the next word, לַמְרִבָּה “to the increase of,” in 9:6a (see below). The לָמוֹ in Psalm 28:8 (LXX 27:8) was translated as τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ “to his people,” and in Psalm 49:14 (LXX 48:14) simply as αὐτοῖς “to them.”

4. See GKC §132^b.