

ISAIAH 6:1-8

“In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.’ And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, ‘Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.’ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth *with it* and said, ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”

The death of King Uzziah (Azariah) indicated a significant shift in the prosperity and stability of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (cf. 2 Chronicles 26:1-15). This is the backdrop for the Divine commissioning of the Prophet Isaiah, who experiences a significant theophany involving God proper in Heaven (Isaiah 6:1), and various angels (Isaiah 6:2-3) specified to be *serafim* (שֶׁרָפִים). All readers of Isaiah 6:1-8 confront the grand holiness, majesty, power, and awesomeness of the Creator. The response of Isaiah to what he encountered—as a mere mortal in view of such supernatural wonders—is hardly surprising: “Woe is me; I am lost! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5a, NJPS).

The narrative of Isaiah 6:5b states, *ki et-ha'melekh YHWH tzeva'ot ra'u einay* (כִּי אֶת-הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוָה רָאוּ עֵינָי), “and *** the-King Yahweh-of Hosts they-saw eyes-of-me” (Kohlenberger).¹²⁷ The level to which Isaiah saw the (full) glory of God is not the focus of what is recorded; it is instead how one of the seraphim takes a coal from the altar of God’s Heavenly Temple, and touches Isaiah’s lips with it (Isaiah 6:6), an indication that he has been forgiven of his sins (Isaiah 6:7). The question is then posed from the Throne, “Whom shall I send, and who shall go for us?” (Isaiah 6:8a, ATS). Isaiah then responds to the call (Isaiah 6:8b).

Questions about whether *Elohim* or God can be a unity in plurality, are necessarily posed by readers of Isaiah 6:8a: *et-mi eshlach u'mi yeilekh-lanu* (אֶת-מִי אֲשַׁלַּח וּמִי יֵלֶךְ-לָנִי), “Who should I send? Who will go for Us?” (HCSB). The Greek Septuagint sidestepped the issue of the nature of God being present in Isaiah 6:8, via the rendering, “Whom should I send, and who will go to this people?” (NETS).¹²⁸ Jewish examiners of the statement of Isaiah 6:8 take the plural “us” to include both God proper and His Heavenly court of angels (cf. 1 Kings 22:19-23; Job 1-2),¹²⁹ and there are Christian examiners who follow suit.¹³⁰ Unlike Genesis 1:26-28; 3:22-23; 11:7-8 preceding, where it can be legitimately questioned whether the plural “us” is to include God and His Heavenly court of angels—or God/*Elohim* as a unified plurality—it is to be recognized in Isaiah 6:1-8 that the “us” present could be God and His Heavenly court of angels. The scene of Isaiah 6:1-8 unambiguously includes the presence of *serafim*; the previous records of Genesis 1:26-28; 3:22-23; 11:7-8 do not.

¹²⁷ Kohlenberger, 4:12.

¹²⁸ Grk. *tina aposteilō kai tis poreusetai pros ton laon touton* (τίνα ἀποστείλω καὶ τίς πορεύεται πρὸς τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον).

¹²⁹ I.W. Slotki, *Soncino Books of the Bible: Isaiah* (London: Soncino Press, 1983), 30; Benjamin D. Sommer, “Isaiah,” in *Jewish Study Bible*, 796.

¹³⁰ John D.W. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33*, Vol 24 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), pp 72-73; John N. Oswalt, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 185; John Goldingay, *New International Biblical Commentary: Isaiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 62.

It is at all to be ruled out that “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isaiah 6:8, RSV), involves God speaking as a unified plurality? J.A. Motyer interjects his opinion, which incorporates the witness of later Scripture:

“The *us* in *who will go for us?* is a plural of consultation (cf. 1 Ki. 22:19-23). The New Testament, however, relates this passage both to the Lord Jesus (Jn. 12:41) and to the Holy Spirit (Acts 28:25), finding here that which will accommodate the full revelation of the triune God.”¹³¹

ISAIAH 9:6-7

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.”

Those who believe in either a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being God, or a low Christology of Yeshua the Messiah as a created entity, are both going to read Isaiah 9:6-7 in a Messianic context, referring to Yeshua of Nazareth (cf. Luke 1:32-33). How one reckons with the titles of Isaiah 9:6-7, which both should agree are applied to this Messiah King, will force one to consider some significant things about His nature. The Hebrew source text of Isaiah 9:6[5] states, *v'yiqra sh'mo pele yo'eitz El gibbor avi'ad sar-shalom* (וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פֶּלֵא יוֹעֵץ אֱלֹהִים גִּבּוֹר אַבִּיעֶזֶר שַׂר-שְׁלוֹם), “and-he-will-call name-of-him Wonder-of One-Counseling God-of Might Father-of Everlasting Prince-of Peace” (Kohlenberger).¹³²

That the Messiah will be a “Wonderful Counselor” (*pele yo'eitz*), taken by the NET Bible to be “Extraordinary Strategist,” makes light of His great wisdom and abilities.

The second title the Messiah is to have, asks some immediate questions about His nature, as it is *El gibbor* or “Mighty God.” This is a title used of God proper in Isaiah 10:21: “A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God [*el-El gibbor*, אֱלֹהֵי-גִבּוֹר].” In the estimation of John N. Oswalt, “Wherever *‘el gibbôr* occurs elsewhere in the Bible there is no doubt that the term refers to God (10:21; cf. also Deut. 10:17¹³³; Jer. 32:18¹³⁴).”¹³⁵

There were, in the Ancient Near East and classical Greco-Roman worlds, likely many kings and aristocrats who identified along the lines of being considered deified as “gods,” even though they were only mortal. When it comes to the Messiah, however, whose origins are certainly something beyond corporeal (Micah 5:2)—and with the spiritual and religious culture of Ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism being decisively subversive to paganism—would the Messiah’s being titled as *El Gibbor* or “Mighty God” imply His being anything other than God? Isaiah 9:6 could have just said that the Messiah would be *gibbor* (גִּבּוֹר), “strong, mighty” (*BDB*),¹³⁶ akin to “mighty one,” and thusly one simply empowered by God or who had a special relationship with God. But when the title *El gibbor*, actually used of God proper, is a title

¹³¹ J.A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 78.

¹³² Kohlenberger, 4:19.

“and he will be given the name Pele-Yo'etz El Gibbor Avi-Ad Sar-Shalom [Wonder of a Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace]” (CJB).

¹³³ “For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty [*ha'gibbor*, הַגִּבּוֹר], and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe” (Deuteronomy 10:17).

¹³⁴ “who shows lovingkindness to thousands, but repays the iniquity of fathers into the bosom of their children after them, O great and mighty God [*ha'El ha'gadol ha'gibbor*, הָאֱלֹהִים הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר]. The LORD of hosts is His name” (Jeremiah 32:18).

¹³⁵ Oswalt, *Isaiah* 1-39, 247.

¹³⁶ *BDB*, 150.