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The Brit Hadasha Series - The MEM Mystery

Isaiah 9:6-7

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord (YHWH) of hosts will do this.

Jewish anti-missionaries insist that this passage must refer to Hezekiah and not Messiah Yeshua.

It is argued that the passage is in the perfect verb form and must refer to events which had already occurred.

In reality, there is no such thing as tense in Hebrew grammar. In reality Hebrew verbs do not take past, present and future forms, but perfect (completed action) or imperfect (incomplete action).

In Hebrew thinking, an action is regarded as being either completed or incomplete. Hebrew, therefore, knows no past, present, or future tenses, but has instead a Perfect and an Imperfect. ... The Hebrew Perfect may be taken to represent action in the past... the equivalent of the English present tense is supplied by the participle.... and the [equivalent of] the English future tense (with other varieties) by the imperfect.

A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew. 2nd Ed. Clarendon Press; Oxford; 1959; J. A. Weingreen pp. 56-57

To be strictly accurate we should speak of "forms" rather than "tenses" of the verb, since it is the completeness or otherwise of an action which is being expressed and not the time factor, as in English....

...Hebrew has no "tenses" in the normal sense of the word. Instead there are two "states"...

Teach Yourself Biblical Hebrew; R.K. Harrison; 1984; pages 68, 80

Normally a verb in the perfect form would imply a past tense which is why Jewish anti-missionaries insist that Isaiah 9:6-7 must be past tense and therefore, refers to Hezekiah.

In reality there is a special idiom in Hebrew called the "Prophetic Perfect." This is where prophet speaks of future events in the perfect form because he has seen them in the future where they have already happened.

Gesenius' mentions the Prophetic Perfect idiom and describes it this way:

...he [the prophetic writer] describes the future event as if it had been already seen or heard by him.

Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar. 2nd edition Translated by A. E. Crowley; Clarendon Press; Oxford; 1956; Edited by E. Klautzsch; pp. 312-313

To illustrate that scholars and us are not just simply making this up, there are many examples of the Prophetic Perfect in the TANAKH:

Isaiah 5:13

*Therefore my people go into exile
for lack of knowledge;
their honored men go hungry,
and their multitude is parched with thirst.*

In this particular verse, this verb is in the perfect form but it is clearly a future event because the captivity spoken of did not occur in Isaiah's lifetime.

Other examples are Isaiah 10:28-32, Jeremiah 23:2, and Amos 5:2

In fact, Rabbinical writings support a "prophetic perfect" approach to Isaiah 9.

The Targum Jonathan to Isaiah 9:6-7 clearly identifies the figure spoken of in Isaiah 9:6-7 as the Messiah.

"The prophet says to the house of David, A child has been born to us, a son has been given to us; and he has taken the law upon himself to keep it, and his name has been called from of old, Wonderful counselor, Mighty God, he who lives forever, the Messiah, in whose days peace shall increase upon us"

Targum Jonathan Is. 9:6

And we read in the Midrash Rabbah:

Rabbi Jose the Galilean says: The name of the Messiah too is "peace"; as it is written: "God the mighty, the everlasting Father, the ruler of peace" (Quoting Is. 9:5-6 (6-7))

PEREK HA SHALOM; NUMBERS RABBAH XI, 16-20

He said to him: 'I have yet to raise up the Messiah, 'of whom it is written, For a child is born to us (Isa. IX, 5). Until I come unto my Lord unto Seir (Gen. XXXIII, 14).

R. Samuel b. Nahman said:

We have searched all the Scriptures and we have nowhere found [it stated] that Jacob ever came together with Esau at Seir. What then is the meaning of, 'Unto Seir'? Jacob [meant] to say to him: 'I have yet to raise up judges and saviours to exact punishment from you. 'Whence this? For it is said, And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau (Obad. I, 21). Israel asked God: 'Master of the Universe, how long shall we remain subjected to him?' He replied: 'Until the day comes of which it is written, There shall step forth a star out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel (Num. XXIV, 17); when a star shall step forth from Jacob and devour the stubble of Esau. '

Midrash Rabbah - Deuteronomy I:20

And we read in the Zohar:

"As for the expression El Gibbor, the whole verse in which this occurs in an epitome of the holy supernal faith. The word "Wonderful" alludes to the supernal Wisdom, which is wondrous and concealed beyond the reach of all; "Counsellor" is the supernal stream which issues forth perennially and counsels all and waters all; "El" refers to Abraham, "Gibbor" to Issac, and "Everlasting Father" to Jacob, who lays hold of both sides and attains perfection. The "Prince of Peace" is the Zaddik, who brings peace to the world, peace to the House, peace to the Matrona."

Zohar 3:31a

So we quote these ancient rabbis, not to say that we agree with everything they have written, but we want to communicate that they understood Isaiah 9:6-7 (verses 5 and 6 in some editions) to refer to a FUTURE MESSIAH.

Why would they do this if this passage supposedly obviously speaks of the past?

Obviously it does NOT have to be in the past tense. Like Isaiah 5:13 it is written in the prophetic perfect.

The common anti-missionary argument that the figure described in Isaiah 9:6-7 is Hezekiah actually contradicts the Rabbinical position as stated in the Talmud.

This brings us to a fascinating insight regarding Isaiah 9.

The MEM Mystery

Before going further, there are two things we need to state.

First, the Hebrew letter "mem" is always written as a closed "mem" when it is written at the end of a word, but as an open "mem" when it is written at the beginning of the word.

Secondly, there is a traditional anomaly which is preserved in the Masoretic Text.

The letter "mem" in the word "L'mar'beh" ("of the increase") is written as a closed final "mem" when

it should be written with an open “*mem*.”

The Talmud discusses the use of the abnormal closed final “*mem*” in the passage as follows:

Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end (Isaiah 9:6 or 9:7). R. Tanhum said: Bar Kappara expounded in Sepphoris, 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 Justice 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. Straightway the earth exclaimed: ‘Sovereign of the Universe! Let me utter song before Thee instead of this righteous man [Hezekiah], and make him the Messiah.’ So it broke into song before Him, as it is written, From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous. Then the Prince of the Universe said to Him: ‘Sovereign of the Universe! It [the earth] hath fulfilled Thy desire [for songs of praise] on behalf of this righteous man.’ But a heavenly Voice cried out, ‘It is my secret, it is my secret.’ To which the prophet rejoined, ‘Woe is me, woe is me: how long [must we wait]?’ The heavenly Voice [again] cried out, ‘The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously: which Raba — others say, R. Isaac — interpreted: until there come spoilers, and spoilers of the spoilers.*

b.San. 94a

Here the Talmud specifically tells us that Hezekiah was not the Messianic figure mentioned in Isaiah 9:6-7 because of the closed final “*mem*” and because the secret of Elohim which is revealed by the use of a final “*mem*” in this word.

Now it is important to understand that in Rabbinic thought, the “*mem*” is associated with the womb. Here is a recorded example of that thought:

“Three Mothers Alef, Mem, Shin are in the body of male and female: Fire and Water and Air. Head was created from Fire, and Womb was created from Water, and Chest was created from Air, balancing the scales between them.”

Sefer Yetzirah 3:6

Furthermore, the Zohar teaches that the final “*mem*” in “*adam*” represents the female side which was taken from Adam to make woman:

Further, the words “let us make man” may be taken to signify that Elohim imparted to the lower beings who came from the side of the upper world the secret of forming the divine name “Adam”, which embraces the upper and the lower in virtue of its three letters, aleph, dalet, and final MEM. When these three letters descended below, together in their complete form, the name Adam was found to comprise male and female. The female was attached to the side of the male until Elohim cast him into a deep slumber, during which he lay on the site of the Temple. God then sawed her off from him and adorned

her like a bride and brought her to him, as it is written, "And he took one of his sides and closed up the place with flesh." (Genesis 2:21).

Zohar 1:34b

Again, this is not to state that we always agree with the Rabbis, we are simply using their own writings to make a point against Jewish anti-missionaries that passionately attack the legitimacy of Messiah Yeshua.

The Bahir elaborates that not only does a "mem" represent a womb, but an open "mem" represents an open womb and a closed "mem" represents a closed womb:

"The open Mem. What is the open Mem? It includes both male and female. What is the closed Mem? It is made like a womb from above. But Rabbi Rahumai said that the womb is like the letter Teth. He said it is like a Teth on the inside, while I say that it is like a Mem on the outside.

What is a Mem? Do not read Mem, but Mayim (water). Just like water is wet, so is the womb always wet. Why does the open Mem include both male and female, while the closed Mem is male? This teaches us that the Mem is primarily male. The opening was then added to it for the sake of the female. Just like the male cannot give birth, so the closed MEM cannot give birth. And just like the female has an opening with which to give birth, so can the open MEM give birth. The MEM is therefore open and closed."

Bahir 84-85

While anti-missionaries claim that Hezekiah was the figure described in Isaiah 9:6-7 the Talmud states that Hezekiah was not this figure because of the "secret mystery" of the closed final "mem".

What is the "secret mystery" of the closed final "mem?"

The "mem" represents the womb and the closed "mem" points the birth of Messiah to a woman with a closed rather than an open womb!

This points us to the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son..."

Messiah Yeshua would be born to the closed womb of a virgin. The closed "mem" (closed womb) birth described in Isaiah 9:6-7 points us back to the virgin birth described in Isaiah 7:14.

Hezekiah could not have been the figure born in Isaiah 9:6-7 because he was not born of a virgin.

For more on this subject, we would recommend the teaching:

[The Brit Hadasha Series: The Virgin Birth.](#)

We hope that this teaching has blessed you, and remember continue to test everything.

Shalom.

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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