A RE-EXAMINATION OF ISAIAH IX 1-6

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The identity of the child mentioned in Isa. ix 5-6 has been one of the most difficult problems in the study of the Old Testament, for while he appears to be born and thus in some sense human, the appellations applied to him suggest that he is more than merely human (e.g., יולו gibbôr). Since the classic articles by G. von Rad¹ and A. Alt,² it has become more and more common to maintain that Isa. ix 1-6 is an accession oracle for one of the Judean kings³ (most often thought to be Hezekiah) and that the appellations of the child reflect the Egyptian practice of throne names or mere court flattery. However, there are significant problems with this commonly accepted interpretation of Isa. ix 1-6 making a re-evaluation of the passage necessary.

It is difficult to know with certainty what an Israelite accession oracle would specifically contain since there are no explicit biblical examples.⁴ However, it is generally assumed that 2 Sam. vii 10-16;

4 2 Sam. vii 10-17 appears to be recorded after David had been king and not upon his accession to the throne. And Pss ii and cx (LXX) are not clearly stated
Pss ii 6-12, cx 3 (LXX) contain possible royal accession oracles and a careful form-critical analysis of these passages reveals the following distinctions between accession oracles and Isa. ix 1(2)-6(7): (1) In an accession oracle God speaks directly to the king, but in Isa. ix the announcement of a son is given to the people in the third person and in passive form. (2) In an accession oracle the king is declared to be God's son (2 Sam. vii 14; Pss ii 7, cx 3 [LXX]), which is generally thought to be one of the basic purposes of such an oracle; but Isa. ix 5 does not identify the child as God's son or contain adoption language. (3) There are no other examples where the word yeled is used in an accession oracle.

Often scholars who argue that this passage is an accession oracle do so on the basis of supposed parallel structures in Egyptian literature. This association is generally sought since it is commonly recognized that the titles used in Isa. ix 5(6) stretch beyond the normal limits of the language when applied to a Hebrew king and would correspond more closely to the Egyptian practice of viewing their kings as divine. Therefore a careful evaluation of this supposed connection with Egyptian material is necessary.

(1) Regarding the assumption that the titles in this passage are a direct assimilation from the Egyptians reflecting their concept of the divinity of kings, the following objections can be raised: (a) There is insufficient evidence to confirm the existence of five titles in v. 5 corresponding to the Egyptian titulary. (b) The titles found in the Egyptian accession oracles are different in structure from...