

NAMES FOR THE MESSIAH

An Advent Study

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

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INTRODUCTION

*For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

—Isa. 9:6

CHRISTIANS HAVE CLAIMED FROM THEIR BEGINNINGS that Jesus was the Messiah foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures. His reign began a new testament of the relationship between God and humanity. For that reason Christians often call the Hebrew Scriptures the Old Testament. Jesus did not replace or deny the expectations of a messiah previously told. He fulfilled them. The

people were waiting for God to act, and many oracles in the Old Testament predicted what God would do.

What were these expectations, and did Jesus fulfill them?

Isaiah 9:2–7 is a well-known oracle, a divine utterance given to us, that uses four royal titles in verse 6—Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. This Advent study will ponder each title and how the people understood it then, how Jesus did or did not fulfill the title, and how Christians interpret Jesus as representative of that title.

As we ponder the use of those titles with reference to Christmas and the birth of Jesus, two things become clear. First, in the witness to Jesus by the early Christians in the New Testament, they relied heavily on Old Testament “anticipations” of the coming Messiah. But second, Jesus did not fit those “anticipations” very well, such that a good deal of interpretive imagination was required in order to negotiate the connection between the anticipation and the actual bodily, historical reality of Jesus.

This book is for individual or group study.

Prayers and questions for reflection for each chapter are provided at the end of the book. Space is given for participants to write in their answers.

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