

Mighty God

Isaiah 9:6 Part-2
by Chuck Jones

Most of us, when we read the Bible, are at the mercy of the translators, those fluent in the Hebrew and Greek languages that our scriptures were originally written in. It isn't beyond reason to think that they may have chosen words that highlight their theological leaning. They, like many, want to put a positive theological spin on scripture to prove points.

To point at a verse and say, "See here? That proves it" is not a good model of Bible teaching to follow. Many Bible students (and, by extension, teachers) like to line up questionable verses with other scripture texts to gain a broader foundation from which to teach.

A good case in point is the two word title found in Isaiah 9:6, "Mighty God." I don't want to be understood as saying this is a mistranslation, but I do think it is a theologically spun translation. It is used therefore as a proof text by some to drive home their point. Let's compare this text with other scriptures to see what we can learn.

Mighty God

This name comes from Isaiah 9:6. The expression, "and he shall be called" indicates that the title is given to this son by the people as they rejoice in or celebrate him. The Hebrew words are "el gibbor." My preferred translation is "mighty champion." I'll explain why I think this works best.

Beginning with the first of this two-part title, let's explore how it is used in scripture. "El" is translated several ways, such as God, gods, mighty one, strength and power. "El" is not always used in reference to Yahweh. Note the following examples:

Proverbs 3:27 *"Don't withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power [el] of your hand to do it."* "El" is descriptive of your hand when it has the power (el) to do good for others.

Psalms 89:6 *"For who in the skies can be compared unto Yahweh? Who among the sons of the mighty [el] is like unto Yahweh?"* Here "el" is a reference to the sons of the influential and powerful of society.

Psalms 29:1 *"Ascribe unto Yahweh, O ye sons of the mighty [el], ascribe unto Yahweh glory and strength."* Those who are influential and wield power are directed to acknowledge the Almighty Yahweh.

Daniel 11:3 *"And a mighty [el] king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will."* Here the term "el" is used to describe an ungodly king because of the power he exercises.

So the term “el,” although it is used to describe our Heavenly Father, also shows God’s presence or confirmation. However, it is also used to describe the ability, power, or prominence of someone or something.

Names with El

Here are some other names that contain the description “el.” The name Immanuel is literally “with us is God” or “on our side is God.” This descriptive name implies that because Jesus was born, God is showing kindness toward us. Yahweh has acted on our behalf. It does not state that the individual bearing the name is actually God Himself.

Another name found in scripture with “el” is Joel. This name means, “Yahweh is mighty.” This, too, is descriptive of the nature of the prophecies Joel proclaimed. Samuel means “Hear from God,” and Ezekiel means “Judgment of God.” We certainly wouldn’t mistake Joel, or the other prophets as actually being God Himself.

The son that would be born would be “el” or mighty. But a mighty what? That’s where the second part of the name comes in. He will be called a mighty “gibbor.”

Gibbor

This Hebrew title is used mainly “to denote one who is mighty, strong, or valiant in war time. It is typical of a warrior. “Gibbor” is the hero or champion of the armed forces” (TWOT). One infamous individual had this title – Goliath. In 1 Samuel 17:4 we read that he was considered the "champion" [gibbor] of the Philistine Army. Certainly it was a title that he earned.

The word “gibbor” appears over 150 times in the Old Testament, of which perhaps only five refer to Yahweh. But in each case, it carries the idea of a valiant warrior, one who is capable of overcoming the enemy.

That’s why I think a better (in my humble opinion) translation would be “mighty champion” or even “God’s champion.”

The Man Jesus

Does this description fit the man, Jesus of Nazareth? Would we rightly give him this title as we celebrate what he has done? Let’s see:

Hebrews 5:7-9 *“Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation.”*

Jesus should be considered our champion. Do you? He is the one who made salvation available to us. He is the one who brought it near enough to grab on to. It was through his work that we can expect God's great salvation, now and in the future.

Hebrews 2:10-11 *“For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.”*

Jesus is the captain of our faith. Just as in many sports a captain is chosen to encourage, be an example for, and spur the other team members on to do their best, Jesus does that for us. The man, Jesus of Nazareth is our champion of God. Because of all we have in Christ we can truly say God is on our side, Immanuel.

The faith that Jesus championed, the faith of Jesus, can be yours. You can be mighty, through God, and be an over-comer just as Jesus was:

1 John 5:4-5 *“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”*

You see, we must believe in God as Jesus did. That, is having the faith of Jesus. Having faith (or trust) in God as Jesus did is what overcomes the world. You can be a mighty champion of faith by following in the footsteps of our mighty champion.

We all can put away childish behavior and learn to trust God more than the desires of the flesh. It's hard, I know, but still keep practicing. Jesus is our prime example of total trust in God. He invites us to follow Him.

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