

The "MIGHTY GOD"

An Old Testament Study Guide

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The "MIGHTY GOD"

INTRODUCTION:

There are over 35 Hebrew and Greek words that are translated by the word "mighty" in the Old and New Testaments. In many places God is described as "mighty" or the "mighty God." This concept is especially predominant in the Old Testament. (It also occurs about five times in the New Testament, depending on translation.)

The emphasis of this study is limited to the predominant Hebrew word translated "mighty" ("*gibbowr*," which occurs 138 times), and *only* to verses in which the word is associated with the word "God" or "LORD." (The word "LORD," in all capital letters, refers to the Hebrew name of God - "YAHWEH," sometimes translated as "Jehovah.") This reduces the list to seven occurrences.

A few comments should be made before we examine these verses:

- In English translations, the word "mighty" can be located either before the word "God" (such as in "mighty God") or after it (such as in "God, the Mighty <One>"). The meaning is the same; in either case, the adjective ("mighty") is being used in reference to the noun ("God"). [In the original Hebrew text, the word "God" (or "LORD") precedes the word "mighty" in each of these verses.]
- It should be pointed out that the word "is" (which exists in many English translations) does not occur in the original Hebrew. Translators often supply this word for smoother reading in the English. (Some "literal" translations show this by putting the word "is" in italics.) The phrases, "the mighty God," and "God is mighty," communicate basically the same thing.
- Since it is the *Hebrew* word for "mighty" that is being examined, there may be some occasions in which an English translation uses a different word (such as the word "powerful"). But in any case, the concept being conveyed is the same - and that is what's important!

The "MIGHTY GOD"

WHAT ABOUT THE WORD "ALMIGHTY"?

Because the English word "almighty" contains the word "mighty," some people might mistakenly assume that the two words are related, forming a contrast between two "levels" of might. In such thinking, being "almighty" ("all mighty" or "super-mighty" or "mightiest") would be contrasted with just being merely "mighty" - as though the word "mighty" implied something less than (or inferior to) "almighty." In reality, these are two totally different words, with different (though somewhat related) emphases.

The word "mighty" ("*gibbowr*," the Hebrew word examined in this study) has to do with strength, power, and ability to prevail. The word normally translated as "almighty," (which comes from a different Hebrew word - "*shadday*," and which occurs 46 times) has to do with self-sufficiency or (according to some) the "all-providing" character of God. Perhaps it has reference to his "invincible" nature. (Hebrew scholars are not in total agreement as to the exact meaning of this word.)

In the verses examined in this study, the Hebrew word "*shadday*" does not occur.

There is another Hebrew word ("*tsawbaw*") that is translated as "Almighty" in some English translations, and as "hosts" or "armies" in others (examples: "the LORD of hosts" or "the LORD of armies"). This word, which occurs in two of the passages quoted in this study (Psalm 24:10 and Jeremiah 32:18), probably conveys the idea of "all mighty," better than the word mentioned above. But it is *not* used in the sense of a *contrast* between "mighty" and "all mighty." In each of these passages, *both* words are used in reference to the same person (God).

The "MIGHTY GOD"

Deuteronomy 10:17

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.

The immediate context of this verse begins at verse 12 and continues on through chapter 11. There is so much to be found in this wonderful passage that we will only be able to touch on a few things. Further study would be encouraged.

Moses has just reminded Israel about their history, including their rebellion against God and the fact that he did not utterly destroy them. He reminded them that God, in his continued forbearance, spared them from the destruction they deserved. It is within this context, that Moses presents to them what could be called the theme of this passage:

And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to *fear* the LORD your God, to *walk* in all his ways, to *love* him, to *serve* the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to *observe* the LORD'S commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? (Deuteronomy 10:12-13)

This theme is echoed throughout the whole passage. Note the numerous "action verbs" (shown in italics). These words are used the same way in several other verses in the passage, as shown in the following list.

Fear the LORD your God and *serve* him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. (Deuteronomy 10:20)

Love the LORD your God and *keep* his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always. (Deuteronomy 11:1; the word "keep" comes from the same Hebrew word as "observe," in verse 13)

Observe therefore all the commands I am giving you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ... (Deuteronomy 11:8)

So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today--to *love* the LORD your God and to *serve* him with all your heart and with all your soul-- (Deuteronomy 11:13)

If you carefully *observe* all these commands I am giving you to follow--to *love* the LORD your God, to *walk* in all his ways and to hold fast to him-- (Deuteronomy 11:22)

(Additional passages mention similar concepts, though not using the exact words listed above.)

What types of things did the LORD ask them to do? Only things they should be doing anyway - things that were for their own well-being! (10:13) What a wonderful God! (It's amazing - or perhaps appalling - to see how distorted a person's thinking can become, when sin takes over! People even come to the point that they consider the requirements of the LORD to be burdensome and something to be avoided!)

Everything in heaven and earth belongs to God (v.14), yet he chose to focus his attention (and undeserved favor) on these people. Because of this, they had an obligation have more than just a superficial, "external" devotion to God. They were to have an undivided devotion and loyalty that comes from the heart.

So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer. (Deuteronomy 10:16)

Their God was a great God, a mighty and awesome God, who showed love to those who were "outsiders," and who defended those who nobody else would defend (and they were to follow his example - verses 18-19). But he was also an impartial God, who could not be swayed from a righteous judgment against sin. If they chose to forsake him, they would have to suffer the consequences their rebellion earned.

Throughout this passage, there is a constant reference to the wonderful acts of God, in his providing and caring for his people - great deeds which they themselves witnessed (Deuteronomy 11:7) and which they were to teach to their children (those who were not yet alive when God did them - 11:18-21). They were witnesses not only of the often-miraculous protection and safety that he provided for them, but also of the great overwhelming judgments, poured out against those who chose to oppose him. Now they were about to receive from him even more blessings beyond imagination! All this in spite of the fact that they deserved the opposite. Their rebellion against God had been so great, that it was only on account of Moses, that they were not totally destroyed (Deuteronomy 10:10-11).

Though God blesses us beyond what we deserve, we must not forget that our mighty God is (and must be) impartial. If, when they entered the land, they would do the things God required of them (things that were for their own good), he would continue to bless them. But if they refused, and continued in their rebellion, he would, *of necessity*, let his anger burn against them. Considering all he had done, they would have more than earned it! And if it came to that point, not even a bribe (10:17) could prevent it from happening.

At this present moment, they were being given the choice of a blessing or a curse - and God, being the mighty God, had the power to give them whichever they asked for. (History shows that they chose the curse.)

QUESTIONS/THOUGHTS:

Today we do not have a duty to practice the ceremonial obligations that were given to Israel. (Those obligations had a special purpose in teaching about salvation and the work of Christ - which, at that time, was a future event.) But we *do* have the same obligation to have supreme devotion and love for God, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). What is *your* attitude toward your fulfillment of those duties? How does *your* attitude compare/contrast with the lax or rebellious attitude that most of Old Testament Israel had?

In the above passage, God describes our obligations as "for our own good." In the New Testament, Jesus makes demands such as these:

Jesus replied, " 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' " (Matthew 22:37-39)

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:37-39)

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus describes his "yoke" of discipleship as "easy" and the "burden" as "light."

Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

What is *your* attitude toward the obligations he places upon us? If you don't view them the way Jesus views them (as being "easy" and "light") why is that?

God warned the nation Israel that they would experience blessing if they followed his ways, and cursing if they opposed them. What is the attitude of *our* nation toward the God of the Bible and the moral influence of his Word? What type of circumstances are we experiencing - as far as blessings or judgment are concerned? Does there seem to be any correlation between our attitude (as a nation) toward God and his moral precepts, and what we are experiencing? Do you see any trends?

What does this passage tell us about "the mighty God"?

The "MIGHTY GOD"

Nehemiah 9:32

Now therefore, our God--the great and mighty and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love--do not treat lightly all the hardship that has come upon us, upon our kings, our officials, our priests, our prophets, our ancestors, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until today.

The context of this verse is a prayer of repentance, and of worship and praise to God, "who is from everlasting to everlasting" (verse 5b).

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. Then those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors. They stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth part of the day, and for another fourth they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God. (Nehemiah 9:1-3)

The results of sin - the "curses" God had warned them about in Deuteronomy - had taken place... *just as God had said they would.* (Should we be surprised?) They were now acknowledging God's righteousness in his judgment, as well as his faithfulness and compassion. They were now acknowledging the sinfulness of both their forefathers and themselves, as well as their deserving of the judgment they were at that moment experiencing (v. 36-37). In the moments that followed, the entire nation would be reaffirming commitment to their God.

They joined with their brothers, their nobles, and bound themselves with a curse, and an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments, ordinances and statutes of the LORD our Lord. (Nehemiah 10:29)

Throughout this prayer are various themes: the persistent sinfulness of the nation, the justice and righteousness of God, as well as his judgment and his love. Time after time, the people rebelled. Though God warned them of the consequences of rebellion, they would persist to the point that God would have to pour out judgment against them. They would turn back for a while (and for a while experience the blessings of God), but sooner or later they would again turn to sin.

Yet in all this, the goodness and love of God was evident. The theme of love and compassion was always present. The people never fully received what they deserved. Look at a few of the many passages:

But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to

their slavery in Egypt. *But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love*, and did not forsake them. Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,' and had committed great blasphemies, *you in your great mercies* did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. (Nehemiah 9:16-19)

Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and *according to your great mercies* you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them *according to your mercies*. (Nehemiah 9:26-28)

Many years you were patient with them, and warned them by your spirit through your prophets; yet they would not listen. Therefore you handed them over to the peoples of the lands. *Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God*. (Nehemiah 9:30-31)

Even as they were praying, they were experiencing judgment.

Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress. (Nehemiah 9:36-37)

More than that, they were willing to acknowledge that this judgment had come from the hand of God. But did they accuse God of wrongdoing? Never! Only rebellious people do that! Instead, they were repenting!

You have been just in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly; ... (Nehemiah 9:33)

It was this same God - the one they had so continually rebelled against - who they were now looking to for deliverance. And on what basis did they dare to do so? Was it on the basis of their works? Of course not! Was it on the basis of their promise to once again obey and "to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments, ordinances and statutes of the LORD our Lord" (Nehemiah 10:29b)? Even though their repentance was genuine, and it would result in a changed way-of-life, that was not the basis for their prayer. Remember the passage in Deuteronomy, which says that God "accepts no bribes" (10:17). We cannot bribe him with a promise to be "good."

No, their basis for expecting deliverance was *God himself*.

Centuries before, God had made a covenant with Abraham. The people knew that no matter what happened - no matter what the circumstances - God would not lie: he would keep his promise!

You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham; and you found his heart faithful before you, and made with him a covenant to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite; and you have fulfilled your promise, for you are righteous. (Nehemiah 9:7-8)

So they prayed:

Now therefore, our God--the great and mighty and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love--do not treat lightly all the hardship that has come upon us, upon our kings, our officials, our priests, our prophets, our ancestors, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until today. (Nehemiah 9:32)

To them, this covenant-keeping God was the "great God," the "mighty God," and the "awesome God." And he is still that today.

QUESTIONS/THOUGHTS:

What physical or spiritual blessings do you enjoy? Why? Do you deserve them? What do you deserve? Have (or will) you receive what you deserve? Why? What does this tell you about God?

Does our nation experience any blessings from God? Judgments? What do we as a nation deserve? Time and time again, the prophets teach that God must judge a nation that sins - especially if that nation has been exposed to the truth and has rejected it. We may someday have to be destroyed, just as Israel, Babylon, Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah, and many others have. *If* this happens, do we have a promise of future restoration, as Israel did? (Did any of the other nations, mentioned above, have a promise of future restoration?) What is the significance of this?

What does this passage tell us about "the mighty God"?

The "MIGHTY GOD"

Psalm 24:8

Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!

The study of the kingship and rule of God over the earth can prove to be very fascinating and enlightening. The LORD our God is "the great King over all the earth." (Psalm 47:2) He is "the blessed and *only* Ruler - the King of kings and Lord of Lords." (1 Timothy 6:15) He is the King of glory and we are his people.

This Psalm is divided into three parts:

1. Verses 1-2: The LORD - YAHWEH - is the supreme owner over all. He is the King!
2. Verses 3-6: A description of those who may enter his presence. They have clean hands and pure hearts, etc.
[Note that this passage does not mention *how* they got the clean hands and pure hearts. That is answered in a multitude of other places. It is God's power that makes it possible. *The King of glory himself gets the ultimate credit!* No wonder he is worthy of such worship and praise!]
3. Verses 7-10: The entrance of the King of glory through the gates of Jerusalem (called "the hill of the LORD" in verse 3).

This Psalm may have had initial reference to the LORD's entrance into Zion, when David brought the ark into the city (2 Samuel 6). But its significance seems to be far greater. This Psalm has long been considered prophetic, pointing to what the New Testament calls the "New (or 'heavenly') Jerusalem." Just as in this Psalm, the King - elsewhere called "the King of kings and Lord of Lords" - rules over that glorious city. He is supreme owner over all, and those who will enter his presence are those with "clean hands and pure hearts."

This is such a glorious Psalm, that perhaps it would be better to read it in its entirety and to think about what it says, than to spend a lot of time making comments about it. It will suffice to point out that verse 8 describes God as the "mighty LORD" twice; and verse 10 describes him as the "LORD of hosts" - also translated as the "LORD almighty." (See comments about the word "almighty" in the Introduction.)

Psalm 24:1-10

A Psalm of David.

The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein,
for he has founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.
He will receive blessing from the LORD
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.
Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Selah.

Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle!
Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift them up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory!

Selah.

QUESTIONS/THOUGHTS:

What does this Psalm say about the King of glory? Do *you* qualify for entrance into his presence? Explain.

What does this passage tell us about "the mighty God"?

The "MIGHTY GOD"

Isaiah 9:6

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.

In view of the already-studied uses of the phrase "mighty God," we might find this passage to be rather surprising. The title is ascribed to One who is called a "child" and a "son"! Yet the phrase "mighty God" does exist in this passage; and unless we want to be guilty of adding to or subtracting from the Word of God, we must accept it.

Acknowledging these things does *not* mean that we will understand all the answers to all the questions that might arise because of what we have read. But it does mean that we are willing to accept God as he reveals himself (whether or not we fully understand it), instead of inventing a "God-concept" that caters to our imaginations and preferences. (Doing so would be idolatry.)

There is much in the Bible that does not appeal to the "natural" (unregenerate) mind. Many things are not presented in the ways that one's "preconceived notions" would mandate. No wonder the apostle Paul declares that our minds must be "renewed"! (Romans 12:2) No wonder he describes the mind that has not submitted to Christ as "darkened in understanding"! (Ephesians 4:18)

We should reflect on the fact that *no* revelation of the mighty God could ever exhaustively reveal his infinite nature. Any revelation in creation would (and must be) only a finite reflection of the infinite One who created all things. Yet throughout Scripture, we read that - because of his great love for us - God *has* revealed himself to us in many ways! And here we read about what is perhaps the most amazing - yet most complete (though still finite) - revelation of all!

Let us praise him and give him the glory he deserves. (See Revelation 14:7.) But let us *never* become so arrogant that we think we - finite beings of the dust - can fully comprehend the God who made us, and who reveals himself to us. We cannot fully comprehend creation itself (Ecclesiastes 8:17); how much less can we comprehend the wonders of our Creator!

The context of this verse refers to a coming Ruler, who will reign on David's throne *forever* (verse 7) - his rule will never come to an end. Clearly, this will be no ordinary ruler. The four titles he bears show this quite vividly: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And who will accomplish all this? None other than "the LORD of hosts" (or "the LORD Almighty") himself - the one called "the mighty God" in many places throughout the Old Testament!

QUESTIONS/THOUGHTS:

We find in Luke 1:78-79 a reference to Isaiah 9:2 (the "introductory statement" to the verse currently under consideration). What is the significance of this prophetic statement?

Isn't God awesome? Should he receive anything less than our utmost devotion and praise? Should we not be filled with wonder and amazement every time we even *begin* to try to comprehend his greatness?

What does this passage tell us about "the mighty God"?

The "MIGHTY GOD"

Isaiah 10:21

A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.

Unlike the previous Isaiah passage, this verse better fits our expectations. As we read the context, we see that the reference is to "the LORD, the Holy One of Israel" (verse 20).

This passage mentions a day that a "remnant" of Israel would once again rely on the LORD. But it warns us that *only* a "remnant" would return.

For though your people, O Israel, are like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. For the Lord, the LORD of hosts, will bring about this destruction as decreed, in all the land. (Isaiah 10:22-23)

QUESTIONS/THOUGHTS:

The One who is going to accomplish the things mentioned in the Isaiah 9:1-7 passage is the same One who is going to carry out the destruction mentioned in this passage. Perhaps we should reflect upon this for a while. The God who is the God of mercy and grace is also the God of righteous judgment. Surely sin is no trivial matter in his sight!

Part of this passage (verses 22-23) is quoted in Romans 9:27-28 - in the middle of the great passage dealing with God's sovereignty and man's responsibility (Romans 9-11). Perhaps you might want to look at these chapters. You will discover that the issue of sovereignty and responsibility is no less "mind-boggling" than the issue of who the "mighty God" is, as revealed in these two Isaiah passages! Our duty is to accept the Word of God as true, to comprehend it to whatever extent our finite minds can do so, and then to leave the rest to the One who comprehends all things exhaustively!

What does this passage tell us about "the mighty God"?

The "MIGHTY GOD"

Jeremiah 32:18-19

You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the fathers' sins into the laps of their children after them. O great and powerful God, whose name is the LORD Almighty, great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men; you reward everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve.

This passage is nothing more than a repeat of a familiar theme throughout the Scriptures. In fact, part of this passage is a quotation of the very description ("name") that God gives for himself, when he appeared before Moses:

The LORD came down in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed his name, "the LORD."

The LORD passed in front of Moses and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and kind God, who is slow to anger and abounding in kindness and faithfulness, who shows his love to thousands of generations, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin, yet does not let the guilty go unpunished, punishing the children for the sins of the parents, to the third and fourth generation." (Exodus 34:5-7)

Many people become offended when they read such verses. But what is the conduct of the godly person?

Moses immediately bowed, with his face touching the ground, and worshiped. (Exodus 34:8)

At first glance, it might appear that the phrase "mighty God" does not occur in this passage. Yet it must be remembered that our study includes all instances in which the *Hebrew* word for this concept occurs. In this instance, the Hebrew word is translated as "powerful" (in the NIV translation). In some other translations the word is translated as "mighty." (It might be of interest to note that the use of the word "mighty" in the phrase "mighty are your deeds" is another Hebrew word that emphasizes the greatness and vastness of those deeds.)

QUESTIONS/THOUGHTS:

It might be beneficial to read the entire chapter, to learn more about the way God's great love and his judgment "co-exist." They do not "contradict," as some (who do not submit to God's Word) might claim. (Their concept of "God" is nothing more than an "image" they have concocted in their own minds. It never came from Scripture.) How are God's "great purposes" and "mighty deeds" (verse 19) displayed?

You may want to look for other passages which describe God in this manner. Examine the context of the verses you find. What do these verses reveal about our mighty God? How does this description of God compare with your concept of him (either now or in the past)?

What is your response to such a God? Do you respond in the manner that Moses did? Explain.

Do your prayers include the depth of worship and praise and adoration of God for who he is, as does this prayer? (You could also consider the prayer mentioned in the study about Nehemiah 9:32.) What might you learn about prayer (and put into practice) based upon this passage (and others like it)?

What does this passage tell us about "the mighty God"?

