

Mighty God Isaiah 9:6

In this season of Advent, we are working our way through a familiar prophecy about the birth of Jesus Christ. Isaiah 9:6 says, *“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.”* This was a prophecy given to the people of Israel, who had rejected God, committed all kinds of detestable practices, and experienced devastating judgment because of it. Their country lay in ruins, most of the inhabitants were dead, and those who survived were in exile in Babylon.

But God was not done with them. Even though they had been faithless, he would be faithful. This prophecy is one of many that promised that God would deliver his people by giving them a king – a much different king than they had known before. A king that would bring hope, joy, and freedom, and this is one of the prophecies that described him. It uses four names, and we will be looking at one of them each week of Advent. Last week we looked at Wonderful Counselor and today we turn to Mighty God. I want to look at what I think Mighty God meant to them back then, how Jesus fulfilled that prophecy, and what it means for us today.

When I looked at the Hebrew words behind this name I found that the word for “mighty” was most often used for elite warriors in battle, the champions of the armies. You may remember that Goliath was the champion of the Philistine army and nobody wanted to fight him because it was certain death. King David also had an elite fighting force who were simply known as his “mighty men.” In our day and age, we have the Army Rangers, Navy Seals, Green Beret, Delta Force, and others that none of us would ever want to face in battle. That’s the idea behind this name for the promised future king. He would be a warrior, a champion.

But he wouldn’t be just a mighty man, the name given him was “Mighty God.” Ellicott’s Commentary states: *“It is significant that the word for “God” is not Elohim, which may be used in a lower sense for those who are representatives of God, but El, which is never used by Isaiah, or any other Old Testament writer, in any lower sense than that of absolute Deity.”* In other words, this prophecy and this name is saying that their future king would not be just a human warrior king, he would be a divine warrior king.

As we saw last week, the name Wonderful Counselor had special significance for the people in exile because of their background, and I think the same would have been true for this name. Mighty God wasn't just a good name, it was exactly the kind of king they needed in their situation. They needed a divine warrior king.

We have to think about what they had just been through and what their current situation was. I shared some history last week about the Assyrians and Babylonians and how the armies of those empires had been instruments of God's judgment against the people of Israel and Judah. Today I want to help us get a better idea of how powerful and terrifying those armies would have been. Most of the information I found was about the Assyrian army, which the northern kingdom encountered, but they would have been very similar to the Babylonian army which is the one the Jewish exiles had encountered. Here's a little bit about what those armies were like.

The Assyrian army was the fiercest in the world for a long time and conquered a huge area including the northern kingdom of Israel. The scholar Paul Kriwaczek describes how the army would have appeared to an opponent: (Picture) *"He would have seen, in the center of the formation, the main body of infantry, compact groups of spearmen, their weapon points glittering in the sun, each arranged in ten files of twenty ranks. He would have marveled – and perhaps trembled – at the discipline and precision of their maneuvering, a contrast to the relatively freewheeling manner of previous armies, for the reforms had introduced a highly developed and effective command structure. They were well protected and even better equipped, for Assyria was fielding the very first iron armies: iron swords, iron spear blades, iron helmets and even iron scales sewn as armor on to their tunics. In addition, there were archers and slingers, the archers equipped with the new composite bow which could fire long-range over the advancing infantry, and, at the forefront, the siege engines of the shock troops and... formations of chariots, mobile missile platforms, the ancient equivalent of tanks."*

The Assyrian army was a terrifying force to behold and encounter, and they were highly effective because not only were they able to dominate in the open field of battle, they were also able to conquer fortified cities. The World History Encyclopedia states: (Picture) *"More than anything else, the Assyrian army excelled at siege warfare, and was probably the first force to carry a separate*

corps of engineers...Assault was their principal tactic against the heavily fortified cities of the Near East. They developed a great variety of methods for breaching enemy walls: soldiers were employed to undermine walls or to light fires underneath wooden gates, and ramps were thrown up to allow men to go over the ramparts or to attempt a breach on the upper section of wall where it was the least thick. Mobile ladders allowed attackers to cross moats and quickly assault any point in defenses. These operations were covered by masses of archers, who were the core of the infantry. But the pride of the Assyrian siege train were their engines. These were multistoried wooden towers with four wheels and a turret on top and one or two battering rams at the base.” Because of their mastery of siege warfare, the Assyrians became an unstoppable military force that subdued many lesser nations.

At some point after the expansion of the empire, the kingdom of Babylon, which had been a vassal state, led by a man named Nebuchadnezzar, rebelled against Assyria and was able to conquer their capitol of Nineveh. They fought with the same tactics and ferocity as the Assyrians and were able to take over the empire and expand it even further, which eventually brought them to Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The king of Judah had rebelled and they were there to punish him. When he resisted behind the massive protective walls of Jerusalem, the Babylonian army laid siege to the city. After 18 months of siege and famine the walls were breached, and the city was taken and utterly demolished. When the army finally left, there was nothing left. Just a heap of ruins.

That’s what the exiles had been through – overthrown and captured by an unstoppable enemy who had led them hundreds of miles away from home. What hope did they have for their future? Who could possibly deliver them from someone like Nebuchadnezzar and his unstoppable Babylonian war machine?

It was because they were in that situation, I think this second name in Isaiah’s prophecy would have been especially significant and brought them hope. God was going to send them a new king, and one of his names would be “Mighty God” – a divine warrior king. A king with the power and might to deliver them from an enemy as strong and formidable as Nebuchadnezzar. That’s the king they started to look for. And they continued to look for him through the next five centuries of oppression under various empires who ruled over them with their powerful armies.

Eventually the Roman Empire came to power, and it was then that God fulfilled his promise to send a deliverer to his people – Jesus of Nazareth. But he wasn't exactly the kind of deliverer the people had in mind. I think they were looking for a divine warrior king that would raise up an army to overthrow the Romans and establish an earthly kingdom that would last forever. And they could see that Jesus had divine power and that people were drawn to him – he was miraculously healing people, casting out demons, and even raising people from the dead. But he wasn't a military leader like they were expecting, he was a teacher. And he didn't raise up an army of soldiers, he gathered a following of disciples. And they weren't going out on raids to fight against the Romans, they were going into towns and villages to teach people about God and heal their diseases.

So there was a lot of confusion about who Jesus was. Was he the Messiah or not? Some thought he was, but many did not because he just didn't fit in with what they were expecting. At one point when he had reached the height of popularity and could have easily started a rebellion against Rome, he avoided their efforts to make him king. And because of that the people quickly gave up on him and rejected him. Their religious leaders even convinced the Romans to have him crucified, and he was nailed to a cross and died a painful death. He wasn't the divine warrior king they were looking for.

But did he fulfill that prophecy? If so, how did he fulfill it? What the people of Israel didn't realize is that their greatest enemies weren't kings or emperors or armies. Their greatest enemies were Satan, the great deceiver, and the sin inside them that would lead to their eternal condemnation. They had all come under overwhelming spiritual oppression. They didn't see it and they were giving themselves over in despicable ways. God had been telling them that for hundreds of years through the Law, the sacrifices, the priests, and the prophets. He had been warning them and calling them to repent, so they could enjoy forgiveness, peace and freedom, and they refused to listen. They bowed to their greatest enemies and hardened their hearts against God and he's the one that actually brought the Assyrians and Babylonians to punish them.

So when God promised to send them a divine warrior king to deliver them, it wasn't to deliver them from a worldly king or empire, it was to deliver them from sin and Satan and condemnation, and that's exactly what Jesus of Nazareth did.

Colossians 2:13-15 says it like this: *“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him (Christ), having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”*

God sent Jesus to destroy our deadliest enemies, and that’s exactly what he did when he died on the cross. He completely demolished the power of sin to condemn and control us and he triumphed over the efforts of Satan to destroy us. Hebrews 2:14-15 says: *“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”*

His triumph on the cross was so complete that there is nothing sin or Satan can do to destroy us if we bow in worship and surrender to our Divine Warrior King. Our enemies are completely powerless against us. Romans 8:1 says, *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* And Romans 8:38-39 promises: *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

We can walk in joy and freedom with everlasting peace in our souls if we follow Christ. In him we have everything we need to stand firm and resist any ongoing efforts today to trip us up, knock us down, and make us ineffective. And one day when Christ returns, we will see him as that Divine Warrior King with his unstoppable angelic army to completely destroy all our enemies forever.

What does this mean for us today? It means we need to bow to King Jesus. We need to receive him as our Deliverer. We need to trust him as our Savior and depend on him to carry us through. We will face ongoing attacks from our enemy without and within. Satan knows he’s defeated, but he isn’t going down without a fight. Sin is ultimately defeated as well, but we still go through life in these bodies of flesh. We’re in a spiritual war here on earth and we will have to fight every day

of our lives. But it's a war that's already been won and we've already been fully equipped for victory if we will stand in Christ.

Ephesians 6:10-18 says: *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."*

And here is that armor: *"Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints."*

These are the ways that we stand firm against an enemy that's already been defeated but is still trying to take us down. Learn to stand firm in the Lord and in the power of his might and you will never fall. And at the end of this age, all of us who have stood firm by the grace of our Lord and Savior, will be ushered into his glorious kingdom to live forever and ever.