

THEISM

God Is Jealous

When the Ten Commandments were given at Mt. Sinai, God described himself saying, “I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9). When Moses went up onto Mt. Sinai to receive the second set of tablets containing the Ten Commandments, God reiterated, “the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Exodus 34:14). Just before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, Moses told them that “the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (Deuteronomy 4:23-24). Moses again warned, “the LORD your God is a jealous God among you” (Deuteronomy 6:15). Before Joshua died, he described God as “a jealous God” (Joshua 24:19). The prophet Nahum wrote that “God is jealous, and the LORD avenges” (Nahum 1:2). When the Israelites were in Babylonian captivity, God promised that he would “bring back the captives . . . and I will be jealous for My holy name” (Ezekiel 39:25).

Merriam-Webster Online Collegiate Dictionary defines jealousy as “intolerant of rivalry or unfaithfulness; disposed to suspect rivalry or unfaithfulness; hostile toward a rival or one believed to enjoy an advantage; vigilant in guarding a possession.” This definition of jealousy aptly indicates God’s intolerance of other gods. God is exclusive! He tolerates no other. “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7). This commandment applies to both nations and individuals. Israel was instructed many times not to depart from God (Exodus 34:12; Deuteronomy 4:23; Deuteronomy 6:12; Joshua 24:20) and not to follow other gods (Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 6:14; 7:16; 11:16; 28:14; Joshua 23:7), but to remain faithful to God (Deuteronomy 6:13, 18). God warned Israel not to make molded images of false gods (Exodus 20:4; 34:13-17; Deuteronomy 5:8; 7:4; 8:19; 12:30-31; 28:36, 64; 30:17-18; Joshua 23:16; 24:20; 1 Kings 9:6-9). Moreover, images of false gods were to be destroyed (Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 6:14; 7:25; 12:2-3).

God is jealous in that he is “vigilant in guarding his possession” Israel. He reminded Israel of past blessings that He had given them (Deuteronomy 2:7; 4:32-35; 6:20-23). He promised them future blessings when they remained loyal to him (Deuteronomy 6:10-11, 18; 28:3-6), but curses when they turned away from him (Deuteronomy 11:28, 27:15-26; 28:16-19). If they disobeyed, God would allow them to perish (Deuteronomy 4:25-28; Joshua 24:20). Yet, the Israelites are assured that after they have forsaken God, but later seek the Lord, they will find him (2 Chronicles 15:2) because God is merciful (Deuteronomy 4:29-31) and he will forgive (1 Samuel 7:3). God had Moses write a song for Israel to sing because he said, “When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey . . . they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant” (Deuteronomy 31:20).

God is jealous in that he is “hostile toward a rival or one believed to enjoy an advantage.” God’s hostility is like “a consuming fire” (Deuteronomy 4:24). He himself said that he visits “the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Exodus 20:5-6; Deuteronomy 5:9-10). Although God is “slow to anger and great in power . . . he will make an utter end . . . of his enemies” (Nahum 1:3, 8) just as he was furiously jealous against Assyria because it had opposed Israel.

In spite of God’s reminders, promises, warnings, and commandments, Israel forsook God and turned to other gods periodically throughout the periods of the judges (Judges 2:12-13; 10:6) and the kings (1 Kings 9:9; 2 Chronicles 7:22; 2 Kings 21:22), provoking God to jealousy (1 Kings 14:22). Whenever they did, God allowed them to be conquered by other nations (Judges

3:12; 6:1; 13:1). Serving other gods was considered as “evil in the sight of the Lord” (e.g., Judges 3:7; 4:1; 10:6; 1 Kings 11:6; 15:34; 16:30; 22:52; 2 Kings 3:2; 8:18).

As God was jealous then, so also is he now. As Israel was told that if they forsook God he would forsake them, so also Jesus told his disciples “whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:33, see also Luke 12:9). Paul wrote that “if we deny him, He also will deny us” (2 Timothy 2:12). The Israelites provoked God to jealousy whenever they turned to false gods who were in the land. What about us? Do we not also provoke God to jealousy whenever we turn to false gods in our culture? Many contemporary false gods are known by their philosophical terms, such as naturalism, materialism, secularism, statism, feminism, hedonism, relativism, etc. Whenever we turn to evolutionism, we have surely replaced the God of creation with the god of naturalism. Whenever we trust in material possessions, we turn away from God, just as did the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-24; Mark 10:17-25), and the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21). When in the name of secularism, we fail to apply God’s word to education and politics, or any other segment of life, we make secularism our God and thereby turn away from God. Whenever we think and act like civil governments have final authority in determining behavioral standards, we turn away from God to the god of statism. When in the name of feminism, we substitute gender equality for God’s desire that man be head over woman (Genesis 2:18; 21-23; 3:16; 1 Corinthians 13:3; 1 Timothy 2:8-14), we turn away from God. Whenever our goals are personal pleasures rather than service to God and fellow men, we turn away from God (Luke 8:14). When in the name of relativism, we act like there are no absolute values and that everyone’s behavior must be tolerated as equally valid, we deny God’s word as the law that must be obeyed.

Whenever we thus turn to false gods of our age, do we not also act like the ancient Israelites and provoke God to jealousy? Just as the ancient Israelites sometimes performed their sacrificial rituals to the true God yet were at the same time guilty of worshipping false gods (Zephaniah 1:5), so we can also be guilty of attending Christian worship assemblies yet at the same time devoting ourselves to current philosophical gods. Such synchronizing practices are just as unacceptable now as they were to God then (Deuteronomy 6:13-14; Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8). Faithfulness to God does not permit service to other gods.

Whenever people turn away from God, they lose their knowledge of God (Judges 3:7; 1 Samuel 12:9; Galatians 4:8) and fail to govern themselves by the word of God (Hosea 4:1-6). Turning away from the God is not just a matter of changing religious rituals. Since God is the foundation of law, turning away from God means turning away from God’s commandments and replacing them with ordinances of false religions. Laws are meant not only for individuals but also for communities. Whenever a nation’s laws are in the process of changing, as ours now appear to be, then that nation is also in the process of changing its God and its religious practices. Such changes, unless reversed, can only bring the nation to ruin because God turns against those who turn against him. However, a nation that returns to God will be forgiven (2 Chronicles 7:14). Although individual citizens may personally remain faithful to God, as Jeremiah did, still, whenever a nation forsakes God, individual citizens of that nation share consequences of God’s judgment against it. Godly citizens should work to make their nation’s laws conform to God’s statutes for many reasons, one of which is that God is jealous – a consuming fire – intolerant of faithlessness.

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