

## Objections to Christianity

Is the God of the Bible immature by displaying jealousy and fits of rage?

Dr. Copen in his book "Is God a Moral Monster?" References a statement by Oprah Winfrey who shared that her impatience with "rules, belief systems and doctrines" began when she, in her late 20s, heard a Baptist pastor say that God was jealous. Such a description of God made Him petty in the eyes of Oprah so she began to pursue other forms of spirituality while rejecting Christianity.

Where do we learn that God is jealous?

Exodus 34:14 "...for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."

Deuteronomy 4:24 "For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

Deuteronomy 6:15 "For the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth."

Nahum 1:2 "The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies."

The second part of the last two verses listed contribute to the accusation that God is immature because He admits that He kindles His anger and His acts of vengeance are seen as fits of rage similar to a child of two years.

An accusation that can be added against God is hypocrisy when we compare the verses above to the following.

Proverbs 14:30 "A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot."

James 3:16 "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice."

To answer this objection about the character of God described in Holy Scripture, the first thing that must be established is that God uses anthropomorphic language to best communicate with us. Anthropomorphisms describe given human traits to God so that we can relate to Him. Because we see life through a dim glass and because we are on this side of the sun, God has to bend down to us and communicate with us in ways we can understand and relate. The use of the word "jealous" when describing God is a clear example of anthropomorphism.

The word jealous generally refers to the thoughts or feelings of insecurity, fear, and concern over a relative lack of possessions or safety. For our purposes we can categorize jealousy in one of two ways. There is a jealousy for love of self or a jealousy for the love of another. An example of each would be a mother being jealous over her daughter's relationship with her boyfriend because she wants to be her daughter's sole companion and a father being jealous over the same daughter's relationship because he wants to protect her chastity.

Understanding jealousy as love for self or love for another allows us to see why passages such as from Proverbs 14:30 and James 3:16 can warn against jealousy because such is out of love for self. Those passages above that describe God as being jealous clearly fall under the definition of love for another.

Consider some of the greatest heartaches that can occur in a person's lifetime. The death of a loved one is at the top. The unfaithfulness of a spouse is very close to the top. That is how God relates to His people. He shows us how difficult it is to see His people worship false gods. The best way for God to show us how it hurts Him is as a cheated lover. Instead of God being Jealous, Cope makes the point that we should see Him as vulnerable, which is God being gracious to us. Cope said, "Jealousy implies vulnerability and the capacity to experience pain—not pettiness of a power hungry deity obsessed with dominating people. Amazingly the disappointed Husband of Israel only requires her repentance to restore the relationship."

No book but Hosea better describes this love relationship God has with His people. Hosea follows the directives of the Lord and marries a woman he knows will be unfaithful to him. The prophet plays the role of

God and his wife plays the role of the people of Israel. Throughout the book, Hosea describes the people turning away from the Lord and turning toward other gods (4:12-3; 8:5-6). This propensity for idolatry meant that the Israelites lived as if they were not God's people. And though God told them as much through the birth of Hosea's third child, Lo-ammi (not my people), He also reminded them that He would ultimately restore their relationship with Him, using the intimate and personal language of "sons" to describe His wayward people (1:9-10; 11:1).

Finally, let's look at God's anger. The Bible definitely describes God having anger. Below are a small sampling.

Deuteronomy 9:8 "Even at Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, and the Lord was so angry with you that He would have destroyed you."

Exodus 15:7 "And in the greatness of Your excellence You overthrow those who rise up against You; You send forth Your burning anger, and it consumes them as chaff."

Exodus 32:10-11 "'Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.' Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, 'O Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?'"

Numbers 11:1-2 "Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the Lord; and when the Lord heard it, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. The people therefore cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord and the fire died out."

2 Kings 13:3 "So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He gave them continually into the hand of Hazael king of Aram, and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael."

The reason for God's anger has several layers. Those layers include Israel destroying their own souls by worshipping false gods, their ungratefulness after God delivers them again and again, and their overall ungratefulness for God revealing Himself to them and bringing them under His covenant. This makes God's anger just anger.

Recall these passages: 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

Joel 2:13 "'And rend your hearts and not your garments.' Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster."

Numbers 14:18 "The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation."

God being angry over His people participating in false worship is best seen in Jesus overturning the tables of the money changers. His anger was calculated as it was necessary and poignant. It was necessary in that money exchangers needed to end their business abruptly so that the worshippers who came to worship could do so without distraction. It was poignant because it emphasized what Jesus taught as priority which is the worship of God and God alone. Anything that comes in the way of worshipping the one true God is to be "turned over."

Once again we see that the accusations toward God reveal opposite virtues.