

It Is Written

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IN DEFENSE OF A JEALOUS GOD

By Richard Blackford

Several times, the Bible states that God is a jealous God. One of those is in the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image...Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God..." (Exodus 20:4-5). That conjures a kneejerk reaction as something bad, for jealousy is a vice rather than a virtue (Galatians 5:20). We're even told God's name is "Jealous" (Exodus 34:14). We're also told that "Love is not jealous" (1 Corinthians 13:4). How can all this be?

Oprah states, "I was in my 20s, and I remember sitting in a church...the minister was preaching about...how the Lord thy God was a jealous God and the Lord thy God would condemn us for whatever, and I remember I had a spiritual! And I was in my late 20s, and I suddenly thought, 'How can this God who is all loving and all-powerful, why would God be jealous of me?'" [Finding Your Spiritual Path Webcast Transcript, January 14, 2009 www.oprah.com/spirit]. This moment caused her to turn from her childhood faith in the God of the Bible to a New Age faith in which there are many paths, not one, as the Bible teaches (Matthew 7:13-14).

1. Why would God be jealous of idols? "...For we know that an idol is nothing..." (1 Corinthians 8:4). An idol is powerless and is absolutely no threat to the person of God.

2. The misunderstanding is that God is not jealous of us. He is jealous for us. Since an idol cannot save us, when we turn to an idol, we turn away from the only one who can save us. The idol is not a threat to God but to us. God loves us and doesn't want us to be lost, so He is jealous on our behalf. So, while envy is always used in a bad sense, jealousy can be either good or bad, depending on context. We should be thankful and rejoice at the jealousy of God. He is looking out for us.

Not all idols are made of wood, stone, or gold (think "golden calf"). They can get more sophisticated and more deceptive. Samuel said that stubbornness is like idolatry (1 Samuel 15:23). Do you know anybody who is stubborn? When stubbornness stands in our way of serving God, we put ourselves first. It can become "self worship." Paul said "covetousness is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5).

Covetousness is an insatiable desire for worldly gain - to find fulfillment, meaning, and purpose in things instead of in God. We are not to covet the things of others. Again, covetousness is self-centered and amounts to self-worship.

We cannot afford to misunderstand why God is a jealous God. We should be very grateful that God is jealous for us, not of us.

Why Did David Use Instruments?

By Steven Deaton

In discussions with denominational folks about instrumental music, they will sometimes claim that David's use of them justifies their use today. Is this true?

First, let us establish that David is not our Savior. He is not the authority in Christianity, Jesus is (Colossians 3:17; Matthew 28:18). David was a prophet; he was the sweet psalmist of Israel, guided by the Spirit of God. Still, the New Testament reveals that we are not to follow and heed the Law or

prophets, but the Son of God (Matthew 17:1-5).

Second, David used the instruments because God commanded him to (2 Chronicles 29:25). It is not as though David presumptuously changed the worship of God. Many today believe they can. Without a commandment from God, they alter what the New Testament says about worship. They add instrumental music, social activities, even outright entertainment. All such activities are without divine authority and render the worship vain (Matthew 15:7-9).

Third, there are many things David did that we cannot do. David offered and commended animal sacrifices (Psalms 51:19). He had many wives (2 Samuel 3:2-5; 5:13; 12:8). Who will argue that we should offer bulls and goats or that a man can practice polygamy because David did? Honesty demands that none of these things are permissible because of David's practices; not sacrifices, not polygamy, not instrumental music in worship.

The bottom line is, David used instruments because that is what God commanded him to do. In our worship we must sing, because this is what God commands us to do (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Let us be like David, people after God's own heart, by submitting to the Lord's will, not living by ours.

What the Quran Doesn't Have

Adapted from Shahriq Khan

When I was Muslim, I never noticed what the Quran doesn't have: dates, places, and names you can check. Read the Quran's stories and you won't see chronology or hardly any geography. Kings are called only "Pharaoh" and events float in no particular year. Where did the story happen? When? Under whom? The text doesn't say. And you conveniently can't check it.

Now read the opening of Luke 3: "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness." There are SEVEN historical anchors in one sentence: an emperor, a governor, three rulers with their exact territories, and two high priests.

And people have checked these references for centuries, often trying to break it. Skeptics mocked Luke's "Lysanias ... of Abilene" as an error until an inscription verified the reference. Pilate was discounted by some until the Pilate Stone was found at Caesarea in 1961 with his name and title carved in it.

One book floats above history where nothing can touch it. The other planted its flag in checkable ground and said: dig. They dug. It's still standing.

Looking Forward to Bible Study

By Frank Himmel

Kids like to go to Bible class. They come into the building and head straight for their classrooms. When they come out, they can't wait to show Mom and Dad what they did. I've seen considerable disappointment on some little faces, and at times even tears, when on Sunday evenings they march off to class, only to be told this is not class time.

How about adults? Do we have the same enthusiasm for Bible study? Some do. They always read the text and answer questions ahead of time. Their questions and comments indicate they have been thinking about the text, either forming an opinion or perhaps wondering what something means. Others show less interest. They rarely bring their lesson books, and when they do, the book is likely blank. Some are just as likely to be absent as present. They view the worship hour as mandatory but the Bible study hour as optional. When such little value is placed on public study, it would be surprising indeed if much private study takes place.

The psalmist eagerly awaited nightfall, when "the daily grind" ended and he was free to reflect on God's word. What do you do with your spare time?