

Other Gods

God's jealousy over our unfaithfulness does not arise from some insecurity on His part, but from anguish over what we are doing to ourselves.

“You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3).

“They forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger” (Judg. 2:12).

“You have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore, I will deliver you no more” (Judg. 10:13).



Of all the attributes of the Biblical God, the one that gets the most attention among skeptics is His anger over people going after other gods. Repeatedly, the Lord calls Himself “a jealous God” who threatens grave consequences if people do not give Him their full allegiance (Ex. 20:5; Deut. 4:24; Josh. 24:19; etc.). Atheist Richard Dawkins notes that “God’s monumental rage whenever his chosen people flirted with a rival god resembles nothing so much as sexual jealousy of the worst kind” (*The God Delusion*, p. 243). Surely God must have quite a self-confidence problem if He’s that sensitive to people getting involved with the competition. How can such a god be worthy of our respect?

This view of God and His jealous anger trivializes the nature of humanity and our relationship to Him. Regardless of what we may think of the Biblical God, we must acknowledge that *everyone of us has a god of some kind in our lives*. A “god” is simply an object, an ideal, or a passion that holds ultimate sway over our affections. Our god is that for which we will sacrifice everything else in our lives. In more primitive times, the gods were idols made of stone or wood or precious metals. Today, the gods come in the form of money, power, investments, careers, sex, hobbies, social causes, family, friends, drugs, education, sports, houses, electronic devices, and a thousand other worldly pursuits. None of these things are inherently evil in themselves; but when they become the locus of our existence—the thing that, if lost, we lose all reason for living—then they have become our god. We are then in bondage to whatever demands these gods make upon our life.

Therein lies the danger that these false gods pose to our well-being. They were never designed to fulfill the innermost desires of our heart and will always come up short in satisfying those desires. They are fragile and untrustworthy, and sooner or later will fail us. When they do, we will be left facing life alone and helpless.

The God of the Bible, on the other hand—the timeless, spaceless, immaterial Being who has created all things and sustains all things by His infinite power—is not bound by these limitations. He demands our allegiance, not to assuage some insecurity on His part, but because *we* need the benefits that only He can provide. He made us for a higher purpose than the false gods can address, and we can find that purpose only in a close relationship with Him.

So, when we forsake God for other gods, He will not punish us arbitrarily. He respects our free will and allows us to experience the natural consequences of our decisions. As with ancient Israel, He will “deliver you no more,” leaving us to struggle with the wreckage we have created by chasing our idols. God is angry at our rebellion, yes; but He is also grieved at the foolishness of those who had every reason to know better.

— David King