

Is God Jealous?

There are many passages in the Bible that say or imply that God can be jealous. Ex. 34, for instance, says: “Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” Yet, the idea that God is jealous does not sit easy with us. Why would an almighty and holy God be jealous of finite and mortal creatures? Also, how could God be jealous of us over our worshiping idols, given that those idols do not really exist? Finally, jealousy seems possessive and demanding, something a perfectly good God would not be. Thus, is God truly jealous? If so, how should we respond? And what does it mean for the Christian life if God is a jealous God?

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I. Introduction

A. A few reasons to think that God is jealous

B. A few worries

C. Structure of the talk

II. What Is Jealousy?

A. Three remarks:

1. Jealousy and envy
2. Jealousy as an episode and jealousy as a character trait
3. Jealousy as a relation

B. Four theories of jealousy

1. Fear of loss theory (Jerome Neu, Leila Tov-Ruach)
2. Normative judgement theory (Robert Solomon)

3. Desire-judgement theory (Luke Purshouse)

4. Affection-desire-judgement theory (Michael Wreen)

III. Jealousy in the Bible

A. Human jealousy

B. Something remarkable about divine jealousy

C. God's jealousy in the Bible

1. God's jealousy on particular occasions

2. God's properties are described as 'jealous'

3. Jealousy as a defining character trait of God

D. How this fits the affection-desire-judgement theory of jealousy

IV. Philosophical Arguments

A. The argument from divine love. Structure of the argument:

(1) God loves humans

(2) If someone loves someone else, then he will be jealous of that person over some other person if (i) he believes that that person gives (too much of) his love to that other person or might be giving (too much of) his love to that other person, he does not deem that belief irrational, and he has no reason to think that that person does not deserve his love or special attention

(3) Hence, God will be jealous if humans love or serve another god

B. The argument from the image of God. Structure of the argument:

(1) Humans have been created in the image of God

- (2) To be created in the image of God is to share certain properties with God
- (3) Humans share certain properties with God
- (4) Human beings are jealous beings
- (4) If human beings have a property and their having that property does not issue from their finiteness or sinfulness, then their having that property is part of what it is to be created in the image of God
- (5) To be a jealous being does not issue from one's being finite or sinful
- (6) Human beings share with God the property of being jealous
- (7) God is jealous

V. Objections

- A. Jealousy implies that one does not know that one is jealous
- B. Idols do not exist
- C. The jealous person is inconsistent
- D. Jealousy is morally wrong

VI. Implications

- A. Read the Bible differently
- B. Revise our image of God
- C. Revise our image of ourselves

Suggested Readings:

- Good, Edwin M. (1962). "Jealousy", in George A. Buttrick, Keith George, and Crim Butterick (eds.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol 2 (New York: Abingdon), 806-807.
- Neu, Jerome. (1980). "Jealous Thoughts", in Amélie O. Rorty (ed.), *Explaining Emotions* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 425-463.
- Opperwall, Nola J. (1982). "Jealousy", in Geoffrey W. Bromiley (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol 2 (Exeter: Paternoster Press), 971-973.
- Renaud, Bernard. (1963). *Je suis un Dieu jaloux. Evolution sémantique et signification théologique de qin^e 'ah* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf).
- Solomon, Robert C. (1977). *The Passions* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press).
- Tov-Ruach, Leila. (1980). "Jealousy, Attention, and Loss", in Amélie O. Rorty (ed.), *Explaining Emotions* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 465-488.
- Wreen, Michael J. (1989). "Jealousy", *Noûs* 23.5, 635-652.