

Jealous and Vengeful God (Matot-Masai)

“I had rather be a toad, and live upon the vapor of a dungeon than keep a corner in the thing I love for others uses.”-William Shakespeare

There is a dark and dangerous side to our God and beware all who may unleash it. We believe in His mercy, but also in His justice. There is a divine fairness in His eternal plans that no human will ever fathom. However, we also witness His wrath, His anger, the death and destruction he lets loose upon the earth.

In the Bible we see two general victims of His wrath. Perhaps ironically, He is most angry at the people of Israel. Every infraction, every betrayal of the ancient covenant brings hardship, poverty, famine, conquerors, exile, persecution and even death. But there is also the element of mercy. He punishes Israel but does not obliterate Israel. The second types of victim of God's castigation are those who hurt Israel. There God has shown less restraint.

During our desert wanderings, the Midianite nation participated in the enticement of the men of Israel. Israel was drawn toward the worship of other gods, and God's response was swift and devastating, a plague that took the lives of 24,000 Israelites. But the Midianites, who had helped engineer Israel's downfall, faced an even harsher judgment. Ibn Ezra on Numbers 31:3 explains that God commanded vengeance for both His own honor and Israel's, seeing the two as deeply intertwined. Like a jealous husband, God takes profound offense not only at betrayal, but at those who exploit His people's weakness and lead them away from Him.

This is a difficult and uncomfortable idea, but it is part of the biblical picture of divine justice. God's bond with Israel is not abstract or distant. It is passionate, covenantal, and demanding. Those who seek to corrupt, seduce, or destroy Israel are not merely attacking a nation; they are striking at a relationship God Himself protects. History has not been kind to many empires, regimes, and peoples that dedicated themselves to harming Israel. Some vanished, some collapsed, and some are remembered mainly for the destruction they tried to cause.

May those who seek Israel's harm lose their power, their influence, and their place in history.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the Israeli study on the benefits of a quicker step: jpost.com/health-and-wellness/article-901395