

Exodus 20:1 – 6; Deuteronomy 4:1 – 24

^{20:1} Then God spoke all these words, saying, ² 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ You shall have no other gods before Me. ⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. (Exodus 20:1 – 6)

^{4:1} Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you... ⁵ See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. ⁶ So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? ⁸ Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today? ⁹ Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. ¹⁰ Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.' ¹¹ You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom. ¹² Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form – only a voice... ²⁰ But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today... ²³ So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything against which the LORD your God has commanded you. ²⁴ For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. (Deuteronomy 4:1 – 24)

Historical and Cultural Context

- *Israel's Covenant with God*: The 'covenant' God made with Israel was like a marriage vow, requiring faithfulness from both sides. This occurred after God brought Israel (and others who joined them) out of Egypt. God met Israel at Mount Sinai (also called Horeb), which was a reminder of Eden, which was a mountain (Gen.2:4 – 7; Ezk.28:13 – 14). God was going to give Israel a new garden land, which was a reminder of the original Garden of Eden.
- *'On the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me'*: Refers to God sending Israel into exile away from the garden land. This occurred during the Babylonian captivity, from 586 – 516 BCE.

Questions

1. Question: When have you felt jealous of someone? [stir up emotions]
2. What are your first reactions to God saying He is jealous?
3. First of all, what if God said, 'You could believe whatever you want. It makes no difference to me.' How would you feel about that?
 - a. In some ways, we might feel 'free'! God created us and then is kind of checked out. He's neutral. He's not relational.
 - b. But in other ways, that would be weird. If God is not fundamentally relational, then why would we pray and expect any kind of response? Why would we expect God to care about anything that goes on with us?
 - c. If God doesn't really care about having a relationship with us, and if being relational is part of being good, then why would we expect God to be *good*? That's the main difference between deism, which is belief in a God who is not relational at all, and the God of the Bible.
4. Or, what if we want God to be more like a great-grandfather, and less like a husband?
 - a. A great-grandfather just likes it if you come and visit him. But he doesn't know you very well and doesn't ask you how he can be involved in your life.
 - b. Any decent husband really wants to be actively and intimately involved with his wife. And there is a sense in which Mount Sinai serves as the altar to a wedding between God and His people Israel at this point.
5. What's the difference between being 'jealous of' vs. 'jealous for'?
 - a. To be 'jealous of' someone means that you are competing with that person.
 - i. Question: When have you felt jealous of someone? [if you haven't asked it as an intro question]
 - ii. Is God 'jealous of' idols? In a sense, yes. Because these people belong to Him, by virtue of the fact that He brought them out of Egypt. Like a husband is 'jealous of' any man who tries to mess around with his wife. You'd be jealous of anyone else who tries to take what belongs to you.
 - b. But God is also 'jealous for' His people. To be 'jealous for' someone means that you want the absolute best for that person.
 - i. Illus: When Ming and I were dating, we had to navigate a three hour time zone difference. She was in Boston, MA. I was in East Palo Alto, CA. At first, we tried to talk in the evening. But when it would be 8pm my time, it was 11pm her time, and she would be tired. One time when I was telling her about a sermon that I was going to preach, she fell asleep! I was jealous for her, in the sense that I wanted her to have good conversations with me when she wasn't tired. So we decided to talk once or twice a week in the morning, and I would get up at 4:30am, get ready for work, and then we would talk at 5am – 7am, and then I would go to work. I was more of a morning person anyway, but that was when we could both be alert and at our best for each other. That's what it means to be *jealous for* someone. You want them to be at their best so they can experience your best. I wasn't *jealous of* Ming. What's there to be jealous of? I was *jealous for* her.
 - ii. Notice that God wants very good things for His people: To bring them into the garden land so they could be a partial restoration of Adam and Eve; to shape their character through His commandments so that they could be a blessing to one another.
 - iii. So it's not ONLY that God is 'jealous of' idols as potential competitors for the worship and allegiance of His people. On a deeper level, even when idolatry is not an issue, the people's character still is. So God is 'jealous for' His people to experience the best of what He has for them.
6. God says that worshipping other gods and idols is really bad. Why?
 - a. According to what we know from history, these other gods ranged in character from arbitrary to very evil.
 - i. The most extreme idol-worship was where Molech and other Canaanite gods demanded child sacrifice.
 - ii. Agamemnon, in *The Iliad*, sacrificed his daughter to the gods in order to ensure safe passage for his Greek fleet to get to Troy.

- iii. But in general, idol-worship was a human attempt to control war, harvest, weather, other people, etc.
 - iv. Idol worship is like an addiction.
 - b. Ultimately, we have to reckon with the fact that Someone loves you and wants you. And that Someone is not a random stranger. That Someone is the God who created us and all things. He calls us to love Him and obey Him to be the people He originally intended. God is jealous for you.
- 7. What was God offering to Israel? Why?
 - a. God was offering a partial restoration of the original Garden of Eden!!!
 - b. He was showing that He is a God who restores. Ultimately, He wanted to show His commitment to restore human nature back to the way He wanted us to go, by coming as a human being in the person of Jesus. In Jesus, God shared in our fallen human nature so that we might share in his healed human nature. But partially restoring Israel to something like the Garden of Eden set the stage for Israel to understand God as restorative.
 - c. He was offering Himself, because God is the source of life, and the greatest good.
- 8. Why would God say that He is a consuming fire in Deuteronomy 4:24 as a manifestation of His jealous love?
 - a. How did He represent Himself as a fire? On Mount Sinai/Horeb, when He gave commands. Those commandments were, like fire, meant to consume things in people that were impure. They played a part in cleansing Israel. That's why God spoke of fire as a refining fire, and people as precious metal that He wanted to purify (e.g. Malachi 3:1 – 5; Isaiah 1:25).
 - b. Often, we treat 'fire' as a motif or theme in Scripture as if it were not associated with purification. As if it's meant to be punishing, but it's not. It starts with purification. But that is still serious. An alcoholic faced with a very determined addiction counselor has a choice: receive that counselor as salvation, or as punishment. It depends on what the alcoholic decides about his addiction.