

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

GOD IS ANGRY (JAMES 1:20; HEBREWS 3:10)

When was the last time you got angry? I mean, *really* angry. Was it when one of your kids talked back? Or when your restaurant to-go order was all wrong? Or when someone pulled out in front of you along SPID, making you have to swerve out of the way?

Israel Made God Angry

Do you know what makes God angry? Sin. He doesn't grow impatient with someone because they're slow at performing a task or they made a simple mistake (as we humans are prone to do). Our loving Heavenly Father grows angry over unrepentant hearts that openly rebel against him and disregard righteousness. His covenant people did this repeatedly throughout their history.

A Failed Test (Ex 17:1–7)

No sooner had Israel been delivered by God from Egyptian slavery, that they made God angry. They doubted his love and protection. As they traveled from Egypt to Mt. Sinai through the wilderness, the people grew hungry and thirsty. What God wanted was for them to trust him. After all, he had just defeated the world's superpower for them by unleashing the Ten Plagues. Instead, though, the Israelites complained about their situation and indicted God as being uncaring and cruel (Ex 16:2–3; 17:2–3). God, of course, miraculously provided food (manna) and water to them, but he was terribly disappointed with their ingratitude and unbelief in his love for them.

This event was commemorated by naming the location Massah (and Meribah, which mean, "testing" and "quarreling" (Ex 17:7; see also Num 20:1–13). It is cited in Psalm 95:7–11, which, in turn, is quoted in Heb 3:7–11. This became the first of several rebellions that culminated in God letting this first generation of Israelites die in the wilderness (Num 14:29).

The Golden Calf (Ex 32–34)

Later, after entering into a covenant with God, the nation of Israel once again openly rebelled against him. They built a golden calf and worshiped it. God became so angry with the nation that he threatened to destroy it and start over with Moses (Ex 32:10). Moses played defense attorney and begged God to relent from destroying them.

Psalm 95:8–9

Do not harden your hearts,
as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in
the wilderness,
when your fathers put me to
the test
and put me to the proof,
though they had seen
my work.

Refusal to Enter Canaan (Num 14)

At last, Israel was ready to enter Canaan. But they didn't; and that's because they listened to the negative report of the 10 spies who said, "We can't take the land." God's response was severe:

"None of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it" (Num 14:22–23).

Throughout the Bible, God's wrath is threatened against those who sin against him (Rom 1:18–23; 2:5–8; 1 Thess 1:10). God, who is perfectly sinless, holy, and perfect, cannot tolerate unrepentant sin.

"The Anger of Man"

While it's not a sin to be angry (cf. Eph 4:29), we do need to be careful, because "the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." What that means is we're not likely to be angry for the right reasons or do what's appropriate and right because we're angry.

Again, what makes you angry? Is it the mere inconveniences of life that compel you to fly off the handle? Or are your fits of anger directed at sinful behavior, either exemplified in yourself or others?

Jesus Got Angry, Too

Like God, Jesus our Lord also became angry with rebellious hearts. He directed his anger primarily at people who knew better and yet had sinful attitudes toward him and others who were trying to please God. The religious leaders, for example, should have recognized Jesus as the Messiah and immediately accepted him. Instead, they plotted and planned to kill him.

Do you remember when Jesus threw out the moneychangers in the temple? He fashioned a whip from cords and drove them out. Why was he so animated and angry?

Jesus' audacious mission was to fix a broken world, to bring humanity and all of creation back into a right relationship to God. He did not have time or patience with the doctors and lawyers of religious law, who elevated themselves about others and rejected his announcement of the kingdom.²

The same God who grew angry at Israel is also our loving Father who is "slow to anger" (Ex 34:6). God is patient with sinners, wanting them to repent. But one day, his patience will run out (2 Pet 3:9–10).

² Mark L. Strauss, *Jesus Behaving Badly* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 53.