

Is God an Angry God?

Psalm 145:8: (NASB) *The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.*



The thought that God is a God of anger - especially in the Old Testament - is alive and well. It is a very convenient thought. All one has to do is select from the many passages in the Old Testament that show God commanding the destruction of this or that people. It is easy to say He has anger issues and therefore should not be worshipped. The only problem is that this conclusion is in direct opposition to the truth. To grasp the correct thought, we need to begin by focusing on putting God's anger into its proper context. This basic exercise opens up a perspective on God's anger that redefines it. Simply stated, God's anger is an occasionally used tool of His overwhelmingly just, loving, wise and powerful character. He is SO much bigger than He is given credit for.

We are going to look at God's anger in a different way. We will repeat the theme scripture because we believe this to be an accurate description of the character of God.

Psalm 145:8: (NASB) *The LORD is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.*

(Source: John Gill's Exposition of the Whole Bible) It seems to have been a psalm David took great delight in, and it may be that he often repeated and sung it, as it was made by him with great care and contrivance, in a very curious manner, as well as he was assisted in it by divine inspiration; for it is wrote in an alphabetical order, each verse: beginning with the letter of the alphabet in course, and goes through the whole, excepting one letter; and very probably it was composed in this form that it might be the more easily committed to memory, and retained in it. The Jews have a very high opinion of it; their Rabbis say that whoever says this psalm thrice every day may be sure of being a child of the world to come.

Of course, this Psalm or any other is not a magic spell if repeated three times. The point is the high value given to this particular Psalm 145. It is an alphabet "acrostic," one of nine in the book of Psalms, where the first letter of each line follows the Hebrew alphabet.

The attitude of this and other Psalms should be central to our Christian fellowship:

Ephesians 5:19: (NASB) *speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;*

Think about the ability to be able to speak *to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* - to truly communicate. There is a heartfelt graciousness we will see unfold if we keep that attitude.

While Psalm 145, and specifically verse 8, presents a powerfully positive message, it is important to realize the origin of this specific description of God's character.

חַנּוּן
gracious

✓ These Hebrews words each appear 13 times in the Old Testament

רַחוּם
merciful

✓ They are only used to describe God

✓ They are used together 11 out of the 13 times they appear

These two words together help us to understand the character of God. We are going to go through 10 out of the 11 combined uses of these two words.

The first combined use of these two words shows us powerful lessons regarding the core of God's mighty character.



While Moses was away receiving the Ten Commandments from God, the people, thinking he was not coming back, built a golden calf to worship. This made God angry!

Exodus 32:24: (NLT) *So I (Aaron) told them, Whoever has gold jewelry, take it off. When they brought it to me, I simply threw it into the fire—and out came this calf!*

Exodus 32:7-10: (NASB) ⁷Then the LORD spoke to Moses, *Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. ⁸They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt! ⁹The LORD said to Moses, I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. ¹⁰Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.*



The Israelites Dancing Around the Golden Calf
1899 (oil on canvas), by Henri-Paul Motte

God says to Moses, *your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned... aside from the way which I commanded them. He puts pressure on Moses. There is a wisdom in this, which we will unfold as we go.*

God's anger is justified. The fact that He is telling Moses of His anger shows us how God is actually not complaining. Rather, He is giving Moses a voice and prompting a discussion - a wise approach.

Moses then uses that voice and boldly approaches God.



His reasoning contains three distinct points that show his love for God and his love for God’s people:

Exodus 32:11-14: (NIV2011) ¹¹But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. LORD, he said, why should Your anger burn against Your people, whom You brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?

Moses turns it back to God: This is YOUR people, whom YOU brought out...with YOUR great power and with YOUR mighty hand. Moses is extolling the greatness and the power of God.

¹²Why should the Egyptians say, It was with evil intent that He brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.

Again, he brings it back to God Almighty by saying, YOU brought them out of Egypt with Your great power. Why would we ever want the Egyptians to say: “Huh, some power God had! He brought them out into the wilderness just so He could destroy them! There’s a god for you.” Moses is putting things in perspective by saying: “Your reputation as God Almighty is critical here.”

¹³Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.

Again, Moses focused on God’s word, His promise and His people. He is showing God how great Moses knows He is. Of course, God knows this, but it is important for us in principle to acknowledge to Him His greatness. This tells Him we see it, we understand it and we accept it. God is giving Moses an incredible opportunity to stand up for God’s greatness and to stand up for God’s chosen people.

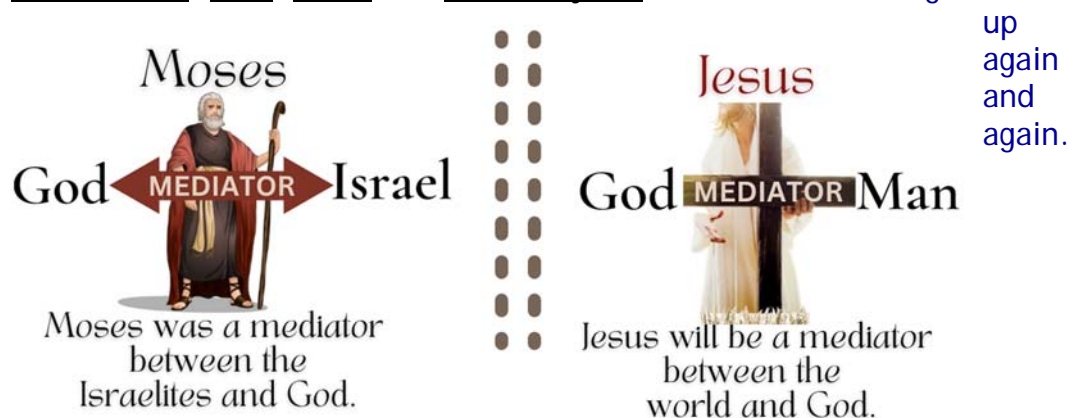
God hears and sees the evidence of Moses’ loyalty to Him and His people:

¹⁴Then the LORD relented and did not bring on His people the disaster he had threatened.

God’s anger is not His driving force - it is expressed through a lens of compassion and graciousness.

This is really tense! Millions of people are about to be destroyed here, and Moses stands in the middle between God and the people. We can see how God gives Moses a voice so that he can be the mediator he is supposed to be.

A mediator brings two sides together. We have a parallel - this foreshadowed Jesus as the great mediator between God and man in God’s future kingdom. See Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 12:24 and 1 Timothy 2:5. This foreshadowing will come





Moses even referred to Jesus:

Deuteronomy 18:15: (NASB) *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.*

Moses comes down from the mountain and shatters the tablets of the Law:

Exodus 32:20: (NASB) *He took the calf which they had made and burned it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink it.*

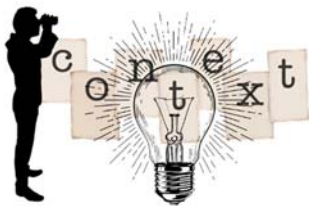
Moses goes back up the mountain to stand before God to speak on their behalf:

Exodus 34:1-4: (NASB) *¹Now the LORD said to Moses, Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered. ²...come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain. ³No man is to come up with you, nor let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain; even the flocks and the herds may not graze in front of that mountain. ⁴So he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took two stone tablets in his hand.*

These were detailed instructions from God to Moses - no one else had this connection with God, nor was anyone else allowed even near the mountain.

It is as if God said, "I am going to reboot what I brought you here for." Moses has basically been the one to initiate that reboot by standing up for the character of God and for the sacredness of God's people. All of this detail helps us to see the absolute greatness of God.

Context observations:



- The newly freed Hebrew people fell into idolatry when uncertainty arose. "This calf just appeared!"
- God was justifiably angry. He gave them miracles and deliverance and received idolatry in return. That is not a good "return on investment"!
- God informs Moses of His anger and also gives Moses space to respond. This provides a tremendous tool of learning and a view into the greatness of God Himself.
- Moses defends God's power and His reputation. He also focuses on God's integrity. Moses goes back to who God is - His power, His reputation and His integrity.
- God accepts Moses' honoring of Him, and He resets a pathway to faithfulness for the people by giving new tablets of the Law.

We read in Exodus 32:10 how God gave the option to make a great nation out of Moses. He could have easily rewired around the promise to Abraham, as Moses was his descendant. He could have taken God up on that offer saying: "I'm mad at these people, too! It's You and me - let's do it!" This shows the humility of Moses as he chose to instead mediate on behalf of the people rather than take the glory for himself.



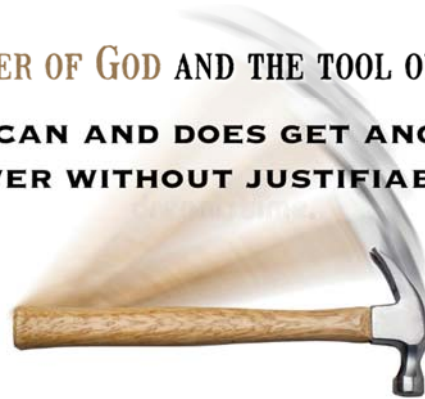
We are still waiting for the first use of *gracious and merciful!* (or *gracious and compassionate*, or *compassionate and gracious*, depending on the translation.) We are almost there!

SAME HEBREW WORDS; DIFFERENT ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATIONS:



THE CHARACTER OF GOD AND THE TOOL OF ANGER:

**GOD CAN AND DOES GET ANGRY,
BUT IT IS NEVER WITHOUT JUSTIFIABLE REASON.**



THIS IS BECAUSE THE CORE VALUES OF GOD’S CHARACTER ONLY ALLOW ANGER TO BE A TOOL TO USE WHEN APPROPRIATE AND NEEDED. THIS EXAMPLE OF HIS ANGER WITH ISRAEL SERVES AS A TEMPLATE FROM WHICH WE CAN BETTER UNDERSTAND THE MIND AND CHARACTER OF GOD.

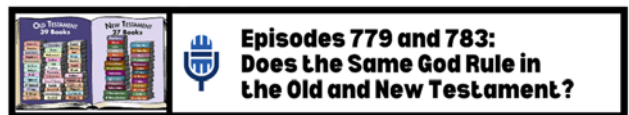
We spent all this time on this event because we will see it is the core, the beginning of the explanation of the character of God through these two words, *gracious and merciful*.

Here in Exodus, God has laid out a significant key for us to use whenever we see God’s anger: His anger is never the end of the story!

**Now that we have the context in place,
how are God’s graciousness and mercy introduced?**

We cannot overemphasize what has happened here with God, Moses and the newly freed nation of Israel. God’s miraculous deliverance of them, their sin of idolatry and His forbearance all led to His bringing Moses back up the mountain to reestablish Israel as God’s chosen people. The drama here is palpable. We can feel it! Moses stands alone on the mountain and God communicates with him.

Before we jump back into the account, we are looking at God’s anger in a very focused way by following the specific phrase of *compassionate and gracious*. People question some of the Old Testament accounts of warfare and brutality, asking whether God changed between the Old Testament and the New Testament’s emphasis on love. For a scriptural walkthrough of that aspect of His anger, we direct our listeners to these episodes.



God’s role and approach in the Old Testament

(Parts I and II)



Back to Moses on the mountain. We have finally come to the first use of this phrase, *compassionate and gracious*:

Exodus 34:5-6: (NASB) ⁵The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. ⁶Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD God, *compassionate <7349>* (merciful in the KJV) and *gracious <2587>*, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;

God descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. We do not know what that looked like or felt like, but it must have been one of the most dramatic things we could possibly imagine! God describes Himself. He tells us who He is through His words to Moses. This gives us a sound basis for knowing who God is.

Merciful/Compassionate: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #7349 *rachum*; compassionate: ONLY USED IN RELATION TO GOD

The Hebrew-English Lexicon 1) to love, love deeply, have mercy, be compassionate, have tender affection, have compassion

This is a deeply-connected, high-level compassion, as in, "I care so much about you that I will make this arrangement." It is not a compassion that simply tolerates; it is one that welcomes.

Gracious: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2587 *channun*; ONLY USED IN RELATION TO GOD

properly, to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior; to favor, bestow; causatively to implore (i.e., move to favor by petition)

It is so meaningful that these specific Hebrew words are only used in relation to God Himself, bending so far down to our level to be there as our God. This tells us we humans cannot even approach this level of *compassion and graciousness*. In this case, He allowed Moses to be a mediator between Himself and the children of Israel, rather than justifiably punishing millions for their idolatry.

Not only did God allow a mediator, but He taught the mediator how to mediate by giving him the voice he needed to have.

Slow to anger: slow to ire

Abounding in lovingkindness: abundant in goodness, kindness and faithfulness

Abounding in truth: stability, certainty, truth and trustworthiness

We have the comparison of being *sloowww to anger* with *ABOUNDING in loving kindness* and *ABOUNDING in truth*. Abounding is overflowing versus *sloowww to anger*. God describes Himself in this way.

How would Moses know that these things are all true? He had just witnessed them! Part of God giving Moses a voice in the matter of preserving the people after their idolatry was to have Moses actually see God's full character in action! This was a very important lesson for Moses, and he was a willing student.

God set it up so that Moses would stand up and mediate on behalf of the people. Again, the parallel is God graciously bending down and providing Jesus as the world's mediator.



As we read previously, Moses said:

Deuteronomy 18:15: (NASB) *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.*

We know that prophet was Jesus because the Apostle Peter tells us so in Acts 3:20-25.

This is another example of a New Testament tie to the Old Testament revealing the Old.



God continues revealing Himself to Moses:

Exodus 34:7: (NASB) *who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.*

The consequences of sin do pass from generation to generation. This is a key text worth exploring further by listening to this past episode.



Curses in family bloodlines and the bigger context of Old Testament curses

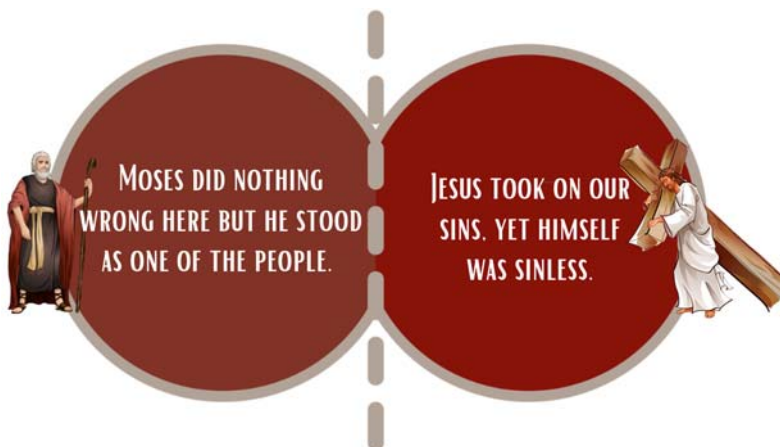
God continues to describe Himself. The first phrase - *compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth* - is the beginning, the core. Now God expands on their meaning.

Even though God is gracious and merciful, justice demands that people are still held accountable. God DID destroy about 3,000 of those worshippers of the golden calf, as reported in Exodus 32:28, but ONLY THOSE who did not repent and were against the LORD.

Moses has seen the length, breadth, height and depth of God's character. God's great compassion and graciousness is being demonstrated as He stoops down to the level of the people to bring them up.

He now goes to work as the humble mediator between God and Israel:

Exodus 34:8-9: (NASB) *Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship. He said, If now I have found favor in Your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession.*



Notice how Moses says *OUR iniquity and OUR sin* - but he was with God when the calf idol was being made - he did nothing wrong, but here he is, standing as one of the people. It is another parallel with Jesus, who took on our sins yet himself was sinless. We are told this in many scriptures like 2 Corinthians 5:21 - *He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf. Yet another parallel!*

Additional references: Isaiah 53:92, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 1:18-10, 1 Peter 2:22, 1 John 3:5)



Moses is doing the work of mediating between God and the nation of Israel. As he is doing that, he brings praise and honor to God. *Moses made haste to bow low* - he was humble in representing the people.

God explained and began to show His character to Moses. He will now put that character to work as the true, just and merciful God that He is:

Exodus 34:10: (NASB) *Then God said, Behold, I am going to make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform miracles which have not been produced in all the earth nor among any of the nations; and all the people among whom you live will see the working of the LORD, for it is a fearful thing that I am going to perform with you.*

God is essentially saying: "The people are going to be My people, Moses, and they will see things that have never been seen before because I am the Almighty God who is gracious and compassionate." He is going to display that to them for the rest of eternity. It would first be displayed to the nation of Israel and then later to the rest of the world.

God now restates His previous promise to give them the land and to protect them:

Exodus 34:11-14: (NASB) *¹¹Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day: behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite.*

All these obstacles stood in their way, but the Lord declares: "I am the Lord your God; you are My people. I have this all taken care of."

God warns them of the dangers of this new land and of having God pave their way to it:

¹²Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. ¹³But rather, you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim ¹⁴for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

The LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God - God's objective for all is eternal good. God is saying: "You HAVE TO follow Me and honor Me because it's the only way you live forever." Worshipping other gods or idols will not bring everlasting life. It's no wonder the first two Commandments were to have *no other gods before me* and to not make any idols or graven images!

In the next verses, God continues with the need for them to stay as a separate people and their need to be reminded of their deliverance by keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread. He reminds them they need to redeem their firstborn, and keep the Sabbath and several other feasts throughout the year.

God puts conditions, activities, rituals and a schedule before them. Why? Because they need to always go back to the source of their deliverance. They need to always go back to the mighty hand of God whose hand is gracious and merciful. They need to see Him for who and what He is. He has given them these things - these are Old Testament "live abundantly" instructions. If they want to live abundantly according to the Old Testament Law, here is how to do it in order to see God's blessing.

These are the “live abundantly” instructions of a *compassionate* <7349> and *gracious* <2587> God, who is slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth:

Exodus 34:27-28: (NASB) ²⁷Then the LORD said to Moses, Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. ²⁸So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

40 days and 40 nights:

MOSES FIRST RECEIVES THE LAW ON MOUNT SINAI :

Exodus 24:18

MOSES INTERCEDES FOR THE PEOPLE:

Deuteronomy 9:25

MOSES BACK ON MOUNT SINAI TO GET A NEW SET OF TABLETS OF THE LAW:

Exodus 34:28

JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS AFTER HE WAS BAPTIZED AND RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT. HE ESSENTIALLY USED THAT TIME IN MEDITATION TO WRITE THE WORDS OF MOSES ON THE TABLES OF HIS OWN HEART.



When Jesus came out of the wilderness from his 40 days and nights of fasting, praying and being with God, after which he was tempted by Satan, his ministry then begins.

Moses complies and finally comes down the mountain, a changed and enlightened man:

Exodus 34:29: (NASB) *It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him.*

Moses LITERALLY was enlightened - *his face shone*. The parallel is Jesus coming out of the wilderness mentally enlightened. God demonstrated His grace, mercy and compassion by taking the time to appropriately prepare both mediators during these 40 days and nights for the benefit of the people.





We have been spending our time looking at this one event where God introduces Himself as *compassionate and gracious*. We have established the magnificence of this introduction with all of its pieces that gives us a basis to move forward.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD AND THE TOOL OF ANGER:

GOD'S DEMONSTRATION OF MERCY AND GRACE TOWARDS THE IDOLATROUS PEOPLE OF ISRAEL SPOKE VOLUMES REGARDING HIS TRUE CHARACTER.



AN ANGRY GOD COULD NOT HAVE SO COMPASSIONATELY GATHERED THEM TO HIMSELF. WITH MOSES AS MEDIATOR OF THE COVENANT, GOD GAVE THEM CLEAR INSTRUCTION ON HOW TO STAY CONNECTED WITH HIS GRACE.

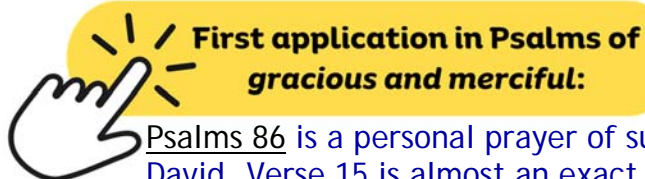
An angry God does not do what God Almighty does here. An angry God is not capable of what God has shown in this one event. We have only begun to reveal through these two little words - *gracious and merciful* - the character of God.

What an inspiring and revealing account! God worked through Moses and delivered a solid pathway to life and happiness.

Now that we have a firm understanding of God's compassion and grace, where else can we find this description of Him?

It is interesting that we do not see these two words together describing God until several hundred years later in the time of King David and the Psalms. These words appear together five times in the Psalms, so their repetition afterwards by four other Old Testament writers is easy to understand. The Psalms set a basis and the other experiences feed off them. We will review four out of the five Psalms scriptures.

It is fascinating how these examples show us God's grace and mercy differently each time.



First application in Psalms of *gracious and merciful*:

Psalms 86 is a personal prayer of supplication and trust, generally credited to David. Verse 15 is almost an exact quote of Exodus 34:6.

Psalms 86:1-2: (NASB) ¹*Incline Your ear, O LORD, and answer me; For I am afflicted and needy.* ²*Preserve my soul, for I am a godly man; O You my God, save Your servant who trusts in You.*

David is pleading with God over his personal experiences.

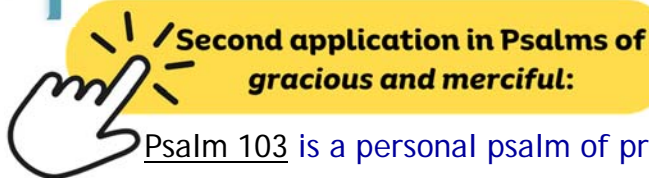


Psalms 86:14-17: (NASB) ¹⁴*O God, arrogant men have risen up against me, and a band of violent men have sought my life, and they have not set You before them.* ¹⁵*But You, O Lord, are a God **merciful** <7349> and **gracious** <2587>, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.* ¹⁶*Turn to me, and be gracious to me; oh, grant Your strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your handmaid.* ¹⁷*Show me a sign for good, that those who hate me may see it and be ashamed, because You, O LORD, have helped me and comforted me.*

This personal prayer of supplication and trust is a beautiful picture. David is telling us that faithful servants of God can personally and confidently quote what God had said about Himself in seeking for God's help with the trials that come from their enemies. This is not a plea to an angry God for His swift retribution; it is a plea to see God's mercy outwardly and personally expressed so that those who were David's enemies (who were also part of God's chosen people of Israel) would be able to know how God was with him and feel ashamed because they saw God's presence in David's life.

David asks for mercy and grace in his personal experience. These attributes of God apply in OUR personal struggles.

recap
recap



Psalm 103 is a personal psalm of praise.

Psalms 103:1-2: (NASB) ¹*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name.* ²*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits;*

What a dramatic difference in the beginning of these two Psalms. The first starts with, "Please help me!" The second starts with, *Bless the Lord, O my soul.*

Psalms 103:6-12: (NASB) ⁶*The LORD performs righteous deeds and judgments for all who are oppressed.* ⁷*He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel.* ⁸*The LORD is **compassionate** <7349> and **gracious** <2587>, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.* ⁹*He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever (He does get angry - but it is temporary).* ¹⁰*He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.* ¹¹*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.* ¹²*As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

God always forgave His people over and over again, even after very sinful actions. Talk about a merciful and gracious God!

Here the phrase *the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness* is repeated. It specifically references, *He made known His ways to Moses* referring to when God made the original declaration of who He is. David knew of that account - everybody knew! All of God's chosen were taught that account because it defined God to Moses, to the nation and therefore to us.

This personal praise celebrates the long history of God's compassion and grace, and His abounding ability to forgive our sins. Obviously, this could not be praise to an angry God, for compassion, grace and forgiveness are central characteristics. Angry gods do not have these attributes!



recap
recap

David was struggling with his enemies in the first application we looked at, but here it is all praise, no struggle. In other words: "I am praising You, God, that You take us back even though our sins are dark. Beginning with that example of Moses and the golden calf, anger is just a tool in Your hand."



Third application in Psalms of gracious and merciful:

Psalm 111 is a psalm of praise to be proclaimed in the assembly - amongst the people.

Psalms 111:1-4: (NASB) ¹Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart, in the company of the upright and in the assembly. ²Great are the works of the LORD; they are studied by all who delight in them. ³Splendid and majestic is His work, and His righteousness endures forever. ⁴He has made His wonders to be remembered; the LORD is **gracious <2587>** and **compassionate <7349>**.

Psalm 111:10: (NASB) The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever.

This psalm of public praise focuses on studying God's mighty works from the past, in the present and into the future. It is comprehensive and is to be spoken out with all the people around us. This public praise could not be for an angry God, as this praise is of eternal righteousness. An eternally angry God is not a righteous God. Please understand these two simple words, *gracious and compassionate*, in the way they are used in the Old Testament. They resound with the power and glory and character of God Almighty!

recap
recap

We recognize He is gracious and compassionate when we proclaim praise collectively with the brotherhood. Collectively we need to recognize how God has led us. This is not just personal meditation; this is encouraging ALL not to forget what He has done for us.

His justifiable anger exists, but it is just a tool; it is not who He is.

We have mentioned this important point several times, but God's anger is a tool in His hand. A tool is used when it is necessary. This is what these psalms tell us and what the original Exodus account told us.



Fourth application in Psalms of gracious and merciful:

Psalm 145 is a psalm of pure praise.

It plainly opens up the character of God to all - not just to believers:

Psalms 145:1-8: (NASB) ¹I will extol You, my God, O King, and I will bless Your name forever and ever. ²Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. ³Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable. ⁴One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. ⁵On the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wonderful works, I will meditate. ⁶Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts, and I will tell of Your greatness. ⁷They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness and will shout joyfully of Your righteousness. ⁸The LORD is **gracious <2587>** and **merciful <7349>**; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.



No one says it quite the way David does, right? It is just his heart. What God said to Moses ages ago, David here declares will forever be true. *Men shall speak of the power...that men shall eagerly utter the memory...and they will shout joyfully of Your righteousness.* Sadly, we do not see humanity with that kind of sheer exhilaration for goodness anymore. Yet this is a psalm assures us it will eventually happen.

Psalms 145:11-13: (NASB) ¹¹*They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and talk of Your power;* ¹²*To make known to the sons of men Your mighty acts and the glory of the majesty of Your kingdom.* ¹³*Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations.*

Here we see the next piece of the puzzle, and it is a little bit subtle. *They shall...make known to the sons of men.* Essentially, the chosen ones make known to everyone else the glory and majesty of God's kingdom.



How do they do that? Why do they do that?



Because God's kingdom is for all men from all times, under all circumstances. No matter what they did, no matter when they lived, no matter what happened, it is for ALL. And that's what this psalm does with God's *graciousness and mercy.* It elevates it to say it applies to ALL at all times.

From the beginning of time to eternity, God's compassion and grace are here.

recap
recap

This psalm of praise begins with individual praise to God. It then expands to generational praise of God. It then includes all of humanity in general powerfully praising Him. It then expands to God's goodness to all of humanity and speaks of His everlasting kingdom. There is NEVER A TIME OR CIRCUMSTANCE when His compassion and mercy are not present! How beautiful!

There is NO ROOM for an angry God here; only a God of justice, wisdom, power and love!



Understanding God's attributes working together in perfect harmony changed my life forever. He is a God of justice, knowing right and wrong. He is a God of wisdom knowing the end from the beginning. His power created everything, and His love is always giving to others. He is worthy of being worshiped.



Rick: There's a big difference between speaking those words, Jonathan, that you just said, and believing those words.



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WHY DO WE WORSHIP GOD?
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The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and great in loving kindness - God used these words to describe Himself.

Now we want to apply these words to ourselves personally. It is a challenge to take the anger out of our perception of God and replace it with how the Scriptures describe God and how He describes Himself. This is a very powerful tool for us.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD AND THE TOOL OF ANGER:

GOD IS DESCRIBED AS GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL IN THE PSALMS INDIVIDUALLY REGARDING PERSONAL TROUBLES AS WELL AS IN PRAISE.



HE IS DESCRIBED WITHIN THE ASSEMBLY AS ALWAYS PRAISEWORTHY. HE IS DESCRIBED AS MIGHTY AND GLORIOUS BY ALL, PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE BECAUSE OF HIS EVERLASTING KINGDOM. GOD IS NOT ANGRY; RATHER, HE IS FULL OF EVERLASTING LOVINGKINDNESS.

We cannot fit anger into somebody that is full of everlasting kindness. A basic law of physics is that two objects cannot occupy the same space. Anger does not fit in the character of God - there is no room for it.

We should feel a great thrill in our hearts when we see the expansiveness of God's praiseworthy and magnanimous character!

With so much praiseworthiness in God's character already established, where else does this specific description appear?

Interestingly, we see this same phrase in the book of [Jonah](#), in relation to [King Hezekiah](#), in the book of [Joel](#) and in [Nehemiah](#). These four examples will again give us a broadly applied explanation as to how God's grace and mercy work and how there cannot possibly be any doubt that God is NOT an angry God!



Gracious and Merciful
Gracious and Compassionate
Compassionate and Gracious

Just like we went through those four examples in the Psalms of God's graciousness and compassionate character, we are going to go through these other four individual uses of these two little words together. They provide a vivid description of the character of God.

Let's start with [Jonah](#). Jonah had a problem. Jonah was a prophet and God had instructed him to preach to the wicked city of Nineveh as God was prepared to destroy them (Yes, God was angry!). But Jonah did not like the Ninevites, so he ran away from God's orders. Condensing the story, Jonah was swallowed by a great fish, repented and finally did his job. He did it so well that the entire city repented, which ironically made Jonah angry!



Jonah 3:10: (NASB) *When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.*

Jonah 4:1-2: (NASB) *¹But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. ²He prayed to the LORD and said, Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a **gracious <2587>** and **compassionate <7349>** God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.*



Here's that phrase again, but now it was spoken very differently!

Jonah is resentful! He says the phrase in a negative sense. "See? I knew this is what you were going to do, God! I just knew it! You are TOO gracious and TOO compassionate." You can imagine him rolling his eyes because he didn't want that city saved. But when there is true repentance and a turning towards Him, God bends down to our level in a *gracious and compassionate way*.

He bends down to our level with that sensitivity and understanding, and it is such a powerful message. If we could only remember this is the basis of God's character.

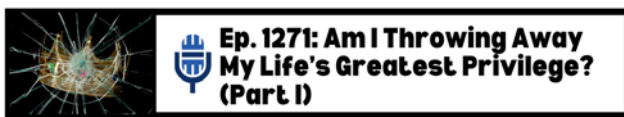
Now, in this, when Jonah says, *You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness*, it seems reasonable that Jonah had Moses and Israel in mind when he complained to God about His grace and compassion. The difference here was Nineveh was NOT part of God's chosen people. Nineveh was outside of Israel. The point in this account is powerful.

POWERFUL POINT

GOD CLEARLY FORGAVE THOSE WHO TURNED TO HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, EVEN IF THEY WERE NOT HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE.

This is obviously NOT an angry God! There was mercy, grace, compassion, love and wisdom. Jonah knew it, which is why he did not want to do this job. Even heathens who turned to God were spared!

This encapsulates the graciousness and compassion of the living God. He told it to Moses. We see how it is like an echoing experience that goes throughout the entire Old Testament to show us the grandeur of God's character. Why do we ever attribute other things to His character when He is so thoroughly described in this way?



A tale of two opportunities, two kings and two failures

Next, we will look at King Hezekiah. In Episode #1271, we started a fascinating two-part series about how and why Israel split into two kingdoms. The end result was two wicked kings who mired the nation in idolatry and bad leadership for hundreds of years.



Finally, a good king comes on the scene. King Hezekiah was a righteous and godly king who ruled over the kingdom of Judah in the south at a time when all the people were evil and idolatrous.

He was determined to serve God and to bring the whole of Israel back to God. He meticulously reestablished the Passover and sent his couriers throughout the northern 10-tribe kingdom of Israel and his own two-tribe kingdom of Judah to invite all to celebrate this Passover for the first time in a very long time.

Here is part of the message he sent:

*2 Chronicles 30:7-9: (NASB) ⁷Do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were unfaithful to the LORD God of their fathers... ⁸Now do not stiffen your neck like your fathers, but yield to the LORD and enter His sanctuary which He has consecrated forever, and serve the LORD your God, that His burning anger may turn away from you. ⁹...For the LORD your God is **gracious <2587>** and **compassionate <7349>**, and will not turn His face away from you if you return to Him.*

This is about 750 years after the Exodus with Moses when this all started. All this time had passed, but nothing had changed. Israel was still dangerously idolatrous - but the LORD our God was still gracious and compassionate!

All of Israel was given this opportunity to return to God - He *will not turn His face away from you if you return to Him.*

This was an irrevocable lesson! It is out there for us to see, to feel and to appreciate. The power and promise of this message were extraordinary. In Hezekiah's case, the people were reminded to NOT continue in unfaithfulness as their fathers had.



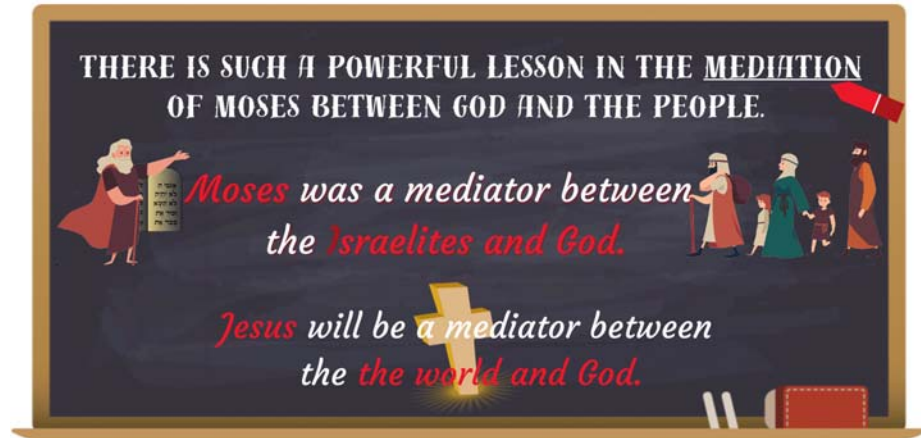
This is the character of God Almighty. An angry God could not possibly accomplish such a compassionate act! Not even remotely close. Can we see how compassionate God is and how He is so willing to bend low to our level?

This special phrase was also used by [Nehemiah](#). Israel rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem behind the motivation and planning of Nehemiah. They had lost their faithfulness to God, and this was a wakeup call. Weeks after finishing the wall, they saw how God had delivered them; they gathered with fasting and in sackcloth to mourn their previous unfaithfulness. The Levites offered up a long and heartfelt prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God on their behalf.

What phrase will they use?

Nehemiah 9:16-19: (NASB) ¹⁶*But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly; they became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments. ¹⁷They refused to listen, and did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them... but You are a God of forgiveness, **gracious <2587>** and **compassionate <7349>**, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; and You did not forsake them. ¹⁸Even when they made for themselves a calf of molten metal and said, this is your God Who brought you up from Egypt, and committed great blasphemies, ¹⁹You, in Your great compassion, did not forsake them in the wilderness...*

You did not forsake them - because they had a mediator, Moses, to stand between God and the people.



God's graciousness and compassion toward His people came through Moses, their mediator. We see this same graciousness and compassion demonstrated in the life of Jesus. God's plan echoes through the mediation Jesus will be performing in the future with all of mankind.

It is a powerful lesson: **GOD NOT ONLY SHOWS US HIS CHARACTER FOR NOW, BUT HE SHOWS US HIS CHARACTER FOR LATER.**

Let's go back to that prayer of the Levites on behalf of the people in Nehemiah.

The prayer continues:

Nehemiah 9:28-31: (NASB) ²⁸*But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You; therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them. When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, and many times You rescued them according to Your compassion, ²⁹and admonished them in order to turn them back to Your Law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances... and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen. ³⁰However, You bore with them for many years, and admonished them by Your spirit through Your prophets, yet they would not give ear... ³¹Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them, for You are a **gracious <2587>** and **compassionate <7349>** God.*



We have condensed this beautiful prayer of Nehemiah 9. This prayer does not recount just one instance of God's grace and compassion, but a long history of them. It recounts it in detail. It brings up the very experience of Moses and the golden calf. It shows us the power of God is unchangeable no matter the circumstance.



Even though the people were obstinate, God's grace and compassion ALWAYS prevailed. This is NOT an angry God!

We have a patient God who loves us so fully that He is willing to stoop down to where we are to find ways to bring us to Him. This is why Jesus came for all.

Q Why do we continue to say this is not an angry God?

A Because so many people just assume God is angry when they pick out this verse or that verse and they say: "See, look at that!" We are all familiar with the statement, "Never judge an artist by his unfinished work." We cannot judge the character of God by an isolated event when you know the graciousness of His eternal plan for every single human being who has ever lived. Let's not confuse a moment with eternity. GOD IS NOT AN ANGRY GOD.



Joel: Unfortunately, we do not have time to get into the details today, but Joel 2 is a fascinating End Times prophecy built upon chapter 1 and the Lord's great army of (figurative) locusts. The first 11 verses of this chapter show the crumbling of the false systems of religion. In verse 12, there is a passionate plea for any who are sincere to come back to God.



Tracing God's hand in the coming Time of Trouble

In the midst of a disastrous mess, we have:

Joel 2:12-13: (NASB) ¹²Yet even now, declares the LORD, Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; ¹³And rend your heart and not your garments...

In other words, make your repentance internal, not external. Be genuine.

Now return to the LORD your God, for He is **gracious <2587>** and **compassionate <7349>**, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil.

God's grace will prevail - ALL will be given an opportunity for life in the kingdom.

The requirement will be to recognize and cling to the grace and compassion of God Almighty.

There is something magnificent here, even in the midst of God's great anger. Joel 2 prophesies the terrible time of trouble. Even in the midst of God's great anger against all that is unrighteous, Joel tells us God still leaves an open door for those who would return to Him. This clearly shows that anger is a TOOL in God's hand and NOT a driver of God's character.

We have to be able to accept that anger is a tool. It is picked up and it is put down.

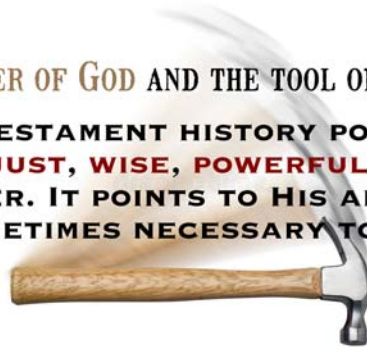
! Even those making God angry during this time of trouble will be given the same resurrection and the same opportunity. Why? Because God is gracious and compassionate.



You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD AND THE TOOL OF ANGER:

ALL OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY POINTS TO GOD AS HAVING A **JUST, WISE, POWERFUL AND LOVING** CHARACTER. IT POINTS TO HIS ANGER AS A SOMETIMES NECESSARY TOOL.



GOD DOES USE ANGER, BUT IT IS ALWAYS FOR THE ULTIMATE GOOD OF HIS CREATION AND IT IS NEVER USED WITHOUT A POWERFUL CONNECTION TO HIS GRACE AND HIS COMPASSION.

The character of God is shown to us in the plan of God. If we are willing to see the Scriptures as a whole, we see a plan that includes every man, woman and child to have ever lived equally given an opportunity to righteousness. Why? Because God is a God who is *gracious and compassionate*.

*So, is God an angry God?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



Bonus Material and Study Questions

Here are exhaustive lists of the two words we have focused on:

Gracious: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2587: *channun*; from 2603; gracious: properly, to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior; to favor, bestow; causatively to implore (i.e. move to favor by petition)

ONLY USED IN RELATION TO GOD

All scriptures shown in the King James Version:

Exodus 22:27: *For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto Me, that I will hear; for I am gracious <2587>.*

Exodus 34:6: *And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful <7349> and gracious <2587>, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,*



2 Chronicles 30:9: For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is **gracious <2587>** and **merciful <7349>**, and will not turn away His face from you, if ye return unto Him.

Nehemiah 9:17: And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, **gracious <2587>** and **merciful <7349>**, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not.

Nehemiah 9:31: Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a **gracious <2587>** and **merciful <7349>** God.

Psalms 86:15: But thou, O Lord, art a God full of **compassion <7349>**, and **gracious <2587>**, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.

Psalms 103:8: The LORD is **merciful <7349>** and **gracious <2587>**, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

Psalms 111:4: He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD is **gracious <2587>** and full of **compassion <7349>**.

Psalms 112:4: Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: He is **gracious <2587>**, and full of **compassion <7349>**, and righteous.

Psalms 116:5: **Gracious <2587>** is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.

Psalms 145:8: The LORD is **gracious <2587>**, and full of **compassion <7349>**; slow to anger, and of great mercy.

Joel 2:13: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for He is **gracious <2587>** and **merciful <7349>**, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

John 4:2: And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a **gracious <2587>** God, and **merciful <7349>**, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

Merciful/Compassion: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #7349 *rachum*; compassionate ONLY USED IN RELATION TO GOD

The Hebrew-English Lexicon 1) to love, love deeply, have mercy, be compassionate, have tender affection, have compassion

Exodus 34:6: And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, **merciful <7349>** and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,

Deuteronomy 4:31: (For the LORD thy God is a **merciful <7349>** God;) He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which He swore unto them.

2 Chronicles 30:9: For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and **merciful <7349>**, and will not turn away His face from you, if ye return unto Him.

Nehemiah 9:17: And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and **merciful <7349>**, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not.



Nehemiah 9:31: *Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and **merciful <7349>** God.*

Psalms 78:38: *But He, being full of **compassion <7349>**, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.*

Psalms 86:15: *But Thou, O Lord, art a God full of **compassion <7349>**, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.*

Psalms 103:8: *The LORD is **merciful <7349>** and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.*

Psalms 111:4: *He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD is gracious and full of **compassion <7349>**.*

Psalms 112:4: *Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: He is gracious, and full of **compassion <7349>**, and righteous.*

Psalms 145:8: *The LORD is gracious, and full of **compassion <7349>**; slow to anger, and of great mercy.*

Joel 2:13: *And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for He is gracious and **merciful <7349>**, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.*

Jonah 4:2: *And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and **merciful <7349>**, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.*

Here is the one text in Psalms we did not review that uses both words together.

It expresses prosperity and honor to those who reverence the Lord:

Psalms 112:1-6: (NASB) ¹Praise the LORD! How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in His commandments. ²His descendants will be mighty on earth; The generation of the upright will be blessed. ³Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. ⁴Light arises in the darkness for the upright; He is **gracious <2587>** and **compassionate <7349>** and righteous. ⁵It is well with the man who is gracious and lends; he will maintain his cause in judgment. ⁶For he will never be shaken; The righteous will be remembered forever.

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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1280: Is God an Angry God?

See:



<https://christianquestions.com/common-questions/who-is-god/1280-gods-anger>

1. How is the LORD described by David in Psalm 145:8? How often is the two-word phrase - *gracious and merciful* - found together in the Bible?
2. Describe the scene at the giving of the Ten Commandments. Why was God angry? Why did God discuss His anger with Moses? What was Moses' counterargument when God told him He would wipe out Israel and start over with Moses? What was God's reaction? (See Exodus 32:7-14,20,24, 34:1-6)
3. What is the definition of compassion? What is the definition of gracious? What other English words are commonly used to translate these two Hebrew words?
4. What is a mediator? How did God prepare Moses as a mediator? How does this relate to Jesus? In what way does Exodus 34:8-9 show Moses' humbleness as well as his care for the people? How does this parallel Jesus as our mediator? (See Deuteronomy 18:15, Acts 3:20-25, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Timothy 2:5)
5. How does God present Himself to Israel? Why does God give the people conditions, activities, rituals and a schedule? Compare Jesus' and Moses' 40 days/40 nights experiences. How does all this show that above all, God's character does not indicate an angry God? (See Exodus 34:10-18, 27-29, Deuteronomy 9:25)
6. In what way do each of the four times the two words appear together in Psalms that we discussed show us God's grace and mercy? Please answer these two questions about each psalm listed:
 - ⊗ What are these psalms about?
 - ⊗ How does this apply to us?

a. Psalms 86:1-2,14-17	c. Psalms 111:1-4,10
b. Psalms 103:1-2,6-12	d. Psalms 145:1-8,11-130
7. Explain what happened in Jonah's mission for God. Was Nineveh part of Israel? Why was Jonah angry with God? How does this illustrate God's compassion? How does the account of King Hezekiah show God's mercy? (See Jonah 3:10, 4:1-2, 2 Chronicles 30:7-9)
8. What was the focus of the prayer given by the Levites in Nehemiah's day? Did God rescue Israel only once? Explain. Again, how does Jesus' mediation in the future parallel Moses' mediation in the past? (See Nehemiah 9:16-19, 28-31)
9. Describe the requirements and promise in Joel 2:12-13. What is God's anger ALWAYS connected to? How do you see the LORD as a God who is *gracious and merciful* for you?