

himself (Hosea 2:19; 3:1-5). When Israel became idolatrous, God disciplined them by allowing them to be captured by other nations (Judges 2:14; 6:1; 8:34; 13:1). Then, in his love, God restored them to their heritage during the time of the Judges (Judges 2:16). And when centuries later they departed from God, he had them destroyed by other nations (2 Kings 17:5-23; 2 Chronicles 34:23-28; 36:15-17), then later brought them back from captivity (Jeremiah 30:3; Ezra 6:21). This God did because he rules over all nations (2 Chronicles 20:6; Psalms 22:28; 47:8; Daniel 2:37; 4:25). God's discipline is itself a sign of God's love (Proverbs 3:11-12; Hebrews 12:5-6).

Although God's elective love was toward Israel (Malachi 1:2; Romans 9:13), God's love is demonstrated also toward all mankind in that God has given general provisions through nature to benefit all humanity. God sends the rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:43-48; Acts 14:15-17). God wants everyone to repent rather than to perish (2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 18:14). Therefore, even in Old Testament times, God sought to spare, through the preaching of Jonah, the city of Nineveh (Jonah 1-4). God especially loves the righteous (Psalm 146:8; Proverbs 15:9). He loves righteousness (Psalm 11:7; 33:5), and justice (Psalm 33:5; 37:28; 99:4). He loves the stranger and gives him food and clothing (Deuteronomy 10:18). He also loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

In the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4), God, "who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us" (Ephesians 2:4), sent his only begotten Son (John 3:16; 5:37; 8:16) to die "for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3), to be "the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10), that "whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Thereby God made us alive, who once "were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1), who had "conducted ourselves in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind," and were therefore subject to the wrath of God (Ephesians 2:3). God demonstrated "his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

God's love through Christ grants to believers forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:3-12), freedom from sin (Romans 6:18-22) and deliverance from the eternal consequences of sin (Romans 8:2). God's love also enables believers to receive the Holy Spirit of God (Romans 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14), to become children of God (Romans 8:14, 19; Galatians 3:26; 4:4-6; 1 John 3:1-2), and in the ages to come to receive "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). Nothing can separate believers from the love of God (Romans 8:35-39).

God's love is also demonstrated in the New Testament to be like that of a father. A father gives good gifts to his children (Matthew 7:11). He cares about his wayward children, and when they return, he runs to meet them (Luke 15:20). Heaven rejoices when sinners repent (Luke 15:4-10). Jesus taught that "it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Jesus declared that the Father loves those who love the Son (John 16:27), noting that the Father's love to the disciples was as God has loved him (John 17:23). Jesus also said, "He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John 14:21). What a great promise! And what great love! "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

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THEISM

God is Love

In contrast to gods of heathen religions who are often presented as vindictive and angry beings in need of appeasement, the God of the Bible is characterized as the essence of love. "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). Since God is love and since God is eternal, then God's love is eternal. Moreover, since love requires that the one who loves have an object to love, and since God's love is eternal, then an object of God's love must have existed throughout eternity. That eternal object of God's love was his Son, Jesus Christ. God's love for the Son is affirmed by many scriptures (John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 15:9; 17:23-24, 26). At Jesus' baptism, the voice of God came from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). In a prayer, Jesus said, "Father . . . you have loved me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24). Since the very nature of God is love, then surely his love is demonstrated.

In Scripture, God's love is declared to be demonstrated in many ways. God has demonstrated his love throughout the history of mankind. Just as parents love for an expected new born child leads them to prepare a nursery, so also God's love for humanity led him before the creation of Adam and Eve to prepared a habitation and provisions for them (Genesis 1-2). When they sinned, God announced plans for their redemption (Genesis 3:15). When humanity became extremely wicked, God spared righteous Noah and his family from destruction (Genesis 6-8). Later, God promised Abraham that through him and his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 22:17-18; Galatians 3:16). When Abraham's descendents, the Israelites, became slaves in Egypt, God heard their cries and delivered them (Exodus 2:23-25; 3:7-10). After bringing great plagues upon the Egyptians, God brought the Israelites out, leading them through the Red Sea (Exodus 8-14) because he loved Israel (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:8; Hosea 11:1). Because of His love, He gave them food and water in the wilderness (Exodus 16:31, 35; Numbers 11:9; Deuteronomy 8:3, 16; Nehemiah 9:20; Exodus 17:1-3, 6; Numbers 20:2-13; Deuteronomy 8:15) and guided their journey with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22; Numbers 14:14; Nehemiah 9:12, 19). At Mt. Sinai, God gave them a covenant (Exodus 24:7-8; 34:10, 27-28; Deuteronomy 4:13; 5:2-3; 9:9, 11) and the priesthood (Exodus 28:41; 29:44; 30:30; Numbers 3:3-4, 10; 18:7; 25:13; 29:9; 40:15). Because God loved Israel, he prohibited Balaam from cursing them (Deuteronomy 23:5). He gave them the land of Canaan (Judges 6:9; Joshua 21:43-44), and later gave them judges to deliver them from their oppressors (Judges 2:16, 18; 3:9, 15). The Psalmist recognized God's love for Israel (Psalm 47:4). He acknowledged that because the loving kindness of God is considered precious, "the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your pleasures. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light" (Psalms 36:7-9). When Solomon became king over Israel, Hiram, king of Tyre, observed that it was because God loved Israel (2 Chronicles 2:11). The queen of Sheba observed the same (1 Kings 10:9). Solomon himself was initially beloved of God (Nehemiah 13:26). When Israel later suffered, the prophet Isaiah realized that God's loving-kindness had previously been extended to the nation (Isaiah 63:7, 9).

Whenever the nation of Israel turned away from God, whether during the times of the judges or days of the kings, to serve idols of the nations around them, he disciplined them but then restored them to himself. God illustrated his love for Israel by instructing Hosea to purchase back his adulterous wife, and by likening that action to his restoring of unfaithful Israel to