

# Psalm 78:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.

## Analysis

**But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not.** The stunning reversal begins with *wēhū'* (וְהָוָה, "but he")—despite their lying flattery and heart-unfaithfulness, God remains compassionate. *Rahūm* (רָחוּם, "full of compassion") derives from *rehem* (רֶחֶם, womb), depicting mother-love tender mercy. *Kāpar* (כִּפֶּר, "forgave") means to cover or atone—the sacrificial language pointing to substitutionary atonement.

**Yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.** The phrase *hirbâ lēhâshîb 'appô* (הִרְבָּה לְהַשִּׁיב אֲפֹו), "multiplied to turn away his anger") emphasizes God's repeated restraint. *hēmâ* (חֶמֶה, "wrath") is burning fury—which God deliberately does not fully unleash. His patience multiplies beyond human comprehension.

This is the psalm's theological heart: God's covenant mercy transcends Israel's covenant breaking. Their faithlessness does not nullify His faithfulness (Romans 3:3-4). This foreshadows Calvary, where God's wrath was fully satisfied in Christ, allowing compassion to triumph over judgment for all who believe.

## Historical Context

Throughout the wilderness period, God repeatedly refrained from total destruction despite capital offenses—the golden calf, Kadesh-barnea rebellion, Korah's revolt.

Moses' intercessions appealed to God's reputation and promises (Exodus 32:11-14), but ultimately God's own character of compassion stayed His hand.

## Related Passages

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**1 John 4:8** — God is love

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

## Study Questions

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1. How does God's repeated mercy toward unfaithful Israel shape your understanding of His patience with your own failures?
2. What does it reveal about God's character that He "did not stir up all his wrath" despite deserving it?
3. How should awareness of God's multiplied mercy affect your worship and obedience?

## Interlinear Text

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וְהַ וְאֵלֶּה  
H1931      **But he being full of compassion**      H7349

רְחֵם  
H7349      **for gave**      H3722

עָזָן  
H3808      **their iniquity**      H5771

וְשַׁחַתְּתָם  
H7843      **and destroyed**      H7235

אַפְתָּה  
H3808      **them not yea many a time**      H7725

לְבָשָׂר  
H639      **away**      H2534

אַפְתָּה  
H3808      **he his anger**      H639

בָּבֶן  
H3605      **all his wrath**      H2534

בָּבֶן  
H5782      **and did not stir up**

## Additional Cross-References

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**Isaiah 48:9** (Parallel theme): For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off.

**Ezekiel 20:17** (Parallel theme): Nevertheless mine eye spared them from destroying them, neither did I make an end of them in the wilderness.

**2 Kings 21:20** (Parallel theme): And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did.

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