

# Psalms 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 *wěhû'* (וְהוּא, "but he")—despite their lying flattery and heart-unfaithfulness, God remains compassionate. *Raḥûm* (רַחוּם, "full of compassion") derives from *reḥem* (רֶחֶם, womb), depicting mother-love tender mercy. *Kāpar* (כָּפַר, "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 lēhāšîb 'appô* (הִרְבָּה לְהָשִׁיב אָפוֹ, "multiplied to turn away his anger") emphasizes God's repeated restraint. *hēmâ* (חֲמָה, "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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וְהוּא	רַחֵם וְיִסְּרֵם	וְכַפֵּר	עוֹן	וְלֹא
H1931	<b>But he being full of compassion</b>	<b>forgave</b>	<b>their iniquity</b>	H3808
	H7349	H3722	H5771	
וַיִּשְׁחֵ יֵת	וְלֹא הִרְבָּה	לְהִשָּׁ יֵב	אֵפֹ וְ	וְלֹא
<b>and destroyed</b>	<b>them not yea many a time</b>	<b>away</b>	<b>he his anger</b>	H3808
H7843	H7235	H7725	H639	
וַיַּעֲרִ	כָּל	חֲמָתוֹ:		
<b>and did not stir up</b>	<b>all his wrath</b>			
H5782	H3605	H2534		

## 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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