

## ***God's Wrath/Anger in the Book of Judges and Other Books***

1. Judges is a book full of violence, immorality, backsliding, idolatry, and promises made to God that were later broken. It makes the children of Israel look very bad. If your church had passed through a set of circumstances like that, would you record it permanently and publish it for the world and universe to read? Even assuming that all of the stories are reported correctly, wouldn't it have been best just to let them be forgotten?
2. Judges begins with God becoming very "exasperated" with Israel and even apparently becoming "angry"! Is that a correct representation of God? When God becomes angry, what happens? See Deuteronomy 31:16-18; 32:15-30; Joshua 7:1-12; Judges 2:12-14, 19-23; 3:7-9; 10:6-12. Compare Romans 1:18-28. How do these ideas fit with your idea of *anger*? How do they fit with Webster's definition?

In light of what we read in these passages, it is absolutely essential that we allow the Bible to define its own terms for us, and we must not assume that our modern "Webster's" definitions are what the Bible writers had in mind.

3. What do the following passages teach us about God's anger and its results?

Look first at God's prediction of what would happen if they left Him.

### **Deuteronomy 31:16-18 (GNB):**

16 The LORD said to Moses, "You will soon die, and after your death the people will become unfaithful to me and break the covenant that I made with them. **They will abandon me** and worship the pagan gods of the land they are about to enter. <sup>17</sup>When that happens, **I will become angry with them; I will abandon them, and they will be destroyed.** Many terrible disasters will come upon them, and then **they will realize that these things are happening to them because I, their God, am no longer with them.** <sup>18</sup>And I will refuse to help them then, because they have done evil and worshiped other gods." [Bold type is added.]

### **Deuteronomy 31:17:** (the key words) [God said:]

"... my anger shall be kindled against them.... I will forsake them.... I will hide my face from them." (*KJV, Leeser, Darby, ASV, Amplified, NASB, NASB 1995, RSV, NRSV, NIV*)

"When that happens, I will become angry with them; I will abandon them, and they will be destroyed." (*GNB*)

"... my anger shall blaze against them, .... I will forsake them, and withhold my favor from them." (*Smith-Goodspeed*)

"... My anger will flare up against them, and I will abandon them and hide My countenance from them." (*Tanakh*)

"... I will have to withdraw my protection from them and leave them at the mercy of their enemies." (*Clear Word*) [Content in brackets is added.]

Earlier, God had said:

### **Leviticus 26:14-17,40-45 (GNB):**

<sup>14</sup>The LORD said, "If you will not obey my commands, **you will be punished.** <sup>15</sup>If you refuse to obey my laws and commands and break the covenant I have made

with you, <sup>16</sup>I will punish you. I will bring disaster on you—incurable diseases and fevers that will make you blind and cause your life to waste away. You will sow your seed, but it will do you no good, because your enemies will conquer you and eat what you have grown. <sup>17</sup>I will turn against you, so that you will be defeated, and those who hate you will rule over you; you will be so terrified that you will run when no one is chasing you.

<sup>40</sup> “But your descendants will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors, who resisted me and rebelled against me, <sup>41</sup>and made me turn against them and send them into exile in the land of their enemies. At last, when your descendants are humbled and they have paid the penalty for their sin and rebellion, <sup>42</sup>I will remember my covenant with Jacob and with Isaac and with Abraham, and I will renew my promise to give my people the land. <sup>43</sup>First, however, the land must be rid of its people, so that it can enjoy its complete rest, and they must pay the full penalty for having rejected my laws and my commands. <sup>44</sup>**But even then, when they are still in the land of their enemies, I will not completely abandon or destroy them.** That would put an end to my covenant with them, and I am the LORD their God. <sup>45</sup>I will renew the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I showed all the nations my power by bringing my people out of Egypt, in order that I, the LORD, might be their God.” [Bold type is added.]

#### **Numbers 32:13-15 (GNB):**

**The LORD was angry** with the people and made them wander in the wilderness for 40 years until that whole generation that had displeased him was dead.... **He will once again abandon all these people** in the wilderness, and you will be responsible for their destruction. [Bold type is added.]

#### **Deuteronomy 32:15-27 (GNB):** [Moses said:]

<sup>15</sup> **“They abandoned God their Creator** and rejected their mighty savior.

<sup>16</sup> Their idolatry made the LORD jealous; the evil they did **made him angry**....

<sup>20</sup> **‘I will no longer help them,’** he [the LORD] said;

‘then I will see what happens to them,

those stubborn, unfaithful people....

<sup>21</sup> So I will use a so-called nation to make them angry;

I will make them jealous with a nation of fools.

<sup>22</sup> **My anger** will flame up like fire

and burn everything on earth....

<sup>26</sup> **I would have destroyed them completely,**

**so that no one would remember them.**

<sup>27</sup> But I could not let their enemies boast

that they had defeated my people,

when it was I myself who had crushed them.”

[Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

**Joshua 7:1-12 (GNB):**

<sup>1</sup> **The Lord was furious** with the Israelites.... <sup>12</sup>this is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies. They retreat from them because they themselves have now been condemned to destruction! **I will not stay** with you any longer unless you destroy the things you were ordered not to take! [Bold type is added.]

**Judges 2:11-14 (GNB):**

<sup>11</sup>Then the people of Israel sinned against the LORD and began to serve the Baals. <sup>12</sup>They stopped worshiping the LORD, ...and they began to worship other gods, the gods of the peoples round them. They bowed down to them and **made the LORD angry....** <sup>14</sup>And so **the LORD became furious** with Israel and **let raiders attack and rob them. He let enemies all around overpower them,** and the Israelites could no longer protect themselves. [Bold type is added.]

**Judges 2:19-23 (GNB):**

<sup>19</sup>But when the leader died, the people used to return to the old ways and behave worse than the previous generation. They would serve and worship other gods, and refused to give up their own evil ways. <sup>20</sup>Then **the LORD would become furious with Israel....** <sup>23</sup>So **the LORD allowed** those nations to remain in the land; he did not give Joshua victory over them, nor did he drive them out soon after Joshua's death. [Bold type is added.]

**Judges 3:7-8 (GNB):**

<sup>7</sup> The people of Israel forgot the LORD their God; they sinned against him and worshiped the idols of Baal and Asherah. <sup>8</sup>So **the LORD became angry with Israel** and **let King Cushan Rishathaim of Mesopotamia conquer them.** [Bold type is added.]

**Judges 10:6-16 (GNB):**

<sup>6</sup> Once again the Israelites sinned against the LORD by worshiping the Baals and the Astartes, as well as the gods of Syria, of Sidon, of Moab, of Ammon, and of Philistia. **They abandoned the LORD and stopped worshiping him. <sup>7</sup>So the LORD became angry with the Israelites, and let the Philistines and the Ammonites conquer them....** <sup>15</sup> But the people of Israel said to the LORD, "We have sinned. Do whatever you like, but please, save us today." <sup>16</sup>So they got rid of their foreign gods and worshipped the LORD; and he became troubled over Israel's distress. [Bold type is added.]

4. A. Graham Maxwell frequently stated that:

**It should be very clear from all of these passages that God's "anger" is not like our anger. The Bible repeatedly describes God's anger as His turning away in loving disappointment from those who don't want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choices.**

**Romans 1:18-28 (GNB):**

<sup>18</sup> For **the wrath of God is revealed from heaven** against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth.... <sup>24</sup> **Therefore**

**God gave them up** in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ....<sup>26</sup> **For this reason God gave them up** to dishonorable passions.<sup>28</sup> And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, **God gave them up** to a base mind and to improper conduct. [Bold type is added.]

How does God feel about leaving His children to the consequences of their own choices?

**Hosea 11:1-2,7-9 (GNB):**

The LORD says,

“When Israel was a child, I loved him and called him out of Egypt as my son.

<sup>2</sup>But the more I called to him, the more he turned away from me....

<sup>7</sup>They insist on turning away from me. They will cry out because of the yoke that is on them, but no one will lift it from them.

<sup>8</sup>“How can I give you up, Israel? How can I abandon you?

Could I ever destroy you as I did Admah, or treat you as I did Zeboiim?

My heart will not let me do it! My love for you is too strong.

<sup>9</sup>I will not punish you in my anger; I will not destroy Israel again.

For I am God and not a human being.

I, the Holy One, am with you. I will not come to you in anger.”

5. It seems that this turning away from God and reaping the consequences, which we have called God’s “wrath,” was a recurrent theme in Judges: Judges 3:7-8,12,15; 4:1-3; 6:1-8; 10:6-16; 13:1. Doesn’t the section in Judges 10:6-16 seem like a very logical response on God’s part? What should God have done at that point? God’s wrath or anger or fury is a recurrent theme throughout the Bible. How does what we have learned in Judges impact your understanding of Revelation 14:9-11?
6. What would we suggest that God do with people who appear to be running away from Him as fast as they possibly can? Should He grab them by the scruff of the neck and demand that they come back? Should He get “angry” and destroy all of them? If He had done that, there would probably not be anyone left on planet earth! Should God have tried some kind of “crisis intervention”? Could He punish them to get their attention? How would you convince those people that they needed to take God, the truth, and their relationships with Him more seriously? If you continued to get no response no matter how hard you tried to reach out to them, would you finally decide to let them reap the results (consequences) of their own behavior to see if they would learn some lessons? The Bible seems to describe this final “letting go” as God’s wrath. It does not describe God as “losing His temper” or “lashing out” or even “losing control of His emotions”—as we so often see people doing in our day. How does God feel as He has to let some of us go farther and farther away from Him? Look at Hosea 11:7-8. In light of all of this, isn’t it fair to say that God’s love never ceases toward us? In the final end, won’t God still be weeping as He turns away in loving disappointment and lets the wicked go as each of them insists?

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Last Modified: January 10, 2016

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