

**Weekly Bible Study Series, Vol. 9, No. 17: 25 May 2008**

© I. Chris Imoisili, E-mail: [imoisilic@hotmail.com](mailto:imoisilic@hotmail.com); [imoisilic@gmail.com](mailto:imoisilic@gmail.com)

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## **GOD'S ANGER IS AS ELASTIC AS YOUR REBELLION!**

**Today's Text:** Micah Chaps 6-7

**Extracts:**

**Hear now what the Lord says: "Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice... for *the Lord has a complaint against His people, and He will contend with Israel.*" ... He has shown you, O man, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?...Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity, and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? *He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast off our sins into the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old* [Mic. 6: 1, 2, 8; 7: 18-19]**

*The swallow bird is a small perching bird which is found almost everywhere in the world.<sup>1</sup> It flies gracefully, making abrupt changes in speed and direction as it feeds on the wing, catching insects in its wide mouth. In African folklore, the swallow bird's flying ability is celebrated in proverbs illustrating how to adapt to changing circumstances. For example, in Chinua Achebe's famous novel, **Things Fall Apart** (1958),<sup>2</sup> the swallow is called Eneke (Igbo language). When asked why it was always on the wings, Eneke replied, "Men have learned to shoot without missing their mark and I have learned to fly without perching" [p. 204].<sup>3</sup>*

*The Scripture says that God will not be angry with us forever because He delights in mercy [Mic. 7: 18]. But does His anger expire? Borrowing from Eneke the bird's principle, we can postulate that as long as we remain in sin and rebellion, God's anger will not abate. In other words, His anger is as elastic as our rebellion. Since His anger is hazardous to our spiritual health, it is necessary for us to know when God is angry with us and how to get out of His shooting range as quickly as possible. This week's study addresses the subject.*

<sup>1</sup>Swallow, [http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Swallow+\(bird\)](http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Swallow+(bird)) taken from The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia® Copyright © 2007, Columbia University Press. Licensed from Columbia University Press. All rights reserved. [www.cc.columbia.edu/cu/cup/](http://www.cc.columbia.edu/cu/cup/)

<sup>2</sup> Heinemann Books. The book has been published in 50 languages and has sold over 8 million copies.

<sup>3</sup> "Selected Proverbs from *Things Fall Apart*," <http://www.unc.edu/~hhalpin/ThingsFallApart/Proverbs.html>

## 1. Have you ever been angry with anyone?

Every one of us gets angry on a daily basis. Something or somebody has irritated us and we are angry. Sometimes, the anger is self-inflicted. The word of God says, “Be angry and sin not; do not let the sun go down on your wrath” [Eph. 4: 26]. That suggests that there is nothing wrong with anger *per se* unless it leads to sin. That means there is “bad anger” and “good anger”! God’s anger must be good anger because He cannot sin. Therefore, to help us to appreciate God’s anger against us, let us first examine anger from a human perspective. Why would you be angry with anybody else? Consider the following possibilities:

### a) *Anger that leads to sin*

In this case, some people are provoked to anger and they act on it in such a way that leads them to sin. For example, some people are very short tempered. They have a very thin tolerance level and at the slightest provocation, they explode and thereby offend others who may even be innocent parties! For example, some supervisors curse their subordinates for the slightest error. Some pregnant wives have a short fuse, curse and fume should their husbands or children offend them, no matter how slightly.

Sometimes, anger that leads to sin may grow out of envy. Persons that we consider our equal or inferior appear to be doing better than we are doing and we get angry with them for no just cause. If we turn such envy into hurting them, then that anger has led to sin. A good example is Esau’s relationship with his brother Abel. It was not Abel’s doing that his offering was accepted by God while that of his brother, Esau, was rejected. Esau became “very angry and his countenance fell.” So, God asked him, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, *sin lies at the door* (and) *its desire is for you but you should rule over it.*” Cain did not, and he went on to murder his brother [Gen. 4: 1-8].

Anger that leads to sin could also grow out of human pride. For example, for daring to challenge his authority before his officers and leaders, Nebuchadnezzar was so “full of fury and the expression on his face changed toward Meshach, Shadrach and Abed-Nego” that he got them thrown into burning fiery furnace that had been heated seven times than usual [Dan. 3: 14-20]. His anger led to sin.

### b) *Anger that does not lead to sin*

In this case, we express anger but not with the motive of sin. This is called “righteous indignation.” Take the case of Jonathan the son of king Saul of Israel. His father was determined to kill David whom he feared was going

to take the throne from him. Jonathan was a very close friend of David's. One day, as the king and Jonathan sat at table in the palace, David's seat was empty. On learning that Jonathan had granted David permission to be absent, Saul was furious with him and said to him, "As long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Now, therefore, send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die." As Jonathan hesitated, still trying to defend David's innocence, his father threw a spear at him to kill him. For that, "Jonathan arose from the table in *fierce anger* ... for he was grieved for David, because his father had treated him shamefully" [1 Sam. 20: 27-34]. Jonathan's anger against his father was justified but it did not lead him to sin. It was righteous indignation.

Other ways in which we show righteous anger include:

- *When we correct* our children or those under our supervision as we train them to become better and successful people. In this case, anger is one means to chasten those we love [Heb. 12: 5-6].
- *When we defend sound doctrine* even when it offends protocol. For example, Paul openly challenged Peter and his close associates for playing the hypocrite by not eating with the Gentiles as soon as Jewish believers had joined them from Jerusalem [Gal. 2: 11-14]. Also, in anger, Jesus made a whip with which He drove out of the temple money changers and traders because they had turned His Father's house into "a house of merchandise" [Jn 2: 13-16].
- *When we mete out punishment to deserving offenders*. For example, judges have discretion in that they may by law be authorized to give minimum or maximum penalties for offenses. Their level of anger, based on the offenders' remorse (or lack of it) could influence the actual punishment imposed. For example, king Solomon caused the living child to be returned to the true mother but we are not told that he ordered the lying mother to be killed, which would also have been in order. The demonstration of God's wisdom was more important to the angry king at the time than the false evidence of a poor harlot. [1 Kgs 3: 16-28].

In reality, some people are more patient than others, but God is more patient than us all! He knew us before we were formed in our mothers' wombs [Jer. 1: 5], and He knows our expected end [Jer. 29: 11]. When He is angry with us, it is for our own good. He is long-suffering because He "is not willing that any should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance" [2 Pet. 3: 9]. Let us see how He demonstrates it from today's study based on Chapters 6 and 7 of the book of Micah.

## 2. Case Study: The cycle of God's long-suffering anger

From the following cycle of God's long-suffering anger with the people of Israel, we can learn a few principles:

a) *His Promise is the benchmark*

The prophet Micah pleaded with God for Israel, saying, "Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities.... *You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old*" [Mic. 7: 18-20].

Israel was a chosen nation by virtue of God's covenant with Abraham. That covenant was based on Abraham's faith in God, which was imputed to him for righteousness [Gen. 15: 1-21]. Blessings were anchored on continued obedience by Abraham's descendants [Deut. 7: 6-26]. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel is also our God and Father for, just as the people's hope was anchored on God's promise of righteousness by faith, the same has now been extended to "us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." Consequently Abraham has become "the father of us all" [Rom. 4: 13-24].

Many criminals persist in their nefarious activities because they know that the day they are caught and found guilty, they will certainly go to jail. On the other hand, God's promise of total forgiveness for repentance is always there for us when we ask [1 Jn 1: 7-9]. Knowing beforehand that their sins would be forgiven if they repented should encourage sinners to come forward to confess their sins.

b) *God draws our attention to our sins*

The prophet laid God's complaints against His people and warned that He was ready to contend with them [Mic. 6: 2]. What wrong had God done against them? Was it for bringing them out of bondage in Egypt or rescuing them from the curse of Balak [vv. 3-5]? Did they think that they could placate His anger with "thousands of rams" or "ten thousand rivers of oil" and other offerings in place of repentance [vv. 6-7]? What God required of them was "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly" with their God [v. 8].

In deed, how often do we behave as if we could buy off God's anger by hypocritical worship? We pay unfair wages to our workers and cheat on taxes. From stolen wealth, we pay tithes or undertake projects in God's house. Can we assuage God's anger that way? I doubt!

c) *God punishes us if we persist in sin*

God saw their unconfessed sins, namely, “treasure of wickedness in the house of the wicked,” “wicked scales... with the bag of deceitful weights,” “rich men ... full of violence,” and lying inhabitants with deceitful tongues [vv. 9-12]. For such abominations, He was going to strike them down with judgment as follows:

- They would eat and not be satisfied and hunger, famine and the sword would devastate the population [vv. 13-14];
- They would sow and not reap, or reap and not eat or drink of it [v.15]; and
- For their idolatry, the people would be a hissing and a reproach [v. 16].

Most times, because of the time lag between sin and its punishment, we can hardly link the two together. For example, how are you sure that that barren woman that you are fervently praying for in your church is not under punishment for a sin that she has not given up or confessed?

d) *But He relents when we repent*

Repenting on behalf of the people, the prophet exclaimed, “Woe is me!” He acknowledged that the faithful man had perished from the face of the earth, and there was no one upright among men [Mic. 7: 1, 2]. Distrust among friends and family had taken over and “a man’s enemies are the men of his own household” [vv. 3-6]. Therefore, the only one to look up to, to wait for, was the God of their salvation who would hear them [v. 7]. Israel’s redemption lay in confessing their sins and seeking the comfort of their God [vv. 8-13], and He would forgive and shepherd his people as He had done of old when He brought them out of the land of Egypt [vv. 14-15]. With Israel restored and renewed, the nations that had lorded it over her would crawl out of their holes like snakes and be afraid of the Lord God of Israel [vv. 16-17]. That God is also our Lord and God.

### 3. Conclusion: Whatever is elastic can also snap!

I heard recently of a Nigerian police officer who reportedly recovered huge sums of money from victims of a fatal accident (students on the NYSC- National Youth Service Corps) which he did not report to the police authorities. In due course, his own children also went to the university and began to serve in the NYSC programme. But every one that was returning home after completing the service died in a vehicle accident. After losing two children like that, he came out to confess to what he had done some ten years earlier. What a price to pay for unconfessed sins!

If only humans feared God the way that Americans fear the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), there would be little or nothing for Him to be angry about! Americans dread the IRS because they know that it can send them to jail, *no matter who* is found guilty of tax offenses. Before God, all have sinned and fall short of His glory. Yet, we continue to offend Him. You know why? It is because He so loved us that He sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins [**Jn 3: 16**]. But does that save us from eternal damnation in hell? Yes, *if and only if* we believe in His Son, Jesus. Those who believe in Jesus are those who do His Father's will [**Mk 3: 35**]. Our attitude to sin and error is a measure of how we do the Father's will. As long as we remain in sin, God will be angry with us.

God is long-suffering but His anger can only get worse with continued rebellion. Therefore, if you do not end your provocation *now*, He will end your discretion *soon*!