

IS GOD ANGRY WITH YOU?

Today's Text: Amos Chap. 9

Extracts:

*I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said: "Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake, and break them on the heads of them all. ... Though they dig into hell, from there My hand shall take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down; and though they hide themselves on top of Carmel, from there I will search and take them. **Though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them; though they go into captivity before their enemies, from there I will command the sword, and it shall slay them. I will set My eyes on them for harm and not for good**" [Amos 9: 1-4]*

On September 11, 2001, now popularly known as '9/11,' Al Qaeda attacked the mainland territory of the world's only superpower, the United States of America, causing much damage to lives, property and national pride. Before then, members of the terrorist organization had attacked US interests abroad without any reprisals. Even when they bombed the World Trade Center in New York in 1993, the US remained calm. However, 9/11 pushed the provocation button too far. The US took the fight to Afghanistan where the Taliban regime had provided sanctuary to Osama Bin Laden and his Al Qaeda forces. In a matter of months, the Taliban lost political control and Bin Laden went underground, reportedly now hiding in the wilderness on the Afghan-Pakistan border. America is angry with Al Qaeda and has pursued it globally ever since.

Just as Al Qaeda has provoked America to anger, so have we, as sinners, been provoking God since we were born. He has been patient with us because it is not His desire that we should perish but that we should come to repentance [2 Pet. 3: 9]. However, instead of repenting, we have provoked Him to the point of anger. Can you imagine what He is going to do? After almost seven years of searching, America has been unable to locate the whereabouts of Osama Bin Laden, not to talk of capturing or killing him. But can you hide from God who is omnipresent?

In today's lesson, the children of Israel had provoked God to the extent that He threatened, "I will set My eyes on them for harm and not for good" [Amos 9: 4]. That is a very serious matter. Can you survive it if God sets His eyes on you for harm? What is it that you have done that may force Him to want to harm you? How can you get out of such a terrible situation? Those and more are the issues that we shall examine in today's study.

1. Background: God was angry with Israel!

We have now reached the last chapter of the prophetic ministry of Amos among the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. A farmer-turned prophet, God had sent Amos from the smaller southern kingdom of Judah to bring a series of warnings to Israel, with the hope that they would change from their evil ways and repent. We can summarize what we have discussed so far as follows:

- God will judge sin [**Amos 3: 1-6**]. There is an iron law between sin and punishment. Therefore, the sermon that God is too good to punish sinners is unscriptural. Rather, God is good and severe at the same time- He shows His goodness to those who continue in His goodness but cuts off those who do otherwise [**Rom. 11: 22**].
- In spite of hardship, such as famine, pestilence and death, the people of Israel persisted in sin [**Amos 4: 6-11**]. Instead of heeding God's warnings, they attacked his messenger, the prophet [**Amos 7: 13**].
- God's patience was finally exhausted and He decided to withdraw His protection over them. They were going to be carted into exile and hardship. That brings us to today's lesson.

In a vision, Amos saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said, "Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake, and break them on the heads of them all. I will slay the last of them with the sword. He who flees from them shall not get away, and he who escapes from them shall not be delivered" [**Amos 9: 1**].

Let us underline the following points:

a) *God was speaking to 'church-goers'!*

Amos saw the Lord standing by the altar. Certainly, the altar was in the place of worship, not in the market place or the king's palace. A majority of those who go to church are professed believers, that is, those who have faith in God. It is an exercise of their free will. Therefore, God was not speaking to atheists (those who do not believe in God) but to the faithfuls. Clearly, we who claim to be believers, having given our lives to Christ, should be interested in this story.

b) *God was angry with them!*

God told the prophet to smite the lintels of the (entrance) door and break the thresholds on the heads of all the worshippers there [**v. 1**]. Does that not remind you of what Jesus Christ did when He came to the temple in Jerusalem? John's Gospel describes it as follows [**Jn 2: 13-16**]:

Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and

doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep, and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables, and He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise."

If you carefully examine that passage, you will note that on the surface, the worshippers might have thought that they were facilitating worship. After all, the items that they sold were sacrifice items under the Law of Moses. The money changers made it easy for those buying and selling to obtain or save their money respectively. In the process, however, they defiled God's house and turned it into a den of thieves.

Is that far-fetched from your place of worship? All those people carrying cameras to record sermons and songs that are later put into cassettes, CDs and DVDs, when do they kneel down to worship? All those unending collections and offerings that are taken every worship day in your church, are they for God's glory or for the "money changers"? Do you sincerely think that God is not angry with us? Is a person not cursed who does God's work deceitfully **[Jer. 48:10]**?

c) *So God set His eyes on them for harm!*

God revealed through the prophet "I will set My eyes on them *for harm* and not for good" **[Amos 9: 4]**. Could they escape from such an attack? No way because in God's own words **[vv. 3-4]**:

Though they dig into hell, from there My hand shall take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down; and though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them. Though they go into captivity before their enemies, from there I will command the sword, and it shall slay them.

Most times, we behave as if we can escape from God's sight. We tend to forget that He is all-seeing **[Jer. 23: 24]** and that He is everywhere at the same time **[Ps. 139: 7- 12]**. Unlike human security authorities who may search for years and still be unable to find wanted criminal suspects, God finds us the moment He decides to get us. We have no place to hide! So, why do we think that we can get away?

d) *But it was the unrepentant among them that would be harmed*

God said that He would destroy the "sinful kingdom" from the face of the earth but He would not utterly destroy "the house of Jacob." Rather, "as grain is sifted in a sieve," so He would separate the sinners from the righteous and

“all the sinners of My people shall die by the sword who say, ‘the calamity shall not overtake nor confront us’” [**Amos 9: 8-10**].

The house of Jacob consisted of the two divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah. God was not angry with everyone in Israel but only with the sinners who refused to repent. They kept claiming that they would be saved because they were Abraham’s children instead of doing God’s will [**Jn 8: 31-47**]. Is that not the same claim that we make, when we believe that we shall go to heaven by virtue of our denominations rather than by our personal relationships with Christ? Are we not thus putting ourselves in harm’s way?

Let us relate the above story to ourselves to see how we make God angry with us.

2. How we provoke God to anger

God knows that, from our ancestral link with Adam and Eve, we have all sinned and come short of His glory [**Rom. 3: 23**]. That is why He promised us the Messiah right from the Garden of Eden [**Gen. 3: 15**]. Out of His abundant love for us, God allowed His only begotten Son to bear the guilt of our sins by dying on the cross. So, in Christ Jesus, we have an Advocate with the Father when we sin [**1 Jn 2: 1-2**]. However, we are required to confess the sin(s) and repent. When we refuse to acknowledge sin or confess it, we are actually calling God a liar [**1 Jn 1: 10**]! At that point, He gets angry with us and who can stop Him from allowing harm to get to us?

Here are some ways that we demonstrate lack of confession/repentance:

a) *When we blame shift*¹

We have sinned against God or against fellow humans but instead of repenting to Him or apologizing to them, we hold others responsible for our misdeeds. For example, a man caught in adultery may blame his wife’s frigidity! A pastor caught stealing church funds may blame the treasurer for not taking the money from his hands early enough! In the Bible, we saw that Adam blamed his wife for giving him the forbidden fruit to eat. In turn, his wife blamed the serpent [**Gen. 3: 9-13**]! When God asked Cain about his brother that he had just killed, he replied, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” [**Gen. 4: 9**].

Sometimes, we blame shift by our hypocrisy. We condemn in others what we actually admire in ourselves. We expect them to repent whereas we should not! For example, we expect everyone below us (by age or position, etc) to defer to us but we hardly defer to those above us, including God! One way we do so is to fight for the front rows in our

¹ For more on the subject, see ‘Blame shifting is not repentance!’ *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 3, No. 3: 20 January 2002, www.bibleresourcecentre.com

churches or associations and be served rather than serve others. Jesus illustrated the point in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (tax collector) [Lk 18: 9-14]. Both of them went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee stood and prayed, saying, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.” The Publican stood afar off and could not as much as look up. Instead, he beat his chest and said, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Jesus concluded that the Publican went home justified because “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.”

b) *When we try to hide our sins*

Rather than confess and repent, some people try to bury the evidence by hiding their sins and continuing in them. For example, David used the privilege of being the king to hide his adulterous affair with the wife of one of his soldiers who was far away in the battle fronts. When it resulted in pregnancy, the king did not confess his sin. Instead, he sought to bury it by getting the woman’s husband killed in battle while he married his wife [2 Sam. 11: 1-27]!

Somehow, we tend to relate to God as we relate to the justice system in our respective countries. Before the police or judges, we try to hide our offences, instead of admitting them, for the following reasons, among others:

- *We may never be caught or found out!* For example, criminal cases are judged on “proof beyond reasonable doubt.” In most cases, there are three versions of the case: the prosecutor’s, the defendant’s and the truth! So, even though we are as guilty as hell, we may still be acquitted on the basis of available evidence. We tend to use the same attitude when we relate to God. In David’s example given above, who could have dared to even prosecute him before the court, not to talk of convicting him of adultery and murder? Only God could and He did by sending Nathan the prophet to let the king know that he had made God angry [2 Sam. 12; 1- 15].
- *We may not be pardoned if we admit guilt.* Even if we were to plead guilty instead of wasting the court’s time, they would hardly set us free. At best, they might only reduce the sentence or punishment. So, why admit fault when you will not be pardoned? When we bring such an attitude before God, we may not admit any guilt. Instead, we may find excuses for our failings.

Since we cannot hide anything from God and He is merciful when we confess our sins, He is the only one that we ought to run to when we are messed up. If

we refuse to go to Him, He will disgrace us as He did to Adam and the people of Israel. But if we confess our sins, He will rehabilitate and restore us as He did to David and Peter. With respect to repentant Israel, God raised up again the tabernacle of David that had fallen down and repaired the damages. He did not only bring back the captives, He rebuilt their cities and replanted them in their lands, no longer to be pulled up from the land that He had given to them [Amos 9: 11-15]. That is the portion of backslidden believers who return to God.

3. Conclusion: Hide in the Light of Christ!

In African tradition, an offender being pursued by a wronged person is safe as soon as he hides behind a village elder, until the matter is adjudicated. That is akin to the concept of ‘city of refuge’ under the Law of Moses [Num. 35: 9-12]. Under the New Covenant that God has signed with us by the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus is our city of refuge before His Father when He pursues us for harm on account of our unconfessed sins. What does that do for us?

When we take refuge at the feet of Jesus, His light exposes the shadow of our sins that has been hidden by our dark past. Since we cannot escape from our shadows, we have no choice but to own up! In turn, God has no choice but to forgive us.

Alleluia!

For further reading

1. ‘The best place to hide is in the open!’ *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 2, No. 30: 11 November 2001.
2. ‘No place to hide!’ *WBSS*, Vol. 9, No. 1: 20 January 2008.

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