

# Die by Fire (Isaiah 66: 16): A Study of Divine Justice in Old Testament and in African Yoruba Context

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## Abstract

This study attempts to reread Isaiah 66: 16 in the light of divine justice in African Yoruba culture in Nigeria. The study survey various uses of fire in ancient Israel and in the African Yoruba tradition. In the event of justice, a parallel is sought between Yahweh and a Yoruba deified divinity called Sango whose presence is marked by fire, thunder and lightning. The parallel is with the view to establish the significance of fire on justice in African Yoruba Christianity. African Biblical Hermeneutics was used for the study. It was discovered that fire was used as medium of divine justice and mercy in African Yoruba tradition. Fire marked divine presence, manifestation of the glory of God, revelation of God's power, cleansing of human and vessels for holy use, and use for domestic purposes especially cooking. The African Yoruba Christians in Nigeria see fire as a weapon of divine justice. Therefore, in their prayers to God they call down fire to kill their spiritual and physical enemies. They are fond of using the words: 'die by fire'. In this way, the Bible becomes a sure and reliable weapon in the battles of life and thus makes the biblical text relevant in any context, condition and generation.

**Keywords:** Fire, *Sango*, Divine Justice, Ancient Israel, and African Yoruba.

## Introduction

From time immemorial, humans have continued to engage in interpretation of ancient documents. It has been observed that there is the livelihood of misinterpretation especially if the interpreter is not the writer of the text. Sometimes the interpreter has his/her preconceived notion while working on a text. In biblical study, attempts are made to make a text relevant to its contemporary readers. This is the reason why when an ancient document is read from generation to generation in the light of human experiences, a new understanding or interpretation is inevitable (Wyatt, 1986: 361-364).

Prophet Isaiah's prophecy was primarily to Judah and Jerusalem, though there were oracles to some of the nations around them (McCain, 2002: 298). Isaiah addressed issues of concern to his audience. One of the Issues the Prophet spoke on was justice for the oppressed. In Isaiah 66: 16, the Prophet announced what Yahweh was about to do for Israel that suffered oppression at that time. Yahweh will come down with fire and sword to destroy the oppressors. Isaiah predicted the coming of a Messiah who will bring salvation, righteousness and justice on earth. The new kingdom will be characterized by justice and true worship of Yahweh (Awojobi, 2015: 101). This kingdom will be established to put an end to Injustice. Isaiah 66: 16 has been read and interpreted over and over again with little or no attention paid the African Yoruba Christian interpretation in the light of fire as a medium of divine justice. African Biblical Hermeneutics

that makes the Bible relevant in African experience was used for the study. The purpose of this study is to reread Isaiah 66: 16 in African Yoruba Context in the light of divine justice. This study also attempts to survey various uses of fire in biblical literature and in African indigenous tradition.

### **Fire in Biblical Literature**

Fire is something that is burning. It means flames, light, heat, and smoke, that are produced when something is burning (Hornby, 2015: 583). Fire is the product of burning which produced heat, light and flame (<http://www.bible-history.com/Faussets/F/Fire:1-6>). To the ancient people, fire was regarded by as supernatural and divine in origin (Dt 12:31; 2 Ki 17:31; Ps. 106:37). In the Old Testament words like “flame, light, that which burns, lightning, firebrand, torch, or fiery serpents” are used to denoted various kinds of fire. These words are used both literally and figuratively in the scriptures (Awojobi, 2021: 72).

In ancient Israel, sacrifices were usually consumed by fire (Gen. 8:20). Fire could also come from heaven (Le 6:9,13 9:24). Fire came down at the dedication of Solomon's temple (2Ch 7:1,3). In the Scripture, the expressions "fire from heaven" and "fire of the Lord" denote lightning or fire of the altar (Ex 29:18 Le 1:9 2:3 3:5,9). Fire obtained outside Yahweh was called "strange fire" (Le 10:1,2 Nu 3:4).

God uses fire as a medium of destruction (Nu 11:1; 16:35, etc.; Ps 104:4; 2 Pet 3:12). The Israelites used fire as a means of destruction of idolatrous objects and the cities of their enemies (Dt 7:5,25; 12:3; 13:16; Josh 6:24). Punishment of death by fire was inflicted on those guilty of offences like incest (Le 20:14 21:9). The bodies of unknown persons executed during wars were sometimes burned. (Jos 7:25 2Ki 23:16). In war, fire was used in the destruction of cities (Jos 6:24; Jos 8:19; Jos 11:11; Jud 18:27). The Israelites burned the images of the house of Baal (2Kgs. 10: 26).

Besides, fire communicate the presence of divine. A good example is the burning bush (Exod.3: 1-6). Another event is when Moses raised his staff towards heaven and there was fire, thunder and lightning from heaven in Egypt that destroyed plants, animals, humans and trees (Exod. 9: 23-25). Yahweh's arrival on mount Sinai was marked by fire, thunder and lightning (Exod. 19: 16-18). Fire was used in cutting covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15: 17), in the pillar of fire that guarded Israel (Ex 13:21), on Sinai (Ex 19:18), and God was refer to as the God who answers by fire (1 Ki 18:24,38).

In the Torah, sacrifices and offerings were to be made by fire (Ex 12:8,9,10; Lev 1). Fire from Yahweh signified the acceptance of sacrifices (Jdg 6:21; 1 Ki 18:38; 1 Ch 21:26). In Lev 9:24 the sacrificial fire was to be kept continually burning (Lev 6:12,13); offering by "strange fire" was punished by "fire from before Yahweh" (Lev 10:1,2). Fire came from heaven at the consecration of Solomon's Temple (2 Ch 7:1). Figuratively, fire was used in the Old Testament to portray the image of divine “presence, holiness, glory, guidance and protection (Ezek 1:4, 13, 27; 8:2), God's jealousy and wrath against sin, and the retribution of sin (Ezek 36:5; Is 10:16-17), against evil, lust, greed, war, trouble, suffering and affliction” (Job 5:7; Is 29:6). Fire was used for purification and testing, and as the power of the word and the truth of God (Jr 5:14; 20:9; Ps 39:3; 119:139), for prophetic inspiration, and for the zeal of saints and angels (Awojobi, 2021: 72).

From time immemorial, fire has been used and for domestic purposes such heating, cooking, baking, warmth lighting, etc (Jer 36:22 Mr 14:54 Joh 18:18). Fire has been used for melting (Ex 32:24), and refining (Nu 31:23; 3:2,3, etc.). For sacrifices, fire wood was used as fuel (Gen 22:3,1; Lev 6:12); for ordinary purposes, charcoal or coal was used (Prov 25:22; Isa 6:6; Hab 3:5; Jn 21:9; Rom 12:20).

God's word is also likened unto fire (Jer 23:29). Fire is referred to as an emblem of trials or misfortunes (Zec 12:6 Lu 12:49 1Co 3:13,15 1Pe 1:7) and of eternal punishment (Mt 5:22 Mk. 9:44 Rev. 14:10 21:8).

Holy Ghost is likened unto fire and his appearance as tongue of fire (Mt 3:11; Acts 2:3). The Hebrew word for fire in the Old Testament is *עֵשׂ*. This word occurs 400 times in the Old Testament (Renn, 2006: 386). It is either used literally or metaphorically for fire exclusively. There are many passages in the Old Testament where the word *עֵשׂ* is used for literal fire (see Gen. 22: 6, 7; Judges 9: 15; Psa. 66: 12; Isa. 44: 16; Jer. 36: 23 & Ezek. 15: 4). The word is also used as an agent of military destruction as evident from 1 Samuel 30: 1; 2 Samuel 14: 30; 1 Kings 9: 16 (Renn, 2005: 386). Fire was used to destroy idols and the city of Jerusalem (2Kgs. 19: 18, 1 Chron. 14: 12; Isa. 37: 19; Neh. 1: 3, 2: 3, 13: 17). Fire is commonly associated with sacrificial rites and ceremonies (Exod. 29: 14; Lev. 4: 7; Num. 6: 18).

Furthermore, fire may symbolize cleansing. A good example of this is when Israel was preparing for war and the priest said that anything that passes through fire will be clean (Num 31:21 -24). Fire came to purify or refine Isaiah (Isa 6 cf. Mal 3:2). This is an indication that to one fire means death and to another life. To one it means eternal judgment and to another eternal blessing.

Besides, Fire symbolizes the holiness of God that cannot behold iniquity (Heb. 10:27; 12:29). The risen Lord's "eyes are like a flame of fire" (Rev. 2:18,23). He shall come "in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that, know not God and obey not the gospel" (2 Thes. 1:8). In the theophanic event in Exodus 3, the fire purifies the bush and the land (Hamilton, 2011: 43). It was the fire that caught Moses' attention. God used fire to arrest Moses' attention because of the task he had for him. Fire has been object of worship for humans whether in the Old Testament or in African traditional religion. This may be because of the notion that fire or lightning has divine origin (Adamo, 2017: 2). God has used these elements to demonstrate his power, approval and disapproval of persons, or events (Gen. 15: 17; Exod. 3: 2; 19: 18 & 24: 17). Also, the same symbol appeared in the pillar of cloud and fire (Exo. 13:21,22), in His giving the law on Sinai (Exo. 19:18) and at the second advent of Christ (Dan. 7:9,10; Mal. 3:2; 4:1; 2 Pet. 3:7,10). John the Baptist, declared of the Messiah, "He shall baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire," (Mt. 3:11,12).

Furthermore, Fire also symbolizes the purifying of believers by testing dealings (Mal. 3:2), also the holy zeal kindled in them as at Pentecost (Acts 2; Isa. 4:4). The same Holy Spirit, who sanctifies believers. In 1 Cor. 3:13-15, "every man's work ... on the day of judgment shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is ... if any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." The fire in this context is to try the works of Christians.

### **The Book of Isaiah**

Some scholars claimed that the prophecy of Isaiah is the third longest, complete literary entity in the Bible. Prophet Isaiah ministered in the reigns of Uzziah (740BC), Jotham (750-731BC), Ahaz (735-715BC) and Hezekiah (729-686BC) (VanGemeren, 1990: 248). According to the Jewish tradition, Prophet Isaiah belonged to the royal stock and as such he had access to Kings of his days (Isa. 7: 3; 37: 21-22; et al.). Isaiah prophecy largely in Jerusalem and its environment. He was believed to have been martyred in the reign of Manasseh in 687 B.C. (Barker & Kohlenberger III, 1994: 1041).

Scholars have difficulty in dating the reigns of the Kings of Judah from Uzziah to Hezekiah. They place Uzziah's death between 747 and 735. Uzziah was a godly king until he became proud (2Chron. 26: 16-21). Under Uzziah, Judah gained remarkable economic achievements (2Chron. 26: 6-15) and attempted to reassert herself as a political power. It was after the death of Uzziah that Isaiah claimed to have seen the glory of the Lord.

On the authorship of the book, apart from the Talmud (Jewish tradition) that maintained that Isaiah the son of Amoz authored the entire book, scholars are divided into camps (Awojobi, 2015: 99). These scholars

claimed that chapter 1-39 recorded events that happened when the Assyrians invaded Judah (742-688BC) (Dillard, 1995: 269); chapters 40-44 emphasizes that there is hope for Israel because the Babylonians will be destroyed and Israel will have the privilege of returning to their land (Hinson, 2017: 127-128). To this end, at least three authors have been suggested for the book. They are: Isaiah the son of Amoz (Chps. 1-39), Deutero or second Isaiah (Chps. 40-44) and Trito or third Isaiah (Chps. 45-66). Some scholars also proposed Babylonian Isaiah and the Great unknown as author of the book (Awojobi, 2015: 99; Torrey, 1928, 20-21; Archer Jnr, 1994: 366-67).

This view led to the conclusion that the book of Isaiah is a work of a redactor (Torrey, 1928: 20-21). In other words, the book is a composite work written by at least three and probably more unknown authors (Buksbazen, 1971: 52). It is a compilation of the post-exilic period containing oracles of Isaiah and in large quantity prophecies and narratives of much more recent date (Gray, xxxi). It is pertinent to note at this juncture that contrary to the above claims some modern scholars still up hold the authorship of Isaiah's son of Amos on the grounds of its historicity (Young, 1958: 16; Young, 1980: 41; Allis, 1980: 41; Berges, 2010: 549-575).

It should be mentioned, however, that the ongoing debate on the authorship of the book, has not tampered with the unity of the book. The main theme of the book revolves around "the holy one of Israel" (Kohlenberger III, 1994: 1043) which the author expressed when he called "Yahweh as the holy one of Israel (6: 3) who will not condole sin and any form of injustice. Yahweh is Sovereign and Holy and as such those who reject him will be condemned (Baba, 2013: 85).

## Interpretation of Isaiah 66: 16

### Text in Hebrew Language

כִּי בָאשׁ יִהְיֶה נִשְׁפָּט וּבְחַרְבוֹ אֶת־כָּל־בָּשָׂר וְרַבּוֹ חַלְלֵי יְהוָה:<sup>16</sup>

### The Text in English

For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgement upon all men, and many will be those slain by the LORD

In this text, the Yahweh is said to be coming to visit the people with the intention of judgement. The manifestation of Yahweh's anger is expressed in terms of fire which is like a whirlwind (Baker & Kohlenberger III, 1994: 1146). The fire is expected to consume the enemies of Yahweh. The Hebrew word *עַשׂ* (fire) is used as instrument of divine judgement. In other words, fire symbolizes divine judgement. Biblical examples are: fire separates from the tree of life (Gen 3:24); the destruction of Sodom and Gomora (Gen. 19: 24); execution of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10: 1-2); death of Korah Abiram, Dothan and their families (Num. 16: 35); destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 34: 2, 39: 8; 52: 13; Lam. 2: 3; Ezek. 5: 4, 16: 41; 2Kgs. 25: 9 & 2Chron. 36: 19); God punished his disobedient Children by fire (Psa. 78: 21; Isa. 1: 7, 30: 14; Jer. 4: 4; Ezek. 20: 47; Hos. 8: 14 & Micah 1: 4,7). Ezekiel sees the angelic being scattering coals of fire over backslidden Jerusalem (Ezek 10:2). Fire is a symbol of passion and extortion (Psa. 39: 3; Jer. 20: 9; Lam. 1: 13). Israel would be set free from their enemies by fire (Zech. 2: 5, 3: 2,).

Metaphorically speaking, the word *עַשׂ* (fire) is used in the events where a supernatural fire is perceived as part of the theophanic experience like what Moses saw in the burning bush (Exodus 3) and in Israelite journey from Egypt to Cannan, the promised land (Renn, 2005: 386). Yahweh is described here as a warrior, who uses fire and sword to execute his verdict against his foes. Some scholars maintained that the fire in this context is that of the final judgement of the world (VanGemeren, 1997: 535). They stressed

that fire will signal the day of the Lord. This speak about the time when God's universal judgement will come on humans. God's word is also likened unto fire (Jer 23:29).

The word fire appears over 375 times in the Bible. Preponderantly, these references are in the context of theophany or worship and sacrifices. According to Gen 3:24, the climax of creation is a sword of fire placed at the east of the garden of Eden. The only way man could get back in was to go through the fire. As a climax to God's covenant with Abraham, fire moves between the separated pieces of animals (Gen 15:17) as God's signature to the contract. The Lord appears to Moses in/as a flame of fire (Exo 3:2), a fire which purged the bush of every bug on it and a fire which protected the bush from any landing buzzard or browsing goat. Moses' response was one of fear and attraction. He was "lashed with terror, leashed with longing." The nocturnal pillar of fire preceding and following the people of God in the wilderness guarantees the faithful that they are led and followed by the divine presence. It is not hard to believe that the pulse rate and heartbeat of Moses considerably accelerated when he ascended Mount Sinai, engulfed in smoke (Exo 19:18). To take another portion of Scripture, look at the prophetic literature, the first chapter of Ezek for example. The prophet's life begins with a vision of God which is determinative for the rest of his life. It is a vision dominated by fire (Ezek 1:26-27).

The phrase **שֹׁפֵט** (Isa 66:16), 'he will execute judgement' must be noted. The primary sense of **שֹׁפֵט** **judge, govern**, is to exercise the processes of government. The judge executed or caused to be executed judicial decisions. Hence, for example, in David's appeal to God as judge in his controversy with Saul he declares, "The Lord will be a judge, between me and you and he will see and will plead my case and he will deliver me out of your hand" (1Sam 24:15). Hence such words as deliver, vindicate, condemn, punish, and related words of judicial executive import are justly used in the translations. However, in this context, it is Yahweh who is the ultimate judge of all nations (Psa 96:13; Psa 50:6; Psa 75:8) and meanwhile through providence he is always supreme judge of the universe (Psa. 94: 2; cf. Psa. 103: 19).

### **Fire as a medium of Divine Justice to Yoruba Christians in Nigeria**

The Yoruba are one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Most Yoruba are found in the south western part of Nigeria. Some Yoruba are found in middle belt in Nigeria, Benin Republic, Togo, and Sierra Leone. The Yoruba people of Nigeria are very religious. Prior to the advent of Christianity and Islam, the Yoruba practiced African traditional religion. Many Yoruba are now Christians or Muslims but their traditional religion still survives. The Yoruba religion has a hierarchy of deities, including a Supreme Creator and some 400 lesser gods and spirits that are associated with difference cults and priests across the land. One of these deities is *Sango*, the god of fire, thunder and lightning. The Yoruba fear *Sango* because of his ability to strike with fire, thunder and lightning. It was also said that whenever *Sango* spoke, fire will come out of his mouth.

*Sango* was a son to *Oranmiyan*. According to tradition, *Sango* lost his mother after birth (Daramola, & Jeje, 1995: 284-287). Being a mysterious child, *Sango* was thrown into the forest and a man called *Ekun* picked him up and took care of him (Oladele et al, 1986: 64-65). When his father who travelled came back, he took him from *Ekun* and brought him back home, *Sango* later became the fourth King, (*Aalafin*) of Oyo (Awolalu, 1979: 33-38).

Like the Prophets in the Old Testament, the Yoruba belief that *Sango* can possess a person. The possessed person is called *Elegun Sango* and he can deliver messages from *Sango*. In most cases, the *Elegun Sango* wears red attires and plants his hair like that of a woman. The *Elegun Sango* can do mysterious things like sitting on an iron spear point, carrying a pot of fire on his head, cutting himself with knife without being

hurt and so on (Awolalu, 1979: 37). During the *Sango* festival, the *Elegun* is seen singing and dancing in the presence of *Sango* worshippers. In the process of singing and dancing he receives messages from *Sango* to the people. Worshippers from far and near come to *Sango* with special requests like healing, prosperity, sound health, protection, provision, and fruit of the womb (Adamo, 2017: 6).

Some Yoruba Christians in Nigeria interpret Isaiah 66: 16 in the light of divine justice. Gleaning from the Bible, justice is one of the attributes of God and as such God hates injustice (Clifford, 2000: 1; Dominik, 2011: 2). The Prophets appealed to leaders in their days to make justice and equity their watchword. People have demanded for justice for themselves, their loved ones, associations, ethnic group so on (Wilson, 2013: 1). According to Lamb injustice is noticed in: distribution of wealth, oppression of women, ethnicity, religion and undue exploitation of physical, chemical, biological and zoological nature (1985: 103). Justice had been established before the institution of monarchy in Israel (Moshe, 2000: 5). God is always with the oppressed (Exod. 2: 23-25; 3: 7; 19: 4). The prophets in the Old Testament spoke passionately and vehemently on injustice in ancient Israel.

The Yoruba phrase: “*Nitori Oluwa yio fi ina ati ida re se idajo*”, (For with fire and with sword the LORD will execute judgement...). Suggests that God is coming to judge the wicked. The metaphor fire (*ina*) and sword (*ida*) are indication that Yahweh is a warrior and battle ready. It also indicates that Yahweh has identified a war situation and has resolved to fight. The Author recognized that Yahweh has fire (*ina*) and sword (*ida*) at his disposal and that he is now set to use them.

It should be noted that, Israel was under an oppressive government at this time and she needed freedom. The government of the day made the lives of Israel miserable. Several of them were killed and the remnant became slaves to those who captured them. In the midst of sufferings and oppression, Isaiah the Prophet came with an oracle from Yahweh that God was coming in anger to bring justice and freedom to the nation of Israel. According to Isaiah, this time around, Yahweh will come with fire (*ina*) and sword (*ida*) to execute justice.

Fire was used as an emblem (1) of Yahweh in His glory (Dan 7:9); (2) in His holiness (Isa 6:4); (3) in His jealousy for His sole worship (Dt 4:24; Heb 12:29; Ps 79:5); (4) of His protection of His people (2 Ki 6:17; Zec 2:5); (5) of His righteous judgment and purification (Zec 13:9; Mal 3:2,3; 1 Cor 3:13,15); (6) of His wrath against sin and punishment of the wicked (Dt 9:3; Ps 18:8; 89:46; Isa 5:24; 30:33).

This information is heartwarming and brings hope to the Yoruba especially when they remember *Sango* who always strike with fire, lightning and thunder. *Ina* (fire) is a weapon of judgement on the enemies. In Yoruba tradition, *Sango* is perceived as the manifestation of the wrath of *Olodumare*, the Supreme Being (Idowu, 1962: 889-95). As Yahweh is perceived as God of justice so also the devotees of *Sango* claimed that he is god of justice and fair play who hates lies, deception, and any form of wickedness. God will show mercy to the oppressed and manifest his wrath on the wicked. Like *Sango* in African traditional religion, God will provide children and riches to those who asked and devoted to him (Adamo, 2017: 6). Among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, *Sango* is worshipped by his adherents as a god. In fact, *Sango* worshippers claimed that whenever there is thunder and lightning in a place, *Sango* has come to visit. *Sango* is considered as a messenger of God. Whenever, a thunder strikes a house or individual, the Yoruba will say that the occupants of the house or the person is wicked. As such, those who died by thunder strike are to be taken to the evil forest for burial to be conducted by *Sango* priest called *Magba*. The house destroyed by thunder is not to be used by humans until certain sacrifices are carried out to appease *Sango* (Adamo, 2017: 6). It is good news for Yoruba Christians to hear that God is coming with fire to judge their enemies. It is not *Sango* but the God of the universe that will bring justice to the afflicted and oppressed.

One of the things that fire does is to consume. The word consume in Yoruba is *run* and it means to burn completely. Since God is a consuming fire (*ina ajo ni run*), the *ota* (*enemy*) cannot escape. When *ota* is completely burnt by the *ina* of God, the oppressed person is free to now fulfill purpose on earth.

God is coming with the sword (*ida*) to judge the adversary. *Ida* is one of the weapons of war used in biblical literature by ancient Israel and the Yoruba during the intertribal wars. The Yoruba are warriors and this is evident by the wars they fought to retail their heritage, land and culture. Every Yoruba soldier had *ida* (sword) for self-defense and to tackle the enemies. The Yoruba Soldiers used *ida* to cut their enemies in pieces. It was heartwarming and relief for a Yoruba person to hear that God will come with his *ida* to fight in the battle confronting him. The Yoruba believes that the weapon (*ida*) of God is superior to any earthly weapon.

It should be understood that an average Yoruba person believes that every human has at least an enemy called *ota*. *Ota* does not want anyone to succeed. Sickesses, failures, accidents, premature death, delays and the likes are activities of *ota*. With this claim, the Yoruba are seen praying against their perceived enemies. Some visit *Babalawo* (native doctor) for charm to protect them against the enemies (Adamo, ). It is good news for them to hear that God is coming with *ina* (fire) and *ida* (sword) to execute judgment on the enemies.

It is pertinent to mention that, Isaiah 66: 16 as an influence in the lives of many African Indigenous Yoruba Christians in Nigeria. This is evident in the way they pray or interpret this text. To the Africans, a biblical interpretation is relevant only if it addresses their concerns. They maintained that the biblical text should meet their felt needs. In other words, biblical studies must be relevant to the cultural and religious situation of the community that received it (Awojobi, 2021:2). Some Yoruba Christians during prayers call fire down from heaven to consume their physical and spiritual enemies. They plead with God to descend in his wrath with fire and fight for them. As mentioned above, fire is a symbol of divine presence in ancient Israel and in Yoruba tradition. Fire in both contexts if divinely used could be a weapon of justice and mercy. A good example of this type of prayer is:

The Pastor will say: Call the of Jesus 3times and Holy Ghost fire 3times

The congregation will respond, in Jesus, in Jesus' name, in Jesus' name, Holy Ghost fire, Holy Ghost fire, Holy Ghost fire!

Or

Let all the enemies of your life die by fire

The people will say, fire, fire, fire

Some African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria are fond of organizing different programs at different times to seek divine intervention on issues of concern to their members. These programs are tagged: "Fire Conference", "Fire for Fire" "Fire night", "power must change hand", "let my people go" "ogun ile wa" (battle of our household) and etc. What they do is simply to pray against their enemies by asking the fire of God to come and consume them. Prominent among them is a Church founded 1989 by a Yoruba man called Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM) ([www.mountainoffire.org/](http://www.mountainoffire.org/)). MFM's interprete the Psalms and other parts of the Bible in the context of victory over spiritual adversaries. They belief in God's willingness to fight with the enemies of believers in Christ Jesus (Olukoya, 2008). The members of MFM are always seen calling down fire on their perceived enemies whenever they pray. Members of this Church use words like: die by fire! fire! fire! Fire! when in prayers. Sometimes when some African Indigenous Churches are in pray meetings, they sing songs like:

*You know me, you de do me, you no know me, you de do me, die by fire, fire, fire, die by fire.* As the tempo of the prayer becomes high, one will be hearing, die by fire, die by fire, die by fire, die by fire.... This song is an appeal to God to come to their aid. They are appealing to a higher power for intervention.

### Conclusion

From the study, it is clear that fire was used for different purposes in the Bible and in African Yoruba tradition. Fire is a symbol of divine presence in ancient Israel and in Yoruba tradition. Fire in both contexts if divinely used could be a weapon of justice and mercy. Whenever some members of the indigenous Churches in Nigeria are facing hard time, they usually appeal to God for divine intervention. Fire, thunder and lightning have been effective mode of communication between divinity and humanity. The Bible and African Yoruba tradition revealed that fire is an instrument to express the mind of God. As far as the Yoruba people are concerned, fire, lightning and thunder are used as rod of punishment on the wicked. Any person hit or died by thunder strike is considered wicked and does not deserve befitting burial. Some of the Yoruba in African Indigenous Churches in Nigeria whenever they are in trouble appeal to God for intervention. In their prayers, they demand fire from God to come down upon their enemies. Since God promised to fight with fire and sword in Isaiah 66: 16, they appeal to him to come down and judge their enemies as he did for Israel.

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