

# “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”

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*Their foot shall slide in due time.* Deuteronomy 32:35

In this verse God threatens vengeance upon the wicked unbelieving Israelites, who were God's people and who lived under the means of grace. But, in spite of God's wonderful works toward them, they remained, as it says in verse 28, "...without sense, having no understanding of the blessings." As verses 32-33 say, their work brought forth bitter and poisonous fruit. "Their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah.... Their wine is the venom of the serpents, the deadly poison of cobras." The expression I have chosen for my text—"...in due time their foot will slip...", seems to imply the following things concerning the punishment and destruction these wicked Israelites faced:

1. They faced the risk of destruction like one who walks in slippery places faces the risk of falling when his foot slips. We see the same metaphor in Psalm 73:18—"Surely you place them on slippery ground, you cast them down to ruin."
2. It implies that they are always exposed to sudden, unexpected destruction. One who walks in slippery places is at any moment apt to fall. He cannot know if his next step will allow him to stand or fall, and when he does fall, it's instantly and without warning. Again as in Psalm 73:18 and 19, "Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed...."
3. Another thing implied is that their fall will be of their own doing—no one will push them. One who walks in slippery places needs nothing but his own weight to cause him to fall.
4. The only reason they have not fallen already, and do not fall now, is that God's appointed time has not yet come. The passage says "in due time," that is, in God's appointed time, they WILL slip. And they will fall of their own weight. God will cease holding them up in slippery places. He will let them go and in that very instant they shall fall into destruction. A man who stands on slippery, declining ground at the edge of a pit cannot stand without someone holding him, and when he is let go he immediately falls and is lost.

My interpretation of these words, of which I am convicted, is this—"There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God."

By the mere pleasure of God, I mean his SOVEREIGN pleasure, his arbitrary will, restrained by not obligation, hindered by nothing. The truth of this interpretation is made clearer by the ten following considerations:

1. God does not lack the power to cast wicked men into hell at any time. The strongest man has no power against God. He is not only able to cast wicked men into hell, he can do it easily. Sometimes earthly princes have trouble subduing a large band of rebels, but not so with God. There is no fortress that can defend against the power of God. Though vast multitudes of God's enemies band together, he easily breaks them into pieces. They are no more than huge piles of light chaff before a whirlwind, or stacks of dry wheat stubble before a raging fire. We find it very easy to step on an earthworm on the sidewalk, or cut a slender thread that anything hangs by. And it's that easy for God, whenever he pleases, to cast his enemies down to hell. Who are we to stand before him, at whose rebuke the whole earth trembles?

2. They deserve to be cast into hell. Justice calls loudly for an infinite punishment of their sins. In Luke 13:7, the divine justice proclaimed by Jesus says of the tree that brings forth such poisonous grapes of Sodom, "Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?" The sword of divine justice at all times waves menacingly over their heads, and ONLY the hand of God's arbitrary mercy and divine will hold it back.

3. They are already condemned to hell. They deserve to be sent there. That eternal and immutable rule of righteousness that God has fixed between him and man finds them guilty, so that they are already bound over to hell. As Jesus says in John 3:18, "...whoever does not believe stands condemned already...." Every unconverted person properly belongs in hell—that is his place, that is where he came from. Jesus said to the Jews in John 13:23, "You are from below...." And that is where they are headed. It is the place where justice and God's word and the sentence of his unchangeable law have assigned them.

4. They are at this very moment the objects of that anger and wrath of God expressed in the torments of hell. And the reason they do not go down to hell this very moment is NOT because God is not angry with them, as he is with many miserable creatures already tormented there by the fierceness of his wrath. In fact God is considerably more angry with great numbers that are now on earth. Some of them are undoubtedly sitting at ease with themselves in this very congregation. It is not because God is ignoring their wickedness and therefore doesn't resent it that keeps him from loosening his grip and letting them fall. God is not like man, though many men believe him to be. The wrath of God burns against them, his damnation of them doesn't slumber. The pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is right now white hot, ready to receive them. The flames rage and glow as we speak. The glistening sword is sharpened and held over them, and the pit has opened its mouth under them.

5. The devil stands eagerly ready to pounce upon them and seize them as his own as soon as God permits him. They belong to him. He owns their souls. He controls them. They are his property. The devils stand behind each of them and watch them like greedy, hungry lions stalking their prey, held back only by God's restraining hand. And if God should withdraw his hand, they would instantly pounce upon their poor souls. The old snake lies in wait for them, hell opens its mouth wide to receive them, and if God permits they will be swallowed up and lost in the blink of an eye.

6. In the souls of wicked men hellish tendencies reign that would soon flame up into hell-fire if not for God's restraint. The very nature of carnal man, powerful and exceedingly violent, propels him toward the torments of hell. Isaiah compares the souls of the wicked to the raging waves of a stormy sea, and God says, "To here you shall come, and no further." But if God should withdraw his restraint, the sea would wash away everything, Sin is the ruin and misery of the soul. It is destructive by nature, and without God's restraint, it would need nothing else to make itself perfectly miserable. The corruption of the heart of man is huge and boundless in its fury. While wicked men live on earth it is like a fire contained by God's restraint, but if it were let loose it would inflame all of nature. And as the heart is now a cesspool of sin, if the sin were not restrained it would immediately turn the soul into a fiery oven...a furnace of fire and brimstone.

7. Wicked men are not safe for a moment just because they cannot see any sign of impending death around them. Natural man is not safe just because he is healthy and sees no imminent danger in his vicinity. The many and continual experiences of men throughout the ages proves that apparent health and safety do not mean that their next step will not be into another world. The unseen and unthought of ways of leaving this world are innumerable and inconceivable. Unsaved men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak they will not bear a man's weight, but no one can see them. All the means of taking sinners out of this world are in God's hands, and they are universally and absolutely subject to his power and determination.

8. Natural men's caution and care to preserve their own lives, or the care of others to keep them alive, do not make them safe for a moment. Divine providence and universal experience bear testimony to this. There is abundant evidence that a man's wisdom provides no security from death. If it were otherwise we would see wise men living longer than fools, but that is not the case. As the teacher says in Ecclesiastes 2:16, "Like the fool, the wise man too must die!"

9. All the scheming wicked men do to escape hell while they continue to reject Christ will not secure them from hell one moment. Almost every natural man that hears of hell fools himself into thinking he shall escape it. He flatters himself in what he has done, what he is doing and what he will do to insure his safety. Everyone figures out in his own mind how he will avoid damnation, and convinces himself he's a pretty smart guy and his schemes will not fail. They hear that few are saved, and that the majority of men though the ages have gone to hell, but each imagines he's smarter than the rest and he will escape. But foolish people miserably delude themselves. They place their confidence in their own strength and wisdom, but they are trusting a shadow. If we could speak to those now in hell, and ask each of them whether they expected, while alive and listening to preachers talk of hell, that they would ever end up in such a place, they would probably all reply, "No, I never planned to come here. I had planned otherwise. I thought I had planned well and my scheme was good. I intended to be careful, but it came upon me unexpectedly...like a thief. Death outwitted me. God's wrath was too quick for me. Oh, my cursed stupidly! I was flattering myself, dreaming of what I would do in heaven, and when I was saying, 'Peace and safety,' sudden destruction came upon me."

10. God is under NO OBLIGATION, by any promise, to keep any natural man out of hell for one second. God certainly has made no promises whether of eternal life or

deliverance from eternal death, but those which are contained in the covenant of grace, the promises that are given in Christ, in whom all the promises will most surely come to pass.

Whatever some have imagined and pretended about promises made to natural men's earnest seeking and knocking, it is crystal clear that whatever actions a natural man takes in religion, whatever prayers he makes, until he believes in Christ, God is under no obligation to keep him a moment from eternal destruction.

Natural men are held over the pit of hell in the hand of God. They deserve the fiery pit and are already sentenced to it, and God is dreadfully provoked. The devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames rise and flash about them. The fire pent up in their own hearts is struggling to break out, they have no interest in Christ the Mediator, and there are no means within reach that can be of any security to them. In short, they have no refuge, nothing to take hold of. All that preserves them every moment is the mere arbitrary will, and uncovenanted, unmerited forbearance of an incensed God.

#### APPLICATION

I am dwelling on this awful subject so that unsaved people in this congregation might be awakened. What you have heard is the life story of every one of you who does not know Christ as your savior. That world of misery, that lake of burning brimstone lies below you, and there is nothing between you and that hell but air—it is only the power and pleasure of God that hold you up.

You are probably not aware of this. You are not now in hell, but you do not see that it is the hand of God that holds you back. You're counting on the good state of your health and your self-reliance. But that is nothing. If God should withdraw his hand, your self-reliance would no more keep you from falling than this air could hold up a person suspended in it.

Your wickedness makes you as heavy as lead, and presses you downwards toward hell, and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink swiftly into the bottomless gulf. And your healthy constitution, your self-reliance, your best schemes, your self-righteousness, would no more hold you up and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would stop a falling rock. Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not tolerate you for one moment, for you are a burden to it. All of creation groans with you. All living things are subject to the bondage of your corruption, and not willingly. The sun does not willingly shine upon you to give you light to serve sin and Satan. The earth does not willingly yield her increase to satisfy your lusts, nor is it willingly a stage for your wickedness to be acted upon. The air does not willingly provide you breath to maintain the flame of life in you while you spend it in the service of God's enemies. The world would spew you out were it not for the hand of God. The black clouds of God's wrath are right now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm and rumbling with thunder. Were it not for God's restraining hand, it would immediately burst forth upon you. The sovereign pleasure of God, for the time being, holds back the tornado, otherwise it would come with fury and your destruction would come like a whirlwind, and you would be like dust on the floor.

The wrath of God is like a dam on a flooded river, holding back roaring waters rising higher and higher. The longer the river is held back the more ferocious the water

when the floodgate is finally opened. It is true that judgement against your evil works has not been executed so far. The floods of God's vengeance have been withheld, but your guilt in the meantime is constantly increasing and you are every day treasuring up more wrath. The flood waters are constantly rising and building more and more strength, and there is nothing but the mere pleasure of God that holds the roaring water back as it strains mightily against the dam. If God should only remove his hand from the floodgate, it would fly open and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God would rush forth with inconceivable fury and engulf you with omnipotent power. And if your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is...even ten thousand times greater than the strongest devil in hell, it would be as nothing to withstand it.

The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow of justice is aimed directly at your heart, and the bow quivers with pent-up power. And it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, an angry God, who owes you nothing, that keeps the arrow from getting drunk on your blood. Thus all of you whose hearts have never been softened by the Holy Spirit, all of you that have not been born again, and made new creatures, and raised from the dead in sin, are in the hands of an angry God. However you may have changed your ways, and maintained a religious façade, bringing your family to church on Sunday, and sitting in the house of God with your most pious Sunday face, it is nothing but God's mere pleasure that keeps you this moment from being swallowed up in everlasting destruction. However unconvinced you may now be of the truth of what you are hearing, there is coming a time when you will be fully convinced. Those who have gone before you in similar circumstances can testify to that, for destruction came suddenly upon most of them, when they expected no such thing. And while they were saying, "Peace and safety," they now sadly know that the things that they depended on for peace and safety were but thin air and shadows.

The God that holds you over the pit of hell like some spider or loathsome insect over a fire, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked. His wrath burns like fire and he considers you worthy of nothing else but fuel for the fire. His holy eyes cannot bear to even look at you. You are ten thousand times more abominable in his sight than the most hated venomous snake is to us. You have offended him infinitely more than the most stubborn rebel ever did his earthly prince, and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you above the fire at every moment. There is no other explanation why you did not go to hell last night when you went to sleep. There is no other explanation why you were allowed to awake this morning, and no other reason why you have not dropped into hell since you arose this morning, but that God's hand has held you up. There is no other reason why you have not gone to hell since you sat down in your pew in God's house this morning, provoking his pure and holy eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship. Yes, there is no other reason why you do not drop down this very moment into the depths of hell.

Oh sinner, think about the fearful danger you are in. It is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath that you are held over in the hand of God, whose wrath is as provoked and incensed by you as any of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath licking about it, and ready at any moment to burn it in two. In spite of that you have no interest in Christ the Mediator, and nothing with which to save yourself, nothing to keep away the flames of wrath. Nothing of your own, nothing you have ever done, nothing you can ever do will induce God to spare you one moment. Now consider these four points

very carefully:

1. Whose wrath is it? It is the wrath of an infinite God. If it were only the wrath of man, even the most powerful man on earth, it would be insignificant by comparison. In the olden days that wrath of absolute monarchs was dreaded since they had the possessions and lives of their subjects completely in their power to do with as they wished. Proverbs 20:2 says, "A king's wrath is like the roar of a lion; he who angers him forfeits his life." Anyone who enrages the monarch is apt to suffer the most extreme torment the human mind can conceive and inflict. But the most powerful despot on earth, in his greatest majesty and strength and armed with his greatest tortures is but a feeble despicable worm in the dust compared to the great almighty Creator and King of the universe. All the worst kings of history are as grasshoppers before God...they are nothing...they are less than nothing. The wrath of the great King of kings is as much more terrible as his majesty is greater. Jesus tells us in Luke 12:4-5, "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."

2. It is the fierceness of his wrath that you are exposed to. We often read of the fury of God, as in Isaiah 59:18. "According to what they have done, so will he repay wrath to his enemies..." And in Isaiah 66:15, "See, the Lord is coming with fire, and his chariots are like the whirlwind: he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire." And, among many other places in the Bible, Revelations 19:15, "...He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." The words are exceedingly terrible. If it had only said, "the wrath of God," the words would have implied something infinitely dreadful, but it says, "the fierceness and wrath of God." The fury of God! The fierceness of Jehovah! How incomprehensibly dreadful must that be? Who can conceive what that means? But it also says, "the fierceness and wrath of ALMIGHTY God." Oh, what will be the consequence? What will become of the poor worm who suffers such? To what dreadful, inexpressible, inconceivable depth of misery will the object of such wrath be sunk?

Please carefully consider this, you who are here today who are not saved. That God will execute the fierceness of his anger implies that he will inflict wrath without any pity. When God sees the indescribable agony you are in, and the torment that so vastly exceeds your ability to endure, and when he sees how your poor soul is crushed, he will have no compassion on you; he will not call off your torment, or even lighten it. There will be no moderation of mercy, but he will see to it that you will NOT SUFFER BEYOND WHAT STRICT JUSTICE REQUIRES. Nothing will be withheld because it is so hard for you to bear. God says in Ezekiel 8:18, "Therefore I will deal with them in anger: I will not look upon them with pity or spare them. Although they shout in my ears I will not listen to them." Today God stands ready to pity you. This is a day of mercy. You may cry now with some hope of receiving mercy. But once the day of mercy is past, your most lamentable and mournful cries and shrieks will be in vain. You will be forever lost and thrown away by God with no regard for your welfare. God will have no other use for you than to serve as a vessel for his wrath. He will be so far from pitying you that when you cry to him, he will only laugh and mock you as it says in Proverbs 1:26.

How awful are God's words in Isaiah 63:3. "I have trodden the winepress alone...I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered

my garments and I stained all my clothing.” It is impossible to conceive of words that could carry any greater intensity of contempt, hatred, and fierceness of indignation. If you cry to him for pity, he will be so far from pitying you in your miserable condition that he will only step on you. And even though he knows that you cannot bear the weight of omnipotent God on you, he will crush you anyway under his feet without mercy. He will crush out your blood and make it fly and it will splatter on his robe and stain it red. He will not only hate you he will have the utmost contempt for you, and the only place fit for you will be under his feet, to be mashed down like mud on the streets.

3. The misery that you are exposed to was designed by God to show you the degree of his wrath. God’s immutable plan is to show all men both the excellence of his love and the terribleness of his wrath. Sometimes earthly kings like to show how terrible their wrath is by some extreme punishment of those who provoke them. Nebuchadnessar, that mighty, arrogant monarch of Babylon, tried to show his wrath when upset by Shadrach, Mesheck, and Abednego. He thus gave the order to heat up the fiery furnace to seven times normal, probably the hottest that was humanly possible. But God is also willing to show his wrath, and magnify his awful majesty and mighty power in the extreme suffering of his enemies. Romans 9:22 says, “What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction?” And since this is his plan, to show how terrible is the unrestrained wrath, the fury and fierceness of his wrath, he will do it. What will come to pass will be horrible to behold. And when he has done it, he will call on the whole universe to witness the awful majesty and might power in it. As it is written in Isaiah 33:12-14, “The peoples will be burned as if to lime; like cut thorn bushes they will be set ablaze. You who are far away hear what I have done; you who are near acknowledge my power! The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless; who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?”

Thus it will be for you here today who are in an unsaved state, if you continue in it. The infinite might, majesty, and terribleness of the omnipotent God will be magnified on you in the unbearable agony of your torments. You shall be tormented in the presence of holy angels, in the presence of the Lamb. The glorious inhabitants of heaven will gaze upon you in that state of suffering, and they will see the wrath and fierceness of Almighty God. When they have seen that awful spectacle they will fall down and adore that great power and majesty. As it is written in Isaiah 66:23-24, the last two verses of a powerfully prophetic book, “ ‘From one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,’ says the Lord. ‘And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will the fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.’ ”

4. It is EVERLASTING wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God for one moment, but you must suffer it for all eternity. There will be no end to this perfectly horrible misery. When you look forward you will see a long forever, a boundless duration before you that will swallow up your thoughts and amaze your soul. And you will absolutely despair of every having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all. You will know with certainty that you must wear out long ages, millions and millions of ages in wrestling and fighting with this almighty merciless vengeance. And when you have done it, you will know that is all

was just the blink of an eye compared to what remains. Your punishment will be infinite. Oh, who can fathom the state of the soul in such circumstances? All that we can possibly say about it is the dimmest of descriptions. It is inexpressible and inconceivable, for “who can know the power of God’s anger?”

How awful is the condition of those who are daily and hourly in danger of this great wrath and infinite misery. But this is the dismal case of every soul in this congregation that has not been born again, however moral and strict, sober and religious they otherwise might be. Oh, please give it your most careful consideration, whether you be young or old. There is reason to think that many of you who are in this congregation hearing me talk will actually be the subjects of this very misery for all eternity. We don’t know who they are, in which seats they are sitting, or what they are thinking. It may be that they are perfectly content, hearing all of this without alarm, and are flattering themselves that they are not the persons we’re talking about...they shall escape. If we knew that there was one person, and only one, in this whole congregation that would be the subject of such misery, what an awful thought that would be. If we knew who it was, what an awful sight it would be to see such a person. But, such a pity, instead of one, how many are there here who will likely remember this sermon in hell? Most likely some here today will be in hell in a very short time, perhaps before the year is over. And it would be no surprise if some people sitting here today in this church, in health, peaceful and secure, should be there before tomorrow morning! Surely you know some people that never deserved hell more than you, and looked as likely to be still alive today as you are. But now they are past hope, in hell for all eternity, crying in their extreme misery and abject despair, wishing they were here in your place. YOU are in the land of the living, and in the house of the Almighty God, and have the opportunity to obtain salvation. What would those poor, damned, hopeless souls give for one hour’s opportunity such as you now enjoy?

And now you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has thrown the door of mercy wide open, and stands calling, and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners. This is a day where many are flocking to him, and being welcomed into the kingdom of God. Many that are daily coming from the east, west, north and south; many that were recently in the same miserable condition as you, are now in a happy state. Their hearts are filled with love for him who loved them first, and washed their sins away with his own blood, and they are rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. How awful it is to be left behind on such a day! To see so many others feasting while you are pining away and perishing. Are not your souls as precious as those already saved by faith in Jesus Christ?

Are there not many older people here who are not yet born again...who are aliens to the Commonwealth of God’s Chosen...and have done nothing since the day they were born but treasure up wrath against the day of judgment? Oh, dear friends, your situation is extremely dangerous! Your guilt and hardness of heart are extremely severe. You need to WAKE UP!!!! And you, young men and women, will you ignore this priceless opportunity, while so many others of your age are renouncing youthful vanities and flocking to Christ? And you children, who have not yet confessed Jesus as your Lord and Savior, do you not know that you are going down to hell, to bear the dreadful wrath of God, who is now angry with you every day and every night? Will you be content to be children of the devil, when so many of your friends are coming



to Christ and are becoming holy and happy children of the King of Kings?

And let everyone here who does not yet know Christ as savior, and are hanging out over the pit of hell, whether they be old, middle aged, young, or children, **NOW RESPOND TO THE LOUD CALL OF GOD'S WORD AND PROVIDENCE.** This year of the Lord, a day of such great favor to some, will doubtless be a day of remarkable vengeance to others. Men's hearts harden and their guilt grows on such a day as this, if they neglect their souls. Never was there such great danger of such people with hardened hearts and blinded minds. God now seems hastily gathering in his chosen people all over this country, and probably the majority of adults that shall be saved will be brought in very shortly. It will be like the early days of the apostles, when the Holy Spirit entered the hearts of great multitudes. The chosen will be saved and the rest will be blinded. If this should be the case with you, you will eternally curse this day, and will curse the day you were born, because you witnessed such a great season of the pouring out of God's Spirit, yet your heart was never softened. You will wish you had died and gone to hell before you witnessed it. Now, undoubtedly, just like in the days of John the Baptist, the awesome, divine axe is brought to bear on the forest, and every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Therefore, let anyone who does not now know Christ awake and fly from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation. Let everyone fly out of Sodom!! Run for your lives! Don't look back! Escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed!