

*“His chariots of wrath
the deep thunderclouds
form, And dark is His
path on the wings
of the storm.”*

“THOU ART CLOTHED WITH
HONOUR AND MAJESTY,
WHO COVEREST THYSELF WITH
LIGHT AS WITH A GARMENT”
PSALM 104:1, 2



Be still.



Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God

by Jonathan Edwards (ABRIDGED)

The original sermon was preached at Enfield, North America in 1741, a time of great spiritual awakening. God worked powerfully in the hearts of a large number who heard this sermon. In this age of unbelief, the love of God has been diluted to bland sentimentality, and the wrath of God is seldom mentioned, let alone preached. This sermon is an urgently needed medicine for what ails both society and Christianity. May the Lord bless it richly to your soul as He has to countless others.

“Their foot shall slip in *due* time” (Deut. 32:35)

In this verse, God threatens vengeance on the wicked unbelieving Israelites. They were God’s visible people, with the blessing of the Word of God and other means of grace. But notwithstanding all God’s wonderful works towards them, they remained ‘void of counsel’, having no ‘understanding in them’ (v. 28). In spite of God’s tender care they brought forth bitter and poisonous fruit as verses 32 and 33 reveal. The words ‘their foot shall slip in due time’ seem to imply four things relating to the punishment and destruction to which these wicked Israelites were liable.

First, they are *always* exposed to destruction,

just as someone who stands or walks in slippery places always risks a sudden fall.

Secondly, it implies that they were always exposed to *sudden, unexpected* destruction. He who walks in slippery places is liable to fall at any moment. He cannot foresee at any time what will happen in the next minute—whether he shall stand or fall. When he does fall, he falls at once without warning. This is expressed in Psalm 73: 18, 19. “Surely you set them in slippery places; you cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are *brought* to desolation, as in a moment.”

A third thing implied is that they are liable to fall by themselves, without being thrown down by someone else’s hand. He who stands or walks on slippery ground needs nothing but his own

weight to throw him down!

Fourthly, the only reason why they had not fallen already is only that it was not yet God’s appointed time. When that appointed time comes, their foot *shall slip*. Then they shall be simply left to fall. God will no longer hold them up in these slippery places, but will let them go. He who stands on a very steep, slippery slope, on the edge of a pit, cannot stand without being held. When he is let go he immediately falls and is lost. So God will let them go.

The words of Deut. 32:35 prove that there is nothing that keeps wicked men for one moment out of hell, **except the mere pleasure of God**, I mean His sovereign pleasure, His arbitrary will or purpose. He is not under the slightest obligation to preserve the life of a sinner. He is

hindered by no difficulty in releasing him. He is not duty bound to preserve any wicked person's life for one moment longer. May the awesome truth of this become clear as we continue.

There is no lack of power in God to cast wicked men into hell at any moment. Men's hands cannot be strong when God rises up. The strongest have no power to resist Him, nor can any mere man deliver a fellow mortal out of His hands. He is not only *able* to cast wicked men into hell, but He can easily *do* it. Sometimes a whole army has difficulty subduing a few rebels when they have weapons to defend themselves—especially when others keep joining their cause. But it is not so with God. There is no fortress that is any defence from the power of God. Though many rebels band together, and vast multitudes of God's enemies unite against God, they are easily broken in pieces. They are like great heaps of straw in a whirlwind or dry grass before devouring flames.

We find it easy to tread on and crush a worm crawling on the earth. We have no difficulty cutting or singeing a slender thread suspending a weight. It is just as easy for God, when He pleases, to cast His enemies down to hell. What are we, that we should imagine that we could successfully stand before Him, when at His rebuke the earth trembles! Or before whom the rocks are thrown down!

The wicked deserve to be cast into hell. God's justice makes no objection against God's using His power at any moment to destroy them. On the contrary, justice calls aloud for an infinite punishment of their sins. Divine justice says of the tree that brings forth such grapes of Sodom (v.32), "Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?" (Luke 13:7). The sword of divine justice always hangs over their heads. It is nothing but the hand of arbitrary mercy, and God's sovereign will, that holds it back.

They are already under a sentence of condemnation to hell. They not only justly deserve to be cast down there, but the sentence of that eternal and unchanging rule of righteousness that God has fixed between Himself and mankind has already been pronounced against them: "He who does not believe is condemned already" (John 3:18). This means that every unconverted man truly belongs to hell. Hell is his place. He has come from hell. ("You are from beneath," John 8:23) and to that place he is bound. It is the place that justice and God's Word, and the sentence of His unchangeable law, assign to him.

They are now the objects of that very same anger and wrath of God, that is expressed in the words 'torments of hell' (Luke 16:23 KJV). And the reason why they do not go down to hell at each moment, is not because God is not angry with them. They are in His power. He is angry with many miserable creatures now tormented in hell, where they feel and bear the fierceness of His wrath. But no doubt God is a great deal more angry with multitudes now on earth!

Just because God appears to do nothing about men's wickedness now, that does not mean that He will not let loose His hand and cut them off when He chooses to do so. God is not like the wicked, though they may imagine Him to be so.

The wrath of God burns against them. Their damnation does not slumber. The pit is prepared. The fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them. The flames are now raging and glowing. The glittering sword of judgment is sharpened and held over them. The pit has opened its mouth under them.

The devil stands ready to fall upon them, and seize them as his own, at the very moment God shall permit him. They belong to him. He has their souls in his possession and under his dominion. The Scripture describes them as his goods, Luke 11:12. The demons watch them. They are always by them at their right hand. They stand waiting for them, like greedy hungry lions that see their prey, and expect to have it, but are for the present kept back. If God should withdraw His hand, they would in one moment fly upon their poor souls. The old Serpent is gaping for them; hell opens its mouth wide to receive them. If God should permit it they would be hastily swallowed up and lost.

There are *hellish principles* reigning in the souls of wicked men. These would quickly kindle a flame out into hell-fire, if it were not for God's restraining hand. **The foundation for the torments of hell is laid in the very nature of carnal man.** The corrupt, powerful principles ruling in them and possessing them are active and so exceedingly violent that if not for God's restraining hand, they would soon break out in the same way as the same corruptions and the same enmity does in the hearts of damned souls. They would reap the same torments as this sin does in the damned. The souls of the wicked are in Isaiah 57:20 compared to the troubled sea. For now, God restrains their wickedness by His mighty power, as He does the raging waves of the troubled sea, saying "This far you may come, but no farther." But if God should withdraw that restraining power, it would soon carry all before it.

Sin is the ruin and misery of the soul. It is destructive in its nature. If God should fail to restrain sin, man would need nothing else to make his soul perfectly miserable. Man's heart is such a factory of sin, and the corruption of it is so immoderate and boundless in its fury, that while wicked men live here, it is like fire pent up by God's restraints. If it were let loose, it would set fire the whole of nature.

No man is secure in this life simply because he cannot see the thing that will cause his death. A natural man has no security simply because he is healthy today and cannot see the accident that will take him to hell tomorrow. The common and continual experience of the world in all ages shows otherwise.

Man lives on the very brink of eternity. He knows not when his next step will be into another world. The unseen, unthought of ways and means by which people are suddenly taken out of the world are beyond imagination. Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering. There are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noon-day; the sharpest sight cannot discern them.

God has many unsearchable ways of taking

wicked men out of the world and sending them to hell and does not need a miracle to do it. He does not need to go out of the ordinary course of His providence to destroy any wicked man, at any moment. All the means to take sinners out of the world are in God's hands now. Men are so universally and absolutely subject to God's power and determination that it depends only on the mere will of God, whether or not sinners shall go to hell at any moment. God needs only to speak, and it is done.

Natural men's wisdom and care to preserve their own lives, or the care of others to preserve them, do not make them secure for a moment. There is clear evidence that men's own wisdom cannot make them secure from death. If it were otherwise we should see some difference between the wise and foolish men of the world. The wise would outlive the foolish! What do the facts say? "How does a *wise man* die? As the fool!" (Ecclesiastes 2:16)

All the cunning and effort which wicked men use to escape hell, while they continue to reject Christ, does not secure them from hell for one moment. **Almost every natural man depends upon himself for his own security.** He flatters himself about what he has done, is doing, or intends to do. Everyone dreams of avoiding damnation in his own way. Of those who hear in the gospel that there are but few saved, few believe it. Each sinner imagines that he can escape where others have failed. He says within himself that he intends to take better care and so organise matters for himself that he will not fail, just because others have. The foolish children of men miserably delude themselves in their own strength and wisdom and trust in nothing but a shadow. Many of those who have lived up till now, have lived under the same means of grace. They are now dead and undoubtedly have gone to hell. Why? Was it because they were less wise than those who are now alive? Was it because they did not plan to escape hell? No! If we could speak with them, one by one, and ask whether they expected to go to hell, when alive and hearing about its misery, how would they answer? Without doubt, we should hear replies such as these:

"No, I never intended to come here. I never planned to come here."

"I thought I could avoid coming here by my own works."

"I thought that there was no hell, that is was in this life. I thought that God was too loving to have a hell."

"It came unexpectedly. I didn't look for it at that time or in that manner; it came as a thief."

"Death outwitted me. God's wrath was too quick for me."

But without doubt, all would add:

"O my cursed foolishness! I was flattering myself with vain dreams of what I would do in the hereafter. When I was saying, 'peace and safety', then suddenly destruction came upon me."

God has laid Himself under *no obligation*, by any promise to keep any natural man out of hell one moment except those promises contained in the covenant of grace, the promises that are given in Christ. In Him all the promises are "yea and amen"—gloriously true. But those who are not

the children of the covenant have no interest in the promise of the covenant of grace. They do not believe in any of the promises, and therefore have no interest in the Mediator of the covenant, Jesus Christ. Some mistakenly imagine that they are entitled to heaven because of God's promises to natural men who earnestly seek and knock. It is clear, however, that whatever effort a natural man takes in religion, whatever prayers he makes, till he believes in Christ, God is under no obligation at all to keep him a moment from eternal destruction.

So natural men are held in the hand of God over the pit of hell. They deserve it, are already sentenced to it, and have done nothing in the least to appease or abate God's anger. God is dreadfully provoked by their sin. His anger is as great towards them as towards those who are actually suffering the fierceness of His wrath in hell. The devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them. Fiery tongues reach out to them to swallow them up. The fire pent up in their own hearts is struggling to break out. They have no interest in any Mediator; there are no means within reach that can be 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, unobliged forbearance of an incensed God.

This is an awful subject. May it be blessed for the awakening the unconverted to a conviction of their danger. What you have heard so far applies to everyone who is out of Christ. That world of misery, that lake of burning brimstone, lies beneath you, if you are unconverted. You have nothing to stand on, nothing to take hold of. There is nothing between you and hell but thin air! It is only the power and mere pleasure of God that hold you up. You are probably not aware of this. You do not see the hand of God that has kept you out. You look at the good state of your health, your care of your own life by what you eat and do, and so on, to preserve it. But indeed these things are nothing. If God should withdraw His hand they would no more keep you from falling than a worn-out cotton thread could suspend you over a cliff. Your wickedness makes you seem to be as heavy as lead. It bends you downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell. And if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf. Your health and constitution, your own care and prudence, your best-laid plans, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you, and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock.

Were it not for the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you for one moment; **you are a burden to it.** The creation groans with you; all of nature is made subject to the bondage of your corruption, 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. It does not willingly become a stage on which you can act out your wickedness. The air does not willingly serve you for breath to maintain the flickering flame of your life, while you spend your life serving God's enemies. God's creatures are good

and were made for men to serve God with, and they do not willingly serve any other purpose. They groan when they are abused for purposes so directly contrary to their nature and end. The world would spew you out, if not for the sovereign hand of Him who has subjected it in hope. The black clouds of God's wrath are now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder. Were it not for the restraining hand of God, His hurricane would immediately burst forth upon you. Otherwise it would come with fury; and your destruction would come like a whirlwind. In it you would be like chaff on an open threshing-floor.

The wrath of God is like a great body of water held back by a mighty dam. The level rises higher and higher until it reaches the floodgates. The longer the floodgates remain closed the higher the water level rises and the more rapid and mighty is the torrent when the gates are at last opened. It is true that judgment against your evil works has not been carried out—yet. But your guilt, meanwhile, is constantly increasing and every day you are treasuring up more wrath. The flood of God's wrath cannot be stopped, but presses hard to be unleashed. If God should only withdraw His hand from the floodgate it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God would rush forth with inconceivable fury. His wrath would come upon you with omnipotent power. If your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is, or even ten thousand times greater than the strength of the strongest devil in hell, you could not withstand or endure it.

The bow of God's wrath is already bent. The arrow has been made ready on the string. Justice aims the arrow at your heart and stretches the bow. Nothing but the mere pleasure of an angry God keeps the arrow from ending your sinful life and ushering you before His judgment seat. "I will make my arrows drunk with blood..." (Deut. 32:42).

Those of you who have never experienced a great change of heart, never been touched by the mighty Spirit of God, never been born again, are in the hands of an angry God. Those who have never been made new creatures and been raised from a state of being dead in sin, to a state of new life in Christ are under His judgment too. So are those who have never experienced light and life in Christ Jesus. No matter how much you may have reformed your life, or how many religious experiences you may have had, no matter how much you may have kept up a form of religion, it is nothing but His mere pleasure that keeps you from being swallowed up this very moment in everlasting destruction. However unconvinced you may be now, by and by you will be fully convinced of it! Those who have been in similar circumstances to yours now know the awful truth!

God's eyes are too pure to bear to have you in His sight. You are ten thousand times more abominable in His eyes than the most poisonous snake is in yours. You have offended Him infinitely more than the most stubborn rebel offended his government. Yet it is His Divine hand that kept you from going to hell last night, that allowed you to awaken again in this world this morning. While you are hearing this sermon,

nothing but his mercy has preserved you.

Oh sinner, consider the fearful danger you are in! **Consider whose anger is raised against you!** It is the wrath of the infinite God. "The wrath of a king is like the roaring of a lion; whoever provokes him to anger sins against his own life." (Prov. 20:2) The rebel who enrages a ruler is liable to suffer the most extreme torments that diabolical human nature can invent or inflict. But all the kings of the earth together, before God, are nothing more than a few grasshoppers. The majesty, strength and terror of the greatest of earthly kings is nothing compared with that of the almighty Creator and King of heaven and earth. "And I say to you my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear him!" (Luke 12: 4-5).

Consider also that it is the fierceness of His wrath to which you are exposed: "According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay fury to his adversaries" (Isa. 59:18); "For behold, the Lord will come with fire and with his chariots, like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire" (Isa. 66:15). We read too of "the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Rev. 19:15). If the passage had only said "*the wrath of God*" the words would have implied something unspeakably dreadful, but it speaks of the *fury of God*! It declares the *fierceness of Jehovah*! Who can utter or even imagine what such words carry in them? It speaks as though Omnipotence will be enraged and exerted, just as men are inclined to exert their strength in the fierceness of their wrath. Whose hands can be strong and whose heart can endure in the face of such a justly offended, angry God? Consider this, you who remain unregenerate: **God will execute the fierceness of His anger.** This implies that He will inflict wrath without any pity. When God beholds your torment to be so vastly beyond your strength to bear it, He will have no compassion upon you. There will be no moderation or mercy! He will only be careful that you shall not *suffer beyond what strict justice requires*. "Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them." (Ezek. 8:18)

Now God stands ready to pity you, but when once the day of mercy has passed, your saddest, most pitiable cries and shrieks will be in vain. You will be wholly lost and thrown away by God, so far as any regard to your welfare will be concerned. God will have no other use for you than to suffer misery. You will continue through eternity having no other end! You will be one of the "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction" (Rom. 9:22). When you cry to Him, Scripture says, reverently, that He will only laugh and mock: "Because I have called you and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, when your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind... Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they

will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord... they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies" (Prov. 1).

How awful are those words of the great God! "I have trodden them down in my anger, and trampled them in my fury; their blood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my robes" (Isa. 63:3). It is impossible to think of words that carry in them greater evidence of these three things: contempt, hatred, and fierce indignation. If you cry to God to pity you, He will only tread you underfoot. No place shall be thought fit for you except under His feet, to be trodden down as the mud of the streets.

The misery you are exposed to is the same misery that God will inflict for the purpose of showing *what the wrath of Jehovah is*. God has had it in His heart to show to angels and men two things: how excellent His love is and how terrible His wrath is. Sometimes the persecuting wrath of totalitarian régimes is shown by the extreme punishments they inflict on those who cross them. Nebuchadnezzar, the proud and mighty monarch of the Chaldean empire, showed his wrath in this way. He gave an order that the burning fiery furnace was to be heated seven times hotter than it was normally (Dan. 3). No doubt it was raised to the highest temperature that Chaldean skill could produce. But the great God is also willing to show His wrath, and magnify His awful power in the extreme sufferings of His enemies: "What if God, wanting to show *his* wrath and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" (Rom. 9:22).

God has not only decreed that He will show how terrible the unmixed, unrestrained wrath, the fury and fierceness of Jehovah is, **but He will do it to effect**. Something dreadful will be accomplished and brought to pass—with a witness. When God has executed His vengeance on the sinner, and the wretch is actually suffering the infinite weight and power of His indignation, He will call upon the whole universe to behold the awful majesty and mighty power that is to be seen in it. "And the people shall be like the burnings of lime; like thorns cut up they shall be burned in the fire. Hear, you who are afar off, what I have done; and you who are near, acknowledge my might. The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?'" (Isa. 33:12-14).

This is how it will be with those of you who are unconverted, if you remain so. The infinite might, and majesty, and terribleness of the omnipotent God shall be magnified upon you in the indescribable severity of your torments. You shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. The glorious inhabitants of heaven shall go forth and look on the awful spectacle so that they may see what the wrath and fierceness of the Almighty is. When they have seen it, they will fall down and adore that great power and majesty.

God's wrath is everlasting wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God for one moment, but you must

suffer it to all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite, horrible misery. When you look forward, you shall see a long forever, a boundless duration before you. It will swallow your thoughts and stagger your souls. You will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverances, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all. You will feel certain that you must wear out after millions of years of wrestling and conflicting with this almighty, merciless vengeance. Then when you have wrestled for millions of years in agony, you will know that there is still an eternity of suffering to endure! What words can express the feelings of a soul in such circumstances? All that we can possibly say about it is nothing but a very feeble, faint representation. It is inexpressible and inconceivable, for "Who knows the power of God's anger?"

How dreadful is the state of those who are daily and hourly in danger of this infinite misery! This is the dismal prospect of every soul who has not been born again, however moral and strict, sober and religious they may otherwise be. How I pray that you would consider it, whether you are young or old!

If we knew that there was one person, and only one, of those whom we know, who was to be the subject of this misery, what an awful thing would it be to think of! What an awful sight it would be to see such a person! **How much would every Christian lift up a bitter cry over him!** But alas! Instead of one, how many will likely remember these solemn words in hell? And some may be in hell before this year is out. Some who are not in health, yet quiet and secure, may be there before tomorrow morning. Your damnation does not slumber. It will come swiftly if you remain unsaved! No doubt some of your friends are there already. Their case is past all hope. They are crying in extreme misery and despair; but here you are in the land of the living, perhaps even in the house of God, blessed with Bibles and a biblical ministry. What would those poor damned souls give for one day's opportunity such as you now enjoy?

Christ has thrown the door of mercy wide open and stands calling, crying with a loud voice to sinners such as you. Many throughout the world *are* flocking to Christ and pressing into the kingdom of God. Many of them were recently in the same miserable condition that you are in, but are now in a happy state with their hearts filled with love to Him who has loved them, and washed them from their sins in His own blood. How awful is it to be left behind at such a day! How can you rest in such a condition? Isn't your soul as precious as the souls of those who are flocking from day to day to Christ?

Are there not many older folk who are foreigners from the people of God, who have done nothing since they were born except heap up wrath against themselves in the day of wrath? Your guilt and hardness of heart are extremely great. Do you not see how many older people are passed over and left in the outpouring of God's mercy?

What about you, young man or woman? Will you neglect this precious opportunity when others of your age are renouncing the sinful thoughts, words and behaviour so common

today and coming to Christ? If you neglect it, you will be like so many others, who spent all their precious days of youth in sins and now in their later years are in such a dreadful mess in the blindness and hardness of their hearts.

Let everyone who is not trusting Christ now hear the loud calls of God's Word and this message. The acceptable year of the Lord, a day of such great favour to some, will doubtless be a day of remarkable vengeance to others. As in the days of John the Baptist, "...every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Let everyone who is out of Christ now awaken and fly from the wrath to come!

THE EMBRACE

It has been said
That those who live by the sword
Die by the sword.

It has also been said
That those who refuse to live by the sword
Go to the cross.

Faced with the horrific truth:
A death that meant being forsaken
By all that is:
By God,
By men,
By all creation...
He embraced it.

Now, you are faced with Him:
The living Truth.

But to embrace One so lovely,
You must embrace all truth.

You must take Death by the hand
As a close, cold companion
To redeem your numbered days,
To mortify your members,
To prevent you from living a lie.

You must also invite Hell
To his place at the table of your mind
To say his piece: Justice,
The enormity of the millions who will burn.
Even now, you reject him,
Send him from the table.

No. You must embrace Hell as well,
For Hell is truth
And truth is a friend.

Embracing Death
You may embrace Life fully.
For without Death there can be no
Resurrection.

Embracing Hell
You may embrace Truth fully,
For without Hell there is no Justice.
Your life tempered, your prayers heartened
By Death and by Hell,
You may agonise as He does
Over them both
With the knowledge that He
has conquered them both for us.

Then embrace Him.

He will embrace you.