

Man's Extremity, God's Opportunity

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that when believers reach their lowest point of weakness and powerlessness, God sees their extremity as an opportunity to judge, restore, and revive His people.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:36, Job 1, Psalm 30:5, Jeremiah 31:3, Isaiah 43:2, Psalm 34:19

Topics: "Divine Judgment", "Spiritual Revival", "Faith in Trials"

Description

In 'Man's Extremity, God's Opportunity,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound spiritual truth that God uses the lowest points of His people's lives as opportunities for divine intervention and revival. He addresses the trials of churches, believers, and convicted sinners, encouraging faith and prayer in times of weakness. Spurgeon's message is one of hope and assurance that God's compassion never fails, even when human strength is gone.

Transcript

"For the LORRD shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left." Deuteronomy 32:36

THE same event may happen alike to all, yet it may have a very different meaning to different individuals. Ungodly men are brought low by affliction or poverty, for sinners have no immunity from suffering. Saints, also, are led into trying circumstances, for the utmost holiness will not preserve any man from trial. But what a difference there is between the downfall of the prosperous sinner and of the man whom God loves! The wicked man who continues in his wickedness, falls forever. But the righteous man, though he may fall seven times, rises up again, for he shall not fall finally. How dreadful is the language of Jehovah when speaking of the ungodly! "To Me belongs vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste."

The wicked man who prospers in this world carries his head very high. He is proud and conceited, and he treads the poor under his feet. His career seems to be one of uninterrupted prosperity—higher, and higher, and higher, and yet higher he mounts—he becomes more wealthy and famous and, meanwhile, he also becomes more boastful and more arrogant towards God. He asks, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" He breathes defiance again at the Most High. His heart grows harder and harder, like the heart of Pharaoh. Do you see where he is now? He has climbed to the very mountain's brow. He is rejoicing that he has reached the topmost pinnacle of fame. Who can ever pull him down from that height? Who can even disturb his peace? Wait a while. Tarry but a brief season. High places are full of danger and

the terrible prophecy shall yet be fulfilled in his experience—and in that of many others who are like he—"Their feet shall slide in due time"—and when men in such a position begin to slip and slide, their fall is irrevocable! Down, down they go, falling from precipice to precipice, until they are utterly broken in pieces.

Am I addressing any man who thinks that he is beyond the reach of the arrows of the Almighty? Before another week has passed over your head, Sir, you may lie gazing into eternity—and the joints of your loins shall be loosed as you begin to realize that you must so soon stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ! Vain, then, will be all your wealth and all your wit! You may now deride the godly who seek mercy at the hands of God, but then you will cry out worse than they have ever done! You have often, in your pride, mocked them in the hour of their distress. But, in the day of your calamity, it may be that before you shall have even time to present one prayer to God, your foot shall slide, you will find yourself lost, and forever have to wring your hands in anguish at your own folly in having despised eternal love and rejected the mercy of God in Christ Jesus!

I would not change places with the greatest man who is living without the Savior! If I could have the whole world given to me. If I could be the possessor of a thousand worlds and yet live for a single moment without having my sin forgiven, and without the love of God shed abroad in my heart, it would be a living death to me! I think it would be so with each one of you and it would be if you carefully thought the matter over. I invite you to do so and I earnestly ask you to imagine how dreadful must be the doom of an ungodly man. When he dies, he sinks into the abyss of Hell! When his light goes out, there is no means of lighting it again! The tenfold midnight, thick as Egypt's darkness, shall never be broken by

the gleaming of a solitary star of hope. I want you to think all the more of this solemn Truth of God because I am going to speak of others who do fall very low, and suffer very much, yet, after all, their descent is followed by an ascent—their declining leads to a revival, for, according to our text, "the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left." I. I shall apply the text, first of all, to THE LORD'S OWN CHURCH.

It may relate to any sorely-tried church I may be addressing some Brothers and Sisters, up from the country, who are members of churches that are sadly declining. If that is the case, let me remind you, dear Friends, that God may have a true church which is very severely tried. The track of the ship of the church has lain full often over very boisterous waters. Sometimes the sea has seethed and the billows have boiled through the fury of persecution—the prow of the vessel has been crimsoned with blood, but onward has she moved! Still has the Divine wind speeded her on her way and, despite the kings of the earth, and all the infernal tortures that Rome's inquisitors could invent, the sturdy ship has gone straight on towards her desired haven! The days of persecution have not yet ceased, but when any churches are brought very low through the attacks of cruel enemies, there is still hope for them in this promise of the living God.

What is even far worse for a church than persecution, it may be diminished and brought low through the folly of its own members. My eyes could weep day and night over some churches that I know, which seem to me to be determined to commit spiritual suicide. They fall to quarrelling, when they are weak enough, already, and need what little strength they have for fighting against the common foe. Often they divide into parties about nothing at all and where there should be unbroken brotherhood, there is an absence of anything like Christian love and, therefore, the Spirit of God departs from them.

Many churches are, alas, brought low through a faulty ministry. A ministry that does not ring out in tones as clear as a clarion, "Salvation by Grace, through faith in the precious blood of Jesus Christ," is an impoverishing ministry. If there is no nourishing food for the soul, how can it be in spiritual health? Where will the gathering of the people be if the Shiloh is not present? If Christ is absent from the assembly, is not everything lacking that can build up a true Christian Church? In many and many a place that I know of, the members of the church have become few and feeble because the ministry has not fed their souls. And, sometimes, a church may get down so very low that it appears as if it would become altogether extinct. One is afraid that the doors of the chapel will have to be closed, that the altar-fire will go out and that the testimony for God will cease in that particular hamlet, or village, or township.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, if any of you are members of such a church as that, what you have to make sure of is that it is a Church of Christ and that you are God's people and God's servants, for our text speaks of God's favor to, "His people" and, "His servants." This passage does not apply to every nominal church, nor to every conglomeration of merely moral men who call themselves Christians—but it does concern every real Church of God, however low it may have been brought.

When you are in such a state as this, what you have to do is to lay the condition of the church to heart and to cry unto God to raise it up again. Use every possible and right means to bring a revival, but if your way is blocked and there seems to be no possibility of success attending your efforts, then fall back upon this text and plead it with God in prayer—"For the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left."

For, next, if you pray in faith, God will return to you. I believe that half-a-dozen persons with vital religion in their souls, and really in earnest, may pray a church right out of any ditch into which it may have fallen, or bring it even from the sepulcher where it has been buried—and make it live again in fullness of life! Only there must be an intense determination that it shall be so and real anguish and travail of soul until the desired end is attained. The fact that the church has come to her extremity of weakness should cheer you, rather than drive you to despair, for when a thing is so low that it cannot get any lower, there is some consolation in that fact. Now is the time to hope that the tide will turn! If it has ebbed out to the very uttermost, now let us trust that it will soon begin to flow again! I do not know whether the common saying is true, that the darkest hour of the night is that which precedes the dawn of day, but let us hope that it is so with your church and that, when it has got very, very, very low, it has reached its limit of weakness—and that God will raise it up again.

There are some friends, whom I meet every now and then, who tell me that there are very dreadful times coming upon the world. I am not sure that they are right in all their forecasts, but one thing I do know, and that is, if ever the Church of God should get into a worse state than she has ever yet been in, if I am alive at such a time, I will still call together the last, half-dozen faithful ones if I am one of them, and I will get them to read with me this verse, "For the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left."

You remember that when John Huss was being burned to death, he said, "Within a hundred years, there will come a man whom the persecutors will not be able to burn." The word Huss used was, goose, and he said, "there will come a swan that you will never be able to roast"—that was Martin Luther, who was many times in great peril, and yet was not killed by the persecutors. When he was converted, the world was as spiritually dark as it well could be, yet God then found, even in the monastery, a monk whose preaching of the Gospel shook the world! Never be afraid of the ultimate issue of the great battle! God will beat the devil

yet. Never admit into your mind, thoughts that shall lead you to despond concerning the end of the conflict. The battle is the Lord's and He will yet give the victory to His Gospel. If some of the young people here should live to see all those who now preach the Gospel laid in the silent grave. If any of you should live to see this place of worship empty. If ever this pulpit should cease to resound with the Gospel of Christ, do not give up hope, my Brothers and Sisters! Still stick together, even if there are only a few of you left, and cry mightily unto God, pleading the promise of our text, for He will remember you, and will, "repent Himself for His servants," and His cause shall yet again revive!

II. Now, in the second place, I want to show you that our text is applicable to THE TRIED BELIEVER. I may be addressing someone to whom these words of Moses shall drop as the rain and distil as the dew.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters, God may bring His people, in the order of His Providence, into such a state that "their power is gone." Apparently they are in such a condition that they are quite unable to help themselves. They have struggled against many difficulties, but, at last, the difficulties have proved more than a match for them. All earthly help has quite failed them. To quote the words of the text, "their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left." No garrison left in the city, no soldier left in the field, no helper anywhere. You may be like Job who had no friends left, except the miserable comforters who spoke more like enemies than friends. You are not the first of God's servants whose power is gone and whose friends are gone!

The worst about your trial may be that it may seem to you, and seem truly, that some of your suffering is the result of sin. You may not have been walking with God as you ought to have done. Your heart may have grown cold so that which has come upon you may be a chastisement for your wandering. It may be a rod in the hand of your loving Father, smiting you because of your folly. But I beseech you, now that all human power is gone, do not run away from God, but fly to Him! Do not give up your hope in Him! However deplorable your circumstances may be, let them drive you to God—not from Him. Your only hope now lies in the compassion of your God. Let me read this text to you again, and I pray that your faith may enable you to grasp it—"For the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left." There is a gracious purpose behind your present trial, even though you do not yet perceive it.

It is possible that it was absolutely necessary that you should be brought as low as you are in order to cure you of your sin. You have come to your last shilling, have you? I have known a doctor to keep his patients almost without food, and bring the man down every low in order to starve out the complaint from which he was suffering. And in a surgical case, the knife has had to go in very deeply so as to get at the roots of the cancer. In like manner, it may be that it was necessary that your affliction should not be stopped midway, but should be allowed to proceed to the bitter end in order that it might be the means of curing you of the evils which were rankling in your spirit.

Possibly, too, the affliction was permitted to develop to the uttermost in order that you might be induced to return to your God. It may be that in your prosperity you had grown so careless and so fond of the world—and you had so little delight in God—that it was necessary for you to have your gourds withered and your flowers all made to decay in order that you might, in your abject distress, turn again to your God.

Or it may be that God intends that you should forever bear a testimony to His faithfulness such as no ordinary man can bear. Those people who only sail in a little boat on a lake have no stories to tell of adventures at sea. But he who is to

write a book describing long voyages must travel far out of sight of land and behold the sea in the time of storm, as well as in a calm. You are to become, perhaps, an experienced Christian—you are to bring great honor to God by being the means of comforting others who will be tried in a similar way to yours. You are to be trained into a hero, and that cannot be done except by great and bitter griefs coming upon you. I believe that there are some of us whom God cannot trust with much joy. If we carry much sail, His wisdom and His love compel Him to give us also much ballast, or else we shall be blown over. There must be many a man who knows within himself that he cannot be trusted with success. His head would turn dizzy if he were set upon a high pinnacle and he would get proud, and self-sufficient, and so be ruined. God will not kill His children with sweets any more than He will destroy them with bitters. They shall have a tonic when they need it, but when that tonic is so bitter that they seem as if they could not drink it and live, their Lord will either take the tonic away, or give them some delicious sweetness to remove all the bitter taste.

I will read the text to you again. I cannot preach from it as I should like to do, but the text itself is full of comfort to the Lord's own chosen ones who are in sore straits. "For the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left." Tried child of God, I wish I could grasp your hand in tender sympathy and whisper in your ear, "In your lowest moments, do not despair. 'Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? No, verily, for the Lord will not cast off forever. But though He causes grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies.' 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.' The Lord Himself says to you, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you.' 'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you: when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you.' 'He shall deliver you in six troubles: yes, in seven there shall no evil touch you.' 'Therefore, if you walk in darkness, and see no light, trust in the Lord, and stay yourself upon your God, for He will have compassion upon you; He will take away His wrath and smile again upon your soul, and turn your lamentation into singing, and your mourning into dancing.'"

III. This must suffice for the tried child of God, for I want to show that the text also applies to THE CONVICTED

SINNER.

Are there any of you who cannot say that you are the children of God, but who wish that you were? I said to one, the other day, "Are you a Christian?" and he replied, "No, Sir, but oh, how I wish that I were!" When I heard with what emphasis he spoke, I thought that he must not be far from the Kingdom of God, for is not he who wishes to be a Christian, almost one already? Is there not the beginning of a work of Grace in his heart which the Holy Spirit will carry on to completion? So I will read the text now to you who wish to be saved, but fear that you shall not be, for you have had a dreadful sense of sin—"For the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left."

Do these words describe your present condition? First, is your self-righteousness all gone A few months ago you were a fine fellow according to your own estimate. You thought that there were few as good as you. But tonight you came slinking in as if you felt afraid even to sit down with the people of God! You remember that line of the hymn—

"Then look, Sinner—look unto Him, and be saved"—and you feel that you would like to look to the Crucified One. You can go as far as that but you cannot yet say that you have looked unto Him and that you are saved, for you have such an awful sense of your guilt in the sight of God. I know you, my Friend. I "know the heart of a stranger," for such was my heart in the time of my conviction on account of sin. Oh, the heaviness of a guilty conscience! Oh, the long, dark, dreary winter of the soul, when sin blots out the sun, turns even mercy into misery, and sorrow makes the day into night! Ah, I know you, my Brother, my Sister—your self-righteousness is all gone and I am glad of it! I rejoice that the Lord has broken the iron sinew of your neck and that your fine feathers and ornaments have all been stripped off you, and that you have put on sackcloth in place of your former comely array. The Lord help you to keep it on till Jesus Christ takes it off, for it is fit livery for a sinner to wear!

Then, next, you say that your power is all gone. Not many months ago you thought that you could believe in the Lord Jesus Christ whenever you liked—that it was the easiest thing in all the world to become a Christian—and that you would trust the Savior some fine day or other, whenever you pleased. Yet, at this moment, you are sighing, "I would, but can't believe. Lord, relieve my load of guilt! All my help must come from You." You are the gentleman who

was going to conquer his evil temper and give up his bad habits—and be a saint and do it all yourself! Oh, yes, yes! Then you thought you could do anything and everything! But now you have come to realize that, apart from Christ, you can do nothing! Only the other morning, when you got up, you prayed to God and you thought that you would lead a very good life throughout that whole day, yet you were out of temper before breakfast was over! You went to your business and you were going to be quite an example there—and a pretty example you were! You felt that as you went home at night, all your attempts to be better and to do right had failed. I am glad you have learned your weakness and I hope that your consciousness of weakness will become deeper and more painful, for, until every bone in your body is broken, I am afraid that you will not turn to God! You are, I fear, one of the men who, as long as they can lift a little finger to help themselves, will still put all their trust in their little finger and will not turn to the Strong for strength! To cure them of that evil, you must grind them to powder! You must do with them what Solomon says concerning the fool, bray them "in a mortar among wheat with a pestle," before you can get this folly of supposed self-strength out of them! Even then, sometimes every atom of their ground and pounded being still seems to say, "I am somebody, after all." So it is a blessed thing when God makes us to know that all our power is gone.

Is my text true concerning any of you? "Their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left." Are you brought to such a pass that you have not anything in the whole world that you dare to rely upon? You look back upon all your Church attendance and your Chapel attendance, but you dare not rely upon them, for you feel that you have been a hypocrite in the House of God, and that your heart has not been right towards Him. You look back upon your attempts to pray—for you have been trying to pray lately—but you feel as if you could not pray aright. The words stuck in your throat, and the very desires were dead within your spirit. Have you come to such a pass that when you read the Bible, it condemns you? And when you hear the Gospel, the preacher seems as if he excluded you from its provisions? Is it so? Is there no ray of hope for you anywhere? You used to have some kind of hope in reserve, some secret, mysterious confidence that still buoyed you up—is that all gone? Do you realize that you are lost? Do you know that the sentence of death has been pronounced against you? Do you even begin to wonder why it has not been executed? Do you seem to feel in your heart the working of the Spirit, as if even now He would take you away and cast you into Hell?

Blessed be the Lord if you have come to such a pass as that! Your extremity is God's opportunity! The difficulty all along has been to get to the end of you, for when a man gets to the end of himself, he has reached the beginning of God's working! When you are cleaned right out and have not anything at all left, then all the mercy of the Covenant of Grace is yours! I may have doubts about whether God's Grace will be exercised in certain cases, but I cannot raise any question about the freeness of Divine Grace to a soul that is empty, to a soul that is ready to perish, to a soul that is enquiring after God, to a soul that is hungering and thirsting after righteousness! If you, poor Sinner, are covered with leprosy from head to foot. If, though the priest should thoroughly examine you, he would have to declare that there is not one sound speck in you even of the size of a pin's head, let me tell you what the Law of God itself says—you are clean! Therefore go your way. When once your soul is so conscious of your sin that every hope of salvation by your own works is entirely abandoned and you feel that you are utterly condemned, then is Jesus Christ yours, for He came not to call the righteous, but sinners. So, accept Him as yours! Take Him, receive Him now! He is made of God, fullness to our emptiness, righteousness to our unrighteousness, life to our death, salvation to our condemnation, all in all to our poverty, our wretchedness, our sin!

Now let me read the text to you yet once more and see if God the Holy Spirit does not press it home upon your conscience and heart. "For the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left." There is no hope for you except in the pity of God, no hope except in His mercy, and no hope of mercy except in the freeness of His mercy. And no hope, even, of the freeness of mercy except in the Sovereignty of God who has mercy on those upon whom He will have mercy, and who gives His Grace to the most unworthy, that it may be proved to be all the greater Grace because it saves the very chief of sinners! If there is one of you who says, "I am the most unlikely man in all the world ever to be saved. I have the least claim upon God of any man that lives. The only claim I have is the right to be damned, for I have so grievously transgressed against God. I feel myself to be so guilty that my only claim upon justice is the demand to be tried, condemned, and executed." If you really mean what you say, then you are the man to whom the Gospel of the Grace of God is specially sent, for it is written, "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet

perhaps, for a good (a benevolent) man some would even dare to die. But God commends His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

He gave Himself for our sins, not for our righteousness! And He, Himself, said, "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Trust Christ, you who dare not trust yourself! Fling yourself, all broken to pieces, at the feet of the broken-hearted Savior and He will turn again, and have compassion upon you. Yes, look unto Him and live, for—

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One! There is life at this moment for you!" Give but one believing glance at that dear dying Son of God and you shall hear Him say to you, "Go your way; your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you." The LORD grant it, for His name's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: DEUTERONOMY 32:1-43.

Verse 1. Give ear, O you heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth Because men are so slow of hearing, Moses calls on the heavens and the earth to bear witness against them. And because of the sublimity of his subject, he calls upon the heavens and the earth to pay attention to it.

2. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass. It is good preaching, and good hearing, too, when the Gospel comes like a gentle shower which saturates and soaks into the soil and refreshes and makes it fruitful. May God the Holy Spirit make it to be so whenever we gather together for worship! The Word of the Lord may be as a driving hail, breaking everything upon which it falls, and so becoming the savor of death unto death. But may God make it to us as the dew and the small rain from Heaven, that it may be a savor of life unto life!

3-5. Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe you greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He. They have corrupted themselves. What a contrast there is between the incorruptible and immutable God and corruptible man! "They have corrupted themselves."

5. Their spot is not the spot of His children: they are a perverse and crooked generation. God's children have spots—the spot caused by sin which are recognized, mourned over, and struggled against by them. The ungodly have the same sort of spots but they have no repentance concerning the sin which causes them.

6. Do you thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? Is not He your Father that has bought you? Has He not made you, and established you? Sin is the basest form of ingratitude. We owe everything to God, and we ought, therefore, to treat Him as our Creator and Father should be treated. On the contrary, how often have we requited Him evil for good, and acted as if we regarded Him as our enemy rather than as our best Friend?

7. 8. Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you. When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel His first thought was concerning His own people. He provided Canaan for them. It was just the very land for them, with space enough, and yet with not too much room, so that they might cultivate it all and prove it to be a land flowing with milk and honey. Yet these special thoughts of God with regard to His own chosen people did not exclude kind thoughts towards the rest of mankind, for "He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people," that is, the people belonging to other nations. But, still, His deepest and His highest thoughts were concerning the children of Israel.

9, 10. For the LORD'S portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. And is not this also a true description of God's love and kindness to you and to me, Beloved in the Lord? Did He not find us in the wilderness? Has He not led us about, and by our experience instructed us, and has He not guarded us with as much watchful care as a man bestows upon the apple of his eye? Oh, blessed be His holy name, we owe everything to Him! He gives us everything that we have.

11-14. As an eagle stirs up her nest, flutters over her young, spreads abroad her wings, takes them, bears them on her wings: so the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock, butter of cows, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys, of wheat; and you did drink the pure blood of the grape. God fed His ancient people with the best of the best, and gave it to them with no stinted

hand. And, oh, when I think of the spiritual food which God has prepared for His people, surely "butter of cows, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs," and all such carnal things are but poor in comparison with the provisions of His Grace! In a spiritual sense, the Lord has indeed given to us "a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." But now look again at the contrast between the Lord and His ancient people. God's great goodness makes man's sin appear all the blacker—

15. But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: you are waxen fat, you are grown thick, you are covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. Many can endure the trials of adversity who cannot escape the perils of prosperity. Solomon truly said, "As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise." And many a man has failed in that time of testing. When you come to be wealthy, to be admired, to receive honor among men, then is the time of your severest trial.

16, 17. They provoked Him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they Him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Moses multiples expressions to show the folly of Israel's idolatry. Only think of "new gods that came newly up," as if that which is new could be a god! The same thing may be said of the "new truth" of which we hear so much about nowadays. That which is new cannot be true. Certainly, there is nothing new in theology but that which is utterly false. The idols which the Israelites worshipped were not only new gods, but they were strange gods, which their fathers feared not. Worse than that, they were demons—"they sacrificed unto devils, not to God." How low had even the chosen people sunk!

18-27. Of the Rock that begat you, you are unmindful, and have forgotten God that formed you. And when the LORD saw it, He abhorred them, because of the provoking of His sons, and of His daughters. And He said, I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very stubborn generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved Me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked Me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled in My anger, and shall burn unto the lowest Hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischiefs upon them, I will spend My arrows upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without and terror within shall destroy both the youngman and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of grayhairs. I said, I would scatter them into corners. I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men: were it not—Here is a sweet Word of Grace amid the just judgments of Jehovah. "Were it not"—

27. That I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the LORD has not done all this. So He spared them for His own name's sake and, to this day, when God can find no other reason for showing mercy to the guilty, He does it for His name's sake. And this is a blessed plea to be urged by a man who can see no reason why God should have mercy upon him! He may say, "Lord, do it for Your name's sake, to make Your Grace and Your mercy illustrious in the salvation of such a poor, hopeless wretch as I am."

28-32. For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut

them up? For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges. For their vine—That is, the vine of God's enemies—

32-34. Is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps. Is not this laid up in store with Me, and sealed up among My treasures? What a striking and startling question that is, as though God laid up the memory of man's sin,

sealed it up, and kept it in a secret place against the day when He shall call sinners to account, and visit them for their iniquities! What an awful thing it is to have the sins of one's youth laid up, sealed up, and put away in God's treasury— and the sins of middle life, and perhaps the sins of old age, too, to be brought out, by-and-by, and laid to our charge! Who shall be able to stand in that great day? Only those who are washed in the blood and robed in the righteousness of Christ Jesus our Lord!

35-38. To Me belongs vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the LORD shall judge His people and repent Himself for His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left. And He shall say, Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted, which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? Let them rise up and help you, and be your protection. To you who trust in anything except God, the day will come when you will hear such terrible words as these—"Now let your riches save you, let your pleasures and your vices cheer you. Go you now in your own wicked ways and see if you can find any comfort in them!" What holy sarcasm there is in these words, which will cut to the quick the conscience when it is once fairly awakened!

39-43. See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me: I kill, and make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand. For I lift up My hand to Heaven, and say, I live forever. I fling My glittering sword, and My hand takes hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to My enemies, and will reward them that hate Me. I will make My arrows drunk with blood, and My sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy. Rejoice, O you nations, with His people: for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries and will be merciful unto His land, and to His people. It is only in mercy, you see, that the Lord deals with His people. They cannot stand before Him on the ground of justice, but in His mercy is their place of refuge! May we all find that mercy by fleeing for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us in Christ Jesus and His glorious Gospel! Amen.

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