

“YOUR FIRST LOVE”

NO. 2399

A SERMON
 INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD’S DAY, FEBRUARY 10, 1895.
 DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
 ON LORD’S-DAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 20, 1887.

“Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says the LORD, ‘I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.’”
Jeremiah 2:2.

THIS was the word of Jehovah to His ancient people. He remembered the faithfulness and earnestness of Israel when the nation was first born, and came out of Egypt under Moses, and went after God into “the waste howling wilderness.” Alas, in later years, they would not obey, or trust, or rejoice in God! He therefore tells the prophet Jeremiah to say to them that He remembers their better days; they seemed to have forgotten, “but,” says the Lord: “I have not forgotten. ‘I remember you, the kindness of your youth, and the love of your espousals.’”

I. Using the text practically for our own profit, I make this first observation, that GOD REMEMBERS WITH GRACE THE BEST THINGS OF HIS PEOPLE’S EARLY DAYS.

Some of us were converted to God when we were very young, and we look back with pleasure upon our early days. But, whether we look back upon them with pleasure or not, God does, and He says, “I remember you, the kindness of your youth, and the love of your espousals.” Why does God remember and prize so highly the early piety of His people, their first faith, their first love, their first zeal?

I think that it is, first, because *all these were His own work*. If there was anything good in us, in the early days after our conversion, the Lord worked it all! Remember Paul’s questions to the Corinthians: “Who makes you to differ from another? And what have you that you did not receive?” If there was in you any light, or life, or love, it was the gift of the Spirit of God. If there was any repentance, if there was any faith, it was the work of the Holy Spirit! A man remembers his own work, and God, the Holy Spirit, never forgets any of His work upon the spirits of men whom He forms anew.

God also remembers with pleasure those best things in His people’s early days because *they gave Him great delight at the time*. It seems a strange thing to say, but it is strangely, yet blessedly true, that it gave God great pleasure to see us repent. Those first tears which we tried to secretly brush away were so precious to the Lord that He stored them away in His bottle! That first faith of ours, though it was but the feeble tottering of a babe in grace, was very lovely in God’s sight. You know how mothers love to recollect the first words their children began to speak, and the broken notes and strange tones in which they lisped their first childish sentences? Well, even so does God remember His children’s early utterances which gave Him such pleasure when He first heard them. Let not any of you imagine that God is indifferent to your first prayers, your first praises, or your first reformations and purging away of sin! No, He takes infinite delight in them all, for, “like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him.” Therefore, you can be sure that the things which gave Him such joy in your early Christian experience have not faded from His gracious memory!

It is very sweet, however, to reflect that when God says that He remembers the love of our espousals, and the kindness of our youth, *He does not mention the faults connected with our early days*. Our gracious God has a very generous memory; we have often noticed this in the Scriptures. When the Lord and His angels came to Abraham’s tent in the plains of Mamre, to give the patriarch the promise that a son and heir should be born to him, Sarah turned eavesdropper behind the tent doors. It was bad manners on her part, and when she had overheard what the Lord said, she disbelieved Him and laughed within herself. This was worse manners, still, on her part, to laugh at the divine prophecy, and when she was brought to book for it, she denied that she had laughed, which was still worse! When she laughed within

herself, she said, "After I am waxed old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old, also?" And the Holy Spirit, writing in the New Testament about her, does not say anything concerning her lie, or her unbelief, but He mentions the only good thing about her speech, which was that she called her husband, "lord": "For after this manner in the old time the holy women, also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling Him lord."

Oh, the gracious goodness that spies out the diamond on the dunghill! There was but one bright star in all that murky sky, yet the Spirit of God saw it, and moved Peter to write concerning it! That which was to Sarah's credit is recorded, while that which was to her *discredit* is blotted out. "You have heard of the patience of Job," have you not? The Holy Spirit is very careful to remind us, in the New Testament, of the patience of Job, but He does not say anything about Job's impatience! Yet the patriarch cursed the day of his birth in a very bitter and wicked fashion, and this might have been remembered to his shame, but it was not. Ah, our blessed Lord, when He forgives our sin, forgets it, too! But He remembers all the excellences, and all the graces which His Spirit works in the hearts and lives of His people.

Besides this, *the Lord so remembers the best things of our early days that He recounts them.* In looking back upon my first days with God, I can see much to deplore, much in which, as a young man, I fell very short of what I ought to have been. But God says to me, and to each one of you who are His children, "I remember you; and I do not remember your shortcomings, your blunders, your headstrong hastiness, your faultiness; but, 'I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of these espousals, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.'" To my mind, it is very sweet that the Lord should so recollect all that was good in His people, in the days gone by, that He recounted it, and recorded it in His Word.

Now, to show how strong is the Lord's memory of all that was good in His people at their beginnings, *He gives a detailed account of it.* He says, "I remember you, the kindness of your youth." Let us try whether we can remember how we showed our kindness to our God in our early days. We resolved, when first we knew the Lord, that we would live wholly to His praise, and we tried to begin, almost as soon as we were converted, to do a little something for our Master. We did all that we could do with the little strength that we then had. It was not much that we could do, but in looking back upon it, we remember that it seemed a great deal to us then. We prayed very earnestly over it. We went to our work with much trembling; we were very diffident in ourselves, but we had a firm confidence in the gospel; and we had a sweet hope in God that even *we* might do something for His praise! Now, perhaps, we go to our Sunday school class and forget to pray! We sit down, open the book, and feel quite competent to teach. Possibly now we go into the pulpit and begin to preach. It is quite a matter of course with us; we have delivered so many sermons that we feel quite easy about our power to instruct the people; but it was not so at first. I can remember how my knees knocked together when I first preached the gospel, for fear that I should not preach it all, and should not deliver my soul so as to be clear of the blood of all men! What sighs my sermons cost me, and what tears! And, surely, God remembers all this, for He says, "I remember you, the kindness of your youth. You were but a youth, but then your heart was all aglow with sacred fervor, your spirit was firmly confiding in your God, your zeal was burning for My glory."

Then the Lord adds, "I remember you...*the love of your espousals.*" Oh, some of us did love God very fervently in our early days! I can recollect the day of my baptism very well. At this moment it comes back to my memory; I cannot help remembering it because the text suggests that we should, each one, think of our first days with God. It was a summer's morning, the 3rd of May, 1850, and quite early, at the very rising of the sun. I was up, that I might have a quiet hour or two of prayer to God, as thus commenced my public life as a Christian avowing my faith in my Lord Jesus. Then there came a long walk of some eight miles or so to get to the place of baptism at Isleham Ferry. As I walked along the country road that week-day morning, with the birds all about me singing, oh, I did feel that I loved my Lord! My soul seemed to dance within me for very joy! My friends were not believers in baptism as it is taught in the Word of God; and, therefore, I was about to do a strange thing, for none of my family had thus confessed Christ publicly by being immersed in the name of the Sacred Trinity! I remember standing by the river's bank with a great crowd of people all around in barges and boats, looking on. And when I had walked some considerable distance into the stream to be immersed, and when I rose from the liquid grave, I remember how I felt that if all the angels in heaven and all the devils in hell were gath-

ered there, it mattered not one jot to me! I was Christ's, and I had given myself up to be buried with Him, to rise with Him, and to live and labor for Him as long as the Lord should spare me! That day my love to my God was bright, and warm, and burning; and that evening, at the little prayer meeting in the vestry, I, who had been the most timid lad, perhaps, in all the world, and never opened my mouth for my Master in public, before, ventured to praise and bless God vocally in the midst of His people, and blessed be His holy name, I have never left off doing so from that day to this!

Many of you might tell a story of your early days which would be much more remarkable than mine. But whether there is anything in them to interest others, or not, God says, “I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals, when you went after Me in the wilderness.” Those were good days, blessed days, days of heaven upon the earth!—

*“What peaceful hours I then enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!”*

And they also seemed to be as sweet to God as they were to us!

You observe that the Lord speaks in our text of Israel's going after Him in the wilderness—“I remember you...*when you went after Me in the wilderness.*” That was a grand Exodus when all the hosts of Israel that were in Egypt, without exception, took away all that they had, and marched out into the desert! It was nothing but a wilderness; yet, when Moses bade them quit the flesh pots of Egypt, they all did so—“and the children of Israel went up harnessed (or, as the margin has it, “by five in a rank”) out of the land of Egypt.” Doubling up their unleavened dough, and carrying their kneading-troughs in their clothes upon their shoulders, they went right away into the wilderness of the Red Sea, “in a land that was not sown,” where they could never reap a harvest, and where it was only natural to fear that they might die of famine. It was bravely done of Israel, thus, to face the howling wilderness as Jehovah led the way in the cloudy-fiery pillar!

Perhaps I speak to some of you who, when you became Christians, had to give up your employment, or to quit some evil trade. Perhaps you had to run the gauntlet of a workshop where everybody pointed the finger at you, and laughed you to scorn. Some of you had hard times in those days, yet I will not call them hard, for you never had, in all your life, such joy as you had then! When everybody gave you an ill word, then Christ was most precious to you, and your love to Him burned with a steady flame! I think that the happiest days the Church of Christ has ever had, have been her days of persecution! What joy the Methodists had when everybody mobbed them! What bliss the Covenanters experienced when the dragoons of Claverhouse hunted them like partridges upon the mountains! God gives an extraordinary measure of joy to His people when, in their first days, they for His sake, can endure anything and everything that they may glorify His holy name!

Now, whatever you may have suffered in the days gone by, the Lord says, “I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.” God has a very lively recollection of the simple trust of His people when they began their Christian career, of their child-like confidence in Him, of their intensely earnest prayers, of their delight in His worship, and of their readiness for His service! It is a thousand pities that this bright experience should ever fade, but whether it fades or not, God says, “I remember it.”

II. So now, secondly, I want to show you that GOD REMEMBERS WITH A GRACIOUS PURPOSE THE BEST THINGS OF OUR EARLY DAYS.

He remembers them that He may *make use of and honor us in our later days*. There is many a man, now honored and beloved in the service of God, who would not have been where he is if he had not been faithful to God as a youth. And I believe that there is many a man who has missed his opportunity of serving God through not beginning well. Young man, I charge you, when you become a Christian, be out and out for Christ! Be true to your convictions through and through! Do not neglect the least thing that you see to be in the Scriptures, but determine to follow the Lord fully. If you do that, you will be the kind of man that God will use! There are plenty of young men who are pliant as the willow, they will bend to anything and anyone—and God says, “I can never make anything of them” and, though He saves them, He puts them in the background as far as His service is concerned. But if there is a young fellow who, from his very youth, is straight as an arrow, one who cannot be bribed, who must do the right and will carry out his convictions at all costs, yes, to the devil's face if necessary, God will say, “That man will do for My service, I will make use of him. He shall be a pillar in the Church in years to

come.” “I remember you,” says the Lord, “the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals and, therefore, I intend to use you greatly to My honor and praise, and to your own joy and honor, too.”

And, depend upon it, God remembers these early faithful ones for another reason, namely, *to instruct them and to reveal Himself to them*. “There,” He says, “I would have taught that young man something, but he would not learn it, so he shall never know much—he will be only a poor fool all his life. I set a light before him, but he preferred the darkness. Consequently, he shall go on with just glimmer enough to get into heaven, but a clear perception of My truth, a deep joy in that truth, he shall never know as he might have known it if he had, in his youth been faithful and obedient to his God.”

I believe that the Lord also remembers what we do in our youthful love and kindness, *that He may sustain us in the time of trouble*. Some poor child of God is in great distress and he cries to his heavenly Father. He does not dare to plead anything that he has *done*; that would be quite out of character for a child of God; but, for all that, God says, “I remember you; though you have very properly forgotten what you did long ago, and have wept over your many defects since your early days, yet I remember the kindness of your youth, and I will help you. I will be with you in the hour of your need, and I will deliver you.”

Especially do I think that this must be true *in the time of old age*. That is a sweet prayer of David, in the 71st Psalm, “O God, You have taught me from my youth: and up to now have I declared Your wondrous works. Now also, when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not.” I know what many firms do, especially in these days when business is so bad and competition is so keen—they begin to weed out the men who must go. The head of the firm says, “There is old John, you see, he is between 60 and seventy—he must go.” “But, sir, he carried you on his back when you were a boy. He was with your father.” “I can’t help it, he must go. He is getting too old and we can get a boy to do his work.” That is how men do, do they not? But that is *not* the way God does! He lets us remain in His employment when there is very little that we can do. We pray to Him—

“Dismiss me not from Your service, Lord,”

and He says, “I will never cast you off.”

Once His servants, we are engaged for life! Once enlisted in His army, He will never drum us out of the ranks of the soldiers of salvation! We shall be His, forever, for He says, “I remember you.” “I remember what you used to do when you could do it. I remember how you worked for Me when you could work for Me, and now that you are getting gray and old, and can do but little in your last days, I will uphold you and bear you safely through.” There is nothing in our service that we care to remember, on which we can build any claim upon God; but yet, in the fatherly discipline of His great house, He remembers all that His servants have done and, oftentimes, He sends them cheer, comfort, strength and honor which He might have denied them had they been unfaithful to Him!

Therefore I would encourage you who are beginning the Christian life to walk closely with God. Beware of little slips while you are young men and young women. A little awry with you when you are single may make much awry with you when you are married, and when your children are about you. He who begins amiss in the morning of life will probably go the *more* amiss before that life comes to its nightfall. I would charge everyone whom my voice can reach to be quite clear about what his duty is towards God as a Christian and, once clear as to what it is, to go straight ahead in the performance of it.

I am obliged to refer to myself because we must, each one, tell his own experience. Well now, upon that matter of baptism which I have already mentioned; reading in the Scriptures, I found that *believers* were baptized. I had never heard anybody preach about believers’ baptism. When I read about it in the New Testament, I did not know another person in the world who thought as I did and I came to the conclusion that it did not matter to me whether anybody agreed with me or not, my duty was plain! If I was the only person who had found out the will of God, I was bound to obey it, for I believed it to be God’s will that believers should be baptized on profession of their faith, and I fancied that I should be the first person in modern days to make such a confession! That idea made no difference to me, nor does it now; if there was *anything* that was taught in the Scriptures which had not occurred to anybody else before, I should not ask whether any other person had or had not seen it! If God commands it, it is not for us to ask whether it is fashionable, or according to the order of other people, but to obey it straightway without a question! I have found, through life, that the habit of going by God’s Word as far as I understand it, honestly and rigidly, and giving way to nobody, has kept my road pretty clear. At first, people used to

get in my way. Then I drove along the right side of the road and if they did not move, I was obliged to run into them, or, if they ran into me, I could not help it. Now I find that they just let me take the right side of the road and go straight ahead! I should do that whether they let me or not; therefore I have got to be “a chartered libertine” in these matters; permitted to do what I conceive to be right according to the Word of God!

If a soldier, in any of our barracks, does not dare to kneel down to pray before his comrades, he will have a hard time of it. But let him once do it boldly and he can do it, again, after that! If there is any young man here who is in a house of business, and he says, “I will be a religious man, but I will be very moderate about it,” he will have a hard fight of it, I know he will! But if you come straight out and say, “I am beholden to no mortal man as to what I shall do. I am only God’s servant and if He bids me do anything, I raise no question about what others may say of it; the thing has to be done and I am going to do it,” why, you will get respect before long! It is, after all, the easiest way to take the hardest way when that way is right! Up with your flag, man! There, let it brave the battle and the breeze, and all that may come to it; you will win the victory so! But to pop your flag up when everybody is out of the way, and then to stand and look through your telescope, and presently to say, “There is somebody coming, I must pull the flag down,” and then, after a while, say, “It ought to be up, the gentleman has gone. He will not look at it; haul it up again! Am I not brave? Oh, but here comes somebody else, pull it down, John, fold it up, and put it away till there is nobody about; fly it at nights when no eye can see it!” That is a dastardly, cowardly way of pretending to be religious which I hope none of you will wish to follow! Oh, that in early life you may bravely follow your God! He will remember it to your credit and honor in the days to come!

III. Now, lastly, and this ought to have been the major part of my discourse, GOD WOULD HAVE US REMEMBER THE BEST THINGS OF OUR EARLY DAYS FOR OUR REBUKE.

Ah, you are not what you used to be; not so decided, not so joyous, not so faithful! What have you been doing? Ask yourselves a few questions. *Were you not happier, then, than you are now?* If it was so, then go back on the old track! If it was better with you in your early days than it is now, get back to the old quarters! Pray the Lord to restore to you the joy of His salvation! Why, Pilgrim, by this time, if you had held on your way, you might have been very much nearer the gates of the Celestial City! What a deal of time you have lost—and now you have to go back to that arbor where you fell asleep and lost your roll! You have to go over the ground *three times*; first an advance, then a going back, and then a going forward, again, yet once might have been enough! You have been very foolish and you have lost a good deal, but now, by God’s grace, since He says, “I remember you in better times,” answer to Him, “Lord, I remember those better times, too, and, by Your gracious help, I am going back that I may have them again.”

For listen. *Do you think you were a fool then?* Why, you were up early in the morning that you might get to hear the gospel! You used to get into a crowded place and stand in the aisle! Somehow you were not half as tired when you used to stand all the while as you now are when you sit! And the preaching—what wonderful preaching it used to be! I do not suppose that it was any better than what you hear, now, but still, it did *seem* all on fire, did it not? And those prayer meetings! And your own private devotions—what hallowed seasons they were! And the Bible, when you read it—how it used to shine out in letters of fire before your eyes! Were you a fool then? Were you deceived, do you think? If so, I do not wonder at your turning back! But if you were no fool, then, but a wise man, what are you, now, that you have gone away from all this blessedness? Oh, come back! I charge you, by the living God, return to the place from which you have gone astray! Do you not owe more to God, now, than you did then? You have come a good way on the road since then; ought you to love Him *less*? He has blessed you. He has preserved you. He has forgiven you. He has manifested Himself to you. You have had some grand times when your heart has burned within you; you have sometimes had a taste of heaven upon earth! Should you not, therefore, love Him much more than at the first? Oh, come back! Come back with tears of deep regret and give yourself, again, to God!

For, look, *you have already slipped a long way down.* Why, looking up, I can hardly see how high you used to be! You were so near heaven’s gate, but you have come down, oh, so far! In the course of a year or two, more, if you keep on going down, you will be still lower! “The Down-Grade” is awfully easy—where will *you* soon be? I hope that it will not come to pass that you will be drinking the cup of

the drunkard, or singing the song of the profane. “Oh, no!” you say, “I will never do *that*.” I do not know. I am not sure. If a man were to fall off the Monument, when he had fallen some 20 feet, I do not see what is to prevent him from falling to the ground. Once begin to fall and who knows how low you may go? Oh, for a miracle of mercy to stop you in your dread descent! May God work that miracle and save you by His grace!

Do you not think, dear friends, any of you who are losing your first love and turning from your first kindness to God, *that you are sowing some ugly thorns for your deathbed?* You may lie a long time, perhaps in sickness and weakness, and then it will be a wretched thing to turn on that uneasy pillow and say, “Ah, I did not serve God as I ought to have done! I did not live to God as I should have done.” It is amazing how some truly good men will, at the last, trouble themselves about very little things. I knew a dear friend who used to have a church in his house. A number of Christian people met for worship and when he grew ill, the singing was too much for him. I think that it really *was* too much for him to bear and the doctor said that his friends had better go somewhere else on the Sabbath—and they did; and I think very properly so. Yet, when my friend lay dying, I had hard work to comfort him, “because,” he said, “I turned the people of God out of my house.” I said, “No, you did not! You were ill, and it was not fit that they should disturb you when you were so weak. I think that you were quite right, my brother.” “Oh, no!” he said, “Oh, no! I shall never forgive myself for that.” And he was whipping himself for it most cruelly. And I thought, “Oh, dear me! The many that I know who have not such a tender conscience as this dear man of God has!” Still, let none of us do anything for which we shall have to flog ourselves when we come to die. Child of God, act so that when you have to look back upon it all, though you know that all your sin is forgiven through the precious blood of Jesus, you may also be able to feel, “In this thing God helped me to do righteously, and to serve Him with all my heart, and so now, when I have come to the close of the chapter, it is with devout gratitude for having been preserved in integrity and not with bitter regrets for having been unfaithful.”

Have you ever seen a waterlogged ship towed into harbor? She has encountered a storm, and all her masts are gone. She has sprung a leak and is terribly disabled; but a tug has got hold of her, and is drawing her in—a poor miserable wreck, just rescued from the rocks. I do not want to enter heaven that way, “scarcely saved.” But now look at the other picture. There is a fair wind, the sails are full, there is a man at the helm, every sailor is in his place, and the ship comes in with a swing! She stops at her proper place in the harbor, and down goes the anchor with cheery shouts of joy from the mariners who have reached their desired haven! That is the way to go to heaven; in full sail, rejoicing in the blessed Spirit of God who has given us an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! May you so live, my dear brothers and sisters, that you shall go into heaven that way, with an abundant entrance! And may none of us be found among those who have so lived on earth that they will not be missed when they are gone; and who will only be welcomed into heaven as those who are “saved, yet so as by fire”! So I commend these thoughts to you. Let our days be such that we may look back upon them with pleasure! And if they are not so, now, let us begin to look back upon them with *repentance*, and turn to God with full purpose of heart, for His dear Son’s sake.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *JEREMIAH 2:1-25.*

Verses 1-3. *Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem saying, Thus says the LORD, ‘I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals, when you went after Me in the wilderness in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the first fruits of His increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, says the LORD.’* God reminds His people of what they used to be in their first days, when they came out of Egypt. They had very sadly declined from what they then were. They were none too faithful to the Lord, then, but they had fallen back, even from that condition! Does not this passage come home to some of you who are not, now, what you once were? May the Lord graciously speak through these words to your ears and to your heart, if you have backslidden from Him in any degree!

4, 5. *Hear you the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel: thus says the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?*

What faults have you to find with God, that you have left Him? What fault have you seen in the ever-blessed Christ, that your love to Him should have grown cold?

6, 7. *Neither said they, Where is the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt? And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof, and the goodness thereof; but when you entered, you defiled My land, and made My heritage an abomination.*

It is a sad charge against anybody that he forgets the care that God has taken of him in the days of his poverty and affliction. When a man becomes rich and is surrounded by earthly comforts, it is a terrible thing that he should then forget God, or that, the more God does for him, the less he thinks of God! This is strangely ungrateful conduct, yet the children of Israel acted thus. They were better in the wilderness; though they were bad enough there; they were better in the wilderness than they were in Canaan, better on the desert sand than they were in the land that flowed with milk and honey! And there are some, nowadays, who were better in their poverty than they are in their prosperity; and some who were better by a long way in their times of sickness than they now are in their palmy days of health! Alas, that it should be so!

8. *The priests said not, Where is the LORD? And they that handle the law knew Me not: the pastors also transgressed against Me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.*

It is always ill with the people when the ministers go wrong. If the dogs do not protect the flock, but are dumb dogs that cannot bark, what is to become of the sheep?

9-11. *Therefore I will yet plead with you, says the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of Cyprus and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there is such a thing. Have nations changed their gods, which are yet not gods? But My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.*

God bids them go to the West, across the Mediterranean, to Chittim, that is, *probably* Cyprus, or to go to the East, to Kedar, or Arabia, and see whether any Gentile nation ever changed its gods, which really were not gods. "And yet," says the Lord, "here is a people that knew the one living and true God, but they have turned aside to idols: 'My people has changed their glory for that which does not profit.'" O friend, if there is no truth in religion, I do not wonder that you give it up! But if you ever knew its blessed sweetness. If Christ was ever precious to you; if you did once enjoy the gospel of His grace, how is it that you have grown cold towards it and declined from its ways?

12, 13. *Be astonished, O you heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be you very desolate, says the LORD. For My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*

To go away from the flowing fountain to the stagnant waters of a cistern is great folly! But to go and hew out broken cisterns that can hold no water, but merely mock your thirst, is madness of the worst kind!

14. *Is Israel a servant? Is he a home born slave? Why is he spoiled?*

God made him to be His son, not His slave, but Israel went aside from God, and so became a slave, being carried away into captivity by the very nation whose gods the chosen people worshipped!

15, 16. *The young lions roared upon him, and yelled, and they made his land waste: his cities are burned without inhabitants. Also the children of Noph and Tahaphanes have broken the crown of your head.*

The Israelites went and worshipped idols, and then the very nations whose gods they worshipped invaded the land and broke the crown of their head, or made them bald, which was, to the Jews, a mark of mourning or of disgrace.

17. *Have you not procured this unto yourself, in that you have forsaken the LORD your God, when He led you by the way?*

You who are depressed in soul. You who have grown spiritually poor. You who are in great trouble of heart, listen: “Have you not procured this unto yourself?” Did you not make the rod for your own back by going away from your God? It was well enough with you when you trusted in Him, but now that you have turned aside from Him, all these evils have come upon you! “Have you not procured this unto yourself, in that you have forsaken Jehovah, your God, when He led you by the way?”

18. *And now what have you to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor?*

“The waters of the Nile,” or, as it may be read, “the waters of that muddy river.” The Israelites had suffered so much during their long captivity in Egypt that one would have thought they would never have wanted to go near the house of bondage again: “What have you to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor?”

18. *Or what have you to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?*

You are trying to find pleasure in the world. You are going to the resorts of sin, to seek amusement there. If you are a child of God, “What have you to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? Or what have you to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?” What are you doing there, Elijah? You have lost the comforts of religion by your backsliding; and are you now trying to make up for them by going into the world’s gaiety? It will never do! You can never fill your belly with the husks that the swine eat. If you were one of the swine, you might do so; but if you are your Father’s son, it is only the bread in His house that will satisfy your hungry soul!

19-25. *Your own wickedness shall correct you, and your backsliding shall reprove you: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that you have forsaken the LORD, your God, and that My fear is not in you, says the Lord GOD of hosts. For of old time I have broken your yoke, and burst your bands; and you said, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree you wander, playing the harlot. Yet I had planted you a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how, then, are you turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Me? For though you wash yourself with niter, and take you much soap, yet your iniquity is marked before Me, says the Lord God. How can you say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? See your way in the valley, know what you have done: you are a swift dromedary traversing her ways; a wild donkey used to the wilderness, that snuffs up the wind at her pleasure: in her occasion who can turn her away? All they that seek her will not weary themselves. In her month they shall find her. Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst, but you said, There is no hope—no—for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.*

God compares His erring people, in the delirium of their sin, to these wild creatures that cannot be tamed, but are driven by their ungovernable passions wherever they will. Alas, that men should be so sinful that God can only find a parallel to them in the wild donkeys of the wilderness!

See, also, what despair will do for its victims. When a man says, “There is no hope,” then he feels that for him there is no repentance. When he believes that God will not forgive him, then he will not turn from his evil ways. “You said, There is no hope, no, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.” God save any here present who are getting into the clutches of Giant Despair! May they know the true goodness of God and may that goodness lead them to repentance! Amen.

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