

# from Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God

JONATHAN EDWARDS

**We** find it easy to tread on and crush a worm that we see crawling on the earth; so it is easy for us to cut or singe a slender thread that any thing hangs by; thus easy is it for God when he pleases to cast his enemies down to hell. . . .

They<sup>1</sup> are now the objects of that very same *anger* and *wrath* of God, that is expressed in the torments of hell. And the reason why they do not go down to hell at each moment, is not because God, in whose power they are, is not then very angry with them; as angry as he is with many miserable creatures now tormented in hell, who there feel and bear the fierceness of his wrath. Yea, God is a great deal more angry with great numbers that are now on earth; yea, doubtless, with many that are now in this congregation,<sup>2</sup> who it may be are at ease, than he is with many of those who are now in the flames of hell.

So that it is not because God is unmindful of

their wickedness, and does not resent it, that he does not let loose his hand and cut them off. God is not altogether such an one as themselves, 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 do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whet,<sup>3</sup> and held over them, and the pit hath opened its mouth under them. . . .

1. **they:** Earlier in the sermon, Edwards refers to all “unconverted men,” whom he considers God’s enemies. Unconverted men are people who have not been “born again,” meaning that they have not accepted Jesus Christ and consequently have not experienced a sense of God’s grace and an assurance of salvation.
2. **this congregation:** the Puritans attending the church service at which Edwards spoke.
3. **whet:** sharpened.

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**wrath** (răth) *n.* fierce anger, or punishment resulting from such anger

Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and 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 noonday; the sharpest sight cannot discern them. God has so many different unsearchable ways of taking wicked men out of the world and sending them to hell, that there is nothing to make it appear, that God had need to be at the expense of a miracle, or go out of the ordinary course of his providence, to destroy any wicked man, at any moment. . . .

**SO** that, thus it is that natural men<sup>4</sup> are held in the hand of God, over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it; and God is dreadfully provoked, his anger is as great towards them as to those that are actually suffering the executions of the fierceness of his wrath in hell; and they have done nothing in the least to appease or abate that anger, neither is God in the least bound by any promise to hold them up one moment; the devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them, and would fain<sup>5</sup> lay hold on them, and swallow them up; the fire pent up in their own hearts is struggling to break out: and they have no interest in any Mediator,<sup>6</sup> there are no means within reach that can be any security to them. In short, they have no refuge, nothing to take hold of. . . .

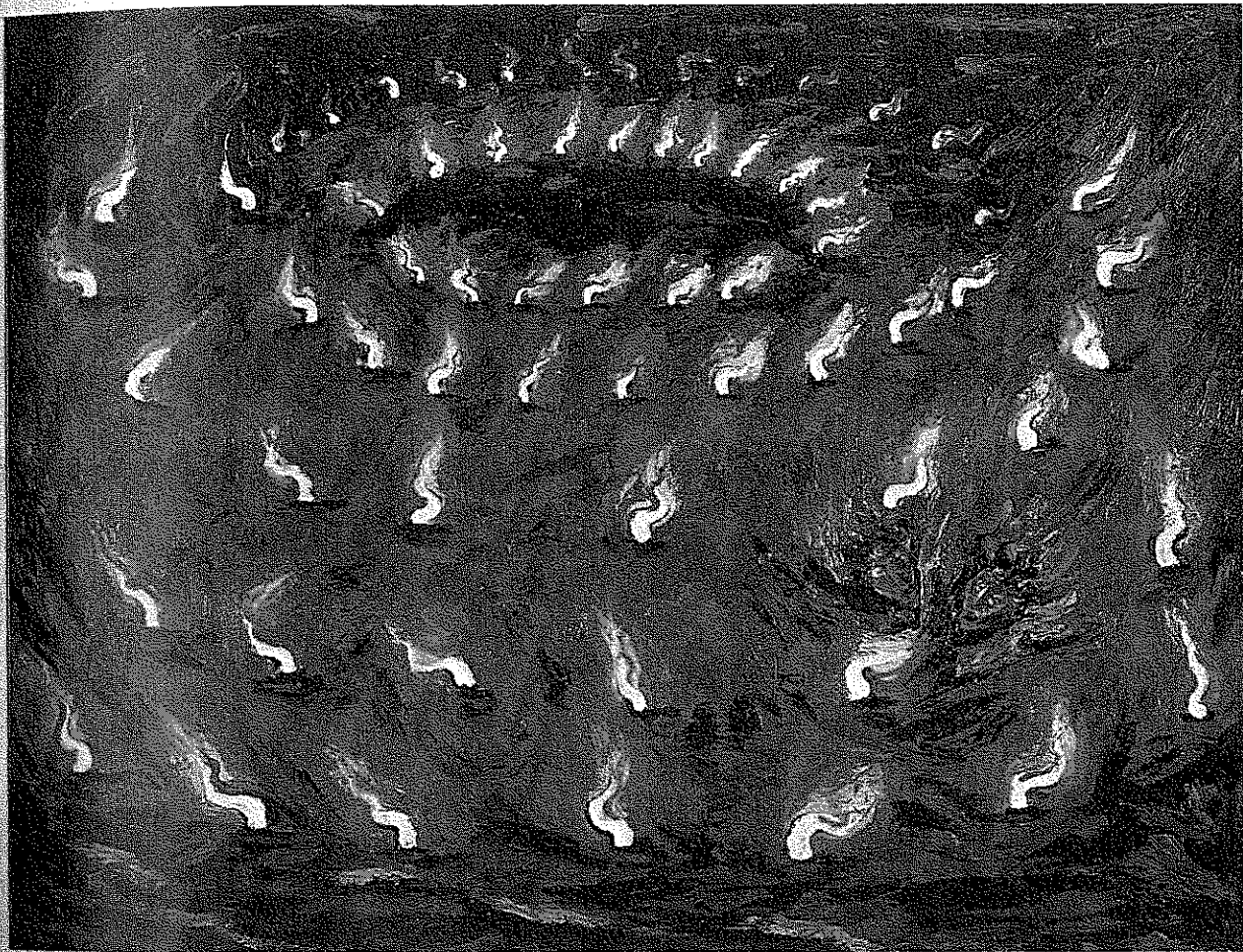
The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood. Thus all you that never passed under a

great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls; all you that were never born again, and made new creatures, and raised from being dead in sin, to a state of new, and before altogether unexperienced light and life, are in the hands of an angry God. However you may have reformed your life in many things, and may have had religious affections,<sup>7</sup> and may keep up a form of religion in your families and closets,<sup>8</sup> and in the house of God, it is nothing but his mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment swallowed up in everlasting destruction. . . .

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night; that you was suffered<sup>9</sup> to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason to be given, why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you

4. natural men: people who have not been "born again."
5. fain: rather.
6. Mediator: Jesus Christ, who mediates, or is the means of bringing about, salvation.
7. affections: feelings or emotions.
8. closets: private rooms for meditation.
9. suffered: permitted.

WORDS **appease** (ə-pēz') v. to bring peace, quiet, or calm to; soothe  
 TO **loathsome** (lōth'səm) *adj.* arousing great dislike  
 KNOW **abhor** (ăb-hŏr') v. to regard with disgust  
**abominable** (ə-bŏm'ə-nə-bəl) *adj.* thoroughly detestable  
**ascribe** (ə-skrib') v. to attribute to a specified cause or source



*Un quadro di fuochi preziosi* [A painting of precious fires] (1983), Enzo Cucchi. Oil on canvas with neon, 117½" × 153½", private collection, courtesy of Sperone Westwater, New York.

The **pit** is prepared,  
the **fire** is made ready,  
the **furnace** is now hot,  
ready to receive them;  
the **flames** do now  
**rage** and **glow**.