

## Strange Ways of Love

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her." [Hosea 2:14](#).

The first part of this chapter is very dark, but the second part is clear daylight. As we read the first verses, we tremble, for we seem to stand at the foot of Sinai when it is altogether on a smoke. But when we reach the second half of the chapter, we can say that, "we have come unto Mount Zion." We hear no sound of trumpet, but the voice of that blood "which speaks better things than that of Abel." The reason for this is not that God has changed, nor that the person who is here spoken of has changed—up to this point there is no change indicated in the person—it is the same unchaste, unholy, obstinate, rebellious, ungrateful creature. Yet there is a wonderful change in the words spoken and the reason is because there is a change of dispensation—the sinner is brought from under Law to come under Grace! God no longer convinces of sin by the terrors of the Law, but He comes to deal with the poor guilty soul on terms of love and mercy! This is the great wonder of wonders that ever it should be truly said that, "in due time Christ died for the ungodly," and that he is saved who believes on Him that justifies the ungodly! Christ died for us, not as saints, not as godly persons, but as the ungodly! Our subject is all about the dealings of Divine Love with guilty sinners, by which God brings them unto Himself. I shall speak of four things.

I. The first is that in our text, FOR GOD'S DEEDS OF LOVE, THERE IS A REASON BEYOND ALL REASON.

The text begins with, "therefore." God is very fond of that word, for He never acts illogically. There is always a good reason for all that He does. But His ways are not our ways, neither are His thoughts our thoughts and, sometimes, our logic is altogether baffled and our reasoning faculties seem as if they could not in any way follow the working of the mind of God, if such an expression may be used concerning His wondrous thoughts.

Here, then, is a, "therefore," but what is the argument of which this is the conclusion? Two of the most eminent writers on Hosea who wrote in Latin in the olden time—and were both Romanists—think that the word, "therefore," ought to be expunged, for they cannot see any reason for its being here. Neither, according to Romanist teaching, is there any reason for it. It is a Scripture nut which is too hard to be cracked if salvation is by human merit and by human works. "Therefore" is a manifest non sequitur in such a place as this if that is the theory. But he who understands that salvation is not of works, nor in any degree

of human merit, but entirely an act of the free and Sovereign Grace of God— that it is not of man, nor by man—he has spied out a method of reasoning, here, which the workaholic will never be able to discover! There is a reason, though it is beyond all reason.

Note, then, first, that when God is about to save a man, He finds a reason for Grace where there is none. Where there is no reason in the man, God, nevertheless, finds one. There never can be any reason in a man's sin why God should pardon it—at least we cannot see how it can be so—yet David did when he prayed, "For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great," as if the very greatness of it was turned into a reason why it should be forgiven! This is a singular argument. When a man has rebelled against the Lord, is that a reason why God should publish an act of amnesty and oblivion? When man refuses to accept forgiveness, is that any reason why the Lord should go out of His way to change that sinner's obstinacy so as not to let him destroy his own soul? I fail to see any reason for it, but God finds a reason, "for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." "He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

We think it always wise to enquire whether a person who applies for alms is a worthy person, for we like to give to deserving people. But God likes to give to the unworthy and undeserving—and He has a reason for it, for how could Mercy be so honored as in the forgiveness of the guilty—and how could Divine Grace get to itself so complete a victory as in reclaiming those who are utterly lost? God finds a reason where to us, at any rate, there seems to be none whatever. If, dear Friend, you are self-condemned and can see no reason why the Lord should have mercy upon you, yet He spies a reason in the very fact of your being unable to see any! He finds, in that very brokenness, misery and helplessness of yours, a reason why His own sweet love and mercy should come and deal with you, even with you.

Further, God not only finds a reason where we cannot see any, but He makes a reason which overrides all other reasons. There was a reason why He should have put Israel away altogether. She had been, as it were, espoused to Him— that is the parallel that is given to us—and if it seems, in your judgment, wrong that I should use the parallel, I cannot help it—it is in the Bible and I am going to follow it. God compares Israel to a wife who has left her husband, broken her marriage vow and become unchaste, filthy and polluted. In such a case as that, there are a thousand reasons why a man says, "I cannot have her as my wife any longer. How can I dishonor myself by receiving her, again, to my house and to my heart?" Yes, just so. But God finds a reason for receiving His banished and guilty ones over and above all reasons why He should put them away. He looks over the head of the argument for their destruction and finds grounds for their salvation! These people had given themselves up to the worship of that abominable idol-god called Baal, whose very worship was full of filthiness—and you can conceive the grief of the holy God when He saw them bowing down before such an obscene deity as this! That was a reason why He should put them away and have no more to do with them. But He had in His heart a reason that was stronger than any

reason in their guilt and in their crime! He had also chastened them. He had brought them very low with famine and fever, yet they had gone on in sin worse than ever! And if they seemed to return for a little while, they were soon off, again, on their wanderings. These provocations of theirs cried aloud, "Put them away! Destroy them! Have no mercy upon them!" Yet God, whose mercy endures forever, still found a reason for looking favorably on poor Israel. And He said, "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her." In like manner, though you, poor conscience-stricken Sinner, may see ten thousand reasons why you should be lost, God sees a reason which is stronger than all those and which, with a louder voice, cries over their heads, "Let them live! Let them find mercy at Your hands, O God!" Thus He finds a reason that overrides every other reason.

Yes, and I go further and say that God turns reasons against us into reasons for us. Every sin is a reason why a sinner should perish. Every willful transgression is a reason why a man should be given over to continue in his stubbornness, but God does not reason so. In His infinite mercy, He treats our sin as though it were a necessity rather than a crime! You know how you deal with persons who are in great need. Did you ever hear a beggar who came to your door say, "Sir, I am not very badly off. I have a nice little income, but I need some relief." How much will he get out of you? He goes the wrong way to work! But here comes a man in a most dilapidated state. His garments are all in rags, his feet are on the ground, his body is emaciated, he tells you that he has not tasted food for the last two days, that he has to walk the streets at night and has nowhere to lay his head. And the worse his story is, the more he prevails with you. Now, the Lord, in His infinite mercy, taking that tender view of sinning, as if it had bred a necessity in men, loves to hear them speak with Him—not thus, "God, I thank You I am not as other men are." You know the rest of it, but the man who said that was not accepted of God! But the Lord loves to hear a man say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." That cry touches His heart. It is the greatness of men's sin which He interprets to be the greatness of their necessity and, therefore, He deals with them in mercy.

He also does this when He treats sin as if it were a disease. If a man were taken into a hospital, or if he were picked up on a battlefield and carried to the surgeon who has a large number of patients to wait upon, does the man who is suffering say, "Oh, it is a very slight affair, just a mere grazing of the skin, that is all"? He knows that if he talked so, the surgeon would pass him by to attend to the man whose wound will prove mortal if it is not stanchd within a few minutes. The man who has the attention of the humane surgeon is the one who can truly say, "Sir, there is not a more severely wounded person in all this throng. My voice is failing, I am almost choked, I shall die if you do not relieve me at once."

The surgeon says to the other patients, "My good fellows, you must all wait awhile. I must see to that poor man." Now, God looks at your sin as if it were a deadly disease working in you—and the greatness of your malady becomes a plea with Him. Oh, how strange it is

that the very thing which, as a matter of justice, is really against us, turns out to be for us when it comes to be a matter of pure Grace!

I want you all to put it upon that footing. You know what the woman said to the great Napoleon when she wanted him to save the life of her father. Napoleon said to her, "Woman, I have pardoned this man two or three times before." But she said, "Sir, I pray you pardon him again." The emperor answered, "I see no reason in justice why I should do so." "No, Sir," she replied, "and there is not any. But I am appealing to your mercy. It is a fine opportunity for you to show mercy, for he does not deserve it." The great man said, "That is well put. Let him live." And God will let you live when you plead on the ground of pure mercy! If you talk of justice, you are doomed, for there is nothing in the justice of God but a sharp, two-edged sword, the very touch of which will slay you! God's Throne of Justice is a place of fiery wrath which shoots devouring flames! But if you approach it by the door that is sprinkled with the precious blood of Christ, and cry to God for mercy, you shall be received with the kiss of forgiveness! Go, then, to that mercy of God which, in the very sins of men, spells out arguments for displaying itself! God does not want your fullness—He wants your emptiness—that He may fill it with His fullness. He does not want your good works, you poor sinners—He wants your bad works—that He may wash them all away. Paul says that Christ "gave Himself for our sins," and Luther's comment on that is, "He never gave Himself for our righteousness. That would not have been worth His having, but He gave himself for our sins." "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." This is the footing on which we must go to God!

They tell us that this preaching of mercy to sinners is against morality. Well, morality can take care of itself, God will take care of it. But we know that there is nothing which promotes morality like this wonderful pardoning love of God. Those who never will be reached by being told what they ought to do, for they cannot do it, and will not do it, are reached by being told what God will do for them and what Christ has done for them! And when they come and believe that, then they set about doing what is right—and good works are produced to the glory of God! But on the other theory, no man living under Heaven will ever come.

II. Now turn to the second point. In our text, notice that there is A METHOD OF POWER BEYOND ALL POWER—"I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness."

This is a singular kind of power. "I will allure her." Not, "I will drive her." Not even, "I will draw her." Or, "I will drag her." Or, "I will force her." No—"I will allure her." It is a very remarkable word and it teaches us that the allurements of love surpasses in power all other forces. That is how the devil ruins us—he tempts us with honeyed words, sweet utterances, with the baits of pleasure and the like. And the Lord in mercy determines that in all truthfulness, He will outbid the devil and He will win us to Himself by fascinations, enticements and allurements which shall be stronger than any force of resistance we may offer! This is

a wonderfully precious word—"I will allure her." I hardly know how to explain it except by reminding you of how bird catchers entice the feathered creatures with the allurements of decoys that sing them into the net, or how a mother allures her little child who is just beginning to walk. You have seen her hold out an orange, or an apple, or a sweet, that the little one may leave the chair against which it is leaning and come to her arms. That is the meaning of the word, "I will allure her." God is trying this plan with guilty men and so tries it as to succeed, for there is in it a power beyond all other power!

Other forms of power had been tried upon Israel. She had been afflicted—God declared that He would strip her even to nakedness! And He had done so, yet she did not turn to Him. He said to her, "I will hedge up your way with thorns," but she went on right over the thorns. Then He said, "I will make a wall, that she shall not find her paths." But she broke through the wall. Affliction of itself cannot bring a man to Christ—you may flog him till he gets more wicked. He may be chastened, as Ahaz was, and yet, like he, go further astray, the more he is afflicted, No dear Friends, the power of God's Grace—the power of His infinite allurements—will be found to be much stronger than the power of affliction!

Moreover, the Lord had tried upon Israel the effect of instruction. He says, "She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil." So He told her, but instruction did not help her. She sinned in the Light of God as badly as she had done in the darkness! Then He tried what could be done by exposure. He said—and it is a strong word—"I will declare her lewdness in the sight of her lovers." There are some people who are made to be thoroughly ashamed—they are caught in some secret sin. They are convicted of something which, even in the eyes of sinners like themselves, is mean and dirty—and they cannot deny it—yet they do not turn from sin. They still cling to it.

In addition to all this, the Lord had tried the power of sorrow upon sorrow, for it is written, "I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, her Sabbaths and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees." Though she found no mirth in sin and the way of her transgression was hard, yet Israel would not turn to God! But the sweet allurements of tenderness would succeed where all else had failed.

This was a power which was greater than those other forms of power because the allurements of love overcomes the will to resist. Israel could resist everything else, but she could not resist the allurements of God's Grace—they won her where nothing else could. If Christ does but touch the blind man's eyes, so that out of the corners of them he only gets one glimpse of the Savior's beauty, he must infallibly be so enamored of the Christ that he will love Him beyond all others! There are amazing beauties about the Person of Jesus, yet, by their own unaided power, men cannot see them. But if once Christ enables them to see Him as He is and they realize the power of His eternal love, then their hearts are captured and they no longer resist Him. In fetters of Grace they are led as willing captives to Christ!

Let me tell you one or two things about the Savior that I think one can never resist. There is, first, His self-denying love—that He loved His enemies—that He loved such poor creatures as we are, who could do Him no good. He was infinitely glorious and we were insignificant and, what was worse, we were opposed to Him! Yet each Believer can say, "He loved me and gave Himself for me." Out of pure, disinterested affection, He came to earth to dwell in a stable, to hang upon a woman's breast, a babe as feeble as any other babe, and then, marvel of marvels, His life on earth ended on the Cross—the cruel gallows of utmost scorn! There the Faultless One bears all our fault and because of our transgression, He is nailed to the tree, His back having first been scourged, His hands and feet pierced. Yes, and God Himself forsakes Him—not for any evil that He has done, but because He has been guilty of excess of love and has dared to put Himself in the poor sinner's place to bear the wrath of Heaven! Look at Him—can you help loving Him with His face disdained with spit and His back all gory from the cruel lash? Is He not more lovely, there, than even up yonder amidst eternal thrones? O Love, bleeding Love, dying Love! If this does not allure men, what will? But that is how God allures the sinner to Himself. He says, "I did all this for you. I lived for you. I died for you." And this wins the sinner's affections, even though he feels himself the guiltiest of the guilty.

Then our blessed Master, having risen from the dead, now charms us by the fact that amidst all His glories He is faithful to His first love. He has not forgotten you and me, though cherubim and seraphim have been singing His praises all these years, day without night. See what He is doing. He makes intercession for the transgressors and he bears upon His breastplate the names of guilty ones for whom His cry goes up that they may be forgiven and find mercy through His wondrous merit! I will not say that you ought to love Him, for love does not act that way. But I will say this—if you truly know Him, you cannot help loving Him—you must love Him. Thus does He allure men to Himself by His own personal charms.

The Lord draws men to Himself in different ways. I was allured to Christ very much by the hope of eternal safety. I was but a lad and I saw young men, a little older than myself, who had been very promising youths, go off into drunkenness and into vice of different kinds. And I thought that I might do the same. But when I read those words of the Apostle, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day," I was charmed with Christ as a sort of Preserver of character—an Insurer of my soul unto eternal bliss! And I came to Him for that reason. I have known others who have seen the happiness of Christians—their peace in the midst of turmoil, their joy in times of sorrow, their contentment in poverty, their calmness in prospect of death—and they have said, "If all this happiness can be had in Christ, I will come to Him for it." And in that way He has allured them. Perhaps some of you have never had any great terrors of conscience, or distress of soul—do not fret on that account! If you come by allurements, it is a Covenant way of coming. If you are fascinated by the charms of Christ, it is

the very way that God declares He will draw His erring and His guilty people. Oh, that you would yield to the fascination! I pray that you may feel the allurements and say—

"I yield—by mighty love subdued! Who can resist its charms? And throw myself, by wrath pursued, Into my Savior's arms."

Do any of you feel some soft drawing? Is there a pierced hand touching you and a loving voice saying, "Seek the Lord"? Have you been very hard, up till now, but does an unusual gentleness steal over your spirit as you are sitting in this House of Prayer? Give yourself up to it—it may be that the time of Divine Grace is now upon you. I hope that it is so, that your birth-night has come and that you are passing from death unto life! We have prayed about you. We met for an hour before service and there was hard pleading for you. And God has given us the desire of our spirit and you are to come to Christ tonight! Blessed Lord, if it is so, there will be work for angels in Heaven to sing Your praises concerning a sinner that repents!

III. But now, thirdly, and with brevity, here is A CONDITION OF COMPANY BEYOND ALL COMPANY. Kindly read the text again. "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness."

If you have ever heard a sermon from this text, you have probably had it translated to you to mean that God will bring His people in trouble, but it does not mean that. It means that God would cause Israel to be alone with Him. It was usual, after the nuptial ceremony, for the husband to take his wife away into some lone spot for a while. The same thing constantly happens among us—when a man is married, away he goes to the seaside for a time—and he takes his spouse away to be with him alone. That is the idea in the text, the Lord says of Israel, "I will allure her to Myself and then, "I will take her into the wilderness. She shall be in My company and in nobody else's company." That is just what the Grace of God does—the soul had forgotten Him, before, but now it thinks only of Him. His sweet love has so won it that it is now full of God! Instead of not thinking of Him at all, He is in his first thoughts in the morning, and in his thoughts all day long—and the last thing at night, till friends who do not sympathize say, "Why, you are going out of your mind! You are going religiously mad!" I wish that you would stay in that blessed state into which you were brought when the Lord's love was revealed to you and His allurements drew your soul to Him.

The soul in the wilderness, alone with God, does not think of anybody else, and does not trust in anything else. It used to trust in good works, but it feels as if it has not any, now, though really its first good works are just being produced. Oh, what a clearance of our finery the love of God makes when it comes into the soul! We are the most respectable people who ever lived until we know God—and then we abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes!

Now it comes to pass that God is our only joy. Once we had joy in the theater, or joy in the ballroom, or joy in other worldly things, but now we find true joy in God! And all other

rejoicing seems only the mirth of fools and idiots. When we have once sat at the feast in our Father's House, we cannot go back to eat the husks that satisfy swine. We have something better than that—our Lord has brought us where everything but Himself is a wilderness and our cry is, "O God, You are my God! Early will I seek You: my soul thirsts for You, my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water." Joy in God eats up all other joy, as Aaron's rod swallowed up the rods of the impostors! Now we can say of the Lord, "He is all my salvation and all my desire." Oh, to be wholly His and to enjoy all that we can enjoy of Him! This is what He means by bringing us into the wilderness. That is, into the solitary place alone with Him.

It may also be understood—and the connection requires it—that God brings His people into the same condition into which He brought the Israelite nation of old. It was not to afflict them that He brought them into the wilderness—it was to take them out of affliction that He led them there—and that is the meaning of our text. When the Lord allures His people, He takes them away from the old Egyptian bondage. He leads them through the Red Sea. He makes it roll between them and their old life and then He treats them just as He treated His people in the wilderness. That is, He provides their food. They live on manna—no longer have they their kneading troughs which they brought out of Egypt. I wonder what they did with those kneading troughs? They never needed them in the wilderness, certainly, for the manna was all ready for them when it fell.

Then, next, the Lord becomes the Guard of His people—a wall of fire round about them. He protects them by a fiery pillar at night and He is the only Guide and Leader of His people—by cloud or by fire He leads them both by night and by day. He becomes the healing of His people, for, in the wilderness, when Israel had sinned and the fiery serpent had bitten them, they looked to the bronze serpent and they lived. The Lord was the Champion and Defender of His people. Si-hon, king of the Amorites, did He smite, "for His mercy endures forever; and Og, the king of Bashan, for His mercy endures forever." In the wilderness Israel had nothing but God—did they need anything else? They carried on no commerce. They had no railways. They kept no shops. Well, really, if you could go out every morning and gather your bread and if, when you needed meat, the quails came in any quantity for you to feed upon. And if your clothes never waxed old, neither did your feet swell—that would be a grand life to lead!

The Lord bring you and me under the wings of His eternal Providence and if the world should seem a wilderness to us, yet if God continues to scatter the manna and faith has but hands with which to gather it, and a joyful mouth with which to feed upon it, then, blessed be God, the wilderness is better than anywhere else! "I will allure her and bring her into the separated place where she shall walk by faith. And I will dwell with her, and walk with her. And I will be her God and she shall be Mine forever." That is the meaning of the promise—a condition of company beyond all company!



IV. Now, fourthly, we have, in our text, A VOICE OF COMFORT BEYOND ALL COMFORT. "I will speak comfortably unto her." The Hebrew is, "I will speak to her heart"—a style of speech that can only be adopted by God who made the heart, searches the heart and tries the reins of the children of men.

When the Lord gets His people all alone, what words of comfort He has with them! What words they are when He assures them of their full forgiveness, when they see all the sins of their former perverse life gone forever and hear the Lord say, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions and, as a cloud, your sins." These are, indeed, comfortable words when they are spoken home to the heart! And so they are when the Lord not only tells His people that all evil is removed, but that all good is theirs—when such words as these come home to them—"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." And, "It does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like He, for we shall see Him as He is." And, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." And, "Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Those are comfortable words when the Lord goes on to tell us of our everlasting safety—"They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abides forever." And when in prayer He foretells our coming glory—"Father, I will that they, also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am."

I like even better that rendering, "I will speak to her heart." I heard of one who died many years ago and an old divine, who stood by his bedside, reported what he said. He had been a great professor, but he had become an apostate and turned aside. But he used to comfort himself with the universal mercy of God. And when he lay a-dying, he said to the minister, "Sir, I have made a plaster for my wound, but it will not stick." He turned over in the bed and said, "It will not stick! It will not stick!" And so he died. Ah, and unless God speaks the Gospel to the heart, it will not stick. You cannot get it to stick to the wound. It seems pretty enough and you fancy that it will heal—it is a "royal court plaster"—but, for all that, it will not stick! But when the Lord speaks His Truth home to the heart and conscience, by the Holy Spirit, and the poor trembling sinner grips it as for dear life and says, "That is mine—I will venture my soul on it! Christ has died for sinners—I am a sinner and I take Christ to be my Savior!" Then that plaster will stick! What a mercy it is, when God makes it to be so! I can speak to your ears, but I cannot speak to your hearts and, what is more, even this blessed Book of Inspiration could only appeal to the ears! Apart from the Spirit of God, it could not reach your heart. But if the Lord Himself takes His Truth, oh, how blessedly it goes home!

I tell you, you desponding and despairing ones, you may come out of the iron cage to-night! You may, this very hour, enter into joyous peace and liberty if the Spirit of God will but speak home a single text—a solitary Word—a New-Covenant Word to your spirit! Be

of good cheer, then—things impossible with men are possible with God—and you may yet be singing instead of sighing, and shouting instead of groaning! Look to Jesus! All our hope lies in Him. May He save you—yes, may the Lord allure you even now! I am afraid I have not spoken gently enough to some of you poor wounded ones. It is very hard for the preacher to always pick his words to suit all His hearers and, perhaps, someone will come to me, after the service, and say, "Oh, there was something you said that tried me so very much." And, usually, the very people who are most tried by the Word are the very ones that we most want to comfort! Sometimes, a dear soul comes to me and says, "Oh, Sir, I am afraid I am a hypocrite!" I answer, "I never met a hypocrite who was afraid that he was a hypocrite." That could not be, for hypocrites are quite certain that they are not hypocrites! And he that is so timid and trembling that he is afraid he may not take these things of which I have been speaking, is the very person whom we must encourage to lay hold of every sweet and precious promise that falls from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ!

May God make this promise true to everyone here who does not yet know Him, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her"! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: HOSEA 2.6-23.

Verse 6. Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. God will cause sin to be painful. He will make the way of it difficult. He will do everything to prevent the sinner running in it—"She shall not find her paths."

7. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them. They cannot find satisfaction in sinful pleasure. That which once they easily obtained, they shall no longer be able to procure.

7. And she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now. Am I addressing a backslider? Has God hedged up your way? Is there a whisper in your heart which reminds you of better days and happier times? Oh, stifle not that whisper! Let it be heard within your spirit—if it is but a gentle voice, listen to it till it increases in force and sounds like the very voice of God in your soul! It will be for your present and eternal good if you do so.

8. For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. It is a sad sin when we take God's mercies and use them in rebellion against Him. Just think of it—the very gifts which Jehovah gave to these people, they presented in sacrifice to Baal! And there are men who are in comfortable circumstances, who spend their wealth for sin. They have health and strength, and they use them in the service of their own evil passions. The very gifts with which God has enriched them become weights to sink them deeper and deeper in the gulf of transgression. Ah, this is terrible! God has often brought men down to poverty, to sickness, to death's door, in order that they might be weaned from their sin. He saw that they were going to Hell full-handed

and He judged it better that they should go to Heaven empty-handed! He knew that if they had health, they would misuse it, so He stretched them on the bed of sickness, that they might turn to Him. God has severe remedies for desperate cases—He will do all that mercy and wisdom can suggest to prevent men from being their own destroyers.

9-11. Therefore will I return and take away My corn in the time thereof, and My wine in the season thereof, and will recover My wool and My flax given to cover her nakedness. And now will I uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of My hand. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her newmoons, and her Sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. There is no more merriment—the old songs have lost their sweetness and the old games have lost their charm.

12. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, of which she has said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me. So I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. So that the joys of sin shall become miseries, as if vineyards were suddenly trained into dense forests wherein lions and wolves might make their lairs. There are some people who can understand this in a spiritual sense. Some, perhaps, who have been made to realize it in their own experience.

13. And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot Me, says the LORD. It is terrible when God comes to visit upon men the days of their sin—when for every night of sin they shall have a night of anguish—when for every pleasure that they took in sin they shall feel the scourge of conscience till they have measured out the weary round. "She went after her lovers, and forgot Me, said the Lord." This was said by Him who never forgot her, by Him whose love was true and faithful to her when she thus went away from Him and defiled herself and dishonored His holy name!

Now read the next verse and be astonished—

14. Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. You might have thought the Lord was going to say, "Therefore, behold, I will destroy her!" Nothing of the kind. "I will fascinate her to myself, I will draw her away from all her idol lovers and I will speak comfortably unto her."

15. And I will give her her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. 'I will pluck this Israel of Mine out of all her sin. I will give her back the purity and the happiness of her early days. 'She shall sing, there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.'" You must have noticed how often God speaks of that coming out of Egypt. He says, in another place, "I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals, when you went after Me in the wilderness." Here the Lord promises to give back to Israel the joy she had when she was young and espoused herself to her God.

16. And it shall be at that day, said the LORD, that you shall call Me Ishi; and shall call Me no more Baali. 'You shall call me, my Man, my Husband"—a name of sweet endearment. "and shall call me no more, Baali," that is, "my Lord, my lordly Husband," for the Lord's love shall not be galling to you, but it shall sweetly and gently rule you. Oh, what a sweet change this is, when we no longer tremble before God with slavish fear, but love Him with intense affection and see in Him our soul's Husband in whom is all our delight!

17. For I will take away the names of Balaam out of her mouth and they shall no more be remembered by their name. The word, Baalim, had been profaned—they had applied it to other lords—and when they used it concerning Jehovah, it sounded harsh, as if He, too, was a tyrant master!

18. And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground. Everything is in covenant with me if I am in covenant with God! There is nothing so high that it can hurt me, there is nothing so low that it can injure me, there is nothing so great that it need distress me, there is nothing so little that it shall torment me!

18. And I will break the bow and the sword out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. Oh, the security of God's people when they get into their right position towards God!

19. And I will betroth you unto Me forever; yes, I will betroth you unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. What a glorious promise is this! It is marvelous that our wayward, wanton, wicked souls should be brought back, by infinite mercy, and then that God should be so enamored of us as to declare, "I will betroth you unto Me forever."

20. I will even betroth you unto Me in faithfulness: and you shall know the LORD. It is said three times that He will betroth us unto Himself, as if the Lord knew that we would hardly be able to believe it.

21. 22. And it shall come to pass in that day, I will answer, said the LORD, will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth; and the earth shall answer with corn, and wine, and the oil and they shall answer Jezreel. So that there shall be no famine to try God's people! Their prayers shall be abundantly answered and all their needs shall be supplied.

23. And I will sow her unto Me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not My people, You are My people; and they shall say, You are my God. Oh, blessed Scripture! May the Lord write it on all our hearts! Amen.