

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God (p. 97) Close Read

Read first section in left column; Then, answer questions for that section in the right column. Write the answers in COMPLETE SENTENCES in your own words, unless otherwise directed. Then, move on to the next section and so on, until you have read the complete text and answered all of the questions. Read slowly and carefully and pay attention to the footnotes.

<p><b>Build Background:</b>          This sermon, which Jonathan Edwards delivered in 1741, remains the most famous literary monument to the Great Awakening. Edwards upheld strict Calvinism, which taught that human nature is essentially evil and that God <b>predestines</b><sup>1</sup> only a select few to be saved from eternal punishment.</p> <p><sup>1</sup>Predestine – (v) to predetermine or to decide in advance</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is a main belief of Calvinism?</li> <li>2. Explain in your own words the meaning of “God predestines only a select few to be saved from eternal punishment.”</li> </ol>
<p><b>Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God</b></p> <p>So that thus it is, that natural men 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 <b>provoked</b><sup>2</sup>, his anger is as great towards them as to those that are actually suffering the executions of the fierceness of his <b>wrath</b><sup>3</sup> in hell, and they have done nothing in the least, to <b>appease</b><sup>4</sup> or <b>abate</b><sup>5</sup> that anger, neither is God in the least bound by any promise to hold them up one moment;</p> <p><sup>2</sup>Provoke – (v) angered  <sup>3</sup>Wrath – (n) extreme anger  <sup>4</sup>Appease – (v) to bring to a state of peace  <sup>5</sup>Abate – (v) to lessen or reduce in force</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. In your own words, what generalization does Edwards make about natural men (All people who have not received God’s grace. They are “out of Christ”)?</li> </ol>
<p>the devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them, and would <b>fain</b><sup>6</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, there are no means within reach that can be any security to them. In short, they have no <b>refuge</b><sup>7</sup>, nothing to take hold of; all that preserves them every moment is the mere <b>arbitrary</b><sup>8</sup> will, and uncovenanted, unobliged <b>forbearance</b><sup>9</sup> of an <b>incensed</b><sup>10</sup> God.</p> <p><sup>6</sup>Fain – (adv) willingly or gladly  <sup>7</sup>Refuge – (n) shelter or protection from danger  <sup>8</sup>Arbitrary – (adj) random  <sup>9</sup>Forbearance – (n) self-control  <sup>10</sup>Incensed – (adj) enraged</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. What is the most likely reason “Mediator” is capitalized?</li> <li>5. In your own words, explain the reason that God keeps us out of hell?</li> <li>6. What is the tone of this first paragraph?</li> </ol>

<p>The use may be of awakening to unconverted persons in this congregation. This that you have heard is the case of every one of you that are out of Christ. That world of misery, that lake of burning brimstone, is extended abroad under you. There is the dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of God; there is hell's wide gaping mouth open and you have nothing to stand upon, nor any thing to take hold of. There is nothing between you and hell but the air; it is only the power and mere pleasure of God that hold you up.</p> <p>You are probably not sensible of this; you find you are kept out of hell, but do not see the hand of God in it; but look at other things, as the good state of your <b>bodily constitution</b><sup>11</sup>, your care of your own life, and the means you use for your own preservation. But indeed these things are nothing; if God should withdraw his hand, they would avail no more to keep you from falling, than the thin air to hold up a person that is suspended in it.</p> <p><sup>11</sup>Bodily constitution – (n) The state of one's health</p>	<p>7. List (4) examples of imagery that Edward's uses to describe hell in this paragraph.</p> <p>8. According to Edwards, why do some in the congregation think they are being kept out of hell?</p>
<p>Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best <b>contrivance</b><sup>12</sup>, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock.</p> <p><sup>12</sup>Contrivance – (n) The use of skill to bring something about or create something.</p>	<p>9. Explain the simile used to describe mankind's wickedness.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>10. Describe in detail and in your own words the hunting metaphor.</p>
<p>Thus are all you that never passed under a great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls; all 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, (however you may have reformed your life in many things, and may have had religious affections, and may keep up a form of religion in your families and closets, and in the house of God and may be strict in it), you are thus in the hands of an angry God; it is nothing but his mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment swallowed up in everlasting destruction.</p>	<p>11. Edwards describes some of his congregation as trying to live a religious lifestyle in their own homes. What point is he trying to make?</p>

<p>The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, <b>abhors</b> 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 so <b>abominable</b> in his eyes as the most hateful and venomous serpent is in ours.</p>	<p>12. What does <b>abhor</b> most likely mean?</p> <p>13. What does <b>abominable</b> most likely mean?</p> <p>14. What effect is created on the listener by referring to those out of Christ as a spider, a loathsome insect, and as a hateful and venomous serpent?</p> <p>15. Find an example of hyperbole in this section and write it here.</p>
<p>O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell; you hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to <b>singe</b><sup>13</sup> it and burn it <b>asunder</b><sup>14</sup>, and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment.</p> <p><sup>13</sup>Singe <sup>14</sup>Asunder – (adv) into separate pieces</p>	<p>16. Which appeal (pathos, ethos, logos) is used in this paragraph when telling his audience to “consider the fearful danger you are in”?</p> <p>17. Why would Edwards most likely use this appeal (answer to Question 16)?</p>
<p>There is reason to think, that there are many in this congregation now hearing this <b>discourse</b><sup>15</sup>, that will actually be the subjects of this very misery to all eternity. We know not who they are, or in what seats they sit, or what thoughts they now have. It may be they are now at ease, and hear all these things without much disturbance, and are now flattering themselves that they are not the persons; promising themselves that they shall escape. If we knew that there was one person, and but one, in the whole congregation that was to be the subject of this misery, what an awful thing it would be to think of! If we knew who it was, what an awful sight would it be to see such a person! How might all the rest of the congregation lift up a <b>lamentable</b><sup>16</sup> and bitter cry over him!</p>	<p>18. How does Edwards assume that most people in the congregation think about their own status with God?</p>

But alas! Instead of one, how many is it likely will remember this discourse in hell! And it would be a wonder, if some that are now present should not be in hell in a very short time, before this year is out. And it would be no wonder if some persons, that now sit here in some seats of this meeting-house in health, and quiet and secure, should be there before tomorrow morning.

<sup>15</sup> Discourse – (n) Written or spoken communication

<sup>16</sup> Lamentable – (adj) Unfortunate; regrettable

19. How does the reader that this section is a turning point in the sermon?