

The Eagle and Her Young

by J.C. Philpot

God finds his people in a state of spiritual desolation, but leads and instructs them through various experiences to a knowledge of himself and his grace.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:10, Psalm 17:8, Psalm 32:8, Psalm 91:4, Psalm 139:9, Isaiah 40:31, Isaiah 46:4, Isaiah 63:9, Zephaniah 3:17, Ephesians 1:4

Topics: "God's Providence", "Spiritual Guidance"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about God's tender care and guidance over His people, using the analogy of an eagle caring for her young. He emphasizes how God finds His people in a spiritual desert and wilderness, stirring them up, instructing them, and keeping them as the apple of His eye. Philpot highlights the importance of God's providential and gracious leadings in the believer's life, showing how the Lord alone leads, instructs, and cherishes His chosen ones, ensuring their safety and growth in faith.

Transcript

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, London, on Tuesday Evening, August 5, 1851, by J. C. Philpot

"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. 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." Deut. 32:10-12.

In the solemn councils of eternity God the Father gave to his Son a Bride. "A certain king," we read, "made a marriage for his Son." This Bride Jesus accepted at his Father's hands--"Yours they were, and you gave them me." "All mine are yours; and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them." But, in accepting this Bride, he accepted her for better for worse, for weal or woe. He took her foreseeing the depth of misery and sin into which she would fall; but determined to have her at any rate and at any price.

Of this Church and Bride, Israel, the literal Israel, was a type and figure. This makes the Old Testament so pregnant with instruction, that in the literal Israel we see the symbolic representation of the spiritual Israel; and in God's outward dealings with her as a nation, we view in type and figure the delineation of his inward dealings with his living family. When this is seen by the eye of faith, a ray of divine light is cast upon the pages of the Old Testament, and it is no longer read as a dry, dead, historical record of times long gone by, but becomes a living book, a sacred memorial of the love, grace, and glory of Jesus Christ, "the same

yesterday, today, and forever." It is of this literal Israel that our text speaks, which we may view as an abstract or epitome of God's dealings with his people in the wilderness.

But if I were, in dwelling on this passage, to confine myself to the literal Israel, and view the words merely as descriptive of their journey to Canaan, I would sadly miss the mark; I would then hover only over the surface of the letter, and not dive into the rich experience of the family of God locked up in its bosom.

With God's blessing, therefore, and as far as he may enable. I shall this evening look upon the words before us wholly in a spiritual sense, and view them as applicable to the redeemed and regenerated family.

Two leading features we may observe. I think, in the words before us-

I. The state and position in which God is said to find his Israel, "A desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness."

II. The dealings of God with his Israel, when he has thus found him. "He led him about," etc.

Viewed in this light, the text takes in the whole experience of a Christian; it comprehends the whole of what he is by nature, and of what he is by grace; and thus embraces in one ample scope the entire condition of a child of God, both as he is in the Adam fall, and as he is in the recovery by the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. The state and position in which God is said to find his Israel- "A desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness." There is something singularly discriminating in the whole chapter. How striking are the words, "The Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance!" But who and what was Jacob more than others? To beat down all idea of meritoriousness, to lay the axe effectually to the root of that huge pharisaic tree, the Lord pronounces decisively what was Israel's situation, what was Jacob's state, when he found him by his grace. "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness." What a description of the state of man by nature! Let us examine it, and see, if we can, what is implied by this striking figure, for it is evidently characteristic of our fallen condition.

Man by nature, then, is here compared to "a desert," that is, an eastern desert--a wide tract of barren, uncultivable land, where everything is parched up by the arid rays of the sun; where not only grows neither plant nor flower, but in which neither can be made to grow.

But was man always this withered spot? When God created Adam in his own image, after his own likeness, was the heart of man then an arid desert? The garden of Eden, in which God planted him, was but an image of what man was, as made in the likeness of God. Smiling Eden, in all its glorious beauty, was a fit emblem of, as well as a fit habitation for man as he came fresh from the creating hand of God, all resplendent and radiant with the rays of divine beauty and glory.

Man, then, was not always a "desert." It was sin that ruined, desolated, and laid him waste--and, as we read of Abimelech Judges 9:45, "sowed with salt," the fair Eden of his heart.

Now this is a matter of individual, personal, and I may add, for the most part, of painful experience. For there is in the heart of a child of God a desire to be fruitful; he looks with no pleasure upon his own desert, but would gladly see the waving ears of a rich and bounteous harvest. But alas, alas! he finds that this desert is absolutely uncultivable; that whatever the hand of nature plants soon withers under the sun of

temptation, or is blasted by the hot breath of the pestilential wind.

But the Lord finds his Israel also "in the WASTE howling wilderness." Is not this a figure also of the desolate state of man? "A waste." The word seems to imply injury inflicted by an enemy.

Conquerors of old exulted in laying fertile regions waste. Thus the proud king of Babylon is said to have "made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof." A mighty conqueror has laid waste the heart of man, marred in it every feature of the image of God, overspread it with every wild and noxious weed, cut down its vines, filled its wells, pulled down its fences, and left it to be trampled down by the hoof of every wild beast. This conqueror is Satan, and his triumphant army is Sin. By sin he has desolated the human heart; by sin he has laid it waste and bare; by sin he has trampled it down, and thrown it open to every beast of prey.

But Israel is also said to have been found in "a HOWLING wilderness." There is something exceedingly expressive in the term; which, I think, may signify two things-

1. There may be some reference to its treeless, shrubless state, which allows the wind to sweep over it unchecked. The eastern deserts are especially exposed to the full force of the Sirocco, or Simoom, as the hot pestilential wind is termed. No buildings or trees arrest its headlong course, and it therefore sweeps over them with its melancholy howl. Thus is the wilderness of the human heart howled over by the pestilential Simoom--as though it would rejoice over the desolation it makes. As God is said to "walk upon the wings of the wind." and to "quiet the earth by the south wind," so Satan may be said to ride upon the wings of the pestilential Sirocco, and to disturb the earth by its howling blast. When God created man in his own image, he pronounced it "very good." He delighted in the contemplation of his own likeness. As God, then, delights in good, so his infernal adversary delights in evil--and, as God rested in his works of creation, acquiescing therein with pure and holy satisfaction, as the product of infinite wisdom and power; so Satan, that restless, wandering spirit, roams with foul, infernal glee over the ruins he has made, howling, like the melancholy wind, over the wilderness, and withering and blighting all that his pestilential breath touches.

2. But the word "howling" may refer not only to the wilderness itself, but to its tenants, the wild beasts, who fill it with their midnight howling. Travelers speak much of the howling of the jackal, and other wild beasts of prey that inhabit the desert. So is our heart howled over by wild beasts that tenant its waste. What malignant passions dwell in the human breast! Pride, jealousy, envy, wrath, hatred, murder! Let a man be crossed and opposed, found fault with even upon good ground, what enmity and wrath work in his mind even against his best friend! The jackal, the tiger, the hyaena, the wolf, the bear, and the fox have all their dens in the human heart. "When the sun rises, they gather themselves together, and lay themselves down in their dens;" but when it is night, "they creep forth, and roar after their prey" Psalm 104:20-22.

What a description of the heart of man, that it is not only a desert, utterly bare of herb, tree, fruit, or flower, but is a "waste howling wilderness," over which the pestilential wind sweeps with melancholy moan, and where beasts of prey continually prowl. Look into, and examine well your own heart; you will see it all there. Has not the pestilential wind of sin nipped many a rising blade? Do not the midnight beasts of prey ever roam after some filthy carrion?

Here, then, God finds his Israel. Israel would never have found God--it is God that finds him in this wretched spot, this desolate, utterly desolate condition. Nothing here is said about man's free-will, of the natural movements of the heart Godwards, of good inclinations, good resolutions, and how, by and by,

through careful cultivation nature gets changed, and by some mysterious chemistry becomes transmuted into grace. Israel does not fence and dig and plant and water until the desert becomes a garden, and this allures the Lord to visit it. The record, the unalterable record, runs. "He found him in a desert land, in the waste howling wilderness."

II. But we pass on to consider the dealings of God with him when he has found him.

1. The first thing said of these dealings of God with his Israel is, that "He LED him about." The words, I think, are applicable to the two special branches of divine leading--those in providence, and those in grace. Those in the experience of God's people are often wonderfully connected.

A. Generally speaking, I believe, most who know anything of the dealings of God with their soul, can trace certain marked PROVIDENTIAL CIRCUMSTANCES whereby providence, so to speak, was linked on to grace. One end of the chain may be indeed of iron, and the other of gold--but there is a point where link meets link, and that usually is where the work of grace begins in the soul. Usually some striking providence immediately precedes the commencement of the work of grace. Some remarkable circumstance, some family affliction, some domestic trial, some bodily sickness, or some unusual turn of events led on to that memorable spot and place where the Lord by his Spirit was first pleased to touch the conscience. Some have reason to bless God for an illness; others for a change of habitation, others for a new situation, others for a peculiar circumstance that led them to read a certain book, or hear a certain minister.

Others again can see the wonder-working hand of God in heavy losses, or painful reverses in business, whereby they were brought down in circumstances, stripped perhaps of worldly goods, or even reduced to actual poverty and distress. And all these are no common providences, nor every-day occurrences--but so connected with the work of God upon the soul, though not themselves grace, that they led on to it as much as Ruth's coming into the land of Canaan led on to her marriage with Boaz, or Matthew's sitting at the receipt of custom led on to his being called to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

B. But the words are not only applicable to the Lord's striking leadings in providence--they may be well referred in a higher and greater sense to his leadings in GRACE. "He led them about." Though the way to heaven is a way "cast up," in which really and truly there is neither crook nor turn, yet so far as our feelings and experience are connected, it is a very roundabout way. "He led them about." This was true literally. What a circuitous, tangled, backward and forward route was that of the children of Israel in the wilderness! Yet every step was under God's direction--they never moved until the cloudy pillar led the way.

But how does the Lord lead about in grace? By leading his Israel into a path of which they do not see the end. One turn of the road hides the next. I have read that you may make a road with a curve at every quarter of a mile, and yet in a hundred miles the distance will not be so much as a mile more than a perfectly straight line. So in grace. The length of the road swallows up the turnings. But these turnings make the road seem more round about than it really is. All before us is hidden. For instance, when the Lord begins a work of grace, he brings convictions of sin, opens up the spirituality of the law, makes the soul feel guilty, guilty, guilty in every thought, word, and deed. But does a man in that condition know what the Lord is doing? Can he clearly trace out the work of God upon his soul? Is he able to say, 'This, this is the work of God upon my heart'?

For the most part, he knows not what is the matter with him--why he is so distressed--why he can take no rest; why the things of eternity keep rolling in upon his soul; why he stands in continual dread of the wrath

to come; why his mind is so exercised with thoughts upon God; why he feels condemnation, bondage, and misery. Nor even when the Lord is pleased to raise him up to some hope, to apply some sweet promise to his soul, to encourage him in various ways under the ministry of the word, can he often take the full comfort of it. He may for a time, but it is soon gone, and he can scarcely believe it to be real. Unbelief suggests that it did not come exactly in the right way, or did not last long enough, or did not go deep enough, or was not just such as he has heard others speak of--and so he is filled with doubts, fears, and anxieties whether it was really from the Lord.

But when God leads him on a step further--opens up the gospel, reveals Christ, drops into his heart some sweet testimony, gives him some blessed discovery of his saving interest in the Lord Jesus, and seals it with a divine witness in his heart, this banishes all his doubts and fears, and fills his soul with joy and peace. Yet even after this, when the sweet feeling is gone, he may sink again very low, and may question the reality of the revelation he has enjoyed. All this is "leading about," for one turn of the road hides the other.

But now for another turn; for the Lord is still "leading him about." He leads him, then, down into a knowledge of his own corruptions, and allows Satan to buffet him with strong temptations. This is indeed "leading him about." For nothing is straight now. He has lost his way altogether, and stands staring and looking about him, looking up at the corners of the streets, and reading name after name--but is unable to tell which is north, south, east, or west. And if he has the map in his hand, it is of little or no service--until he gets so bewildered and confused, that at last he stands stock still, and cries, 'Where am I? I feel quite lost; I cannot tell what way I came, nor where I am going; all I can do is to stand still, and wait for a guide. In this state, he will enquire of this person, and enquire of that person. One says, 'go to the right;' and another, 'go to the left.' One says, 'turn down this street;' and another, 'turn down that;' until, at last, he gets more confused than before. Thus the soul is "led about," until at last it seems as though it never knew anything or felt anything right, and all its religion seems, like poor Job's, tumbled together into one huge mass of confusion. Yet it is the Lord leading him all the time--and though he leads him about in such strange ways, by such circuitous paths, and into such strange spots--yet, it will be found, at the journey's end, that in his mercy he has "led forth the people he has redeemed, and has guided them in his strength unto his holy habitation."

2. But it adds. "He INSTRUCTED him." All the while that the Lord is leading Israel about, he is instructing him. "Everywhere and in all things." says the apostle, "I am instructed." So God instructs his Israel by everything that he does for him and in him. A person learning religion is something like a person learning a trade or business. He often learns most by making mistakes. If you have an apprentice to some mechanical trade or business, and you set him to work, how many mistakes he makes at first. He takes the chisel into his hand, and holds it wrong--then he takes the mallet, and strikes it too hard or in a wrong direction. And O how much work he spoils! yet by all this he is learning manual dexterity. If he held the chisel in a wrong direction this time, he will hold it right the next--and if he has struck the mallet too hard, or hit his own fingers, he will learn to use it with more skill the next time. So we learn much by mistakes. Many a man in business has learned more by his losses than he ever learned by his gains. And many a general has fought his way to victory through defeat.

So the Lord's people learn much by their very mistakes; they learn wisdom and caution for the future. You cannot take a young apprentice, and say, 'Do this just as I do;' he must learn it for himself--and he learns it for the most part little by little, "line upon line, line upon line," just as the children of God learn their religion. So a minister cannot say to the people, 'This is my experience; copy it, and learn it from my lips.' Each

must learn his experience for himself.

It is the Lord who instructs his Israel. "All your children shall be taught of the Lord;" and he instructs us in such a way that we have often to see our folly, and yet admire his wisdom--to take to ourselves all the shame, and ascribe to him all the glory. He instructs us into a knowledge of himself in his greatness, majesty, holiness, and purity--of his righteous law as condemning sin and the sinner; and, as only in his light do we see light, we thence learn something of the wickedness, barrenness, hypocrisy, unbelief, deceitfulness, and pride of our heart. By these divine lectures, he instructs us into true humility, self-abhorrence, and self-loathing before him--and when he has instructed the soul into the mystery of its base original, and stripped it of self-righteousness, he instructs it into a knowledge of his own surprising and most suitable grace as revealed in the Person of his own dear Son, "Immanuel, God with us."

He instructs the soul into a knowledge of electing love, of atoning blood, of justifying righteousness, of unfailing faithfulness, of infinite compassion and everlasting mercy. And all these lessons are "to profit," they "sink down," as the Lord speaks, "into the ears," they drop into the heart, and become "spirit and life" to the soul. We must learn religion by experience. It is not by reading books, nor even the scriptures themselves; it is not by hearing ministers, nor by conversing with God's people that we can obtain any right experience of the teachings of God. Hundreds have had all these advantages and most profitable advantages they are, when owned and blessed of God who have no teaching from above.

Religion can no more be learned by theory than swimming. A man may stand on the brink, and see a person swim, and move his hands in imitation. Put him into the water, and he will soon sink to the bottom. So in religion. Put a man into the waves and billows of temptation, and he will soon sink, if he, who teaches the hands to war and the fingers to fight, has not taught his arms to swim. We must have our personal trials and personal mercies; our own temptations, and our own deliverances; our own afflictions, and our own consolations--and learn each and every branch of the divine life for ourselves. God so teaches his people as though each was the only scholar in his school, and takes as much pains with each pupil as though there were no other in the world for him to take pains with.

3. And not only so, but "He kept him as the apple of his eye." This expression is used in more than one place of scripture to signify the special tenderness of God in keeping his people. The apple of the eye is the tenderest spot of the whole body so far as it is accessible to external violence. As a man, therefore, would above all things guard that important and sensitive organ, so God is said to guard and keep his people as the apple of his own eye.

But some may say, Are the Lord's people always kept? Do they never slip? Are they never guilty of backsliding? Do they never err in any one point? Are they always kept from sin and folly? Are they always preserved from the least taint of evil? Who can say this, when scripture stares him in the face with such declarations as, "In many things we offend;" "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves," "The good that I would do, I do not; and the evil that I would not do, that I do?" Who can say this in spite of, in defiance of all the slips and falls of the saints recorded in the word of God, such as Abraham, Lot, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Peter--against all of whose names a mark stands? And yet withal, the Lord keeps them as the apple of his eye.

There are certain rocks and shoals from which the heavenly Pilot ever keeps the ship of the soul. For instance, he keeps them from "making shipwreck of faith," from drinking down poisonous draughts of error--from the sin unto death--from presumption and apostasy; from sitting in the scorner's chair--from

despair, prayerlessness, and impenitency; from enmity to his truth, cause, and people--from making a covenant with death and an agreement with hell; from despising true experience--and from murdering the reputation of the approved saints and servants of God.

From these and similar soul-destroying evils he preserves them, by keeping alive his fear in their heart, the spirit of prayer in their bosom, and the life that he himself gave them out of Christ's fullness. "Because I live, you shall live also." "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." He does not keep them in every instance from all evil, but he so keeps them as the apple of his eye, that nothing can really and finally harm them. Sin indeed will ever grieve and distress them; Satan will ever tempt or harass them; and a body of sin and death will ever burden them; but they will eventually come off more than conquerors through him who loved them. But to say, that the Lord so keeps his saints that they never in any degree slip, that they never in any way backslide--is to speak in defiance of what is recorded of the saints in the scriptures of truth, and in diametrical contradiction of what the best and wisest of God's people have in all ages confessed of themselves.

4. But by way of further illustration of the dealings of God, Moses, speaking by divine inspiration, brings forward a sweet and blessed figure, that of an eagle and her young. "As an eagle stirs up her nest, flutters over her young, spreads abroad her wings--so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."

The various movements of the eagle here are vividly and beautifully described, and demand, each of them, a special notice.

A. She is said, first, to "stir up her nest." Her "nest," doubtless, signifies her young ones, which, like human babes, doze away much of their time in sleep. But feeding time comes--and they need to be aroused. The bill and claw of the mother bird quickly break their slumber. Though of eagle birth, and vivified by eagle blood; though cradled upon "the crag of a rock," and alone of all birds born to gaze upon the sun, yet often the eaglet's eyes and wings droop. So the Lord's people often nod and slumber. Now, as the eagle stirs up her nest, so does the Lord stir up his people. They fall asleep, get into a drowsy state of soul; their affections dreamily wander from the Lord; and though still upon the Rock, their eyes look not upon the Sun of righteousness, but droop and sink into slumber.

But does the Lord leave them so? No--he stirs them up. And two ways does he chiefly employ to do this.

Sometimes he uses afflictions. They are perhaps as nodding and drowsy in their souls as some of my hearers may now be in their bodies. But the Lord sends some rousing affliction. His hand falls heavily upon their bodies, or upon their families, or upon their circumstances, or upon their consciences; for usually in one of these four ways does the Lord stir up his drowsy people when he lays on the afflicting rod. The affliction has now a voice, and this is its cry, "Awake, you that sleep." "What are you doing here, O sleeper? Arise, call upon your God." The cry reaches their heart, and shakes off slumber from their eyes and limbs.

The other chief instrument in the Lord's hands to stir up the slumbering nest is the bill and claw of a heart-searching, experimental ministry--not to tear, but arouse; to pass between the feathers, but not to rend the flesh. How the Lord's people need stirring up! How they need a minister to search them to the very core! How they require not the baby's lullaby, but the trumpet of alarm in the holy mountain; and for Zion's watchmen to sound aloud, "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem," to rouse them out of that torpidity into which they so often sink. One main use of a gospel ministry is to stir up the people of God.

Peter thought it fit, as long as he was in the tabernacle of the body, to "stir up" the brethren, and says, that "in both his epistles he stirred up their pure minds by way of remembrance."

A fire soon goes out unless stirred--and so the fire of God in the soul would die away unless continually stirred up. All through the week haply you are occupied with business--you live perhaps in a whirl of customers where money, money, money--chink, chink, chink, swallows up the whole time of employer and employed--or, if not so, the cares and anxieties of a family, and the carnality of your own nature, combine together to bury you as it were alive. These things should not be so--but so, it is to be feared, they much are. Now, on a Lord's Day, to be able to hear the gospel, to attend an experimental ministry, is often a blessed means of stirring up the soul, and reviving it out of this six days' slumber. It is a bad mark to despise or neglect a gospel ministry. It is God's own ordinance, and therefore cannot be despised or neglected with impunity.

Nearly four years ago I was laid aside from preaching, through illness, for eight months, and in that affliction I learned one important lesson, if no other--the benefit of a gospel ministry. Being a minister myself, and much feeling my own deficiencies in the ministry, I did not, I confess attach sufficient value to that ordinance. I was much kept from doing so by this feeling, that to attach importance to the ministry was to attach importance to myself. But though too unwell from weakness of the chest to preach myself, I was able to attend chapel during a good portion of that time as a hearer of such gracious men as stand in this pulpit.

It is a singular circumstance, that during that period my gift for the ministry, if I have any, was as completely taken away as if I had never preached in my life. This stopped all criticism, for I felt, in hearing, that were I in the pulpit, I would not have a word to say. This singular feeling, combined with much depression of mind and body, made me a hearer, I think, less disposed to criticize than any one in the whole place. Being, I hope, in this childlike frame, and so prepared to hear, I found there was a benefit in the preached gospel, such as I did not before apprehend; that it stirred me up--brought feeling to my heart, kindled prayer, and seemed to do my soul real positive good. Since then, being restored to the pulpit, and the door of utterance once more opened, I have attached more value, not indeed to my own, but to the ministry of the gospel generally as an ordinance of God. Under, then, a sound, experimental ministry, if there be any life and fear of God in the heart, it draws it forth--if there be any experience, it is brought to light--new life is kindled in the soul--faith, hope, and love are revived--and the work of God upon the heart is made clear and plain.

Thus, as the eagle stirs up her nest, so does the Lord stir up the work of grace upon the heart of his people. And, if I may judge from my feelings in this pulpit, I must think that you in London much want stirring up; I sadly fear that your souls are in a very sleepy, dead, torpid, state, and that you want some rousing afflictions, and pointed dealings of God, to stir you up, and make you alive and lively in the things of eternity.

B. "As an eagle stirs up her nest, flutters over her young." The word "flutters" is the same word as is translated "moved" Ge 1:2. "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." There is something exceedingly expressive in the word. The Spirit of God hovered with a fluttering motion over the waters, and impregnated chaos with life. So the eagle when she returns from pursuing her prey, first "stirs up" her sleeping eaglets, and then, gently fluttering over her nest, broods with tremulous motion of bosom and wing over her young, infusing warmth and life into their torpid frames, chilled through her long absence.

What a beautiful figure is this to set forth the return of the Lord to the soul that has fallen asleep, and become chilled with cold when he has been away! Christ, we read, "cherishes," or, as the word means, "warms with his body," "the church" Eph 5:29. Fluttering by the blessed Spirit with gentle movements over the soul, he communicates to it animation and warmth. To stir up and to cherish the life of God in the soul are the two chief uses of a gospel ministry. See whether you can trace these two effects of the preached gospel in your soul. Are you not sometimes stirred up? And sometimes does not your heart beat responsively to the joyful sound, and palpitate and flutter under the sweet words of gospel grace as they drop with divine unction into your breast? Do not the eaglets flutter too? Does the bridegroom flutter, and not the bride when their hands are tied together never more to part? So the believer's soul flutters and palpitates in responsive movement to the blessed Spirit. Seek these two things under a preached gospel. How different is life and feeling under the preached word from sitting like so many blocks of ice!

C. "Spreads abroad her wings." That she may take in the whole brood. Some of the eaglets are in the center of the nest, and others at the end; but the eagle neglects none. There are those that lie nearer to her breast, as there are those of God's family who are indulged with closer communion with him. These, like holy John, lean upon his bosom. But the eagle spreads her wings over the whole of her nest, so as to encircle the extremity as well as the center, thus communicating warmth to every eaglet. Christ does this by the ministry of the gospel--for that reaches, or should reach all; it should come down to every case, and enter into every experience. Or, if here the ministry of man be defective, so is not the word of truth. The gospel of the grace of God spreads its benignant wings over all the election of grace. From center to extremity, from the bosom of God to the ends of the earth, the wings of eternal love embrace all, from Paul in the third heaven to Jonah in the whale's belly. If you have not the whole warmth of the bosom, you have, as an eaglet, the protection of the wing.

D. "Takes them, bears them on her wings." The eagle is said here to "take" her young, that is, we may gather, to the edge of the nest. The eaglets that now lie in the nest, will one day spread their pinions, and fly abroad in the sky; but at present, when they peep over their couch, and look down the steep precipice on which the eyry is built, their hearts recoil with terror. But the eagle teaches them to look down the precipice, that they may learn to measure its depth, and fear it not.

So the Lord leads his people sometimes to look down the precipice of eternity. They are as yet safe in the nest beneath his wings; but sometimes in solemn moments, as in sickness, they shrink from death and eternity. They recoil from the unfathomed precipice, and shrink back into the nest. But the eagle holds them firm to the sight until they are encouraged by her presence and fluttering warmth to look down without fear.

She then makes them test their strength, and, to uphold them in their flight, "bears them upon her wings." carries them on her back, where they are safe under the arch of her outspread pinions. So the Lord in his gracious dealings with his Israel, when he has caused them to look into eternity, and they shrink from the sight, takes them upon his pinions, gives them some sweet and heart-cheering views of their saving interest in his blood, removes the fear of death, until he teaches them to soar away, and fly aloft to heaven's battlements.

E. And then to show how this is wholly of the Lord, he adds, "So the Lord ALONE did lead him." He would not share the honor with any. "And there was no strange god with him." He would not allow any ash-heap god to interfere; for he is a jealous god. "The Lord alone" he would have no intruder--Jesus bears no rival, "did lead him." Israel did not lead himself, nor was he led by man; but the Lord alone, in his providence

and grace, led him about, instructed him, kept him as the apple of his eye, and was to him all that the eagle is to her young. Free-will had no hand in this matter; human strength did not interfere; creature righteousness was never allowed to interpose. They were all still as a stone, when Israel passed over. God did all the work, that God might have all the glory. He began, he carried on, he completed; for "the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."

O how blessedly does the Lord take the whole matter in hand! And how safely does he lead his people! How secure they are! If he keeps them as the apple of his eye, can anything really hurt them? If he leads them, can they go wrong? If he instructs them, can they remain in ignorance? If he stirs them up, can they lie torpid? If he flutters over them, will they not feel the soft movement of his breast? If he takes them, must not they be carried? If he supports them, must not they be upheld by his pinions? 'Yes,' you say, all true; I believe it every word--but O, this is what I want--to feel in my soul that I am one of the characters toward whom the Lord shows such mercy! But cannot you trace out in your experience something corresponding to the experience described in the text--"The desert," "the waste howling wilderness," "led about"? Can you not see how, in the providence of God you have been led, and how, in the grace of God, you have been brought on from step to step? Can you not see also how you have been instructed?

Though you may know but little, yet have you not been taught this and that lesson, in a gradual and sometimes painful way? Do you not find how the Lord has kept you as the apple of his eye, and preserved you even to this day? has sometimes stirred you up under the ministry of the gospel, and sometimes by painful affliction--how he bears you up, and lifts your affections upward, and sometimes gives you a sweet sip of his love, a foretaste of eternal joy?

Now, if you find something of this going on in your heart, is not this the very way to read your name engraved on this monument of eternal love? But this feeling perhaps creates doubts and fears in your soul, that you are not all, or indeed in many points, what you believe a Christian should be. There are things in you that grieve and distress you; you cannot think as you would, nor speak as you would, nor act as you would. There is always something or other wrong which seems to wound and disturb your mind. It will be so to the end. The heart is at best a Sahara- a desert, a waste howling wilderness. Will any good thing grow there? If anything could by nature grow there, it would cease to be a desert. If the pestilential wind never howled over it, if the jackal never cried out after its prey, it would cease to be a waste howling wilderness. Nature undergoes no change.

But what a mercy it is, even to find in this desert, this waste howling wilderness, some leading, some keeping, some instructing, some stirring, some fluttering, some taking, some bearing up on eagle's wings. Do not look at the desert; you will always see in that nothing but desolation; but see if there be not some of God's gracious dealings and teachings with your soul in the desert; and if you find your character in the text, your name is in the book of life.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-philpot/the-eagle-and-her-young/>

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