

LEANING ON THE EVERLASTING ARMS

In the Old Testament, the image of the arm outstretched is used to refer to the mighty acts of the Lord such as his deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 6.6) and other acts of judgment or salvation (Isaiah 51.9; Ezekiel 20.33). Because of this imagery, the arm or arms of the Lord become the symbol of safe refuge and of comfort in the time of need. Moses, in his blessing of the Israelites on the plains of Moab just before his death and their entrance into the land of Canaan, utters these uplifting and inspiring words:

The eternal God is your dwelling place,
And underneath are the everlasting arms.
And he thrust out the enemy before you
and said, "Destroy."
So Israel lived in safety,
Jacob lived alone,
in a land of grain and wine,
whose heavens drop down dew.
Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you,
a people saved by the Lord,
the shield of your help,
and the sword of your triumph! (Deuteronomy 33.27-29).¹

As for Israel, the surety of salvation and the joy of abundant provisions can be ours. Salvation certainly promises freedom from sin and its terrible consequences, but we must be willing to put our confidence completely in the everlasting arms of the Lord our God.

This requires an attitude like that of the psalmist who said, "Hold me up, that I may be safe and have regard for your statutes continually!" (Psalm 119.117). If we put our lives in the hands of the Lord, if we lean on his everlasting arms, then we must submit to his guidance and direction for our lives. Unfortunately, many who are proud and arrogant have attempted to

¹Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version (2001).

devise their own system of right and wrong, but such schemes lead only to futility and despair.

These persons lean upon the arms of other humans, but the “arm of flesh” (2 Chronicles 32.8) is puny, weak, and temporal in comparison with the everlasting arms of the Almighty One. And those who rest in the everlasting arms of the Lord can be assured of the promise of Nahum 1.7, “The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.”

The writer of the hymn said it well:

What have I to dread, what have I to fear,
Leaning on the everlasting arms;
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,
Leaning on the everlasting arms.

Leaning on Jesus, leaning on Jesus,
Safe and secure from all alarms;
Leaning on Jesus, leaning on Jesus,
Leaning on the everlasting arms.²

²Elisha A. Hoffman, “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms” (1887).