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The Everlasting Arms

“There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to help you, and in his excellency on the clouds. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; he will thrust out the enemy from before you, and will say, ‘Destroy.’ Then Israel shall dwell in safety, the fountain of Jacob alone, in a land of grain and new wine; his heavens shall also drop dew.” Deuteronomy 33:26-28

Jeshurun is a poetic name for Israel and it comes from a word that means “upright, just or straight.” It is found only four times in the Hebrew Bible and three of those times occur in Deuteronomy (33:15; 33:5, 26). The other occurrence is in Isaiah 44:2. This is almost like a pet name for Israel and it points to God’s ideal for his people. Israel was intended to be upright, just and straight. As is so often the case, Israel fell short of the ideal. Isaiah describes the depths to which Israel had fallen in Isaiah 1:21, “How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers.” Justice and righteousness had given way to harlotry and murder.

But we are reminded in Deuteronomy 33:26 that there is “no one like the God of Jeshurun.” God is described here as one who comes to help, a place of refuge; his everlasting arms are underneath to catch us when we fall. These attributes of God give us confidence in times of doubt and hope in times of trouble.

I read a story about a mother who was hovering near her baby as he began to take his first steps. He was faltering and uncertain, but he was a very proud baby, laughing and crowing over his own achievement as he tottered across the carpet with his mother following, her outstretched arms surrounding but not touching him. “He thinks he is doing it all alone,” said his grandfather. “And so he is,” the mother answered. “I am not carrying him and I am not hindering him; my arms are only so close that I can catch him in a moment if he falls.” So it is that we older children walk, and fancy often that we are going on our way alone. God does not hold us back as we turn in one direction or another. He does not carry us; step by step we must make our own way, but always his loving arms are close to uphold us if we fall. Unseen, unfelt, the everlasting arms surround us, and we cannot fall beyond their upholding strength and tenderness.

Jeshurun made mistakes and departed from the source of their strength. Deuteronomy 32:15 states, “But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; you grew fat, you grew thick, you are obese! Then he forsook God who made him, and scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation.” The New Living Translation renders this passage, “But Israel soon became fat and unruly; the people grew heavy, plump, and stuffed! Then they abandoned the God who had made them; they made light of the Rock of their salvation.” As we read further in this chapter we discover that Israel provoked God to jealousy with foreign gods and made sacrifices to demons. As a result God had to judge Israel and he showed them that the gods in whom they had placed their trust were really not gods at all and had no power to save.

There may be times that God has to judge us and chastise us, but underneath are the everlasting arms. As the Hebrew writer reminds us, “If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?” (Heb. 12:7) There is no one like the God of Jeshurun.