



"The vision must be followed by the venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps—we must step up the stairs."
—Vance Havner

22-Sep-17

Hope and Refuge (Part Two)

The author of Hebrews writes in [Hebrews 6:17-18](#):

Thus [God](#), determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

The Contemporary English Version renders "who have fled for refuge" as, "We have run to God for safety." What is this refuge, this place of safety, that God's people have fled to? Commentators generally agree that this metaphor refers to the six cities of refuge in ancient Israel (others were appointed on the east side of Jordan later). The [book of Hebrews](#) is addressed to [Christians](#) of Jewish descent, who did not need to have the cities of refuge explained to them. Perhaps, however, we could use a bit of background on them since they are not part of our culture.

In [Numbers 35:9](#); [Deuteronomy 19:1](#); and [Joshua 20:1](#), God sets forth requirements for six cities of refuge. Notice [Joshua 20:1-3](#):

The LORD also spoke to Joshua, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'Appoint for yourselves cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through [Moses](#), that the slayer who kills a person accidentally or unintentionally may flee there; and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood.'"

This "avenger of blood," the nearest male relative to the victim, was responsible for protecting the property, liberty, and posterity of his next of kin, including their lives through the avenging of blood on a kind of an "eye for an eye" basis. We can use a hypothetical scenario to show how this worked.

A man and his friend walk into a nearby forest to cut some firewood. While chopping down a tree, the head of the man's ax flies off the handle, strikes his friend, and kills him. It is an accident, pure and simple. But in the days before an established judicial system, who was to say this was an accident? [Exodus 21:12](#) states unambiguously that the man must be put to death; he is guilty of taking another person's life.

The next verse declares that if the killing was not premeditated—"he did not lie in wait" to kill his friend—God would "appoint a place where he may flee." He could, perhaps, return to his village and plead his case to the family of the victim, but the slain friend's nearest male relative, the blood avenger, had a duty—a moral obligation, according to Roy H. May, Jr., in his book, *Joshua and the Promised Land*—to take the man's life in return. If the man wanted to live, he had only one choice: to flee to the nearest city of refuge.

There, he would submit such evidence as he might have to the authorities to show that the killing of his friend was not premeditated. If his facts were sufficient, if his account were believed, he would be allowed to live in that city, without fear of retribution, until the death of the current high priest in Jerusalem, whereupon he would be free to return home, unmolested. However, if he left the city for any reason before that time, the blood avenger was within his rights to find and kill him.

We can see several spiritual parallels here. At first, we might think of [Satan](#) as being a kind of blood avenger, chasing us down relentlessly with the intent of killing us. While that certainly sounds like something Satan would do, the metaphor actually fits [Christ](#) more closely.

Recall that the blood avenger's job was to protect the property, liberty, and posterity of his next of kin as well as avenge his death. The blood avenger had the power of life and death. How fast and how seriously he pursued the murderer could dictate whether he caught and killed his prey or not.

[Revelation 6:10](#), among other scriptures, confirms that Christ is the Blood Avenger: "And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'" All judgment has been given to Him in heaven and on earth ([John 5:22](#), 27; [Acts 17:31](#); [Romans 2:16](#); [II Timothy 4:1](#); etc.), and He will see to it that justice is brought upon all those who mistreat His people.

The high priest is another parallel to Christ. Upon his death, those guilty of manslaughter were released from the penalty of their sins. But consider this in terms of hope. Imagine having just accidentally killed another and feeling the grief, the horror, the guilt—all of the emotions that would be gripping us after having taken a person's life. Then, consider the sudden realization that we have just incurred the death penalty! We have to run for our life! Our only hope is to make it to the closest city of refuge. Where is it? It may not be something we think about much.

But we also have another hope beyond that: If we make it to the city of refuge safely, we have the hope of eventual freedom and forgiveness of our [sin](#) in the death of the high priest. His death clears us of our wrongdoing and stays the hand of the blood avenger, our executioner. Is that not what Christ has done for us through His death?

In the concluding essay of this series, we will see how the path has been made straight and sure for all those who are fleeing for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.

- Mike Ford

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[God's Faithfulness and Hope](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The children of Israel severely tested God's patience through their compulsive murmuring and faithlessness, but God (having incredible longsuffering and patience) refused to give up on them, giving them continual instruction and tests designed to make them grow spiritually- even to this day. The significant events experienced by the nation of Israel (the Exodus, Red Sea crossing, and wilderness wanderings) serve as reminders to us not to reject or disparage God's providence, but to trust in God's ability to lead and protect us, giving us all we need to succeed.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Audacity to Hope](#)

by Mike Ford

During the 2008 Presidential campaign, Americans have heard a great deal about hope. Yet, "hope" means different things to different people. Mike Ford explains that the political hope held out by politicians does not compare with the hope found in Scripture.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).

