



"The grand essentials to happiness in this life are something to do, something to love and something to hope for."

—Joseph Addison

29-Sep-17

Hope and Refuge (Part Three)

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.

We saw in Part Two that the refuge mentioned in verse 18 is a reference to ancient Israel's six cities of refuge, places where a person guilty of manslaughter could run to avoid the blood avenger, the slain person's closest male relative whose duty was to take the manslayer's life in return. If the manslayer reached the city safely, he had to remain there until the death of the current high priest. If he left the city for any reason, the blood avenger could do his duty and be guiltless.

As in most every other area of God's law, the Jews expanded on the cities of refuge as well. Chabad.org quotes a section from the *Mishneh Torah* (written by eleventh-century Jewish rabbi and philosopher Maimonides), "Laws Regarding Murder and the Preservation of Life," 8:5:

The court is obligated to straighten the roads to the cities of refuge, to repair them and broaden them. They must remove all impediments and obstacles. . . . Bridges should be built (over all natural barriers) so as not to delay one who is fleeing to [the city of refuge]. The width of a road to a city of refuge should not be less than thirty-two cubits [48 feet]. 'Refuge, Refuge' was written at all crossroads so that the murderers should recognize the way and turn there.

The road to refuge was clearly marked and the path kept free of impediments. The one guilty of manslaughter, however, must be moving, focused on his goal, his hope. If he wants to live, he must discard his worldly baggage and run! No stopping off to pack, say his goodbyes, watch a movie, have a beer—no, he cannot take the time. The blood avenger is somewhere behind him with the right to exact the penalty for his sin—death!

Again, we can see the parallels. Our whole life is to be one of moving ahead, running for our goal. [Christ](#) fulfills the roles of both the blood avenger and the high priest. He is our Redeemer. Redemption involves the securing of release or recovery by the payment of a price. He is our hope, and we have confidence in His promises. Remember in [Hebrews 6:18](#), the hope is pictured as laying in front of us, waiting to be picked up. It is given to us, but we must make the effort to take it.

The analogy continues with the new Christian seeking refuge, protection, and redemption. When a resident of ancient Israel accidentally killed someone, they knew that safety was guaranteed to them in the closest city of refuge; and the cities were positioned so that one was no more than a day's journey away for anyone. All they had to do was get there and enter its gates.

In Part Two, the Christian life was compared to a person walking through a minefield, who had to make sure he or she did not step off the path. The

same carefulness applied to someone running to the city of refuge. He dared not step off the path or slow down. Coming up on a crossroads, he did not have to stop and ponder which direction he should go, as signs clearly pointed the way. He kept moving. His hope for refuge, for safety, was not a wish, however; his hope was a confident expectation of it as soon as he crossed the city limits.

This is what Paul is trying to get across. The Hebrews were slipping away spiritually. [The world](#) was drawing them out of God's church. The epistle exhorts them to pick up the hope God is offering and race with it to safety. What is a normal human reaction when faced with danger? We run to safety; we seek refuge.

- [Proverbs 18:10](#): "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."
- [Psalm 62:7-8](#): "In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength and my refuge, is in God. Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. Selah."

Once again, we will look at Hebrews 6:17-18 with all we have learned in mind:

Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath [God wants those He has called to see clearly that His plan is unchangeable, rock solid], 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.

We have sinned and incurred the penalty of death. We have fled for refuge. God has given us hope, both in redemption and in future reward. Our true hope, our confidence and trust, is in God and His promises.

- Mike Ford (1955-2021)

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

Paul warns of cunningly devised myths because Greek and Roman myths were not based on reality. These fanciful tales nevertheless shaped the world view of much of Western culture, including our attitude toward hope, a concept which is often abused and distorted. As God's created human beings, we are designed to function on a carefully-blended combination of faith, hope, and love, the primary ingredients of the general epistles. Those who have been called by God and who have come to know God have hope, faith and love (actually gifts of God) in the right combination. The trials and tests we experience when confronted with faith, hope, and love produce quality righteous character, embracing perseverance, endurance, and steadfastness. Temporal negative circumstances are not indicative of God's abiding faithfulness. If we do not believe in the reality of God, we cannot possibly have hope. God supplies us with what we need to go through trials, but we need to use these provisions in order to succeed. Our belief and trust needs to be in God and His capability of sustaining and resurrecting us. The Psalms are replete with the assurances of hope in God's promises. We need to recount these promises when we receive affliction, realizing, as Jeremiah came to understand, that great is God's faithfulness.

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

Atonement, when we are commanded to afflict our souls through fasting, is a time of self-evaluation and repentance. This is the only way to have real unity with God.

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