



Refugee Week

God is our Refuge

(Major Colin Elkington – Asylum/Refugee Services VIC)

Psalm 46:1, Numbers 35:6-28

Intro: Throughout the Psalms, God is constantly spoken of as a refuge. He is a safe place, a sanctuary where his people can run for protection. Psalm 46:1 tells us that, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble".

God provides a refuge for Israel. In Old Testament times, God wanted to make sure his people had a refuge. So, as the people of Israel were preparing to enter the land of Canaan, he told Moses to set aside six cities of refuge where a person could flee if they found themselves in trouble.

Illustration: Colin and Kevin go woodchopping. Colin swings the axe, hits the wood, pulls back the axe and the head flies off. Where has it gone? Oh dear. It's embedded in Kevin's head! He's dead! Colin knows that Kevin's family are a hot-headed bunch and they will jump to the conclusion that Colin has murdered Kevin. They will not listen to reason. So, Colin runs. He runs to the nearest city of refuge. Only there can he be guaranteed protection. The nearest city of refuge is some distance away, so Colin begins his flight. After running for a day, he looks back and he can see dust rising behind him. It's Kevin's family! They want to avenge Kevin. So, Colin runs faster. But they are getting closer. In the distance, he can see the city of refuge. The gates are open. But Kevin's family is drawing nearer. You can see the hate burning in their eyes. Colin is exhausted but he keeps running. An arrow narrowly misses him. He can hear the wild cries for vengeance. But he is just a few metres from the gates. The guards can see him coming. They beckon him, "Hurry, you're almost in." Kevin's family are at his heels, but with a final burst of strength he lunges and enters the city. And the gates are shut.

Once a person entered a city of refuge their case would be heard. If it was determined that they were innocent they had to remain in the city until the death of the high priest, then they could go home. By then, the relatives would have cooled down and would have been told they cannot harm the person who accidentally killed someone.

God provides a refuge for us. In our world people are trapped in sin. It holds them in its power and breaks them down and keeps them from God. But people sometimes realise they don't have to be enslaved in this terrible situation. They attempt to escape. They hear



that God has prepared a city of refuge and so they flee towards it. But as they run, they look back and they see Sin's family coming after them.

Look! there is Sin's nephew, Fear. And there is its niece, Despair, shouting cries of misery. Behind them is Sin's daughter, Lust, and son, Greed, putting on an extra burst of speed. Sin's neighbour, Guilt, has joined the party. Sin's brother, Selfishness, spurs them on, and his sister, Weakness, screams insults. How they want to catch the offender who dares to escape their clutches! Sin's uncle, Death, opens his mouth wide and Sin's aunty, Hell, breathes fire. Sin's mother, Pride, urges them not to slow down and Sin itself yells out, "You can run but you can't hide!" Behind them all, lashing them all on with a huge whip, is Satan himself.

But look, there in the distance, the city of refuge! It shines with the glory of God and above the gate is a great cross. Angels beckon every refugee, "hurry, don't give in, keep running".

Sin's family is almost upon us but with a final lunge we are through the gates! We are safe! We are free! Free from sin. Free from the guilt of sin. Free from the power of sin. FREE! Free indeed.

And what is our city of refuge? What is our one and only safe place? It is Jesus Christ! It is his sacrifice on the cross. It is the power of his resurrection. It is his presence in our lives. It is his Spirit at work in us. God provided Israel with literal cities of refuge, but he has provided us with a city of refuge that is God himself; Jesus Christ. God is our refuge and strength and ever-present help in trouble.

There are hundreds of literal refugees in the world. People fleeing from terrible regimes, cruelty, violence, war and famine. We should open our arms and hearts to welcome them. We should insist governments lift intakes and treat them humanely. We should remember that Jesus said: "I was a stranger, (a refugee, an asylum seeker,) and you welcomed me." Alternatively, "I was a stranger, (a refugee, an asylum seeker) and you *did not* welcome me.

And we should do this remembering that we are all refugees. Refugees from sin, from guilt, from destruction, from Hell and finding our only safe place in the loving arms of Jesus.

Appeal: Do you need a safe place? Do you need a refuge from the sin that is ruining your life and keeping you from God the Father? Flee to Jesus, God the Son. Confess your sin, choose to put God first and run into the arms of Jesus.

Suggested appeal song: Haste away to Jesus

Haste Away to Jesus (Harry Hill)

The angel of the Lord shall stand
While thousand thunders roar,
And swear by Heaven's eternal throne
That time shall be no more;
The earth and everything therein,
Shall melt in fervent heat,
And sinners found still in their sin
Will have their God to meet.

*Haste away to Jesus,
O hear the warning cry;
Haste away to Jesus,
For death is drawing nigh.*

In vain they'll cry for rocks to hide
Them from the Judge's face;
But, cursed by sin, they'll be denied,
They'll have no hiding place.
Before God's bar we all must go,
And hear the sentence given;
Depart, ye cursed into Hell!
Or: Come with Me to Heaven!

When once the judgement day is past,
'Twill be in vain to pray;
Wherever then your lot is cast,
Forever you must stay.
O awful thought; when time's no more,
This is God's firm decree,
In happiness or woe, you'll dwell
Through all eternity.