

REFUGES OF LIES

"Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." Isaiah 28:17.

The times in which Isaiah lived, like our own, were full of trouble. The Israelites had drifted far from the glory of their earlier days, and the nation of Israel was in a very sorry plight. Both the social and political life were depraved. Materialism had settled over the nation. False teachings had been hurled against Israel like a tempest. The Ten Commandments had been scrapped and a man-made covenant had been instituted as the rule of faith and practice. The people were spiritually bankrupt.

This decay in the spiritual life of the people had unloosed forms of criminality and general disregard for ethical practice to such an extent that the entire nation was in dire straits and facing grave consequences. They were on the verge of temporal bondage. Captivity was in prospect for them.

To meet this need, the time-serving politicians advocated the formation of an alliance either with Assyria or with Egypt, two great adjacent empires. But Isaiah, who was much in prayer over the approaching collapse, did not consent to turn to the wisdom of heathen rulers for deliverance. Instead, he assured the people that God would raise up a Man Who would be a remedy for all the ills under which his people suffered. This Man, Whom God would send, was the only hope of Israel. He alone could save from complete disaster, and afford protection and refreshment to the covenant people. He would bring relief from wicked rulers, be as a shelter from the blight of corrupting political winds, and be like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Isaiah saw the coming One as a hiding place for the soul.

Everyone needs a refuge or hiding-place for the soul. A refuge is a protection against danger or a source of safety. The fundamental need of every person is a place of safety and rest for the soul.

From what does one need a refuge or hiding-place?

1. The pangs of an accusing conscience.

Everyone has a conscience. He has sinned against his conscience. A conscience may be dulled, seared or mistreated, but it will make a serious cry at times. Oh, what pains there are, at times, in the human conscience! There is no torment like that of an accusing conscience.

2. The power of Satan.

All are sinners by nature, choice and practice. The power of Satan is more than one can master in his own strength. No man knows how weak he is, and he needs a refuge from the slumbering power of sin in his own life. Satan has tremendous power, and he is exceptionally subtle and cunning. Satan is man's greatest adversary.

3. The storms of life.

"The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble" (Psalm 9:9). "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isaiah 43:2).

Even our Saviour passed through the storms of life. He knew what it was to be hungry, thirsty, tired, weary, griefstricken, despised, rejected, slandered, spit upon, scourged and tortured.

Do you have burdens which are hidden to the eyes of people? Are you perplexed, cast down, discouraged or despondent? Our Lord said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

4. The fear of death.

5. The wrath of God.

God loves the sinner, but so long as he continues in unbelief and rejection of the divine remedy for sin he stands exposed to the wrath of God. God's Word says, "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Romans 2:5-6).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only safe refuge from these things — the pangs of an accusing conscience, the power of Satan, the storms of life, the fear of death and the wrath of God. Those who trust in Him as Saviour are forever safe. On the other hand, those who trust in anything other than Christ are doing what Isaiah declared the Jews did long ago, they are making "lies their refuge." What the prophet announced would happen to Israel will happen to them: "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies," that is, the hail of God's judgment, and the overwhelming flood of God's anger shall overflow the hiding place.

What are some of the "refuges of lies" in which men and women are trusting, instead of making the Lord Jesus Christ their refuge and thereby obtaining security which is everlasting?

I. The Lie That God Does Not Exist.

Atheism is growing in popularity. Men boast that they do not believe in a God. Atheism always leads to immorality. It leads people to cast off restraint and it is, therefore, the enemy of decency and order. Years ago Robert G. Ingersoll lectured in Chicago and advocated atheism in his brilliant but shallow way. In the audience were a number of students from medical schools in the city. When he had finished, a number of them went down to the worst vice dens in the city, openly rejoicing in the lie that there was no God to hold them accountable.

Atheism is a lie. Those who seek to escape the wrath of God by trusting in atheism are fools. Everyone knows instinctively that there is a God. It is only the fool who says in his heart, "There is no God." "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handiwork." What God has made bears witness of Him and His power.

Since atheism is a lie, it is foolish to take refuge in it. God does exist and will hold men accountable for sin. The hail of God's judgment shall sweep away this refuge of lies.

II. The Lie That The Bible Is Not The Word Of God.

Satan has been especially zealous and successful in spreading this lie within the past generation. He has seized every opportunity to discredit the Bible in the eyes of men and women, for Satan fears the Word of God as nothing else on earth. He knows that wherever the Bible is believed people will seek refuge in Christ.

Despite Satan's lie that the Bible is not the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures are true. Wherever it has been tested, it has been found to be absolutely reliable. Nothing has ever been discovered in the Bible lands that proves the Bible is wrong, but thousands of things have been found which confirm its truth. It used to be said that the children of Israel never were in bondage in Egypt. Then inscriptions were found in Egypt which proved they were there. Then it was alleged the walls of Jericho could not have fallen as the Bible describes them to have fallen. Then the walls of Jericho were discovered and found to be lying flat as the Bible says they fell.

III. The Lie That God Is Too Good To Damn Anyone.

Some believe that either there is no hell or that it is but a temporary place of correction and not a place of everlasting punishment. Moreover, they believe that ultimately everyone is going to be saved.

What they believe is a lie, for God declares He is too good not to damn those who deserve condemnation, and that if He did not condemn those who deserve His condemnation and reject His offer of forgiveness in Christ, He would not be a good God. "The Lord God is merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty" (Exodus 34:6-7). In Matthew 25:46 Christ declared that those who will be condemned by Him at His coming "shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous unto life eternal."

God will most assuredly condemn the wicked, for He says, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psalm 9:17).

IV. The Lie That People Are Saved By Morality Rather Than By The Substitutionary Work Of Christ.

Some who call themselves minister of Christ refer to the substitutionary atonement of Christ as a "slaughter-house religion." They assert that Christ died simply as a martyr, and that His death has no relation to the salvation of His people. The natural heart does not like the idea of a vicarious sacrifice. The natural man resents the idea that we need a Saviour, or that Christ is the Saviour whom we need.

But Christ did die as a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins, and we are saved through faith in His atoning sacrifice and not by our own works. Do not take refuge in the lie that your own obedience or works will save you. Trust in Christ, for your own righteousness will not prove to be any refuge on that dreadful day.

V. The Lie That It Makes No Difference What You Believe, So Long As You Are Sincere And Religious.

This is among the most popular of the lies in which people take refuge. Because of the popularity of this lie, there is so much opposition to missionary effort. Some say, "Why should we force Christianity down their throats?"

The reason why we must take the message of Christ to all is that the Bible teaches that there is but one true and living God and one Mediator, the man Christ Jesus, and that there is no salvation in or through any other than Christ.

If being religious would save anyone, then there was no need for God to send His Son to earth at all, for the Jews to whom He came were intensely religious. He declared the insufficiency of their religion, for He said, "He that believeth on him (the son of God) is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Christ would not have insisted upon faith in Himself if being religious were enough.

At Athens Paul told the people, "I perceive you are very religious," but he preached Christ to them and sought to persuade them to trust Christ for salvation. The reason why he did so was that their religion was of the wrong kind. Christ is the only safe refuge for the soul.

VI. The Lie That Sinners Will Have A Chance After Death To Accept Christ And Be Saved.

There is not one statement in the Bible to warrant such a belief. God's Word teaches that death ends the opportunity to receive salvation. Death forever fixes the destiny of those who have rejected Christ.

The hail of God's judgment shall sweep away the refuge of lies and the overwhelming flood of God's anger shall overflow the hiding-place; therefore, if you love your own soul, do not make lies your refuge. Do not trust in the lie that there is no God, that the Bible is a collection of myths and legends, that God is too good to damn anyone, that your goodness and works will save you; that it makes no difference what you believe just so you are sincere, or that you will have another chance after death.