

The Divine Refuge

by Charles Spurgeon

The children of Israel, while they were in Egypt, and in the wilderness, were a type of God's visible Church on earth. Moses was speaking primarily of them, but, secondarily, of all the chosen ones of God in every age. Now, as God was the shelter of His ancient people Israel, so is He the refuge of His saints through all time. And, first, He was eminently their shelter when they were under bondage and the yoke was heavy. When they had to make bricks without straw, and the taskmasters oppressed them, then the people cried unto the Lord, and God heard their cry, and sent unto them His servant Moses. So also, there often comes to men a time when they begin to feel the oppression of Satan. I believe that many ungodly men feel the slavery of their position. Even some of those who are never converted, have sense enough to feel at times that the service of Satan is a hard one, yielding but little pleasure, and involving awful risks. Some men cannot long go on making bricks without straw, without being more or less conscious that they are in the house of bondage. These, who are not God's people, under the pressure of mind consequent upon a partial discovery of their state, turn to some form of pleasure, or self-righteousness, in order to forget their burden and yoke; but God's elect people, moved by a higher power, are led to cry unto their God. It is one of the first signs of a chosen soul, that it seems to know, as if by heavenly instinct, where its true refuge is.

You recollect that, although you know but little of Christ, though in doctrinal matters you were very dark, though you did not understand, perhaps, even your own need, yet there was a something in you that made you pray, and gave you to see that only at the mercy-seat could you find your refuge. Before you were a Christian, before you could say—"Christ is mine," your bedside was the witness to many flowing tears, when your aching heart poured itself out before God, perhaps in strains like these: "O God, I want something; I do not know what it is I want, but I feel a heaviness of spirit; my mind is burdened, and I feel that Thou only canst unburden me. I know that I am a sinner; oh, that Thou wouldest forgive me! I hardly understand the plan of salvation, but one thing I know, that I want to be saved; I would arise and go unto my Father: my heart panteth to make Thy bosom my refuge." Now, I say that this is one of the first indications that such a soul is one of God's chosen, for it is true, just as it was of Israel in Egypt, that God is the refuge of His people, even when they are under the yoke.

When captivity is led captive, the Eternal God becomes the refuge of His people from their sins. The Israelites were brought out of Egypt; they were free; albeit they were marching they knew not whither, yet their chains were snapped; they were emancipated, and needed not to call any man Master. But see, Pharaoh is wroth, and he pursues them; with his horses and his chariots he hastens after them. The enemy said: "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them." Thus also there is a period in the spiritual life, when sin labours to drag back the sinner who has newly escaped from it. Like hosts ready for battle, all the poor sinner's past iniquities hurry after him, and overtake him in a place where his way is hedged in. The poor fugitive would escape, but he cannot; what, then, must he do? You remember that then Moses cried unto the Lord.

When nothing else could be found to afford shelter to the poor escaped slaves, when the Red Sea rolled before them, and the mountains shut them in on either side, and an angry foe pursued them, there was one road which was not stopped up, and that was the king's highway upward to the throne, the way to their God, and therefore they began at once to travel that road, lifting up their hearts in humble prayer to God, trusting that He would deliver them. You know the story too, how the uplifted rod divided the watery deeps, how the people passed through the sea as a horse through the wilderness, and how the Lord brought all the hosts of Egypt into the depths of the sea, that He might utterly destroy them, so that not one of them was left, and those who had seen them one day saw them no more for ever. In this sense, God is the refuge of His people still. Our sins which pursued us so hotly have been drowned in the depths of the Saviour's blood. They sank to the bottom like stones, the depths have covered them, there is not one, no, not one of them left, and we, standing upon the shore in safety, can shout in triumph over our drowned sins, "Sing unto the Lord for He hath triumphed gloriously, and all our iniquities hath He cast into the midst of the sea."

While God is thus the refuge of His people under the yoke, and when sin seeks to overcome them, He is also their refuge in times of want. The children of Israel journeyed into the wilderness, but there was nothing for them to feed upon there; the arid sand yielded them neither leeks, nor garlic, nor cucumbers; and no brooks or rivers, like the Nile, were there to quench their thirst; they would have famished, if they had been left to depend upon the natural productions of the soil. They came to Marah, where there was a well, but the water was very bitter; at other stations there were no wells whatever, and even bitter water was not to be had. What then? Why, the unfailing refuge of God's people in the wilderness was prayer. Moses, their representative, always betook himself to the Most High, at times falling upon his face in agony, and at other seasons climbing to the top of the hill, and there pleading in solemn communion with God, that He would deliver the people; and you have heard full often how men did eat angels' food in the desert; how Jehovah rained bread from heaven upon His people in the howling wilderness, and how He smote the rock, and waters gushed forth. You have not forgotten how the strong wind blew, and brought them flesh, so that they ate and were satisfied. Israel had no need unsupplied; their garments waxed not old, and though they went through the wilderness, their feet grew not sore. God supplied all their wants. We in our land must go to the baker, the butcher, the clothier, and many others, in order to equip ourselves fully, but the men of Israel went to God for everything. We have to store up our money and buy this in one place, and that in the other, but the Eternal God was their refuge and their resort for everything, and in every time of want they had nothing to do but to lift up their voice to Him. Now it is just so with us spiritually. Faith sees our position to-day to be just that of the children of Israel then: whatever our wants are, the Eternal God is our refuge. God has promised you that your bread shall be given and that your water shall be sure. He who gives spirituals will not deny temporals; the Mighty Master will never suffer you to perish, while He has it in His power to succour you. Go to Him, whatever may be the trouble which weighs you down. Do not suppose your case too bad, for nothing is too hard for the Lord, and dream not that He will refuse to undertake temporals as well as spirituals; He careth for you in all things. In everything you are to give thanks, and surely in everything by prayer and supplication, you may make known your wants unto God. In times when the cruse of oil is ready to fail, and the handful of meal is all but spent, then go to the all-sufficient God, and you shall find that they who trust in Him shall not lack any good thing.

Furthermore, our God is the refuge of His saints when their enemies rage. When the host was passing through the wilderness they were suddenly attacked by the Amalekites. Unprovoked, these marauders of the desert set upon them, and smote the hindermost of them, but what did Israel do? The people did not ask to have a strong body of horsemen, hired out of the land of Egypt for their refuge, or even if they did wish it, he who was their wiser self, Moses, looked to another arm than that of man, for he cried unto God. How glorious is that picture of Moses, with uplifted hands, upon the top of the hill giving victory to Joshua in the plain below. Those uplifted arms were worth ten thousand men to the hosts of Israel; nay, twice ten thousand had not so easily gotten a victory, as did those two extended arms, which brought down Omnipotence itself from heaven. This was Israel's master-weapon of war, their confidence in God. Joshua shall go forth with men of war, but the Lord, Jehovah-nissi, is the banner of the fight, and the giver of the victory. Thus the Eternal God is our refuge. When our foes rage, we need not fear their fury. Let us not seek to be without enemies, but let us take our case and spread it before God. We cannot be in such a position, that the weapons of our foes can hurt us, while the promise stands good: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that riseth against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." Though earth and hell should unite in malice, the Eternal God is our castle and stronghold, securing to us an everlasting refuge.

Excerpted from *Words of Cheer for Daily Life*. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.