

I remember as a child watching a cartoon, probably Elmer Fudd and Bugs Bunny, where there was a “Wildlife Refuge” protecting the animals from the hunters. The hunters had effectively surrounded the place and if an animal crossed the line and **allowed so much as a whisker outside of the boundary**, a barrage of fire power would cause utter devastation. That humorous situation stuck with me to my late teen years. At that time I lived in western Pennsylvania, where deer hunting was a really big deal. In fact, the first day of buck season was an official day off from school. I know that there were several farms in the area that were posted “no hunting” and many hunters believed that the prized bucks all knew that they were safe on those farms – veritable wildlife refuges. More likely, this was the hunters’ excuse for not bagging the trophy buck they wanted, but I always wonder if the animals are smarter than we give them credit for and were able to somewhat protect themselves by keeping to these certain farms.

There are a handful of Hebrew words that are commonly translated into English as “refuge.” They all mean “place of protection” or “to flee from danger” or something similar. This is not one of those challenging words to translate. The meaning is clear in any language. The English word comes from Latin refugium "a place to flee back to," (from re- "back" + fugere "to flee" + -ium "place for.") The “fuge” part of the English is the same root as in the word “fugitive,” one who is fleeing. Do you think it is interesting that a refuge is a place of safety that we **return** to – that **we were once there and at some point left**? I do not know if the same association of “returning” to someplace is true for those Hebrew words, but I cannot help thinking of God’s refuge as returning to the Garden of Eden; in my mind the perfect example of a refuge. To appreciate this image of Eden being a refuge in terms of the cartoon example above, however, the “hunter” is stationed in the center of the refuge up in the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. **Adam and Eve set out one whisker and Wham!** All hell broke loose - for thousands of years. We need to flee back to that place.

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:15-17)

But, we can’t go back, don’t you remember? God banished “us” from that Paradise. We were kicked out and guards were stationed **to ensure that we would never return**, right? Are you sure? Let’s examine that passage again, just to be sure:

*So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction **to guard the way to the tree of life.** (Genesis 3:24)*

Only the Tree is guarded, not the entire Refuge. In verse 22, just before this, God made the decision to cast Adam and Eve out so that they would not “take of the Tree of Life, eat, and live forever.” But, we know, or should know, that **God is merciful and has retained for us access to the Refuge**. The Kingdom of God – is that a distinctly different refuge, or is it the same as Eden?

*Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, **the kingdom of God is in your midst.**" (Luke 17:20-21)*

Regardless of what the refuge is called, or what it looks like, **when it is from God and you are in it, then you are safe and provided for**. That’s where I want to be! But, how do we get in it? Here is one example of how God granted a place of refuge for a man and his family:

"Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish. "But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you. (Genesis 6:17-18)

Noah, and his family were given a refuge from the destroying flood, but **that is because he entered into a covenant with God**. It looks like access to a refuge is often, maybe always, connected with an agreement one makes. But, if you make an agreement, or covenant, with the wrong entity, the refuge you get may be a false, inadequate, troublesome, or deadly refuge. Here are a few examples; if you read them, look for the agreement, with whom it was made, and what the "refuge" is. Check out Deuteronomy 32:15-38 – Jeremiah 17:1-6 – Isaiah 30:1-17 – Revelation 6:15-17 – Luke 12:16-21 – and with a bit of searching, you will find many more. In that last one, Luke 12, Messiah tells the story of a rich man seeking refuge in his wealth. (Spoiler alert – **this is NOT a winning strategy**.) In this case, the rich man made an agreement with himself to provide long term financial security. But, **provision** and security can only come from God. You've likely heard the phrase "sell your soul to the devil." That's an obvious example of a regretful covenant one can make. Scripture has plenty of other examples for us of what **not** to seek as a refuge. This one below contains a warning of the wrong path as well as a guide to the right one:

Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, And with Sheol we have made a pact. The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by, For we have made falsehood our refuge and we have concealed ourselves with deception." Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed. (Isaiah 28:15-16)

Notice the reference to the Costly Cornerstone, the Firm Foundation, our Rock, our Refuge. Forever, man has recognized that caves (generally made of rock) are a safe place that can protect us from **most things that can harm us** – weather, animals, enemies, so we naturally seek out caves to hide in. Read Revelation 6:15-17, Matthew 7:24-25, Psalms: 46:1, 62:6-7, 71:3, etc... Castles and fortresses are built from rock, and on top of rock, for good reason. The real rock, our true refuge is, of course, God.

"There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God. (1 Samuel 2:2)

But rocky caves do not protect us from disease or hunger, nor do they fight our battles, nor provide comfort and warmth. Physical rocks will not love us. But God's refuge will and does all of those things. There are other images of God's refuge that we can see: Philippians 4:7 (peace beyond comprehension) – Isaiah 25:4-5 (shade from the heat) – Ruth 2:12 (wings of protection and provision) – Psalm 84:11 (sun and shield) – Ephesians 2:4-6 (life!) – John 10:9 (The Door) – Matt 8:26 (calm seas) – Isa 32:2 (streams of water) – Psm 91, (protection from disease etc.) – John 15:12 (love) – **ultimately John 10:28-29 (eternal life)**

This is the lesson here: Seek God, ask Him for a relationship, and enter into a Covenant with Him. Then you will **dwelt in His rich and abundant Refuge**.

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

Peace to you and glory to God!

-Nate

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