



THERE is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in His excellency on the sky. ²⁷ The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. (Deuteronomy 33:26-27)

IN thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy Righteousness. ² Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. ³ For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me. ⁴ Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength.. ⁵ Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth. ⁶ I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the LORD. ⁷ I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities; ⁸ And hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: thou hast set my feet in a large room. (Psalm 31:1-8)

A favorite old hymn of mine has direct bearing on Our Great Refuge as the subject at hand. It is *Rock of Ages* by Augustus Toplady written in 1763. It seems that Toplady found inspiration for the hymn from an incident that he experienced during a storm while passing through a gorge of Burrington Combe, Mendip Hills, in England. As the storm raged more intense, Toplady found refuge in the cleft of a Rock in the gap. Thus, the hymn. That same Rock exists today as a memorial to the event as the Rock of Ages. But the genuine and true Rock of Ages has existed from all Eternity Past in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though this is not a devotion in detail of that hymn, I do include below the first stanza:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

As His blood spilled out in torrents, His side was rent, or cleft, for us.

This hymn is a beautiful expression of the grace and nature of God as our Fortress, Refuge, and great Defense. The hymn has no moral or spiritual authority apart from the biblical truths to which it appeals. But those truths transcend all others in our walk with Christ. He truly is our sure defense. Toplady was used of God to transmit those truths to untold millions. God also uses the life and testimony of each of us who hide ourselves in that same Rock of our Salvation which is Christ.

I am amazed at the way in which the wonderful doctrines of biblical truths have been codified in our classical hymns. The verses of these hymns enhance our recall of those truths at times when the Holy Bible may not be readily available. The arms of God are a refuge unapproachable by the enemy of our souls.

When a young lad, my parents lived in Dalton, Georgia. About twenty-five miles south was the small community of White, Georgia. There is a Methodist church their called Pine Log Methodist Church at which an evangelist named Anthony J. Showalter was preaching in 1887. Showalter owned a printing shop in Dalton but traveled the South on evangelistic tours. While preaching at Pine Log Church, he received a bit of sad news concerning two former men whom he had met on a preaching tour in Alabama. The wives of both men had tragically died shortly after Showalter had departed for Georgia. As he was contemplating what words of comfort he could use to console the two men, the words of Deuteronomy 33:27 came to mind: *The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.* This verse was sufficient to write an entire hymn by the title, *LEANING ON THE EVERLASTING ARMS.* This hymn was first sung at that small church but travelled around the world in just a few months without the aid of radio or television. My favorite stanza of this hymn is the second:

O how sweet to walk, In this pilgrim way,
Leaning on the everlasting arms;
O how bright the path grows from day to day,
Leaning on the everlasting arms.

I had the privilege to hear this hymn sung almost every day by my mother as she busied herself in her garden or in the usual household shores. When a toddler, I had no idea the meaning, but those words sank deep into my heart and later were magnified in my soul as the meaning became clear in later life.

GOD IS OUR REFUGE! What great importance these words signify to the Christian. There are Christian soldiers who have died in battle just moments after throwing their souls upon the altar of mercy in some far-flung foxhole. Amazing the many who accept the Lordship of Christ on the eve of a major battle – in both life and on the battlefield. God is the Refuge of last resort to many; but for those who have found their refuge in Him at an early age, a long life of joy and service serve as evidence of His Mercy and Grace.

In the eyes of God, we are all children. We lack the understanding and wisdom to keep our souls safe and our hearts pure. But He is the over-watching Father whose watchful eye is on those who put their trust in Him. At the darkest moment, He stands at the ready to demonstrate His power and love toward us and IN us.

Walking among our bullying playmates with our big and strong brother is a dim illustration of walking with our Lord through every trial of life. He is bigger, stronger, and more faithful than any problem we face.

God is our Fortress! His walls are strong, and the security He offers is within those walls. Wherever He is – like the Ark of Noah – is security. That fortress is, in counter

measure – like a prison. Both have strong walls to prevent penetration. Both are made as an abode for different kinds of souls. Both have watchmen on the walls and tall towers. Both require authorization for admittance. Both have armed guards to protect the premises. But look at the tremendous difference. The walls of a prison are designed to keep malcontents and criminals INSIDE. The inhabitants cannot leave until their punishment has been exacted. But the walls of a fortress are designed to keep the enemy OUT, and the inhabitants safe. Those within its walls are free to come and go according to their wishes. Theirs is an abode of security. All others within the walls of a fortress are our friends, our compatriots, our brothers and sisters.

The world is a prison; but the Kingdom of Heaven is an impenetrable Fortress. All who place their trust in God are safe within those walls.

In our day, there is much talk of so-called ‘sanctuary cities,’ but those are corrupt and ungovernable cities of the world. The only true Sanctuary City is that City of God which shall descend as a Bride prepared for her husband at the last trump. Sanctuary cities of the world are for law-breakers and violators of the peace; but the Sanctuary City of God (New Jerusalem) is a haven for the righteous. We are not natural sons and daughters of the Father, but sons and daughters by means of adoption. We are ‘naturalized’ citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Are your papers in order, reader, to be admitted to that City of God? ⁷ *And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,* ⁸ *And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.* ⁹ *And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.* ¹⁰ *And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever..* (Revelation 20:7-10) Imagine! This is just BEFORE the White Throne Judgment. The Adversary (Prosecuting Attorney) will not be present to accuse the people of God when they go before that Throne – only our Advocate (Defense Attorney) the Lord Jesus Christ will stand beside us at that moment! The devil will have already been cast into the Lake of Fire!