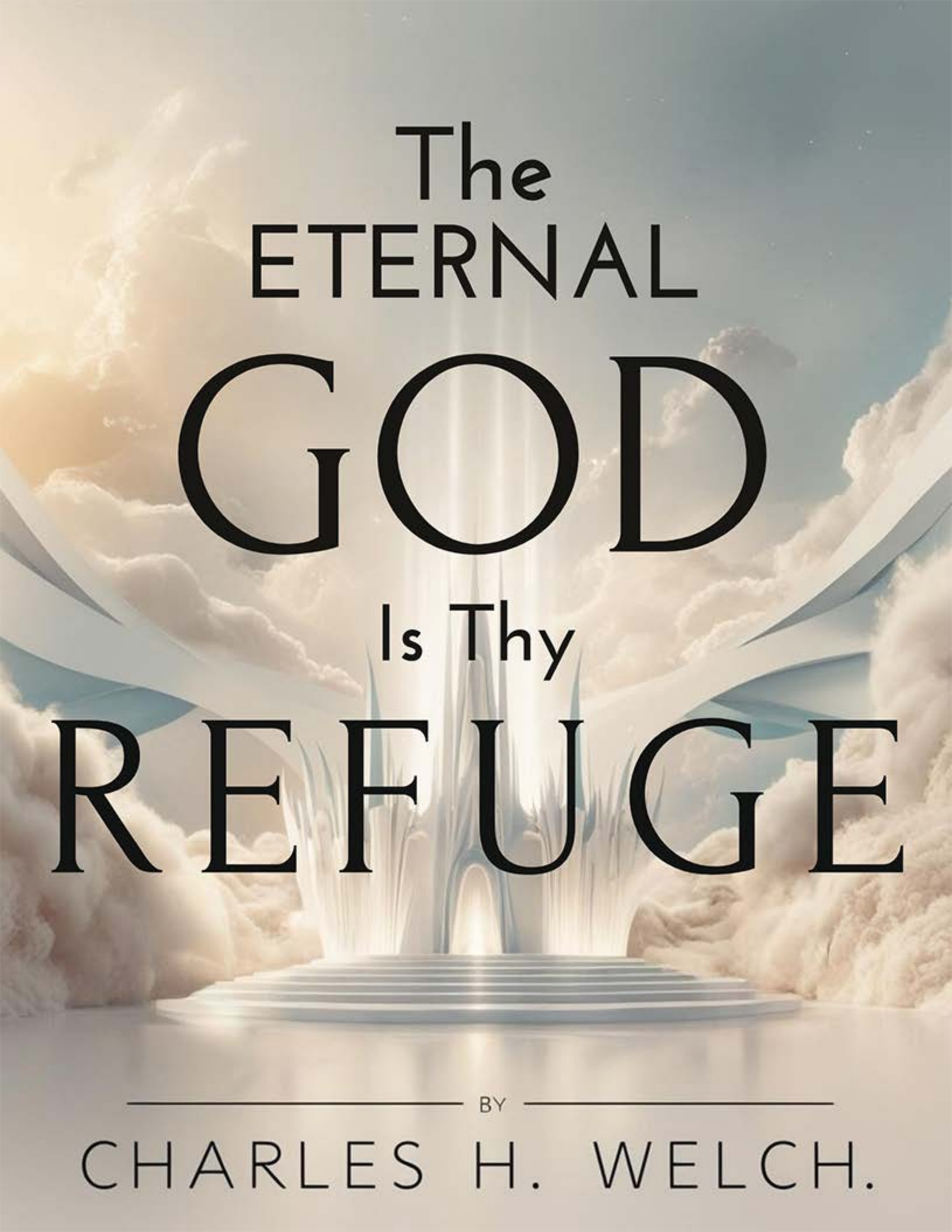

The
ETERNAL
GOD
Is Thy
REFUGE
BY
CHARLES H. WELCH.

The ETERNAL GOD is thy REFUGE

STUDIES DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE THE
BELIEVER IN TIMES OF STRESS

Charles H. Welch

THE

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PUBLISHING

TRUST



The Eternal God is thy Refuge

by

Charles H. Welch

Author of
Dispensational Truth
The Apostle of the Reconciliation
The Testimony of the Lord's Prisoner
Parable, Miracle and Sign
The Form of Sound Words
Just and the Justifier
In Heavenly Places
etc., etc., etc.

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PREFACE

It should be noted that these articles were written during the first eighteen months of the Second World War (1939/45). Raids by enemy aircraft on Britain were anticipated and later became intense.

Air raid shelters provided some measure of protection from physical harm, but what refuge was there for the weary heart and mind? It was under those conditions of stress that Charles Welch thought it might be helpful to encourage the believers, by pointing away to the only true Refuge that they had - the Eternal God. Indeed, these articles still provide comfort and assurance for us today, and for the future.

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1.

The particular bearing of the word ‘eternal’.

At the present time this nation continues in a state of war. We recognize, of course, that both ‘war’ and ‘peace’, while the world rejects the Son of God, can be but relative terms. There was much real enmity during the days of so-called ‘peace’, and, conversely, there may be enjoyed, in the midst of conditions of war, a peace which the world can neither give nor take away. It has never been our policy to ‘meddle’ with the affairs of nations (Deut. 2:5), or the consciences of our readers, but rather to pursue a ministry which belongs to a sphere entirely removed from the things of earth, leaving its readers with the Word as the sole arbiter for all their actions. Nevertheless it is obviously true that we may learn from the things around us, and there are still occasions when the rebuke may be merited that the children of this generation are wiser than the children of light. Foreseeing the possibilities of conflict, the Government provided, among other things, refuges for the protection of the people, and it is this fact that provides the theme of our present meditations. God also has foreseen and provided a refuge, and He Himself is set forth in the Word in this capacity. At other times, we should have felt called upon to spare no pains in acquainting the reader with structural analysis and other exegetical features, but as this booklet is intended to minister to the ‘present necessity’, we shall in this case approach our subject more directly. The refuge

was, so to speak, intended for immediate use, not to be taken to pieces and examined. The character of these short meditations will, therefore, differ somewhat from that of many of our other studies.

‘The eternal God is thy Refuge’ (Deut. 33:27).

This is the covering title of the studies, and takes us to the fountainhead of all consolation, comfort and protection.

Moses must have had a reason for using the adjective ‘eternal’ here. He could have said, with the Psalmist, ‘God is our refuge’, or ‘The God of Jacob is our refuge’, but he obviously intends to direct our attention, not only to God, but to some element in His character that is of particular relevance in connection with the need for a shelter, and its provision. The word ‘eternal’ represents at least four different ideas in the Scriptures, and we must therefore acquaint ourselves with the facts.

Qedem, ‘eternal’, means ‘to precede, to go before’, and so at times conveys the thought of ‘anticipating’ something before it happens, as may be seen in Jonah 4:2, which Gesenius translates: ‘Thus I *anticipated* (the danger which threatens me) by fleeing to Tarshish’.

‘Of old’ is also a frequent translation, and the words of Habakkuk 1:12 : ‘Art Thou not from everlasting?’ give a similar thought. The reader should not only remember that the ‘eternal’ God is ‘from of old’, for this of itself would not necessarily prove that He would be a refuge, but also that the word carries with it the idea of ‘being beforehand with anything’, ‘anticipating the demand’ and providing for it.

As with the word ‘eternal’, so with the word ‘refuge’, it represents a number of ideas. In Deuteronomy 33:27, the word is *meonah*, from a root meaning ‘to dwell’. This refuge is, therefore, a dwelling place. The same word is used for the ‘dwelling place’ of God Himself (Psa. 76:2), and for the ‘dens’ of wild beasts (Psa. 104:22). In either case, the meaning is the same. It is a place that provides protection, and where one may feel secure.

The refuge provided for the people of God is not to be conceived of in terms of concrete or steel, for immediately following the opening statement of Deuteronomy 33:27 we read: ‘And underneath are the everlasting arms’.

In our own language the word ‘arms’ may have two different meanings, but there is no ambiguity in Deuteronomy 33:27. The ‘everlasting arms’ refer, not to armaments but to the arms of the Lord, once ‘stretched out’ to accomplish the deliverance of Israel (Deut. 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:29; 11:2; 26:8), and now stretched out in loving support, so that the weary child of God, forgetting all alarms, thinking not of unkindly steel or rough concrete, sinks into peaceful and secure rest in the arms of the God and *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ. ‘The God Who is beforehand is thy refuge’.

2.

‘God is our Refuge and Strength’ (Psa. 46:1).

After having considered the testimony of Moses, which provides the title for this booklet, we turn almost instinctively to the Psalms. There have, of course, been great doctrinal and

dispensational changes since their immortal phrases were sung and penned, but human experience and need, and Divine mercy and provision remain unchanged. Let us turn, then, to Psalm 46 :

‘ God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present help in trouble’ (Psa. 46:1).

‘ The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our Refuge’ (Psa. 46:7, 11).

The land and people of Israel were not strangers to war, and this Psalm probably refers to the siege under Sennacherib. It does not celebrate ‘a victorious campaign, but a successful defence’ (*The Companion Bible*).

‘ In the whole of Israel’s history, there is *only one event*, of which we can here think, the destruction of Sennacherib’s army before the gates of Jerusalem Isa. 37:36 ... after the exodus from Egypt, there was no occasion more appropriate than this for bringing vividly out the leading idea in this Psalm’ (*Hengstenberg*).

The blessed refrain, ‘God ... is with us’, is but an echo of the Immanuel (‘God with us’) that we find in Isaiah 8.10; and just as Hezekiah prayed that through the deliverance of Jerusalem the kingdoms of the earth ‘may know that Thou art the LORD, even Thou only’ (Isa. 37:20), so in this Psalm we read: ‘Know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth’ (Psa. 46:10).

We note first of all in this Psalm that the exultant reference to God as Refuge comes three times - in verse 1, verse 7, and in verse 11. Further, it should be noted that the reference to the earth being ‘removed’ and the waters ‘roaring’ in verses 2 and 3

corresponds with the ‘rage’ of the heathen and the ‘moving’ of the kingdoms in verse 6, where the same two words are found in the original. The ‘Selah’ between verses 3 and 4 draws attention to the contrast between the roaring waters without, and the gentle flow within of the river that supplied, as from a secret source, the needs of Zion.

Coming back to the thought of the Refuge in this Psalm, we note next that the Psalmist has been inspired to use two words to describe this refuge, neither of them being the same as that found in Deuteronomy 33:27. The word used in verse 1: ‘God is our refuge’, carries with it the idea of something one can ‘trust’, as will be seen by its usage in Psalm 91:4, ‘Under His wings shalt thou *trust*’. It is probably derived from a word which means ‘to make haste’ or ‘flee’ (Psa. 40:13), and suggests that such a refuge is one to which one would flee for safety (compare Heb. 6:18). The second word is found in Psalm 46:7 and 11 and means a ‘high tower’. The idea of safety is evidently associated with this, for we read in Proverbs 18:10 : ‘The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe’.

To sum up, then, we may say that God Himself is set before us as our Refuge in a threefold light. He is a ‘dwelling’ - prepared beforehand by God Who anticipates all eventualities (Deut. 33:27). He is also a ‘trustworthy’ refuge (Psa. 46:1), and a high and exalted place of safety (Psa. 46:7,11). This is a word in season for us all.

3.

‘A very present help in trouble’ (Psa. 46:1).

Most readers could provide examples from their own personal experience of the attitude so often adopted by people of ‘letting things slide’. While no danger seems imminent these people give the superficial appearance of an enviable *sang froid*, but in many cases these are the very people who show the greatest evidence of fear when the crisis breaks. One can find many examples today which illustrate the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. And so we come to another blessed aspect of the teaching of Scripture concerning our ‘refuge’.

‘God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble’ (Psa. 46:1).

However fully the Government may have provided for the people, all such provision is rendered useless if it is not available when wanted. Steel shelters, guaranteed to withstand concussion, to protect from flying splinters, and to resist falling masonry, are so much mockery in a day of calamity, *if they have never been erected*. Respirators, proved by test to provide adequate protection against poison gas, are so much lumber *if they are not at hand when wanted*. And so we read that God is not only our refuge, but He is ‘a *very present* help in trouble’ (Psa. 46:1). There is no actual reference here to the ‘presence’ of God, although, of course, it is implied. This majestic A.V. translation was not altered in the R.V. advisedly, but the reader should know that the words translated ‘A very present help’ are literally ‘A much *found* help’. This same word, when used of the wicked in Psalm 37:36, is translated ‘could not be found’.

Let us consider next one or two passages of Scripture that will strengthen our faith in this ‘very present’ aspect of God’s provision.

‘He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep’ (Psa. 121:4).

Every human life, without exception, is an alternation of waking and sleeping, and there is bound to come a time when sleep will rob even the most vigilant and conscientious guard of all power to carry out his duty. There is, however, more than this in Psalm 121:4. It is not merely for the sake of the poetry of the passage that the Psalmist uses the two expressions ‘slumber’ and ‘sleep’. The two words have not quite the same meaning. ‘To sleep’ (Heb. *yashen*) means ‘to fall asleep’ involuntarily, as when a deep sleep fell upon Adam (Gen. 2:21), or when man ‘sleeps the sleep of death’ (Psa. 13:3). ‘To slumber’ (Heb. *num*), on the other hand, refers more to ‘drowsiness’, something that might be shaken off and overcome. In Proverbs we read that ‘*drowsiness* shall clothe a man with rags’ (Prov. 23:21), and Nahum’s charge against the rulers of Nineveh is expressed in the words: ‘Thy shepherds *slumber*’ (Nah. 3:18). Of false shepherds of Israel, we read in Isaiah: ‘His watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, *loving to slumber*’ (Isa. 56:10).

The Lord neither ‘slumbers’ through lack of interest, nor ‘sleeps’ because of frailty. He is indeed a *very present* help in trouble.

‘The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good’ (Prov. 15:3).

However watchful and wakeful a human sentinel may be, his eyes cannot possibly be ‘in every place’. No such limitations, however, are to be found in the Lord as our great Refuge. He will ever be ‘a very present help in trouble’, for He is ‘ever present’. ‘Whither shall I flee from Thy presence?’ asked the Psalmist, and we know the answer. ‘Whether he ascend to heaven, or descend to hell, there will He still be found’.

Moreover, the most watchful and vigilant of human guards is baffled by the fall of darkness, but this is not so with the Lord, for we read in Psalm 139: ‘The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee’ (Psa. 139:12).

Here, then, is ground for assurance, quiet confidence and peace. Our Refuge is God Himself, and this being so, it must necessarily partake of His glorious attributes. He is eternal, He is almighty, He is ever-present, and we therefore have His encompassing protection by night and by day, in darkness and in light, unceasing, unwearied, and unfailing.

4.

‘The God of Jacob is our refuge’ (Psa. 46:7,11).

We have learned from the Scriptures that :

(1) ‘The eternal God is our refuge’;
(2) ‘God is our refuge and strength’, and we now add
(3) ‘The God of Jacob is our refuge’.

The God of Israel and the God of Jacob are, of course, the same Person, but the two titles present two different aspects of truth. Jacob was frail, erring and sinful, the man who lied and deceived. Israel, on the other hand, was a princely title. And yet, though the name Jacob is associated with weakness and need, it is 'the God of Jacob', and not 'the God of Israel', Who is the Refuge of Psalm 46. This title - 'The God of Jacob' - is very much like the N.T. 'God of all grace', for it was grace indeed that chose and forgave and blessed Jacob.

This leads us to another truth. We read once or twice the title, 'The God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel', but the usual title is 'The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'. This is God's great covenant name. The Church of the One Body, of course, is not blessed under the terms of this covenant, but rather in accordance with His purpose and grace, that chose every member in Christ 'before the foundation of the world'. Nevertheless it is certainly true that if 'Jacob' could find his refuge in God, so may those who, though 'aliens' and 'strangers', are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

The fact that underlies the title we are considering is well expressed in Psalm 135:4 : 'The LORD hath chosen *Jacob* unto Himself, and Israel for His peculiar treasure'. The opening verses of Psalm 20 are also relevant :

> ' The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; *The name of the God of Jacob* defend thee; send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion' (Psa. 20:1, 2).

The title 'The God of Jacob' must not be thought of, however, as purely defensive in character, for in Psa. 76:6 we read: 'At

Thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep'.

Returning to Psalm 46, we note that in verses 7 and 11 there is a twofold title given to the Lord: 'The LORD of hosts is *with us*; the God of Jacob is our refuge'.

He Who is the God of grace, is also Supreme Ruler of all the hosts of heaven and earth, and it is this God Who is our refuge and Who is 'with us'.

' When thou passest through the waters, I will be *with thee*' (Isa. 43:2).
' I will he *with him* in trouble' (Psa. 91:15).
' He will be *with thee*, He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee' (Deut. 31:8).

This emphasis upon the nearness of the Lord which we have already seen in verse 1 of Psalm 46 ('A very present help in trouble'), and in verses 7 and 11 ('The LORD of hosts is with us') is found again in verse 5: 'God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early'.

'With us' ... 'In the midst' ... 'Very present', truly 'the eternal God is our refuge'.

5.

'Only' and 'at all times' (Psa. 62).

Having seen something of Psalm 46, we pass on now to other passages, so that the reader may be able to see how all-embracive is our divinely provided Refuge and Defence.

In Psalm 62:7 and 8 we read :

‘ In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us’.

Six times over in this Psalm does the particle *ak* occur - translated ‘truly’ in verse 1, ‘surely’ in verse 9, and ‘only’ in verses 2,4,5, and 6. We have already learned that ‘God is our Refuge’, and we now learn that He *only* is our Refuge.

Using Young’s literal translation, we find the following occurrences of the word in Psalm 62 :

Verse 1 . . . ONLY. - Toward God is my soul silent, From Him is my salvation.
Verse 2 . . . ONLY. - He is my rock and my salvation, My tower, I am not much moved.
Verse 5 . . . ONLY. - For God, be silent, O my soul, For from Him is my hope.
Verse 6 . . . ONLY. - He is my rock and my salvation, My tower, I am not moved.

In contrast to the Rock and the High Tower provided by God, man is likened, in verse 3, to a ‘bowing wall and a tottering fence’. And in verse 9 we read :

‘ ONLY. - Vanity are the low, a lie the high’.

This is followed, in verse 10, by the words :

‘ Trust not in oppression ... set not your heart upon wealth when it increaseth’.

We find, too, a progression in confidence as the Psalm proceeds, for in verse 2 we read :

‘ He only is my rock and my salvation: He is my defence; *I shall not be greatly moved*’.

In verse 6, however, his confidence his grown. He has compared the ‘bowing wall and tottering fence’, and the vain attempt of his enemy to cast him down; and he can now say :

‘ He only is my rock and my salvation: He is my defence; *I shall not be moved*’ (verse 6).

Here we have true boasting, namely, boasting in the Lord, for he who says ‘I shall not be moved’ without full trust in the Lord may be self-deceived. With true humility the Psalmist says at first: ‘I shall not be *greatly* moved’, suggesting a consciousness of human frailty as well as a confidence in Divine power.

Another passage of a similar kind is found in Psalm 46.

‘ God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved’ (Psa. 46:5).

In another Psalm, David attributes this blessing to mercy:

‘ For the king trusteth in the LORD, and through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved’ (Psa. 21:7).

The same word in the original is rendered ‘to slip’ and ‘to slide’ :

‘ Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps *slip* not’ (Psa. 17:5).
‘ Their foot shall *slide* in due time’ (Deut. 32:35).

Coming back to Psalm 62, we find in the second reference to God as the Refuge of His people, that He is not only a Refuge and Defence from enemies *without*, but also a Refuge from anxiety *within* :

‘ Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us’ (Psa. 62:8).

Or, as the writer of the hymn puts it :

‘ How oft in the conflict, when pressed by the foe,
I have fled to my Refuge and breathed out my woe;
How often when trials like sea billows roll,
Have I hidden in Thee, O Thou Rock of my soul’.

And so we find that God is indeed our Refuge, whether from the upheavals of nature (Psa. 46:2, 3), or from conflict among nations (Psa. 46:6), or from those who would seek to cast us down (Psa. 62:4), or from the fears and troubles of our own hearts (Psa. 62:8).

‘ Trust in Him AT ALL TIMES’.
‘ HE ONLY is my Rock and my Salvation’.

‘Only’ - and ‘at all times’. What an all-embracive exclusiveness!

6.

Experimental entry into eternal truth (Psalms 90 and 91).

When we think of God as a refuge for His people, we instinctively, as we have already said, turn to Psalm 46. There is, however, another Psalm that is almost equally relevant, and that is Psalm 91.

It would be beside the point in this booklet to consider at any length the historical setting of the passages that speak of God as our refuge, but we cannot refrain from drawing attention to the following points.

The Psalms are divided into five books, each book ending with the phrase, ‘Amen and Amen’. Psalm 90 commences the fourth

book, which corresponds with Numbers, the book of the wilderness. This Psalm, which has been called 'The funeral hymn of the world', is entitled: 'A Prayer of Moses the man of God', and deals with the sojourn of Israel during the forty years' wandering in the wilderness. The following Psalm (91) refers to the children that Israel said had been brought out of Egypt to die in the wilderness. The covering text for the two related Psalms might well be such a passage as Numbers 14:27-34:

> ' How long shall I bear with this evil congregation? ... as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness ... from twenty years old and upward, ... Doubtless ye shall not come into the land ... ye shall bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know My breach of promise'.

The reader should compare this passage with the following verses in Psalm 90 :

- ' Return' (verse 13).
- ' We are consumed by Thine anger' (verse 7).
- ' The days of our years are threescore years and ten' (verse 10).

In regard to Numbers 14:31-33, viz. :

> ' But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. ... Your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, ... until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness'.

the following should be compared :

> ' Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee' (Psa. 91:5-7).

The first of these Psalms opens with the glorious words :

‘ LORD, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God’ (Psa. 90:1,2).

This is a great, unalterable doctrinal fact. It extends beyond the possibilities of human experience, for it goes back to the beginning of creation, and concerns the very Being of God. Doctrine is essential, for without it we cannot build or grow, but it is one thing to subscribe to the ‘doctrine’ of Psalm 90 - the children who fell in the wilderness probably believed its truth - and quite another to enter into the truth experimentally. It is this kind of difference that we find when we compare the opening of Psalm 90 with Psalm 91. The latter does not take us back to a time before the creation, but deals with the immediate present :

‘ He that *dwelleth* in the secret place of the Most High shall *abide* under the shadow of the Almighty. I will *say* of the LORD, He is *my* refuge and *my* fortress: *my* God; in Him will I *trust*’ (Psa. 91:1,2).

‘Dwell’, ‘abide’, ‘say’, ‘my’, ‘trust’. This is clearly *experimental* truth.

The same note is again evident in verses 9 and 10.

‘ Because thou hast made the LORD, Which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling (tent)’ (Psa. 91:9,10).

The change of person may be accounted for if we regard Moses as addressing Joshua in the first place, and through him all who ‘wholly follow’ the Lord (Deut. 1:36).

Here then is the Refuge provided for all who ‘trust’, for all who ‘abide’, for all who ‘dwell’. Such are ‘covered with His feathers’, and protected by His stretched-out ‘wings’.

The words ‘abide under the *shadow* of the Almighty’ may be compared with Genesis 19:8, with its allusion to the inviolable character of Eastern hospitality: ‘Therefore came they under the *shadow* of my roof’.

We also find that this dwelling-place is described as ‘the secret place of the Most High’. Let us rejoice in this Refuge, to which we may flee, a ‘dwelling-place’ and a ‘shadow’ where we may abide.

7.

‘When other helpers fail, and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, Lord, abide with me’.

Among the experiences that left their mark upon the soul of David, was that which he endured in connection with the cave of Adullam. In Psalm 142 (which is the last of eight Psalms that have reference to this experience) David, in spite of his anointing and his faith, is shown to have been sometimes brought so low that despair entered his heart.

‘ And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul’ (1 Sam. 27:1).

He had been hunted as a partridge in the mountains, and he knew what it was to be overwhelmed. Looking back upon these times, David said :

‘ When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then Thou knewest my path’ (Psa. 142:3).

Possibly, at the time, David entertained doubts as to the Lord’s watchful care, but looking back afterwards he gladly acknowledges that in his darkest moments (for the word ‘overwhelmed’ literally means ‘was darkened’), the Lord knew his path.

‘Refuge failed me’, said David as he remembered his isolation and loneliness.

‘ I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul’ (Psa. 142:4).

‘*No man ... refuge failed ... no man cared*’. - The word ‘refuge’ David uses here to indicate his plight, is the Hebrew *manos*, ‘somewhere to flee to’, ‘escape’ (Job 11:20); ‘way to flee’ (Jer. 25:35); ‘flight’ (Amos 2:14). There is a peculiar element of bitterness in the choice of this word *manos*, for the verb of which it is a derivative is used in many passages which speak of ‘fleeing’ to one of the Cities of Refuge (Num. 35:11,25; Deut. 4:42, etc.). But David was cut off from all earthly provision for he had not even a City of Refuge to which he could flee, and added to this, ‘no man cared’! In such circumstances there is nothing left but God, and, blessed be His name, David wrote this Psalm to tell us that He ‘knew’, He ‘cared’, He provided a ‘refuge’.

‘ I cried unto Thee, O LORD; I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living’ (Psa. 142:5).

Here David used another word for ‘refuge’ - the one already found in Psalms 91:2 and 46:1. Not only did the Lord provide a

refuge when all help failed, but David adds that the Lord was his portion in the land of the living. *Cheleq*, ‘portion’, has reference to ‘dividing spoil’, or ‘dividing an inheritance’. David used the word when he said :

‘ As his *part* is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his *part* be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall *part* alike’ (1 Sam. 30:24).

He had also heard the words of the men of Belial who had cried :

‘ We have no *part* in David’ (2 Sam. 20:1).
‘ What *portion* have we in David?’ (1 Kings 12:16).

No man ‘knew’; no man ‘cared’; refuge had perished, but God remained, and while God abides, He is the refuge of His people, and not only so, but He is their portion, He takes the place of the *victor’s spoil*, and He supplies the place of the *lost inheritance*. David could, then, boast in his sorest need and direst distress, that he was ‘more than conqueror’ through the Lord. Let us beware of the ‘refuge of lies’ (Isa. 28:15); let us not be cast down when we look to the right hand and find ‘no man’; let us cast all our care upon Him ‘for He careth for us’.

8.

The ‘secret place’ and the ‘shadow’.

‘ He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty’ (Psa. 91:1).

It is evident that we have here in this first verse the echo of thought which is so characteristic of Hebrew poetry. Let us seek a fuller understanding of these wonderful words.

There is a much greater difference between the Hebrew words for ‘dwell’ and ‘abide’ than our English version would indicate. The word ‘dwelling’ implies a settled place of habitation, as, for instance, in Psalm 23:6 : ‘I will *dwell* in the house of the LORD for ever’. Isaiah, also, uses the word as he looks forward to the future reign of peace: ‘They shall build houses, and inhabit them’ (Isa. 65:21). ‘To abide’, on the other hand, means ‘to lodge for a night’ (Gen. 32:21) or ‘to tarry a night’ (Judg. 19:10). The transitoriness of the word is evident in Psalm 30:5 where we read that ‘weeping *may endure* for a night, but joy cometh in the morning’. The believer *dwells*, as in a permanent habitation, ‘in the secret place of the most High’; he *lodges* as though tarrying for a night ‘under the shadow of the Almighty’. The first word speaks of the believer’s eternal security, the second of the protection afforded day by day as he journeys homeward through the wilderness.

‘The secret place’.

Jonathan advises David in 1 Samuel 19:2 to ‘abide in a secret place’ because of Saul’s anger, while Job speaks of Behemoth as lying ‘in the *covert* of the reeds and fens’ (Job 40:21). Isaiah, also, uses the word when he speaks of Moab as ‘a *covert* ... from the face of the spoiler’ (Isa. 16:4), while in chapter 32 he speaks of another ‘*covert*’, infinitely greater than Moab :

> ‘ Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a *covert* from the tempest’ (Isa. 32:1,2).

When the Lord came forth to deliver David as he was fleeing from the hand of Saul, we read that ‘He made darkness His

secret place' (Psa. 18:11). And again, in Psa. 27: 'In the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the *secret* of His tabernacle shall He hide me' (Psa. 27:5).

Again, in Psalm 139:15,16, we read :

> ' My substance was not hid from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them'.

The 'secret place' here is somewhat analogous with the believer's position in the Church of 'the Mystery', as 'chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world'.

For every member of the One Body there is food for reflection in Psalm 91:1. We, too, can go back, as did Moses, to the Lord our dwelling-place, 'before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world'. We can rest in the unalterable truth of our election before the foundation of the world, and we can also know what it is day by day to tarry, as it were, 'under the shadow of the Almighty'. Not only is He our *eternal* home, but His presence is also our 'lodging-place' throughout life's pilgrimage.

'The shadow of the Almighty'.

How insubstantial a thing is a shadow, and yet the very shadow of the Almighty provides full protection for the weary pilgrim. The following are four ways in which this figure of a protecting shadow is used :

(1) The *shadow* of the outstretched wings -'Hide me under the *shadow* of Thy wings' (Psa. 17:8).

(2) The *shadow* of a cloud from the heat (Isa. 25:4,5).
(3) 'The *shadow* of a great rock in a weary land' (Isa. 32:2).
(4) The *shadow* of the LORD's hand (Isa. 51:16).

Those of us who know our calling and election, and something of the 'secret place of the Most High', need nothing more during life's pilgrimage, than the shadow of His hand, to preserve us until travelling days are done.

9.

'The name of the God of Jacob defend thee' (Psa. 20:1) .

The word 'defence' is one that has been much in use in recent times, and assurances have been given from time to time as to the adequacy, the readiness, and the quality of the nation's defences. So too, in Scripture, we find that not only is God the Refuge of His people, but He is also their Defence.

In Psalm 7:10, where we read: 'My defence is of God', the Psalmist uses the word *magen*, 'a shield', but in most passages in the Psalms the word is *misgab*, 'a high place'. It is to this that the Psalmist refers when he says: 'The name of the God of Jacob *defend* thee' (Psa. 20:1). The verb here, which supplies us with the noun *misgab*, is *sagab*, and this must be included in our study if we are to appreciate the nature of the 'defence' that we may find in the Lord.

The primary meaning of *sagab* is 'to lift up', then 'to be exalted', 'to be placed on high', 'to be lofty'. In Psalm 148:13 we read: 'His name is excellent' (or more literally, 'His name is most high') while in Isaiah 2:11 *sagab* is used of the Lord, Who

shall ‘alone be exalted in that day’. Other occurrences are in Psalms 139 and 69, and, more familiarly, in Psalm 91 :

‘ It is *high*, I cannot attain unto it’ (Psa. 139:6).
‘ O God, set me up on *high*’ (Psa. 69:29).
‘ I will set him on *high*, because He hath known My Name’ (Psa. 91:14).

The word *misgab*, which actually appears in the A.V. of Jeremiah 48:1, is used by David in 2 Samuel 22:3, when he says of the Lord :

‘ The God of my rock; in Him will I trust: He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, *my high tower*, and my refuge, my Saviour’.

It was this word, translated ‘refuge’, that came before us in Psalm 46:7 and 11.

Out of his experience ‘in the cave’, David wrote the Psalm we considered in the previous section. Out of another experience belonging to the same period he wrote Psalm 59, the superscription of which reads, referring to 1 Samuel 19:11 : ‘When Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him’. The Psalm opens with the words: ‘Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: *defend* me from them that rise up against me’.

Psalm 59 is divided into two parts by the references to God as David’s defence. If, instead of the somewhat ambiguous rendering: ‘Because of His strength will I wait on Thee’ (verse 9), we read ‘O my strength’ as in verse 17; the two verses can then be read together :

‘ O my strength, I will wait upon Thee, for God is my defence’ (9).
‘ O my strength, unto Thee will I sing, for God is my defence, and the God of my mercy’ (17).

Note the advance in verse 17 over verse 9. In verse 9 David says, ‘I will wait’, but at the close he says, ‘I will sing’ (verse 17). Further, whilst in verse 10 he says, ‘The God of my mercy shall prevent me’, in verse 17 he adds to the words, ‘for God is my defence’, the words ‘and my mercy’.

God was not only David’s ‘strength’ but his ‘mercy’. He (David) was ‘set on high’, i.e. lifted above the conspiracy of his foes.

Well may we sing :

‘ O my Redeemer, what a Friend Thou art to me,
O what a Refuge I have found in Thee’.

Or, in perhaps better known words :

‘ All my trust on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring.
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing’.

10.

‘We will make mention of the name of the LORD our God’ (Psa. 20:7 R.V.).

When dealing with the great promise that the Lord will be the ‘defence’ of His people, we quoted more than one passage in which this ‘defence’ and ‘refuge’ was associated with His ‘*Name*’. *The Companion Bible* draws attention to three occurrences of the ‘Name’ in Psalm 20, and refers to them as follows :

‘The DEFENDING Name’ (verse 1).
‘The DISPLAYED Name’ (verse 5).
‘The DELIVERING Name’ (verse 7).

These references to the ‘Name’ become more significant if viewed in the light of the custom associated with the Kinsman-Redeemer. A man in trouble called upon the ‘name’ of his kinsman, and ranged himself under his banner for protection. It is this that the Psalmist is thinking of in these references. He first prays in verse 1 :

‘ The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee’.

Then, in verse 5, he says :

‘ We will rejoice in Thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners’.

‘ His banner over me’, said the Shulamite, ‘was love’ (Song of Sol. 2:4).

So here, ‘His banner over me’, the Psalmist might have said, ‘is my protection’.

And, in verse 7, David contrasts the vain help of man with the gracious deliverance of the Lord :

‘ Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God’.

The word *zakar*, ‘remember’, is also translated ‘to make mention’, as in Genesis 40:14 : ‘Make mention of me unto Pharaoh’. The same word occurs in Isaiah 12 :

‘ In that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon HIS NAME, declare His doings among the people, *make mention* that HIS NAME is exalted’ (Isa. 12:4).

In Psalm 9, in connection with the Lord as a Refuge, we read :

‘ The LORD also will he a *refuge* for the oppressed, a *refuge* in times of trouble. And they that know Thy *Name* will put their trust in Thee: For Thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee’ (Psa. 9:9,10).

Again, at the close of the Psalm that opens with the words: ‘If it had not been the LORD Who was on our side ...’ David says: ‘Our help is in the *Name* of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth’ (Psa. 124).

Let us then remember that ‘Name which is above every name’, and rejoice to know that the eternal God is our Refuge.

11.

‘Fear not, I am thy Shield’ (Gen. 15:1).

We have considered the several references in the Scriptures to God being a Refuge and a Defence, and we have learned that there is a secret place of the Most High in which we dwell, and a shadow under which we may ‘tarry for a night’. Associated with this ‘secret place’ is also a Shield, as for example :

‘ Thou art my hiding place (*sether*, "secret place") and my *shield*: I hope in Thy Word’ (Psa. 119:114).

To Abram, after the battle with the kings was over, God said: Fear not, Abram; I am thy *shield*’ (Gen. 15:1). To Israel, the prophet Moses said, in his last blessing: ‘Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, *the shield* of thy help’ (Deut. 33:29). David confessed :

‘ He is my *shield*’ (2 Sam. 22:3).

‘ As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried: He is a buckler (*shield*) to all them that trust in Him’ (2 Sam. 22:31).

‘ Thou hast also given me the *shield* of thy salvation: and thy gentleness hath made me great’ (2 Sam. 22:36).

In days when trouble increased, when many rose up against David, when many said that there was no help for him in God, when he was suffering the agony of Absalom’s treachery, he could still say: ‘But Thou, O LORD, art a *shield* for me: my glory, and the lifter up of mine head’ (Psa. 3:3). Again, on another occasion, when David felt that if the Lord should be silent to him he would ‘become like them that go down into the pit’, he said: ‘Blessed be the LORD, because He hath heard the voice of my supplications. The LORD is my strength and my *shield:* my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped’ (Psa. 28:1,6,7). The longing soul, separated from the fellowship and worship of God’s people and God’s house, cried: ‘Behold, O God our *shield* ... the LORD God is a sun and *shield*: the LORD will give grace and glory’ (Psa. 84:9,11).

Here is a cluster of precious passages. Each is illuminative of one or more of the many phases of grace. ‘Shield and exceeding great reward’; ‘Shield and hiding place’; A shield provided by One whose ways are perfect, whose ‘condescension’ (gentleness) indeed makes great, Who is Salvation and Strength as well as Shield, Who protects when men oppose, deny or betray, and who gives both grace and glory.

David’s heart trusted, and the Psalmist added ‘I hope in Thy Word’ (Psa. 119:114).

The days in which we live differ in some ways from O.T. times, but they are comparable to those of Habakkuk, when there was no evident intervention, when there was often no apparent answer to prayer, when 'the just' indeed must 'live by his faith' (Hab. 1:1-4; 2:1-4). Even so, we still have His 'Word', our hearts can still 'trust' in Him, and we rejoice, as no other people on earth can, in His 'condescension' which has indeed made us 'great', for such a text is written large across the epistle to the Ephesians.

' O Israel, trust thou in the LORD : He is their help and their *shield*' (Psa. 115:9).

' O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD: He is their help and their *shield*' (Psa. 115:10).

' Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: He is their help and their *shield*' (Psa. 115:11).

' Above all, taking the *shield* of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked' (Eph. 6:16).

12.

'The hidden ones' (Psa. 83:3).

' They have ... consulted against Thy hidden ones' (Psa. 83:3).

' Your life is hid with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3).

It is clear from these two passages that the title 'hidden ones' is appropriate both for Israel and for the Church. To some the idea of 'hiding' may suggest cowardice, but just as it is foolhardy to expose oneself to the danger of high explosives unless the demands of humanity justify the risk, so, when facing spiritual wickedness, it is wise and right to remember that the shield, the helmet, and the breastplate are as much a part of the

commanded and provided panoply of God as is the sword of the Spirit. The reader will also remember that in Hebrews 11 there are two cases in which ‘faith’ is identified with the act of ‘hiding’ - the hiding of the infant Moses, and the hiding of the spies (Heb. 11:23,31; Exod. 2:2; Josh. 2:4).

‘Hiding’ does not necessarily indicate fear. In Psalm 27 David says :

> ‘ The LORD is my light and my salvation; *whom shall I fear*? the LORD is the strength of my life; *of whom shall I be afraid*?’ (Psa. 27:1).

And yet, in the fifth verse of this same Psalm, he says: ‘In the time of trouble He shall *hide* me in His pavilion: in the secret of His tabernacle shall He *hide* me’.

In Psalm 31, which is in some respects parallel with Psalm 27, we find David in great trouble. Nets have been spread for him, he was a reproach among his neighbours, and forgotten like a dead man out of mind. Slander and fear and adverse counsel were on every side. In such a predicament he says, in verse 5: ‘Into Thine hand I commit my spirit: Thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth’. And in verse 15 : ‘My times are in Thy hand’.

Rejoicing in the goodness of the Lord which He had ‘laid up’ (the same word as ‘hide’) for them that fear Him, the Psalmist passes on from the thought of the ‘hidden’ *goodness*, to that of the ‘hidden’ *ones*, and so he concludes:

> ‘ Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy presence from the pride of man: Thou *shalt keep them secretly* ("hide") in a pavilion from the strife of tongues’ (Psa. 31:20).

Perhaps some may object that, while David with his great faith and experience could take such a stand, such cannot be expected of the general run of believers. As an answer, the reader should notice verse 22 in which the Psalmist cries: 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Thine eyes'. Yet the Lord heard him and preserved him.

In Psalm 143:9 we read: 'Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies: I flee unto Thee to hide me'. The margin here reads: '*Heb*. hide me with Thee', while Dr. W. Kay renders the passage :

> ' To Thee have I confided (my all)' - with the footnote: 'Lit. Unto Thee have I hidden, i.e., with Thee have I deposited my cause; secretly and silently, suppressing all angry feeling against man'.

Keble's rendering is similar: 'I have hid all with Thee', while Young's literal translation reads: 'Near Thee I am covered'. It is outside our present scope and purpose to enter into questions of translation. The reader will, however, be able to see something of the implications here even though a full understanding of the passage must await fuller examination.

We have already discussed the question of 'fear' in relation to 'hiding'. There is one further passage which might well be included under this heading, viz., in Proverbs 22:3, 'A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself'. This same word, 'hide', is also found in other passages, as follows :

- ' *Hide* me under the shadow of Thy wings' (Psa. 17:8).
- ' In the secret of His tabernacle shall He *hide* me' (Psa. 27:5).
- ' *Hide* me from the secret counsel of the wicked' (Psa. 64:2).

‘ Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth ... it may be ye shall be *hid* in the day of the LORD’s anger’ (Zeph. 2:3).

To those who know the secret place of the Most High, whose life is ‘hid’ with Christ in God, whose blessings are associated with a ‘mystery’ that had been ‘hid’ since the ages, the words of Isaiah 26:20 may well prove to have a message, without, of course, in any sense robbing the passage of its *literal* fulfilment: ‘Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast’ (Isa. 26:20).

‘ Rock of Ages cleft for me,
Let me *hide* myself in Thee.

‘The eternal God is thy Refuge’.

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