

support. As pilgrims in a world of woe, with our faces set towards our heavenly home, we are in God's custody and care day by day. Thus we may say with David, 'In the shadow of your wings I will make my refuge until these calamities have passed by' (*Ps. 57: 1*). Moses also tells us that 'underneath are the everlasting arms'. Why 'underneath'? Because His 'arms' come down to the level our needs. He reaches down to us. While God is the eternal God, who *transcends* all things with infinite glory, He is also the *immanent* God whose presence, grace and power pervades all things. There is paradox here. God is 'the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity' yet the God who delights to dwell in humble, contrite hearts (*Isa. 57: 15*). In this way we may experience His gracious power. We worship Him for His great glory and wisdom yet bless Him for His great mercy and love. Faith is reaching out to One who is 'not far from each one of us' (*Acts 17: 27*).

III CHRIST IS OUR REFUGE

When Moses spoke of God in this way, he implied a wonderful prophecy. He earlier told of the coming of a great prophet like himself whom the world was to listen to (see *Deut. 18: 15; Acts 7: 37; Jn. 6: 14*). Thus in the incarnation of the eternal Son of

God, our Lord Jesus Christ was to reveal the love and grace of God the Father (*Jn. 3: 16*). The 'caring arms' of God found expression in the life, ministry and death of the Saviour of the world (*2 Cor. 5: 19*). On the cross of Calvary, God in Christ stretched out His arms to redeem us from eternal wrath and damnation. When we believe the Gospel with real repentance and true faith, we then experience the protecting and comforting power of those 'everlasting arms'. We taste the love and peace of God (see *Rom. 5: 5; Phil. 4: 7*).

Thus our Lord Jesus Christ is our refuge. Accordingly, He invites us to turn to Him: 'Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (*Matt. 11: 28*). We know from experience that life is full of difficulties, problems, frustrations, and threatening situations. Yet God has unchangeable power and grace. Unlike Moses' arms which grew weary during Israel's battle with the Amalekites (*Exod. 17: 12*), God's arms never fail. While we are not promised immunity from trial and tribulation, we have the guarantee of Christ's constant and comforting presence (see *Matt. 28: 20*). As God's dear children, chosen and predestined to everlasting life (see *Rom. 8: 29*), none can pluck us from His hands (see *Jn. 10: 28-30*). May this be

GOD OUR REFUGE

'The eternal God is your refuge,
and underneath are
the everlasting arms.'
(*Deuteronomy 33: 27*)

Introduction

The last words of a person often arouse great interest when all else is forgotten. The famous and beautiful words of our text are among the last things Moses ever spoke. He through whom God revealed the account of creation - and who wrote the first five books of the Bible - now urges God's people to place all their confidence in Him.

No doubt Moses spoke from deep experience. After all, he had endured many difficulties. His life had been threatened by Pharaoh as soon as he was born. Reared as an Egyptian, he was rejected by his fellow Israelites. Having murdered a man, he fled to the desert to save his life. After being commissioned by God to lead Israel out of their bondage, he was locked in conflict with a tyrannical Pharaoh. Burdened with the responsibilities of leadership in times of war and peace, Moses was frequently wearied by faithless and stubborn Israelites (see *Exodus* for all these details). Had God not

strengthened and upheld him, he could not have endured the cares which he felt day by day, year in, year out. These words are therefore a kind of testimony: "God has been my refuge all my life. The arms which held me up will uphold you as well - if you trust Him."

I THE NECESSITY OF REFUGE

We are all 'refugees' whether we admit it or not. Feeling the stress and strain of life is a common human experience. Everyone therefore appreciates the need for rest or refuge when we can relax in comfort and peace. Few if any would seriously contest all this. Whether we are actually refugees driven from our home in time of war or glad to get home after a busy working day, having a 'refuge' is what makes life bearable and liveable. When relationships are strained or broken, being able to find solace in a good and trusted friend makes all the difference between lonely despair and peaceful sanity.

Of course, those who find comfort in their religious faith are seen by some bold individuals as weak and inadequate people. "Religion is just a crutch!" is the defiant dismissal of seemingly self-sufficient people. Yet when such people break a leg,

they too are glad of a crutch!

But those who dismiss the comfort of God have their alternative dependencies. These include alcohol, drugs, career, fame, wealth, immoral sex and related dubious entertainments and a list of other substitutes. In short, no one is capable of living without external help of some sort. The question then becomes: does your particular crutch really work?

The point is that we are all vulnerable and weaker than we are prepared to admit. Such an observation sits comfortably with the Christian view of things, that people were meant to depend on God. We are all creatures of need. However, our situation became complicated by the advent of sin which increased our vulnerability. Tragically, we tend to replace God with crutches which collapse under our weight. The fact is that the sinful substitutes mentioned above simply don't do the job. This is the lesson of the faithless Israelites whom Moses had to lead. They constantly tended to rely on idols instead of the LORD.

Our more secular world is making the same basic mistake. What is more tragic is that people disillusioned by the emptiness of secular-

ism are turning to multi-faith religion instead of the living God of Moses and the Bible. The fact remains: we all need a refuge. The question is, where is it to be found?

II GOD IS OUR REFUGE

Moses points us to the 'eternal God' as the only reliable refuge. Unlike the dumb idols of the pagan nations, the living God is unchanging and unchangeable. Elsewhere, Moses declared that God is the believer's 'dwelling place in all generations' (*Ps. 90: 1*). Using vivid metaphor, he is saying that God is like a harbour to guard us in the storms of life. Changing the metaphor, God is like a mother bird protecting her young. Thus we find shelter beneath 'His' wings (*Ruth 2: 12*).

Using yet another image, when the heat of life becomes unbearable during illness, bereavement, fear of war and other crises, we are invited to 'dwell in the secret place of the Most High', abiding 'under the shadow of the Almighty' (*Ps. 91: 1*). We therefore may seek protection 'beneath' Him when trouble comes (*Ps. 46: 1*). While we are not immune from the knocks and shocks of life, its ups and downs, troubles and tragedies, those who trust in God are never left without comfort and