

DYING LIKE A FOOL
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All we had to do was get to the place of refuge and stay there. Instructions were given for our preservation. Really, it should have been easy. Instead we react like Adam in **Genesis 2:16-17** One command to obey, one action prohibited, and we gravitate to the forbidden like moths to a flame. Cain faced an opposite choice in **Genesis 4:6-7**. He knew he was wrong and knew the one exact thing he needed to do to fix it. He chose to rebel instead. By sins of omission or commission, the rest of Adam's race keeps repeating history. We keep die like fools, one step from safety.

There is the story of the freezing rattlesnake that talks the man into putting him inside the man's shirt. As he lays there dying, he hears the rattlesnake say, "You knew what I was when you picked me up." We knew what could happen before we actually went to the party, took the hit, provoked the fight, started the affair, and forever changed the course of our lives. We knew the law and the consequences. A playwright named Arthur Miller once wrote a gripping drama entitled, "The Death of a Salesman." For sheer tragedy, it has nothing on God's tale of the death of a fool. What is even more depressing is when we insist on starring in the title role.

Some of us know about cities of refuge. The foolish among us have been in one and left. These places of safety were established in **Numbers 35:12**. They were places where those guilty of accidental manslaughter could flee for shelter from the avenger of blood if judged not guilty by the people of the cities. If absolved of blame, the fugitive could remain and live there. If he stepped outside the city, he was still fair game for the avenger. Once the high priest currently in office died, the avenger of blood lost the right of revenge and the one in the city was free to leave and live elsewhere. Those were the rules. They were places of safety from the avenger of a foolish mistake. They were a temporary reprieve from the consequences of sin until the death of the high priest made the mercy permanent.

One of David's mighty men now enters the scene. Abner was a man like many of us, one who got in a situation that got out of control. In **2 Samuel 2:17**, a battle for succession to the throne had been fought and Abner had lost against David's men. He fled the scene and ran from his enemies, including the three sons of Zeruiah. These were Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Two were dangerous and treacherous foes, also called mighty men, but Asahel was merely fleet of foot. It was he that caught up to Abner in single minded pursuit. Abner recognized him and tried repeatedly to persuade him to back off. When the lad refused, he begged him to at least acquire some armor if he insisted on fighting. Asahel would neither protect himself nor stop chasing Abner. He was begged again to stop, for Abner feared Joab and did not want to incur his wrath. Then Abner made an innocent mistake. Trying to knock Asahel back, he jabbed him, not with the point, but the blunt end of his spear. But Abner was a mighty man and what he dreaded happened. The back end of the spear still went through the young man, killing him. Knowing Joab would avenge the death of his brother, Abner fled to safety. He knew full well his life depended on remaining inside his chosen city of refuge.

Abner then made his last mistake. Forgetting men have no power to change what God establishes as salvation, he asked his David for absolution, which his friend granted. The problem was, God had ordained safety was available only when the high priest died. Compounding his error, Abner agreed to meet privately with Joab, between the gates of the city. There he died, not quite inside the city, just a few steps from safety. Though David loved Abner, no action was taken against Joab because Abner simply knew better. He, just as we do, knew the nature of the snake. In the king's grief, he cried in **2 Samuel 3:33-34**, "Died Abner as a fool dieth? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou." David's eulogy for his friend was that he had died as a fool.

We like to think we are in control, but sin takes us farther than we ever intended to go. Most of the incarcerated are there because of one single tragic mistake that has forever redefined us. One incident we never believed would occur, though we started an activity we knew could escalate out of control. That error has forever changed the course of our lives. Do we have an avenger of blood seeking to destroy us for our mistakes? He is described in **1 Peter 5:8** as a roaring lion, seeking to devour us. We are well aware of the intentions of the one waiting for us outside the city of refuge given to us by God. In **John 10:10**, we are

warned, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.” If we know why the thief wants to enter our lives, why unlock and open the door?

Consider the incredibly foolish death of Samson. Consecrated as a Nazarite from his birth, his refuge and his supernatural strength depended on obeying the vows found in **Numbers 6:1-8**. He was well aware of these boundaries separating him to God and making him special. Repeatedly, Samson crossed these lines, touching carcasses and seeking after heathen women. The last line, the cutting of his hair, was the last he would have to cross. Too late, blinded and a slave, he died accepted his academy award for playing the part of a fool.

There is still one city of refuge, called the church of God. **1 Peter 3:20-21**, describes it as an ark like Noah’s; a refuge from coming judgment. Similarities abound between salvation through Christ and entering into Noah’s ark. The offer of deliverance from coming judgment has been preached for many years. The refuge is available to anyone who will enter the Church. Once God alone closes the door, no one else is getting in, no matter how heartbreaking their pleas. It is starting to rain, while we play just outside the door of the city. **2 Peter 3:9** promises it is not God’s will for any to perish. So He gave us an ark, commandments, cities of refuge, the Church, and Himself as the Lamb.

We must get into the city of refuge ahead of the avenger and stay there. Otherwise, we choose to die as fools!