

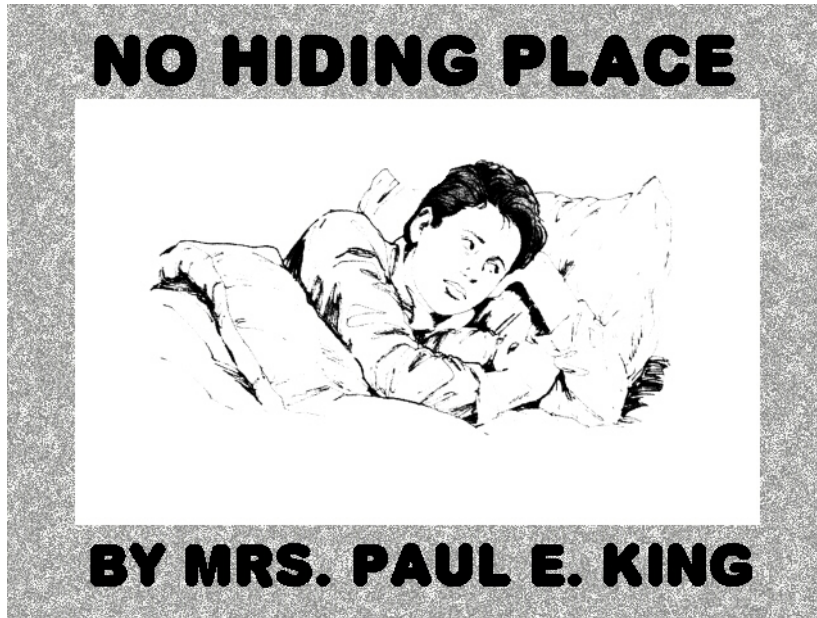
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NO HIDING PLACE
By Mrs. Paul E. King

A terrifying crash of thunder and the pouring-down rain awakened Barry. Startled, he opened his eyes, trying to figure out where he was. A flash of blinding lightening pierced the inky-black darkness, revealing for a very brief moment the overhead beams and the open ceiling. Of course. Of course, he thought, suddenly remembering that he was in one of the cottages on the campground at the district Youth camp.

All year long he had anticipated this event, counting the months, the weeks and, finally, the days until the youth camp would begin. Last year he had had the greatest fun of his whole life, he was sure, and he had hoped the story would be repeated again at the camp, now that he was here. He had met Becky and Sasha last year and felt he loved them both, not sure which one was his favorite. (Not that he dated either one, not actually, since such behavior was forbidden and prohibited.) But they had done a lot of talking and visiting around the lunch stand and while doing dishes in the kitchen and cleaning tables. And, for all his former and old protestations to his mother that doing dishes was a girl's job, he had found that his "tune" changed remarkably and amazingly after having met Becky and Sasha. He hoped his mother would never find out that he had volunteered his services. (After he learned that Becky and Sasha were among the dishwashing crew, that is.)

Barry raised up from his pillow now just as another deafening clap of thunder crashed overhead. It was followed immediately by blinding, dazzling flashes of lightening that danced frighteningly in and out of the cottage in terrible zigzag patterns and ways. What a storm! he thought, feeling his heart throbbing and pounding like a jack hammer inside his chest. His lips went dry and his spittle seemed to have turned into sticky, thick wads of cotton inside his mouth.

He was scared. Last year's preacher, a very young, new, just-getting-started fellow not much older than he, Barry, was, gave "sermonettes" that never once really gripped his heart or put a holy fear on his soul. Not the young fellow's fault, mind you; he was asked to "fill in" the day the camp began when the scheduled youth evangelist became ill and was rushed to the hospital where he had emergency surgery and was laid up for three months after.

Last year he had had a fun-filled time at the camp, Barry recalled. This year things were different. Radically so. The preacher scarcely gave him time to collect his breath from one service to the next; one sermon to the other. He preached against every known and conceivable sin; not generalizing but naming the sins! He didn't mince words, nor did he coddle; ah, no. No! He named and called out sins, one by one, and warned the listener-hearer that "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). He preached much on the rapture -- the return of Christ for His Bride, the Church redeemed, purified,

cleansed and made holy. Only those who were ready, he declared, would hear the sound of the trumpet and would rise to meet their Lord in the air.

Barry tried to push the thought out of his head. He was no pagan, that was a for-sure thing, he told himself. Neither was he an atheist; he believed there was a God; yes indeed, he did. All this preaching and talking about Jesus' coming soon, "perhaps, even, today; this very moment," well, he'd heard about it for so long as he could remember and still the Lord hadn't come.

"There'll be no hiding place for you," the evangelist had declared brokenly but positively. "If you are so unfortunate as to miss going up in the rapture, there'll be no hiding place for you to escape being compelled to take the mark of the beast in order to buy and sell. Turn ye! Turn ye!" he had pleaded, weeping as he preached. "Come to Jesus now/Get on the wedding garment. Be ready. Jesus is coming . . .!"

Barry rolled over on his cot. He tried to drown out the preacher's message and his tears. But everything tumbled back and forth across his mind like the rolling thunder above him. It nagged him; haunted him.

He turned and eased upward on his pillow, trying to probe the darkness to see if any of the other fellows in the cottage were awake. By a series of blinding flashes of lightening, he saw that he and he alone was the only one awake. This frightened him even more. Fear was never quite so fearful or terrifying when and if one had someone to whom he could talk and with whom he could communicate, he felt.

The thunder seemed to have positioned itself directly above the cottage in which he was lying. It crashed and rolled overhead with fierceness and might, shaking his cot violently and rattling the roof in a frightful manner. It was terrifying.

He slid down beneath the cover and shut his eyes, trying to block out some of the dazzling-bright flashes of lightning that darted in and out of the cottage in a fearful way. A sudden, sharp clap of thunder, accompanied by a sizzling-sounding, blinding flash of light and Barry knew the lightning had struck something somewhere nearby.

He slid deeper and farther down beneath the covers, pulling them up over his head, trying to drown out some of the thunder's noise as well as the pouring down rain. His thoughts troubled him. First there had been the accident he'd had with the mini-bike which he used to get back and forth to his part-time job. He escaped without so much even as a scratch but the mini-bike had "gone the way of all the earth."

The driver of the car that hit him was cited for reckless and drunken driving. At a time when, by all standards, he -- Barry -- should have been crushed too as was his economical bike, he was tossed lightly onto a heavy and thick strip of grass, which did him absolutely no harm whatever, not even so much as to give him a bruise. He knew why he hadn't been injured nor, even, killed. Yes, he knew. And his parents kept reminding him Who it was that "kept his life in His hand."

Another deafening crash of thunder, followed by long, ominous sounding rolls which again shook his cot, and Barry recalled the earthquake in his hometown, the first and only time he had ever experienced or felt what an earthquake was like. He had thought he was losing his mind when he was awakened less than five weeks ago, by something for which he had no explanation. He had sat up in bed, wide-eyed and wide awake, wondering what it was that had awakened him out of his sound sleep. He had thought it was an explosion of some kind; perhaps one of the huge oil tanks less than six miles away. He jumped out of bed, and then he felt it -- the earth was rocking and reeling. He dropped to the floor on his face. In fear, he heard things dropping from his chest of drawers to the floor. An earthquake! Yes, an earthquake. But . . . but . . . he wasn't in California! No! No! It shouldn't be happening in his State! California was several thousand miles away!

He remembered now how panic and a nameless fear and dread had churned his insides and boiled up within him as he recalled the words from Haggai 2:6 -- ". . . Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; "And I will shake all nations. . . ."

He recalled ever so many things from scriptures he had read as he was on his face in the bedroom that night. He had even promised the Lord, then, that he would once again begin reading the Bible as he used to do before he thought he no longer needed God's Word when he had started going around with a couple of the most popular fellows in his school. And then the

earthquake had passed and was over, and he had no intentions whatever to carry out and fulfill the promise he had made while down on the floor on his face. After all, he reasoned, a fellow wasn't responsible for what he did while under the stress of fear. And since his part of the country had not had an earthquake before, chances were that it would never again experience another.

Barry remembered now, how sound reasoning, as well as facts he had studied regarding the fault lines in the earth's surface, attested to anything but the false credence upon which he was trying to calm and assuage the fears of his depraved, backslidden heart. Also, how could one get away from the infallible, changeless Word of God? His heart seemed to have all but shouted the answer back to his stubborn and rebellious soul. And he had persisted to go on in his own way, over the prayers and the tears and the pleadings of his parents to come back to the One whose loving arms were wide open, waiting to receive him.

He rolled over on the cot, trying desperately to drown out any and all thoughts regarding God and his own lost condition. After all, he had come to camp to have a good time; a vacation time away from his parents and his part time job. He had seen Becky and Sasha again, but even they seemed different: like they were as miserable as he. Their lightness and indifference seemed to have been pulled out from beneath them just like his had been wrenched from him. And on the very first night of the camp too!

He buried his head harder into the pillow, the thunder, all the while, seeming to have established a stationary stance directly above the cottage in which he was staying. It's crashing and rolling was terrifying indeed and, try as he may, he couldn't shake off the scripture verses he knew so well from his many years of consistent and faithful Bible reading when he knew the Lord. Revelation 16:17-21, seemed to reverberate back to him with each and every clap and crash of thunder:

"And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.

"And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.

"And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the fierceness of his wrath.

"And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

"And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great."

Barry's heart thumped with fear. He knew, as surely as he knew his name, that he would have no hiding place should he be living during the great and dreadful tribulation period. Didn't the same writer, John, say that the great men, the kings of the earth; the mighty, the rich, the bondman and the free man hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

"And said to the rocks and the mountains, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

"For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:15-17).

The wind whipped through the trees; lightening flashed blindingly and ominously and, in what seemed like a ceaseless turmoil, the thunder rolled, crashed and clashed in the heavens above. Barry had the sudden fearful feeling that he was the "Jonah" -- the reason -- behind the dreadfulness of the fierce storm. His body chilled in terror. Above him, a limb broke and dropped with a loud, heavy thud on to the cottage roof. Another fell somewhere near the back of the cottage. Then another. And another.

"No hiding place. No hiding place. . . ." The message played back and forth across his brain -- his entire being -- filling him with a fear and a dread like he had never known before. He felt like he was suffocating with fear; like he couldn't breathe.

"God!" he cried, tossing the covers back and sitting up in bed. Again, "God!"

Realizing that the only covering for sin was the blood of Jesus Christ, Barry dropped beside the cot and, with deep contrition of heart, he confessed

his rebellion and his stubbornness, pleading for mercy and for forgiveness for a hiding place in Jesus. In an instant, the storm and the turmoil inside his heart was at peace and at rest: he was forgiven; saved! The joy of the Lord was now his strength and, all praise and glory to God, he found his hiding place -- beneath and in and through the blood of Calvary's Lamb.

With indescribable joy and peace in his soul, Barry crawled beneath the covers on his cot and, while the storm howled above him, he fell into a delicious sleep, covered by the Blood of Jesus.