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**Escape, Flee**

φεύγω
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φεύγω (*pheugō*), escape, flee, avoid; ἀποφεύγω (*apopheugō*), flee from, avoid; φυγή (*phygē*), flight.

CL The *pheugō* word group derives from Indo-European *bheug-* (cf. Lat. *fugere*). From the time of Homer, its most common meaning is “flee”, “take flight”, whether absolutely, or from someone or something (Homer, Plato, Herodotus, etc.). The present and imperfect tenses often express only the purpose or endeavour to get away. Hence the compounds *apopheugō*, *katapheugō*, *ekpheugō*, or *propheugō* may be added to the participle *pheugōn* in a sentence to denote the escape itself. The accusative (and occasionally the genitive) with *pheugō* specifies that which is being “shunned”, “escaped from”, or “avoided” – whether death and war (Homer), evil (Demosthenes), or the consequences of murder (Euripides). Metaphorically reins may “escape from” the hands of the charioteer. Because a person may flee his country, the articular participle refers to “the exile(s)” (Homer, Xenophon, Thucydides); and since such people may well have been banished, by a natural extension the active verb itself takes on the quasi-passive force of “be banished”, “be expelled” (Herodotus, Xenophon, Dinarchus). Similarly *phygē* comes to mean “exile”, “banishment”. In Attic Greek, both *pheugō* and *apopheugō* occur as law-terms. The *pheugōn* is the defendant, as opposed to the *diōkōn*, the prosecutor; and *pheugein graphēn* (or *dikēn*) means “to be put on trial”, while an added genitive (e.g. *phonou*, murder) specifies the charge. To escape the prosecutors (*apopheugein tous diōkontas*) therefore means “to be acquitted”.

OT In the LXX the *pheugō* word group represents eight different Heb. roots, the most important of which are *nûs* (flee, escape, depart, take flight, fly to the attack) and *bārah* (go through, flee, hasten quickly). Unlike the secular literature, the LXX does not yield examples of a legal idiom, but offers more instances of

flight in a moral context: e.g. flight from an unbearable friend (Sir. 22:22), or from sin (Sir. 21:2); flight to the Lord or to the altar (3 Ki. 2:29), or flight based on fearful ungodliness (Prov. 28:1). The Jewish background is also revealed by a pedantic translation of Heb. idiom, e.g. the large number of times the Israelites “flee to their tents”. Cf. also the stilted idiom of 2 Ki. 18:3; Job 27:22. On the whole *pheugō* is avoided when the Heb. original means something less than rapid flight: e.g. in Cant. 2:17; 4:6 the Heb. verb *nūs* is used for the “departing” shadows of night; but *pheugō* is not used. Contrast Cant. 8:14. The noun *phygē* always means “flight” or “escape”, although in Ps. 141:4 the thought is close to “refuge”. In Philo and Josephus the word-group is more restricted to the concepts of physical “flight” and “escape” than in the LXX.

NT (a) In the most literal sense, Joseph was ordered to flee to Egypt with Mary and the infant Jesus (Matt. 2:13); and the disciples when persecuted in one city were to flee to the next and continue their ministry (Matt. 10:23). Similarly there is no shame in the flight of the sheep from false shepherds (Jn. 10:5), nor in the escape from the sword accomplished by men of faith (Heb. 11:34). Indeed, the believers in Jesus’ day were commanded to flee to the mountains when Jerusalem appeared in danger (Matt. 24:16 = Lk. 21:21; cf. Matt. 24:20, the only occurrence of *phygē* in the NT). On the other hand, fear is attached to the flight of the swineherds (Mk. 5:14 par.) and to the escape of Moses (Acts 7:29); cowardice to the hirelings (Jn. 10:12); irresponsibility and unbelief to the sailors manning the boat which conveyed Paul towards Rome (Acts 27:30); and shame to the total abandonment of Christ by the disciples in the Garden (Mk. 14:50, 52 par.). Jesus himself is never said to flee, unless we accept the weaker *v.l.* of Jn. 6:15. The devil, however, will flee from men if he is resisted (Jas. 4:7).

(b) Both John the Baptist and Jesus warn men to flee from the wrath to come, from the judgment of hell, in contexts urging tangible evidence of genuine repentance (Matt. 3:7 = Lk. 3:7; Matt. 23:33). Repentance thus becomes evidence of such flight.

(c) Related to this is the epistolary exhortation to flee from moral evil. The Corinthians are told to avoid fornication (I Cor. 6:18) and idolatry (10:14); Timothy to flee youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22) and assorted vices (I Tim. 6:11), and pursue such virtues as righteousness, godliness, faith, love, etc. 2 Pet. 1:4; 2:18, 20 use *apopheugō* in the sense of “escape”, rather than “flee”, the escape being from the corruption of the world. If one successfully escapes such defilements and then returns to them, the end depravity is incomparably worse than the first entanglement.

(d) *pheugō* is used metaphorically in the majestic apocalyptic panoramas of Revelation. The woman flees to the desert (12:6). When men seek death, it flees from them (9:6). The islands flee and the mountains disappear in God’s fierce wrath (16:20); indeed, before the face of his majesty, heaven and earth flee away (20:11).

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