

A Mighty Fortress

Psalm 46

There is a world-wide perspective to the Psalm. It proclaims God's supremacy over nature (vv. 1-3), over hostile forces (vv. 4-7), and over the whole violent world (vv. 8-11). "Its robust, defiant tone suggests it was composed at a time of crisis, which makes the confession of faith doubly impressive."¹ As we are currently living during a time of global pandemic we need to see once again the universal reign of the God who is our help in time of trouble.



We know from the superscription that this Psalm was written as a song. Certainly all of the Psalms can be and are sung. But some passages of Scripture beg to be sung. Certainly this is one. In difficult times, is there a more appropriate theme of which to sing than that of God as our refuge and strength? Indeed, it was this Psalm that inspired Martin Luther to write his great hymn *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*.

"Because God is with his people, providing them with safety and strength, they need not fear any calamity that threatens to destroy them, for they may rest assured that the LORD will bring an end to all war and devastation."²

1. Trust God when the earth gives way.

Vv. 1-3

- Notice the calamitous conditions described by the Psalmist in the first three verses. The earth gives way. The mountains fall into the sea. The waters roar and the mountains tremble. In verse 6 he points out the rage of the nations and the instability of the earth's kingdoms. In verse 9 he acknowledges the violence of war.
- The Psalm opens by confessing the truth about God. The focus is on God as one who cares for and shelters his people. In this way the Psalm provides for us a pattern of seeing our circumstances in light of the character of God. This is not to diminish the reality of calamity and pain. After all, notice just how extreme are the conditions the psalmist describes! What is depicted is a global meltdown; an undoing of creation at the very foundations. The psalmist uses this extreme example no doubt as a way of underscoring the fact that God is an ever present help for his people in the very worst of times.
- In times that test us as our current circumstances do, we need not pretend as though we are immune from suffering. The promises of the prosperity preachers are false. Viruses infect the just and the unjust. God has not sealed off his people from the effects of living in a fallen world. But we err seriously if we live as though God makes little difference in the ways in which we experience those trials.

¹ Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (IVP: Downers Grove, 1973) p. 174

² Allen Ross, *The Psalms Vol. 2* (Kregel: Grand Rapids, 2013) p. 86

- The psalmist gives a three-fold description of God: Refuge, Strength, Ever Present Help. When the mountains quake the Christian may rest secure in the knowledge that God is a Refuge. When the seas roar and foam the Christian need not hide his weakness for the Lord is his Strength. And when threats of sickness and death drive us into quarantine, Christians can find comfort in their Ever Present Help.

2. Trust God when the nations rage.

Vv. 4-7

- As mentioned above, the psalm describes extreme conditions of world-wide calamity. And yet despite these tumultuous conditions the Psalmist declares that “we do not fear.” This sense of security is not justified on the basis of positive self-talk or false expectations that calamities will not occur. Rather, it is because “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” God does not lift us up out of all our troubles. He is our very present help “in” trouble. It is *within* the valley of the shadow of death that our God is with us.
- Here the description is one of nations raging. God’s people were well acquainted with the rage of nations. They had long been an object of derision; a target for slavery or destruction. The image painted here is one of the city under siege from hostile forces. Yet, in the midst of the attack “there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God” (vs. 4). Of course Jerusalem is the immediate focus of application here. But as history has proven, Jerusalem, like all cities on earth, is temporal. And yet like no other city, Jerusalem points beyond itself to the eternal reality of God’s presence with his people in the age to come. However viciously the nations may rage against God and his people in this lifetime, such circumstances are a passing breath compared to the eternal peace and joy which will be known in the new creation. So let the enemies of God prattle on. “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our Fortress” (vs. 7).

3. Trust God when the outcome seems unsure.

Vv. 8-11

- This Psalm anticipates the final consummation of the ages when those pillars of creation which seem most sure are wiped away by the chaos of the seas. These words point us toward the consummation of the ages; the judgment to come. Little wonder that there is such terror in the word pictures. What is depicted is the undoing of the created order. It is a reminder that this present age will come to an end and this present creation will be judged by God, not simply “renewed.” Jesus warned those who heard him to flee the wrath of God which was coming. Those warnings are prefigured in this psalm. Judgment is coming. But with the Lord there is rescue and safety.
- Fear not child of God for “there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved” (vv. 4-5). For you, child of God, the presence of the Almighty is one of comfort. The roaring seas become a river of gladness. The ruined nations are replaced by God’s holy and everlasting city.