

PSALMS

Chapter 46

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ²Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, ³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah* ⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. ⁵God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. ⁶The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. ⁷The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah* ⁸Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth. ⁹He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. ¹⁰“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” ¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

Ps 46† A celebration of the security of Jerusalem as the city of God (the inspiration of Martin Luther’s great hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” because Jerusalem anticipates the church as the “city of God”). Thematically this psalm is closely related to Ps 48 (see also Ps 76; 87), while Ps 47 celebrates God’s victorious reign over all the earth. It probably predates the exile. However, as a song concerning the “city of God” (v. 4), the royal city of his kingdom on earth (see Ps 48), it remained for Israel a song of hope celebrating the certain triumph of God’s kingdom. It probably was originally liturgical and sung at the temple: The citizens of Jerusalem (or the Levitical choir in their stead) apparently sang the opening stanza (vv. 1–3) and the responses (vv. 7, 11), while the Levitical leader of the liturgy probably sang the second and third stanzas (vv. 4–6, 8–10). In its structure, apart from the refrains (vv. 7, 11), the psalm is composed of three symmetrical stanzas, each containing three verses. (CSB)

The 46th psalm is a psalm of thanks, sung by the people of Israel because of the mighty deeds of God he had protected and saved the city of Jerusalem, in which was his dwelling, against all the rage and the fury of all the kings and the nations and preserved their peace against all warfare and weapons. And, in the manner of the Scriptures, shall not run dry, as opposed to the great rivers, seas, and oceans of the heathen – their kingdoms, principalities, and domains – that shall dry up and disappear.

We on the other hand, sing this psalm to praise God for being with us. He miraculously preserves his Word and Christendom against the gates of hell, against the rage of the devil, the rebellious spirits, the world, the flesh, sin, death. Our little spring of water is also a living fountain, while their puddles, pools, and ponds become foul, malodorous, and dry. (Reading thee Psalms with Luther)

Nothing in the text specifies the occasion when this was written, but the destruction of the Assyrian army of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:35) was a dramatic example of the way in which this psalm is fulfilled during the history of this world. (PBC)

This psalm could have provided comfort for God’s people at many specific crises in Israel’s history, but its scope extends far beyond any one fulfillment in history. The peace established by Christ’s return completes the fulfillment of the psalm. (PBC)

46:1–3 A triumphant confession of fearless trust in God, though the continents break up and sink beneath the resurging waters of the seas—i.e., though the creation itself may seem to become uncreated (see 104:6–9; Ge 1:9–10) and all may appear to be going down before the onslaught of the primeval deep. The described upheaval is probably imagery for great threats to Israel’s existence, especially from her enemies (see vv. 6, 8–10; 65:5–8). (CSB)

The earth and its mountains seem solid and indestructible. But these too will be dissolved. Even then, believers will be secure in the hand of God. For believers Christ’s appearance will be a cause for joy, not dread. (PBC)

Believers can remain calm even in the midst of the greatest calamities, since God is their strong fortress. His help is ever-present even to the end of the world. These verses will be fulfilled literally and completely on the last day, when the universe is destroyed by fire. (PBC)

46:1 *God is our refuge and strength* – He is first like a strong fortress into which a man may flee and be absolutely safe; He is at the same time an unfailing source of strength, enabling one to cope manfully with the dangers that assail him. (Leupold)

“Refuge” can be used of any shelter one might use for protection in a storm or in war (Is. 4:6; 25:4); but it also is used figuratively for God – he is compared to a refuge, meaning he is the one who can provide the protection from the troubles of life. Related to this noun is the verb “to take refuge” often simply translated “trust” as if finding shelter from danger (s.v. Ps. 7:1) (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

“Strength” is a more abstract term; it can refer to any kind of material strength; but it frequently refers to God to describe the enablement that he gives to the righteous. It is a description of God, but it signifies for the righteous what that strength provides. God is the source of their strength when everything around them seems to be crumbling. He is like a strong tower against the enemy (Ps. 62:7); and the strength that he gives to his people is like a strong mountain (perhaps 30:7). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

A very present help in trouble – As we experience fear or trouble, we can remember that God is identified as “very present” and a “well proved” place of protection. (TLSB)

It literally says “a help in troubles he is found to be abundantly.” In other words, in such times God has proven himself to be a help. The word “help” means that God will do for his people what they cannot do for themselves. The term in no wise demeans God, rather, it depicts him as the all sufficient One. But stating that God is a help is much more forceful than saying that God helps people; it indicates that he so abundantly helps people that he is what help is all about. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

The word for “trouble” has the sense of confinement; it is a strait, a tight bind. It refers to those difficult, life-threatening situations where there seems to be no way out, no room even to move. The word can be used for inner turmoil that cannot be overcome (Ps. 25:17), or a situation such as a natural disaster or a besieging army and all the anguish that goes with such cases (Jer. 6:24). In such times there is no help, except God, and so believers seek him (Ps. 22:11). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

46:2-3 The descriptions of the calamity that follow are very intense: “even though the earth be changed, though the mountains slip; (s.v. Ps. 62:2) into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains shake with its swelling. This all appears to be a description

of a possible calamity of nature with the earthquakes, tidal waves, and the erosion of the mountainsides into the sea. Of all the parts of nature, mountains are considered the most secure and unmovable. To imagine them shaking and slipping into the sea is a terrifying thought (see Is. 24:19-20; Jer. 4:24; and Job. 38:11). The description here is of a national disaster, a chaos. The sea itself is often a symbol of chaos, full of dangers and death (Jonah 2:3). Nevertheless, God is greater than all the forces of nature, even the deep (or sheol, s.v. Ps. 6:5; but see especially Ps. 139:7-12; and Ps. 74:12ff., and p3:3ff.). Accordingly, believers have good reason to place their confidence in the sovereign Lord of creation, for he is the one who controls nature by his powerful word, the one who can shelter his people in the floods and fires, or in the earthquakes or the tempests. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Divine protection in the face of natural disasters is probably the most straightforward reading of these verses. But it is not impossible that the descriptions refer to political chaos in figurative terms. We cannot know for sure whether the psalmist was thinking of war when he used the descriptions from nature itself. In either case, his emphasis on security in the Lord would be relevant. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

46:2 *we will not fear* – “Therefore we shall not fear” s.v. Ps. 2:11). This is the proper conclusion to the theology of the first verse. If God is a strong refuge, if he does give help in times of trouble, then there is nothing to fear. But a statement like this is as much an exhortation as it is an expression of confidence. One can hear encouragers in the face of natural calamity reminding the people, “We shall not fear” because “God is our refuge.” (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

earth gives way – Any turmoil that threatens body or soul (e.g., a tsunami, cancer, death of a loved one, satanic assaults). Ultimately, it is a glimpse of the final judgment. (TLSB)

46:3 *selah* – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. “The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers” (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

46:4–6 A description of blessed Zion—a comforting declaration of God’s mighty, sustaining presence in his city. (CSB)

The heavens and the earth can be shaken, but God’s city cannot fall. The city of God is the church, especially as it is at peace in heaven. In Revelation 21 our eternal home is described as a strongly fortified city in which God’s people dwell in complete security. The waters of the sea are restless and dangerous, but the river of God is peaceful and life-giving. (John 4 and Samaritan woman at the well) This river reminds us of the rivers of Eden which sustained life there. In this psalm and in Revelation the river represents the life-giving power of God which will sustain us throughout eternity. Revelation 22:1-5 describes our eternal home as a new Eden, watered by the river of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God. (PBC)

We begin to experience the fulfillment of these verses already in this life. The Lord preserves His city, the church, from destruction. Since God’s word sustains our faith, it is often compared to waters of life. Nevertheless, the ultimate fulfillment of the promises of these verses will come only in the new heavens and the new earth. (PBC)

46:4 *river*.† Jerusalem had no river, unlike Thebes (Na 3:8), Damascus (2Ki 5:12), Nineveh (Na 2:6, 8) or Babylon (137:1), yet she had a “river.” Here the “river” of 36:8 (see note there) serves as a metaphor for the continual outpouring of the sustaining and refreshing blessings of God, which make the city of God like the Garden of Eden (see Ge 2:10; Isa 33:21; 51:3; cf. also Eze 31:4–9) or the new Jerusalem (cf. Eze 47:1–12; Joel 3:18; Zec 14:8; Rev 22:1–2). (CSB)

Located on a mountain, Jerusalem has no literal river, though it does have springs. The imagery depicts a source of never-ending refreshment or inner strength. Ambrose: “The Holy Spirit is the River [Is 66:12]” (NPNF 2 10:113). Cf Rv 22:1–3; Jn 4:10; and 7:37–39, where out of Christ flow rivers of living water that “make glad” by bringing life. Note that with God the chaotic waters (v 3) have calmed and changed to be a source of life and gladness. St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “All joy from other sources is sorrow, all pleasure is pain, all sweetness is bitter, all beauty is mean, everything else, in fine, whatever may have power to please, is irksome” (SLSB, p 223). (TLSB)

city of Go – Occurs only in Korah psalms (46:4; 48:1; 87:3). The mighty ruler of the universe makes the odd but marvelous choice to reside on earth with His people. This located presence is different than omnipresence, by which God fills all things. In His Church—the NT “city of God”—the Lord dwells as a refuge for sinners in the flesh-and-blood Jesus (cf Heb 12:22–26). (TLSB)

Most High – (The titles “most high,” “lord of heaven” and “creator of earth” were frequently applied to the chief Canaanite deity in ancient times. Terminology and location (Jerusalem was in central Canaan) thus indicate that Melchizedek was probably a Canaanite king-priest. But Abram, by identifying Melchizedek’s “God Most High” with “the LORD” bore testimony to the one true God, whom Melchizedek had come to know.). (CSB)

This description of God as the “Most High” began with the blessing of Abram by Melchizedek, the king of Salem (ancient Jerusalem most likely). The allusion to that title for God remained connected to the holy city in the Israelite period, and especially when kings ruled from Melchizedek’s throne, so to speak. [David took the city of Jerusalem and made that his administrative center, he then wrote how descendant would be his Lord and his priest – after Melchizedek (Ps. 110)]. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Accordingly, when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that Jesus would be “the Son of the Most High,” he used a title that brought to fulfillment the ancient royal ideology of Jerusalem (Luke 1:32; Hebrews 7:1-3). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

46:5 *God is with her* – He can offer his help so effectively because he is in the very midst of his people. (Leupold)

God is located in the place under assault, where fear and trouble try to rule. (TLSB)

Jerusalem’s security was not simply in the water supply, or the walls, or the battlements, but in the reality of God’s presence (Micah 3:11; Zeph. 3:15). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

She shall not be moved – The same word used in verse 2 translated as “slip.” The mountains may slip and slide (v. 2), but not the city and the people of God who dwell in it – the city of God is firm. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

God will help her – By “help” we have noted that the psalmist means that God will do for his people what they could never do for themselves – here, remain secure in a terrifying war. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

at break of day. † Or “as dawn approaches”—i.e., when attacks against cities were likely to be launched. His help brings on the dawn of deliverance, dispelling the night of danger (see 44:19 ; Isa 37:36 for an example). The same Hebrew phrase is used in connection with the exodus victory (Ex 14:27). (CSB)

God’s deliverance of Israel at the sea was at dawn (Ex. 14:27); and dawn is the time of the messianic expectation (Is. 9:1; Ps. 17:15; 59:16). Therefore, the nation may find itself in great danger (signified by darkness), but can expect deliverance when things seem the worst. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

46:6 *Nations ... fall.* Because of God’s victory (see vv. 8–9; 48:4–7). (CSB)

Verse 3 presented the idea of who invade, again indicating a strong connection between the two parts of the psalm. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

It is here asserted that these hostile powers are already making a noise like a building about to crash. (Stoeckhardt)

nations rage – See v. 3 and also 2:1–3; Rev 11:18. (CSB)

utters his voice – See 2:5; 9:5; Jer 25:30; Am 1:2; see also 104:7. God’s thunder is evoked, the thunder of his wrath (see 18:13; Isa 2:10). (CSB)

Depicts thunder and lightning. God’s “voice” is His Word, which renders judgment but also creates (Gn 1), raises from the dead (Jn 11:43), and absolves (Mt 9:2). (TLSB)

Earth melts – The figurative use of “melt” is vivid – it is a picture that what was once a strong element to be confronted dissolved and ran away. So as the menacing powers of the earth invade and threaten God’s people, God speaks the word only, and they all dissolve. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

46:7 The people’s glad response (also v. 11). (CSB)

LORD of hosts – This is the first time in the Bible that God is designated by this title. The Hebrew for “host(s)” can refer to (1) human armies (Ex 7:4; Ps 44:9); (2) the celestial bodies such as the sun, moon and stars (Ge 2:1; Dt 4:19; Isa 40:26); or (3) the heavenly creatures such as angels (Jos 5:14; 1Ki 22:19; Ps 148:2). The title, “the LORD of hosts,” is perhaps best understood as a general reference to the sovereignty of God over all powers in the universe (hence the NIV rendering, “the LORD Almighty”). In the account of the establishment of kingship in Israel it became particularly appropriate as a reference to God as the God of armies—both of the heavenly army (Dt 33:2; Jos 5:14; Ps 68:17; Hab 3:8) and of the army of Israel.). (CSB)

Not Hbr *'elohim*, as expected in Book Two of the Psalter, but *yahweh*, the almighty commander of heaven's armies and defender against all enemies. (TLSB)

Here God is called "Yahweh of armies" (s.v. Ps. 24:1) because the setting is a battle against Jerusalem. The armies that God has at his disposal are heavenly angels as well as earthly forces. And this powerful God with all such resources at his disposal is present with his people. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Is with us – We begin to experience the fulfillment of these verses already in this life. The Lord preserves his city, the church, from destruction. Since God's word sustains our faith, it is often compared to waters of life. Nevertheless, the ultimate fulfillment of the promises of these verses will come only in the new heavens and the new earth. (PBC)

Jacob – Also Israel. (CSB)

Recalls the promise (Gn 28:11–16; 32:22–30) and grace by which God chose Jacob (Mal 1:2–3; Rm 9:13). The refrain sings of both God's might and grace (v 11). (TLSB)

The reference to Jacob speaks not only of God's covenant with the patriarch, but God's power and grace in dealing with the needy Jacob and his descendants (cf. Ps. 20:1 and 24:1-6) (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Is our fortress – The metaphor of a refuge (or stronghold) literally meaning "as inaccessibly high place," speaks of God's protection of his people, as if he had set them safely on high away from the dangers. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

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This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. "The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers" (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

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46:8–10 A declaration of the blessed effects of God's triumph over the nations. (CSB)

We can point to many occasions in history when the Lord intervened to protect his people from destruction. The destruction of the Egyptian army of Pharaoh at the Red Sea and of the Assyrian army of Sennacherib as it surrounded Jerusalem are but two examples. God's protection of the church and the spiritual peace which is brought through the church (Nave - Boat) and the spiritual peace which is brought through the conquests made by the gospel provide another level of fulfillment to these words. The complete fulfillment will occur only in the new heavens and the new earth. There all wars will have come to an end, and perfect, uninterrupted spiritual peace will endure forever. (PBC)

As the people of Jerusalem could take comfort from the psalm when they were surrounded by hostile armies, as Luther could take comfort from the psalm when he was threatened by pope and

emperor, so we too can take comfort from this psalm through any danger even to the end of the world. The words “Be still” are both a rebuke to a world in rebellion against God and an assurance of peace to His people. (PBC)

Psalm 50:15: “*and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.*”

46:8 *Come and behold* – An invitation to see God’s victories in the world. (CSB)

the LORD – Emphatic because of its rare use in Book II of the Psalter. (CSB)

The “works of the Lord” include all of his acts in the history of salvation – exodus, conquest period of the judges, and the monarchy (cf. 66:5). (Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

brought – The verb is to be interpreted as a prophetic perfect, referring to the future devastation in terms of its certain fulfillment. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

desolations – This refers to the way that God will lay waste to the wicked. The word includes the meanings of desolation and astonishment. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

on the earth – Among the hostile nations. (CSB)

The Lord carries out mighty works of judgment that ultimately bring peace (vv 9–10). (TLSB)

46:9† No more attacks against his city. The verse probably speaks of universal, eschatological peace. (CSB)

Only God, not people, can do this, even as Christ alone defeated our enemies of sin, death, and the devil. Cf Is 65:17–25. (TLSB)

He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth – The participle describes what he will do, since the context is a vision of the final victory. By making the wars to cease the Lord will establish peace in the whole world, not just in Israel, but to the end of the earth. This, too, is a strong Isainic point (see Is. 2:4 and 9:1-6). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Breaks bow ... shatters spear – These were implements of war and represent all armaments. To break them would mean to break the power of the warrior (cf. Hos. 1:5). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Burns the chariots – Literally “wagons or war-wagons.” This represents the strength of military hardware that will be destroyed. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

46:10 God’s voice breaks through, as he addresses the nations (see v. 6)—the climax. (CSB)

Be still – Here, the Hebrew for this phrase probably means “Enough!” as in 1Sa 15:16 (“Stop!”). (CSB)

The verb translated “be still” has the idea of “slack” or “drop the hands,” i.e., abandon what was being done. The imperative is a warning for the turbulent world to stoop what they were trying to do. It is also a rebuke for the restless heart, the believer who has not learned to trust in the Lord fully. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

God's rebuke to a restless, raging world that must obey, just as wind and sea obeyed Christ's identical word during a storm (Mk 4:39). (TLSB)

I never thought about it, but there are businesses that sell ring tones for cell phones and those sales are big business. Or were. Not long ago analysts predicted that the sale of ring tones would hit \$11 billion by 2010 but it's not going to happen. Sales have been declining steadily, down now to 9.3% of people who use cell phones.

Good, I thought. I like silence, like Henry Higgins said, "silence like an undiscovered tomb." Quite biblical: "The prudent hold their tongues," (Proverbs 10:19). "The prudent keep quiet in such times," (Amos 5:13). "Be still and know that I am God," (Psalm 46:10). And Jesus was no babbler. Of His suffering, it was predicted, "He did not open His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). Along that line and against declining sales, one ring tone selling well is a voice blurting out, "Why don't you just shut up?"

Alas, the reason sales are down is only because there are other ways to get ring tones, like making your own tone on your computer. So the world isn't going to provide silence for you or me. We've got to seek it out ourselves. When I wondered about the attentiveness of a co-worker, he said, "I chose not to listen." Sometimes you've got to do that. "In quietness...is your strength" (Isaiah 30:15). (Meyer Minute – 1/10/08)

know – Acknowledge. (CSB)

I will be exalted among the nations – God's mighty acts in behalf of his people will bring him universal recognition, a major theme in the Psalter (see 22:27; 47:9; 57:5, 11; 64:9; 65:8; 66:1–7; 67:2–5; 86:9; 98:2–3; 99:2–3; 102:15) and elsewhere in the OT (see Ex 7:5; 14:4, 18; Lev 26:45; Nu 14:15; 1Sa 17:46; 1Ki 8:41–43; 2Ki 19:19; Eze 20:41; 28:25; 36:23; Hab 2:14). This has proven to be supremely true of God's climactic saving act in the birth, life, death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus Christ—yet to be brought to complete fruition at his return. (CSB)

God will demonstrate his glorious sovereignty over all the earth. in fact, the goal of history in the exaltation of the God of glory. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

46:11 Repetition of v 7, emphasizing both the reason and source of our confidence. (TLSB)

Because the future belongs to God and God alone, those who have communion with him now may rest in the security of the faith. Even if events in the world disturb and frighten them, they may take comfort in the fact the Lord is with them, that nothing is beyond his knowledge or control. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

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The revelation of the divine presence finds its great fulfillment in the pages of the NT when the Lord came into this world to dwell among us – Immanuel. And to our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, all power has been given on heaven and in earth, and he alone is the strength and security for the believer in any troubled age. As he was leaving this earth to ascend to the Father, he declared, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Ps 46 The almighty and Most High God controls nature, safeguards His chosen city against attacking foes, and stands over all nations at war. He is our sure fortress. In mercy, He makes Himself accessible and is, therefore, “God with us.” We as individuals, and as the Church, experience many troubles in this life on account of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. Yet amid every crisis of body or soul, God is with us in His Son so that we may face every upheaval. • O Lord, make us to know You as our refuge and strength, our very present help in every trouble. Amen. (TLSB)