

Psalm 46

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[0 : 00] To the choir master of the sons of Korah, according to Alamothe, a song. God is our refuge and strength, our very present help in trouble.

! Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. 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.

God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter. He utters his voice, the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes war cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear.

[1 : 04] He burns the chariots with fire. Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.

The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress. Why don't we pray before we proceed? Our Father in heaven, as we come before you, please open our eyes that we may behold who you are.

Amen. There are around 500 phobias that have been named so far with possible expansions as new fears are identified.

This conveys that we, the people, have all sorts of fears. Let me confess, I have futuro-phobia, a fear of what lies ahead this year as I complete my studies.

You may be fearing about a lot of things, including the increasing tensions in the Middle East, Greenland, rising cost of living, children being sick, heading back to school or work.

[2 : 19] But as we battle through fears, we might think, is God really on our side? Is He trustworthy amidst our dark valleys and uncertainties?

Is He strong enough to save us? Well, Psalm 46 provides us with an answer to all our queries, and it is the certainty that God is our refuge no matter what, and we need not fear.

Let's dive in to see what the Lord has to say to us this morning. Just before verse 1, you may have noticed, to the choir master of the sons of Korah, according to Alamothe, a song.

Have you ever wondered who the sons of Korah are? A good place to know about their lineage is Numbers 16, where Korah, a Levite, incited rebellion against Moses, only to be consumed by the anger of the Lord.

In a very dramatic way, we'll come to that in a bit. However, the Lord in His providence and grace spared the sons of Korah. So we read that in Numbers 26, 11.

[3 : 36] And it's very interesting to note that this family line, who have once experienced the judgment of God, is now proclaiming His praise.

Moving on. We are not explicitly told the background of this psalm. However, theologians estimate that this psalm could have been written during Assyrian king Senegarib's siege of Jerusalem, when King Hesachia was ruling over Judah.

If you can flip with me to 2 Kings 19, that will provide us with some context. 2 Kings 19, verses 10 to 13. 2 Kings 19, verses 10 to 13.

We are about to read the very words spoken by the messenger of the Assyrian king Senegarib. It goes like this, verse 10. Thus shall you speak to Hesachia, king of Judah.

Do not let your God, in whom you trust, deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction.

[4 : 53] And shall you be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them? The nations that my fathers destroyed. Gozan, Haran, Resif, and the people of Eden who were in Telesar.

Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of Sepharvim, the king of Hena, or the king of Eva? Hearing the taunt of the enemy, King Hesachia's questions could have been very similar to ours.

Is he deceived, holding on to God? Is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob trustworthy? Is this Lord stronger than the Assyrian host?

Hesachia no doubt faced a very dire situation. So that brings us to the first section of the psalm, verses 1 to 3, which can be titled, God our refuge in the unstable earth.

Let's read verse 1. God is our refuge and strength, our very present help in trouble. The sons of Korah begin with the affirmation that in trouble or difficulty, God is their refuge.

[6 : 09] What is a refuge, you might ask? Cambridge Dictionary defines refuge as a place that gives protection or shelter from danger, trouble, unhappiness, etc.

But when you read verse 2, we are told that no place on earth can be a refuge, as they might give way or change, tremble, or even agitate.

So if places can't be a refuge, what else can be? As clarified in verse 1. It's in a person who is God himself.

And he is our fortress, as also clarified in verses 6 and 11. So is the idea of strength. We don't derive our strength from what we materially have, not in positions like, say, state of our weapons. Instead, we derive it from God himself. God is our refuge. God is our strength. Maybe it's very true that we are not under siege by any foreign king unlike the people of Jerusalem.

[7 : 17] But I am assured that there is hardly anyone in this room or in this hall without any fear or troubles. There are things that weigh us down.

However, we need not drown in hopelessness, as God is our refuge and strength. And also, we read that he is a very present help in trouble.

Not a distant help, a very present help in trouble. When the Assyrian king Sennacherib was mocking the living God, King Hezekiah did not begin a frantic manhunt for the God of Israel. We read in 2 Kings, verse 14, that When Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, He went straight up to the house of the Lord, spread it before the Lord. Yes, the God of the Bible is not ignorant of our situation. He knows what's going on. He is imminent, so close, very present help in trouble.

[8 : 25] He is so close, just a prayer away. I was reminded about the words of Joseph Scriven, who wrote in the famous hymn, What a Friend We Have in Jesus.

You might know them. It goes on like this, the words. Are we weak and heavy laden? Cumbered with a load of care. Precious to Savior, still our refuge.

Take it to the Lord in prayer. What makes our God? The God of the Bible. Our refuge and strength is His ever-present character.

Meaning, He is not absent, and no trouble we experience catches God by surprise. Therefore, we need not fear, as He is there.

Let's move on to verse 2 and 3. The psalmist mentions in these verses how worse our troubles can look like. Verse 2 and 3. Though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

[9 : 38] Earth is removed or changed, mountains are moved, waters agitated, mountains tremble. Scary indeed, right? Nevertheless, even if our whole existence is threatened amid the cosmic chaos, God is our refuge.

I reckon that the sons of Korah were not only poetical when they wrote this, but they knew what they were talking about. Specifically, verse 2, if you can observe, it says, Though the earth gives way.

That's exactly what happened in Numbers 16. Why don't we read that instance? Numbers 16, verse 31 to 35. Numbers 16, verse 31 to 35.

As soon as He finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods.

So they, and all that belonged to them, went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them. And they perished from the midst of the assembly.

[10:58] And all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up. And the fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men offering the incense.

Though the earth gave way, as it consumed their forefather Korah, God was the refuge for the sons of Korah. Instead of resenting and turning their back on God, the sons of Korah held on to God as their refuge, as seen from their response in the psalm.

There is no better place to run except to fall back on God. As Job mentioned in Job 13 verse 15, Though He slay me, I will trust in Him.

I think now we have even greater reason not to fear, as we know that death is not the end. Death is conquered, and it no longer has dominion over us.

We will rise again, and be with God, our refuge and strength, forever and ever. Even if everything fails, and falls apart, God is still God.

[12:16] God is still a strong refuge, for all those who take shelter under Him. At the end of verse 3, you might find the mention of the word Selah, which is nothing but a suspension of music.

This is a congregational song. You'll also find the word Selah repeated at the end of verse 7 and 11 as well. So this word Selah, the musical pause, is to call the worshippers to stop, ponder, and respond to the truth just expressed.

So why don't we pause for 30 seconds, and let the truth sink in that God is our refuge in the unstable earth. All right, let's move on to the next section, verses 4 to 7, titled, God our refuge in the stable heaven.

While verses 1 to 3 talk about God our refuge in the chaotic city of men, this part is about God our refuge amidst the perfect heaven.

We'll read verse 4. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. As you can see, the focus shifts from earth to heaven, from the city of men to the city of God, from forming destructive waters to life-giving waters.

[14:04] The psalmist here uses an imagery of a river bringing delight to the city of God where God himself resides.

So in fact, the creation account mentions a river in the garden that divides into four different rivers. You can read that in Genesis chapter 2, verse 10. So the garden was the paradise, the city of God where there was a perfect relationship between God and man.

But as we read in Genesis 3, things turned bad very soon. So in the fallen world, the sons of Korah possibly envisioned the lost paradise.

It's important to note that this imagery of a river flowing from God's habitation is not new in the Old and New Testaments. For instance, in Ezekiel 47, verse 12 reads like this, Ezekiel 47.

So likely an angel of the Lord shows Ezekiel a river flowing from the temple. We can read verse 12. And on the banks on both sides of the river there will grow all kinds of trees for food.

[15:20] Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail. but they will bear fresh fruit every month because the water for them flows from the sanctuary.

Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing. With greater clarity, Apostle John writes in Revelation 22, verse 1 to 3. Revelation 22, verses 1 to 3.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the lamp. Through the middle of the street of the city, also on either side of the river, the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit yielding its fruit each month.

The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the lamp will be in it and His servants will worship Him.

So with this background, let's read verse 5. Verse 5 of Psalm 46. God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved.

[16:29] God will help her when morning dawns. There is no chaos in this heavenly city. It is not going to give way. Its mountains, if there are any, are not going to tremble.

Its waters are not going to foam. Why? God is in the midst of her. God is in charge. As He reigns over the chaos of the earth, verses 1 to 3, He also reigns over the calm of His habitation, verses 4 to 6.

As we read in verse 6 again, even if nations rage and kingdoms stutter, literally, the word is move, even if kingdoms move, they are not going to move the city of God.

The Lord utters His voice and the earth, including its kings, they all melt away. So we need not fear as long as our eyes are fixed on the city of God because, verse 7 says, the Lord of hosts is with us,

the God of Jacob is our fortress.

The same verse is also repeated verbatim in verse 11. So the sons of Korah remind the congregation that this God against whom the nations rage, against whom the Assyrian army is fighting, isn't a fickle-headed tribal deity, but rather He is the Lord of hosts, literally, the Lord of heavenly and earthly armies, who is also with us.

[18:09] For the very first time in the Bible, Hannah, an individual, called upon God as the Lord of hosts in 1 Samuel 1.11.

The sons of Korah pick up on this phrase for congregational use and emphasize that the inhabitant of the city of God is Yahweh himself, who is in charge of multiple armies.

And at his command, 2 Kings 19, 2 Kings 19, verse 35 to 37, we read like this, that night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death 185,000 in the Assyrian camp.

When the people got up the next morning, they were all dead bodies. So, Senegarib, king of Assyria, broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.

One day, while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adramalek and Sharazer killed him with the sword and they escaped to the land of Ararat.

[19:24] Nisroch was powerless to save his worshipper Senegarib from his own sons right in the temple. But, the Lord of hosts was powerful to save Hesachia and all the people.

That's what we read in 2 Kings 19. Interestingly, the psalmist also brings to remembrance that this god is covenantal. So, we read that in verse 7.

The later part says that he is the god of Jacob. He commands armies on heaven and earth. sure. But, the same lord is also the god, god of their forefathers who has repeatedly proved himself faithful.

He is trustworthy and he doesn't let his people down. And, even if the worst possible thing happens which is death, it happens under the sovereign knowledge of God and we need not fear.

As death does not have the final say, it just transfers us from the changing chaotic earth to an unchanging heaven inhabited by an unchanging god who remains our refuge and strength.

[20:40] His city, flowing with river, making glad its residents, doesn't cease to exist because of climate change or any sort of human rebellion.

as God is in our midst, God helps her every morning and it is an unchangeable constant. Isn't it a privilege to have this God of Jacob with us as a refuge?

It is. In fact, verses 4 to 7 enables us to fix our eyes beyond the turmoil of the world to the heavenly realm. It gives us hope beyond the grave as earth changes.

Heaven won't because God our refuge doesn't change. And that brings us to the last section of the psalm verses 8 to 11. So which can be titled Our Response to Our Refuge.

It's great to know that we have a God who is our refuge both in this world and the world to come. So what are we supposed to do after hearing this powerful truth?

[21:47] Still soak in despair and sink in fear? No way. The psalmist provides a clarion call in verses 8 and 9.

Let's read that, verse 8 and 9. Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes war cease to the end of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the chariots with fire. In the context of this psalm, the Lord did bring about a great desolation as we read in 2 Kings 19.

He did make the war cease by shattering the Assyrian army. He was strong enough to save his people. James Kaufman, a theologian, writes in his commentary like this, when this psalm was written, the smoke was probably still rising from the funeral of Senegariv's destroyed host.

All Jerusalem could see it, either from the walls of their city or by a short journey to the battlefield where the army had been deployed. Against this backdrop, the people were called to behold the mighty works of Yahweh.

[23:08] Behold isn't referring to a mere physical staring or intellectual knowing, at least in this context. rather, the word behold here demands a response.

It's very significant to note that instead of the psalmist letting us know what we should do by beholding, the Lord of hosts himself speaks in verse 10. Let's read verse 10.

Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. Being still means being still.

In the immediate background of verse 8 and 9, being still is more of a warning to all those who rage against the Lord of hosts. It's literally a caution for people like Senegarib to cease!

They are not going to prevail against Yahweh. The Lord himself has said that he will be exalted among the nations. He will be exalted on the earth.

[24 : 19] And we are moving closer to that day when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

On the other hand, being still is a message of comfort for all those who take refuge in him.

Remember, the psalm began by acknowledging that God, God is a very present help in trouble.

In distress, as we all know, we won't be still. And there is a lot of turmoil going on within ourselves.

We won't be at peace for certain as things go beyond our control.

Last year, we as a family were in need of somewhere to live, as many of you would know, and we were greatly troubled inspections and nothing materializing.

It was a hard time for us, a turmoil indeed. However, our daughter, Jemima, she was not, she was not troubled. She was at peace, being still as it were, happily playing with the toys.

[25 : 31] This is because she knew that her parents would provide her with a shelter and a refuge. her trust in us made us feel how much more we should trust our heavenly father.

I think sometimes the best thing to do is to remain still, maybe with a childlike faith, and let God have the reins. We can confidently do that given that God is our refuge.

And given his proven track record of being the faithful God of Jacob, the sovereign God of heaven, and the mighty commander of armies. Verse 11, the Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress.

It's time to wrap up. There's a huge difference between how the Jews would have read the psalm then and how we read it now. When they read that God is their refuge and strength and a very present help in trouble, they did not experience the constant indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Praise God, when Jesus ascended on high, he did not leave us as orphans. We now have a comforter, Holy Spirit, who dwells in us.

[26 : 51] Nevertheless, there is one thing that unites the Jews and us concerning Psalm 46. It is the fact that their hopes were set on the coming city of God, verses 4 to 7.

The perfect place devoid of any human chaos. Similarly, we with even greater clarity, have our eyes fixed on the coming city of God.

So if you're trusting in Jesus as your refuge, do not fear, be still, holding on to God your fortress.

But if you're someone who is exploring who the God of the Bible is, be still and know that Lord is God.

And this morning it's God's call that you have Him as your unshakable refuge, not only for this life, but more importantly for the life to come, made possible by what Jesus did on the cross.

It's indeed a privilege to be certain of the God who has called us to be His people. He is the Lord of hosts, He is the God of Jacob, our fortress.

[28 : 04] And blessed are all those who take refuge in Him. Let's pray. God, our refuge and strength, thank you for reminding us that you are our eternal fortress.

We ask that we would not fear whatever our situations, but that we would be still and know that you are God and hold fast to you till that day when we will be with you in that perfect city of God, your holy habitation.

Amen.