



A Mighty Fortress is Our God



"A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.

For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe -
his craft and pow'r are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal."

"Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing; were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He. Lord Sabaoth His name, from age to age the same - and He must win the battle."

"The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms." - Deuteronomy 33:27

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea." - Psalm 46:1-2

Psalm 46 was the Scriptural catalyst for Martin Luther's great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." The comforting message of Psalm 46 is that God provides stability for His people who live in a very unstable world. Along with Psalms 47 and 48, it is a song of triumph extolling the Lord of Hosts who stands firm against all threats from nature and the nations.

Earthquakes, floods and other natural disasters cause terror and great loss of human life. The earth and the mountains are symbols of stability, so when they shake, people fear and tremble. When the most stable things become unstable, we need not fear because of the transcendent stability of our God.

This reminds me of Hebrews 12:27-28, which refers to "the removing of things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." Then we read, "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire."

The Psalmist wants to assure God's people that we have a refuge when it seems that the bottom of life is falling out from beneath us. He says that God is present in those times, and we can find strength in remembering that, "God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved." The everlasting arms of the eternal God are there to catch us, when we stay near to Him by faith.

We live in very unsettling times, but that has been true in every age. Martin Luther lived in the 1500s, and he was very aware of "our ancient foe" who seeks to destroy Christians who walk with God. Satan's power is great, and his favorite weapon is "cruel hate" for all that is good. Without the armor of God we will lose the battle against his schemes every time. But God has given us a Man who has won the ultimate spiritual battle on our behalf.

Satan is the reason we have wars, oppression and desolations in the earth, but Psalm 46:7 tells us that we can triumph in our troubles because "the Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." In verse 10 we find the best advice for dealing with the unexpected challenges of life: "Be still (cease striving), and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." We may not understand our present circumstances, but we know the end of the story.

The word "Selah" appears three times in Psalm 46, and it is there to make us pause to take in what has just been said. We need not fear if God is near; we need not fall apart, if God is in our midst. We must quiet our own minds, and sit quietly before Him, trusting that He knows the need of our hearts.

Isaiah 33:1-6 sounds a lot like Psalm 46, where the prophet tells God's people that He will defend them. Then Isaiah offers words of comfort and stability as we wait on Him in our distress:

"O Lord, be gracious to us; we have waited for You. Be our joy every morning, our salvation also in the time of distress ... The Lord is exalted, for He dwells on high; He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness, and He will be the stability of your times, a wealth of salvation, wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is his treasure."