

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 46 — A Mighty Fortress

1.0 Introducing Psalm 46

- Whenever the stress and pressures of life would become to severe, Martin Luther would say, “Come, Philipp, let’s sing the Forty-sixth Psalm.” They would then sing Luther’s version, which we have come to know as “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” — James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), 2:388.
- Psalm 46 is one of the so-called “Psalms of Zion” (46, 48, 76, 84, 87, and 122).
- What historical event was background for this psalm?
 - ◆ 2 Chronicles 20:1-30—the destruction of the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Edom during the reign of Jehoshaphat.
 - ◆ 2 Kings 18–19—the destruction of the Assyrian army during the reign of Hezekiah.

Reading Psalm 46 (NAU)

46:1 *A Psalm* of the sons of Korah, set to Alamoth.
A Song.

God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.

46:2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change
And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea;
46:3 Though its waters roar *and* foam,
Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride.

Selah.

- 46:4** There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
The holy dwelling places
of the Most High.
- 46:5** God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.
- 46:6** The nations made an uproar, the kingdoms tottered;
He raised His voice, the earth melted.
- 46:7** **The LORD of hosts is with us;**
The God of Jacob is our stronghold.
Selah.
- 46:8** Come, behold the works of the LORD,
Who has wrought desolations in the earth.
- 46:9** He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth;
He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two;
He burns the chariots with fire.
- 46:10** “Cease *striving* and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.”
- 46:11** **The LORD of hosts is with us;**
The God of Jacob is our stronghold.
Selah.

For the choir director.

2.0 Understanding Psalm 46

2.1 Outline

- I. God Is Present to Calm His People (vv. 1-3)
- II. God Is Present to Comfort His City (vv. 4-7)
- III. God Is Present to Control the Nations (vv. 8-11)



2.2 Notes

- v. 1 “set to Alamo”
 - Unusual order places “set to Alamo” after the authorial designation (“of the sons of Korah”).
 - “Alamo” could be the name of a melody or could refer to women’s soprano voices.
- v. 1 “God is our refuge”
 - Book 1 of the Psalter is characterized by the theme of refuge.
 - “Refuge” appears in 35% of the psalms of Book 1 as compared to 25% in Book 2, 5% in Book 3, 18% in Book 4, and 13% in Book 5. — Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 715 n. 5.

- v. 1 “A very present help”
 - Literally, “very findable” = “can be found when needed.”

 - v. 2 “though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea”
 - “Slip” here is the same Hebrew word as “moved” in verse 5 and “tottered” in verse 6. Note the contrast.
 - “the picture of a tidal wave caused by the earthquake.” — Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, trans. by Hilton C. Oswald, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993), 461. Compare the description in these two verses to the Asian tsunami of December 26, 2004.
 - The Lord can be trusted even when the heaving earth and surging sea undo the created world.
 - See Psalm 102:25-28.
 - Compare 2 Peter 3:10-12.
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- v. 4 “a river”
 - This is most likely the stream of Siloam.
 - Siloam flows from a siphon spring through the water tunnel built by Hezekiah into the pool of Siloam. This is the only natural water supply within the city of Jerusalem.
 - Cf. Isaiah 8:6.

 - v. 4 “the city of God”
 - Obviously a reference to the earthly Jerusalem.
 - “City of God/LORD” occurs only 7x in the Old Testament (Psalms 46:4; 48:1, 8 [2x]; 87:3; 101:8; and Isaiah 60:14).
 - Compare Hebrews 11:10, 16.

 - v. 5 “when morning dawns”
 - See Exodus 14:27.
 - See 2 Kings 19:35.

 - v. 7 “The LORD of hosts is with us”
 - Note on Psalm 24:10: “The title refers to the hosts who surround the LORD’s heavenly throne and who praise and consult him and carry out his decisions as sovereign of the world (e.g., 29:1-2; 82:1; 89:6-7).” — James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1994), 123.
 - Compare 2 Kings 6:15-16.

 - vv. 7, 11 Refrain
 - This refrain as well as the use of “Selah” divide the psalm into three parts.

- v. 9 “He makes wars to cease”
 - This statement represents peace through victory, not peace through negotiation.
 - “Yahweh is the Great Warrior who establishes peace for his people. They need not fear because he will avenge their enemies . . . No power on earth can resist God’s kingdom.” — Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 5:355.

3.0 Singing Psalm 46

God Is a Stronghold and a Tower
(Tune: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”)



God is a Stronghold and a Tower,
A Help that never faileth,
A covering Shield and a Sword of power,
When Satan’s host assaileth.
In vain our craftye
Still strives to work us woe,
Still lurks and lies in wait
With more than earthly hate;
We will not faint, nor tremble.

Fraile sinners are we: naught remains
For hope or consolation,
Save in His strength Whom God ordains
Our Captain of salvation.
Yes, Jesus Christ alone
The Lord of hosts we own,
God the Word began,
The Word-made-flesh to man,
Still conquering, and to conquer.

Though fiercely strive the hosts of ill
With us, and around us,
With fiendish strength, and fiendish skill,
Yet ne’er may they confound us.
Man’s might for a while despair,
When storm clouds fill the air,
In God’s triumphal hour,
Then on the day of His power,
One word, and He prevaieth.

Ein’ feste Burg ist unser Gott,
Ein gute Wehr und Waffen;
Er hilft uns frei aus aller Not,
Die uns jetzt hat betroffen.
Der alt’ böse Feind,
Mit Ernst er’s jetzt meint,
Gross’ Macht und viel List
Sein’ grausam’ Ruestung ist,
Auf Erd’ ist nicht seingleichen.

Mit unsrer Macht is nichts getan,
Wir sind gar bald verloren;
Es steit’ für uns der rechte Mann,
Den Gott hat selbst erkoren.
Fragst du, wer der ist?
Er heisst Jesu Christ,
Der Herr Zebaoth,
Und ist kein anderer Gott,
Das Feld muss er behalten.

Und wenn die Welt voll Teufel wär’
Und wollt’ uns gar verschlingen,
So fürchten wir uns nicht so sehr,
Es soll uns doch gelingen.
Der Fürst dieser Welt,
Wie sau’r er sich stellt,
Tut er uns doch nicht,
Das macht, er ist gericht’t,
Ein Wörtlein kann ihn fällen.

Our Father's truth abideth sure;
Christ our Redeemer liveth;
For us He pleads His offering pure,
To us His Spirit giveth.
Though the one pass away,
Though strength and life decay,
Yet to us shall he be our gain,
For God doth still remain
Our All-in-all forever.

Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn
Und kein'n Dank dazu haben;
Er ist bei uns wohl auf dem Plan
Mit seinem Geist und Gaben.
Nehmen sie den Leib,
Gut, Ehr', Kind und Weib:
Lass fahren dahin,
Sie haben's kein'n Gewinn,
Das Reich muss uns doch bleiben.

— Words: Martin Luther (1529)
Translation: Elizabeth Wordsworth (1891)

4.0 Praying Psalm 46

- Thank You, Lord, for being our help when we need You. [v. 1]
- We praise You for being with us and for us. [vv. 7, 11]
- Help me to know that You are God. [v. 10]
- Be exalted, O God! [v. 10]
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5.0 Applying Psalm 46

- We can have confidence in the LORD even when all creation is in upheaval.
- God is in control even when nations are in upheaval.
- God is with us—He is our true security at all times.