

# A Very Present Help in Trouble

A Sermon on Psalm 46

by

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## 1. Introduction

## 2. God is Our Refuge and Strength Amidst Natural Calamity (vv. 1-3).

a. *The ground of our assurance is based on who God is (v. 1).*

i. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (v.1).

1. The psalmist immediately begins with a rally cry of confidence in who God is and what has always been found true of Him.

a. First, the psalmist says, “God is our refuge.” In this, the psalmist is simply stating that God is the one place of protection when all else fails.

b. Second, God is our strength. Here the idea is not that they have some sense of inner resolve—but that God actually gives them strength to fight.

2. The third is a description of God’s activity in the midst of impending doom: He is a very present help in trouble.

a. This is a summary statement of the two before it, meaning it is designed to say that once more that God is their refuge and strength—but what’s unique is that it brings a sort of intensity to these realities at this point.

b. The psalmist is simply reminding them that God has always been Israel’s defender, and He has always prepared them for victory in battle.

ii. In all of it, the psalmist is encouraging them to look once more upon the mighty character of God and the awesome works that He has always accomplished on behalf of His people.

1. They are truly in the midst of a time of great distress and trouble. They are not deluded into thinking things aren't as bad as they seem.
  - a. The term "trouble" here actually suggests a sense of anxiety and dread so severe that it binds the people much like a straightjacket would.
  - b. But the language here is so triumphant and the simple reason for that is that God is on their side.
2. The reality the psalmist portrays for us here is that in times of legitimate doom, there is no source of defense, strength, and help besides God Himself—and they see this as a truth that brings them profound comfort.
  - a. Notice that they don't place any shred of trust in their own ability or the weapons that they can bring to the battlefield.
  - b. They place exclusive, full faith in God—but it is an informed faith. It is a faith grounded upon who God is and what He has always been found to do.

b. *Therefore, we shall not fear even when faced with natural disaster (vv. 2-3).*

i. "Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride." (vv. 2-3).

1. The depiction here is one of complete chaos brought on by natural disaster.
  - a. The earth is being broken up and distributed like pieces of bread across the face of the planet.

- b. The once great and mighty, immovable mountains are toppling into the depths of the sea.
      - c. The waters are depicted as a thing of immense danger and death.
    - 2. All of these descriptions speak to the fact that once stable things have become a source of complete disorder.
      - a. And yet the psalmist is not saying that these things have actually happened—he is saying that *even if they happen*, they will not be moved to fear because God is with them.
      - b. Everything here is hyperbolic; it is designed to lift up the worst-case scenario and demonstrate just how safe they truly are because their God is with them.
  - ii. He is using these terms to speak to the fact that there is truly no reason to fear if we are safe with God.
    - 1. That is the natural conclusion to the theology of verse one; we have no reason to fear because God is our protector, our source and strength, and our help.
      - a. The question then is if we really believe this to be true.
      - b. There's an implied rebuke here in the text, and it's no so subtle—but it speaks to both those who are ruled by their fears and those who have a misplaced confidence and hope.
    - 2. When someone is given to a misplaced confidence and hope, or when someone is given to fear, it is indicative of a false understanding of who God is.
      - a. This is not to say one can't have all of the facts right and still struggle—but it has not yet become something we treasure and truly hope in.
      - b. The knowledge of God is intended to permeate every aspect of our lives.

### 3. God is Our Confidence and Help Amidst Manmade Calamity (vv. 4-7).

a. *The ground for our confidence is based on God's nearness to us (vv. 4-5).*

i. "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High" (v. 4).

1. Verse four begins by drawing attention to what the Psalmist calls the "city of God," or the "dwelling places of the Most High."

a. In Psalm 87, which is another psalm from the sons of Korah, we find they also speak of the "city of God" and refer to it by another name: Zion.

Elsewhere, this same city is referred to as the "city of David," or as you all know of it: Jerusalem.

b. Jerusalem is the epicenter of Israel, and it is the place where God dwelled uniquely among the Israelites. In other words, Jerusalem was the place where God was physically with them—and the reason God was with them was because of the covenant sworn to the patriarchs.

2. Notice he says, "There is a river that makes [Jerusalem] glad."

a. The city of Jerusalem was not near any major river—but it did sit on top of a spring that the Israelites channeled all throughout the city so they would have a source of fresh water, in times of peace, and in times of war.

b. The imagery being given here is not difficult to picture on a greater scale; where there is water, there is life, and for the Israelites, there is hope.

ii. "God is in the midst of her [Jerusalem], she will not be moved; God will help her when the morning dawns" (v. 5).

1. The psalmist now brings to the forefront what he alluded to in the previous verse: the God of their forefathers—the God above all creation, is with them, and they cannot be shaken.
    - a. The implication of this is quite clear: though everything else in all of Creation might be thrown into utter chaos, those who have God in their midst will remain unmoved.
    - b. The psalmist pushes this point even further when he states that God will help the city of Jerusalem when the morning dawns.
  2. The psalmist brings us to see a wonderful paradox: the God Most High who stands above all creation and is outside of time and space, is near to His people, and therefore, they shall remain standing when the battle is done.
    - a. God is depicted as the all-sovereign One who stands above creation and dictates all that comes to pass.
    - b. And yet this all-powerful and all-sovereign God stoops down from His throne to be among His people, especially in the midst of their troubles.
- b. Therefore, we shall not fear even when faced with ferocious enemies (vv. 6-7).*
- i. “The nations made an uproar, the kingdoms tottered; He raised His voice, the earth melted” (v. 6).
    1. The psalmist now takes us directly into the fray of the battle, but notice how strongly these warring nations are contrasted against the true power of God.
      - a. The language here is reminiscent of Psalm 2, where the nations come to war with God Himself—and the utter futility of their folly is shown for what it truly is.



a. *Behold the Sovereign One who is in control of all the earth (v. 8-9).*

- i. “Come, behold the works of the Lord, who has wrought desolations in the earth” (v. 8).
  1. The psalmist gives two commands in v. 8: “Come! Behold!”
    - a. It is not a mere cry to pay attention; the psalmist has just proclaimed their certain doom.
    - b. The Lord who stands in Israel’s midst is poised to act, and all the earth will see the weight of His fury.
  2. The depiction he gives immediately moves to the end of all days, when the Lord puts an end to all sin, all evil, and in this case, all warfare.
- ii. “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” (v. 9).
  1. The way he proclaims this certain end is in the present perfect tense; he looks upon these events as if they’ve already happened.
    - a. Though the Israelites are surrounded on every side and the battle is perhaps already underway—the implements of warfare are utterly decimated.
    - b. The way the Hebrew expresses them being destroyed is as if there is nothing left of them when the Lord has judged all the earth.
  2. God’s total annihilation of all war and weapons of war is certain—so certain in fact, that every corner of Creation is subdued by peace.
    - a. In an instant, the chaos and turmoil that everyone knows so well is finally put to rest.
    - b. The cry, therefore, is that all peoples desperately need to see the outcome God has guaranteed to happen.

b. *Trust the Sovereign One who will be exalted above all (vv. 10-11).*

- i. “Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth” (v. 10).
  1. Once again, the psalmist gives two commands to everyone on earth: “Cease striving and know that I am God.”
    - a. The command to “cease striving” is literally to let your hands fall slack and stop their attack.
    - b. Yet it is not enough that they simply stop; they must know that the Lord is God.
  2. There is a rebuke to the nations making war with Israel; there is no king but God. Every effort to rise up against the people of God will one day be met with a swift and certain judgment, and all shall recognize the King of kings is on the throne.
    - a. And yet there is also a rebuke to the faint-hearted here as well; if the outcome is so secure—why do they fear?
    - b. This certainly moves well beyond every earthly threat the people of God face to every spiritual threat they face as well.
- ii. “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold” (v. 11).
  1. This psalm ends on a triumphal note, and the reason for this is simple: God truly is the One who is in control of everything.
    - a. Though everything that is stable to us may come to topple into the depths of the sea—He is the great, unmovable One who dwells among His people.
    - b. Though the nations rage, they do so in vain, for God is the One who will take the throne in the end.



2. One great day, He will make an end to war and exalt Himself as the rightful Ruler over all Creation.
  - a. All of the heavenly armies are at His beck and call—yet all of the armies on earth are also under His control.
  - b. Yet most beautiful of all—just as the Israelites could say, “The God of Jacob is our stronghold,” we too can say this. He places us high above the fray to an unreachable spot.

## 5. Conclusion