

Psalm 46

“God our Refuge”

When surrounded by enemies, physical or spiritual, God’s people take great comfort in knowing that God is our refuge. Psalm 46, one of the songs of Zion (compare Psalms 48, 76, 84, 87, 122), highlights God’s protective presence among His people. It was the basis for Martin Luther’s great hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” According to the psalm title, Psalm 46 was written by the sons of Korah, a musical Levite family, and presented to the director of temple worship. The title also indicates that this psalm was to be sung according to “alamoth,” an uncertain term that’s closely related to the Hebrew word for a young maiden and therefore may refer to a high pitched, soprano voice. The psalm divides nicely into three distinct sections, each ending with “selah,” a term that seems to merely indicate a pause. The content of Psalm 46 reminds God’s people that we need not fear, that we will not fall, and that we can anticipate a peaceful future. God’s powerful presence brings peace.

Because God is our strong refuge, we will not fear (46:1-3)

God shelters His people and gives us strength to face every difficulty life sends our way. For this reason, we need fear nothing.

God is our shelter in times of trouble (46:1).

“God is our refuge and strength” whom we find to be “an ever-present help in times of trouble.” This psalm refers to God as Elohim (vs. 1, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11), the Most High (v. 4), Yahweh (v. 8), and Yahweh of Hosts (vs. 7, 11), but Elohim, the powerful creator God, is the preferred name in Psalm 46. This powerful God is our refuge, our shelter from danger. He is also our strength, the one who from His own limitless power empowers us to withstand the dangers and difficulties of life. When we need help, we find that God is present and powerful. Our times of trouble don’t match His matchless power. God is our refuge and strength.

God’s people need not fear even during the most calamitous experiences of life (46:2-3).

Because God is our refuge and strength, we don’t need to fear that which might harm us. Even the most extreme dangers—the shifting earth, mountains crashing into the sea, the raging oceans, quaking mountains related to the surging seas—can’t destroy God’s people. Earthquakes, tidal waves, tsunamis, or any other natural disaster can’t ultimately harm us if we belong to God. We don’t need to live in fear, but instead we can live by faith in the God who is our refuge and strength.

**Because God is in our
midst, we will not fall (46:4-7).**

We need not fear and we will not fall because God is on our side. In fact, God is in our very midst. He makes His presence known among His people.

God's presence is like a refreshing stream among His people (46:4).

Psalm 46 now turns the worshiper's attention toward the "city of God," Jerusalem. Jerusalem was considered to be the dwelling place of God in ancient times. God promised to live among His people in the "holy place," literally, the "tabernacle" of the Most High ("Elyon"). The psalm refers to a river with streams that make the city glad. Jerusalem certainly had an abundant water supply, a spring-fed water system. But no river runs through the city. The psalm may have in mind a future creation of such a river, or it may picture the spiritual reality of the refreshing nature of God's presence. God is present to refresh His people in their times of trial.

God's presence assures His people of His timely help and security (46:5).

God is in the midst of His city, present with His people. Therefore, Jerusalem will not be shaken or destroyed. God will not let His city fall. At the break of day—at just the right time—God will step in to protect and preserve His cherished people, His cherished place. Jerusalem has been a center of turmoil down through the centuries and yet the city still stands today.

God's presence puts an end to the uproar of the nations (46:6).

Jerusalem has often been the target of attack by surrounding nations. These nations "roared" their threats against God's city and people. But these kingdoms were shaken, in contrast to Jerusalem which cannot be shaken (verse 5). Kingdoms that have opposed God's city and people have fallen because God lifts His powerful voice, making the earth melt in fear. God is more powerful than any of the enemies of His people.

God's presence serves as a protective fortress for His people (46:7).

Verse 7, which is repeated in verse 11, refers to God by His personal, covenant name—Yahweh. Yahweh of Hosts, or Yahweh of Armies ("the Lord Almighty"), is present with His people. He is "with us." This verse then refers to God as the God of Jacob. The descendants of Israel are God's chosen people. This God is a fortress, a refuge (a different term than the one used in verse 1)—a high and secure place of protection. God's presence forms a protective barrier for His people, guaranteeing that they, like the city of God, will not fall. We do not fear, and we will not fall because God is our refuge, our strength, and our fortress.

**Because God is sovereign, we
will enjoy a peaceful future (46:8-11).**

Following the second “selah,” Psalm 46 turns the reader’s attention toward the future with a warning of judgment on the earth and a promise of peace for God’s people.

God will put an end of warfare forever (46:8-9).

Psalm 46 invites God’s people to “come and see” the Lord’s works, specifically the judgments He brings on the earth. God produces desolation. This desolation seems to be the destruction of humankind’s own destructive ways. Human history has been riddled with warfare, but God will one day make wars cease throughout the world. Figuratively speaking, He will break the warrior’s bow, shatter the spear, and burn the shields (possibly “chariots”). God will destroy the implements of war and put an end to warfare forever.

God will be exalted among the nations forever (46:10).

Having been invited to see God’s work of destroying humankind’s warring ways, the reader is now encouraged to “be still” and to “know” that God is God. He is the sovereign God over all gods. To be still implies a restful anticipation of God’s blessing. God’s people will experience peace when God puts an end to warfare on the earth. At that point God will be exalted even among the unbelieving nations of the earth. He will be exalted throughout the earth. God is the sovereign Lord of the universe, and this reality will one day be made known to all people.

God’s presence will serve as a protective fortress for His people forever (46:11).

Repeating verse 7, Psalm 46:11 states, “The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.” God is ever present among His people. He is our protector, our secure high place of refuge. God’s people anticipate a peace-filled future because God is God. We will not fear, we will not fall, but we will enjoy a peaceful future. Psalm 46 reassures those threatened by the challenges of this world that God’s powerful presence brings peace.