

Psalm 46—Our Trust is in God

Introduction

Psalm 46 has been called the psalm of “holy confidence”...Even during the turbulent days of the Reformation, when Melanchthon would express fear lest the Reformation be stilled before it got under way, Luther would say, “Come, Philip, let us sing the 46th Psalm.”.... The psalm was also his inspiration for the great hymn of the Reformation, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”. –God’s Word for Today: Psalms. CPH. Page 11.

1. What does the inscription tell us about this particular psalm
2. Psalm 46 contrasts a world in turmoil to the “glad” city of God. Read the entire psalm and look for some of these contrasting images:

	World in Turmoil	City of God
The waters	v. 3:	v. 4:
Kingdoms	v. 6 (nations):	v. 5 (God’s city):

Confidence in Commotion (verses 1-3)

3. These verses describe great turmoil.
 - a. What was the trouble and commotion pictured by the psalmist?
 - b. What types of commotions are occurring now in the earth...among nations...in humans...in the church? If you were writing this psalm today, what images would you use to convey an impression of chaos?
4. What was the psalmist’s confidence in the midst of this chaos?

God’s Glad City (verses 4-7)

5. The psalmist now presents a contrast to the commotion of the first few verses.
 - a. What does the river flowing into the city symbolize? See also these verses:

Revelation 22:1-3: Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve 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 Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

John 7:37-39: On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

- b. What city of God do we dwell in now, in fellowship with others?
6. Verses 1-3 show that heaven and earth may be shaken. Verse 6 says that nations are in an uproar and kingdoms fall. What does the presence of God promise for His city (verse 5)?
 7. God is the mighty ruler of the universe.
 - a. Where does the psalmist say that God is during these tumultuous times?
 - b. Verse 7 states that the Lord Almighty "is with us". This is the same word that is used in Isaiah 7:14 when he says "the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel [Immanuel means God with us]". What promise has Jesus given us?

In Jesus, God is present for his people. He is a help readily found. By healing the sick, feeding the hungry, raising the dead, Jesus began to restore his broken creation to what God intended in Eden. To be around him was to experience God's merciful presence. No wonder Jesus is the source of "living water", "the water of life". – Concordia Commentary: Psalms 1-50, Saleska, p. 701

8. Does this psalm mean that we, the people of God, are immune from the troubles of this world? See also John 16:33.

John 16:33--I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Invitation to See God at Work (verses 8-11)

9. What two different results do we see of God's work in the world?
10. What does God say in verse 10? Is it a rebuke or an encouragement or both? See also these verses:

1 Samuel 15:10-11, 16a: The word of the Lord came to Samuel: "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments." And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the Lord all night....Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the Lord said to me this night."

Mark 4:39: And Jesus awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

11. Glance through the entire psalm again and list the various phrases and descriptions and names of God. How does thinking on these things give us confidence in our troubled world?

12. How would you summarize the message of this psalm in one sentence?

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

Even though this hymn appears in the "Church Militant" section of the hymnal, Luther intended it as a song of comfort. Some dark events had happened in Luther's life shortly before he wrote this hymn: one of the men who followed his teachings was martyred, Wittenberg was afflicted with the plague, and his 6-month old daughter died. There were also struggles in the church—not so much with the pope but with other groups that had broken away. There were disagreements over the role of pastors, infant baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Due to his role in the Reformation, Luther did face the risk of losing life, possessions, reputation, and family. Psalm 46—and this hymn—provided comfort in the midst of trial and suffering and temptation.

13. What characteristics of God did Luther stress in this hymn?

A Mighty Fortress is Our God

Martin Luther

A mighty fortress is our God,
A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from ev'ry need
That hath us now o'er taken.
The old evil foe
Now means deadly woe;
Deep guile and great might
Are his dread arms in fight;
On earth is not his equal.

With might of ours can naught be done,
Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the valiant One,
Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this?
Jesus Christ it is,
Of Sabaoth Lord,
And there's none other God;
He holds the field forever.

Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill;
They shall not overpow'r us.
This world's prince may still
Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none.
He's judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.

The Word they still shall let remain
Nor any thanks have for it;
He's by our side upon the plain
With His good gifts and Spirit.
And take they our life,
Goods, fame, child, and wife,
Though these all be gone,
Our vict'ry has been won;
The Kingdom ours remaineth.

An Unmighty Fortress—by Chad Bird

Not a mighty but an unmighty fortress is our life—a ramshackle pile of bricks encircled by a dried-up moat. Left to ourselves, we are like Adam and Eve; we sew together fig leaves of self-righteousness and hunker down behind trees of flimsy excuses to hide in vain from a judgment we deserve. The old evil foe, who now means deadly woe, bids us nail together a raft of driftwood instead of boarding the God-given ark of salvation. As devils all the world fill, all eager to devour us, we beat them to the punch by devouring our lives in pleasures and pursuits of egotism that only fatten us for the slaughter to come. No truer words do we sing than these: “With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected.”

It is therefore the best of news that for us fights the valiant one, whom God himself elected. He strips us of our fig leaves and decks us out in the regal robes of the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world. He takes us by the hand and ushers us through the spear-hewn door in the side of Christ our ark where we are dry and safe from the rising waters. He spoon-feeds us the manna of his body and holds to our lips a chalice filled with blood that streamed from the rock of his riven side. He paints the doorways and lintels of our body and soul with the crimson colors of the Passover sacrifice. He parts the sea of the font, leads us through dry shod, and brings those waters crashing down on the army of our sins that trail behind. He—our Lamb, our Priest, our Temple, our Son of David—is our Sabaoth Lord, and there’s none other God. He holds the field forever.

And he holds us. Therefore we will not fear. Though an unmighty fortress be our life, a mighty fortress is our God. 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, we will not fear. Take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife; take they our reputation, dreams, friends, and health; though all these all be gone, our victory has been won; the kingdom ours remaineth.

Therefore, be still and know that Christ is God. The God who is love, who loves you from eternity and back. The God dead upon the cross and alive out of the tomb. All for none other than you. The Lord of hosts is with us, the crucified and resurrected Christ is our stronghold.

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