

Psalm 46

1. *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble;*
2. *Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved,
and though the mountains tremble in the heart of the sea;*
3. *Though the waters rage and swell,
and though the mountains quake at the towering seas.*
4. *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place of the dwelling of the Most High.*
5. *God is in the midst of her; therefore shall she not be removed;
God shall help her at the break of day.*
6. *The nations are in uproar and the kingdoms are shaken,
but God utters his voice and the earth shall melt away.*
7. *The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.*
8. *Come and behold the works of the Lord,
what destruction he has wrought upon the earth.*
9. *He makes wars to cease in all the world;
he shatters the bow and snaps the spear and burns the chariots in the fire.*
10. *'Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations I will be exalted in the earth.'*
11. *The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold.*

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Psalm 46 is a hymn of Zion, which praises Mount Zion. The Israelites believed that God dwelt in Zion, the special place where the temple stood and where the Ark of the Covenant could be seen. The God who dwells on Mount Zion is a sure defence for his people, in the present and even in the catastrophic events of the end of the world. The theme of the end of the age occurs rarely in the Psalter.

In the first part, the chaotic waters of the underworld break out, shaking and submerging the mountains and overwhelming the earth, so that it reverts to the chaos from which God created it (Genesis 1,2). A similar idea occurs in Psalm 18: 'The earth trembled and quaked; the foundations of the mountains shook; they reeled because he was angry. The springs of the ocean were seen and the foundations of the world uncovered at your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of your displeasure.'

In Jerusalem however, there is a picture of a river of life and health flowing from the temple, representing the presence of God flowing out all over the world. All is peacefulness and security. Psalm 46 is a tremendous hymn to the constant presence and support of God for his people. Again, a similar prophecy can be found in the book of Joel:

On that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah
shall flow with water.'

At the end of the age the nations will rage against the Holy City, but at the sight of God's majesty they will reel, and at the sound of God's voice, the earth melts.

The last part (vv.8-end) invites Israel to see the results of these events. The earth is covered with broken weapons of war, and God's reign of peace has begun. God is seen as being present with his people amid all the problems and crises which they face.

We, too, face all kinds of disasters and problems, wars, crises, disease as at present, things going wrong in many different ways. But we come through, we are still alive. We rebuilt after World War 2, and we shall rebuild after the present virus crisis, even if our lives are different, as happened in the late 1940s and early 50s. We can overcome our problems because God is with us, revealed for us in the coming of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God is with us. He comes to reveal God ever present, God, who will never let us down. In the end, in our busy and sometimes frantic lives we need to stop for a moment to be still and to remember: 'Be still, and know that I am God.' That will change everything.

Prayer

Almighty God and Father, help us to be still in your presence,
that we may know ourselves to be your people, and you to be our God; through
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.