

HELP FOR TIMES OF TROUBLE

Psalm 46

Intro: This Psalm was the inspiration for Martin Luther's great hymn, A Mighty Fortress. What the background of the hymn was, we do not know. There have been several attempts to identify it, but none is conclusive.

It is clear that there are three stanzas. They are marked out by the word, "Selah." It is found at the end of verse 3, and again at the end of verse 7, and then at the end of the Psalm. So the divisions are:

- 1) Verses 1-3.
- 2) Verses 4-7.
- 3) Verses 8-11.

Verse 1 really gives us the theme of the Psalm.

That theme is repeated in a different form at the end of the second and third stanzas in verses 7 and 11.

In the first stanza we see the sufficiency of God in the upheavals of nature.

In the second stanza we see the sufficiency of God in the holy city, Jerusalem.

In the third stanza we have a prophetic picture, and, it seems, a millennial picture of the sufficiency of God throughout the whole world.

But throughout the Psalm it is God's relationship with His people which is foremost. Notice the words "our" and "us" in verses 1, 7, and 11.

It seems that with reference to God the Psalmist is making three points:

- 1) Who is He?
- 2) What is He?
- 3) Where is He?

It is the answers to these three questions that have made this Psalm timeless in its comfort and encouragement for the people of God. When we look at the world, there are three areas of concern for us--and these coincide with the subject of each stanza:

- 1) The troubles that come upon us in nature--earthquakes, floods, and volcanic action. Death, disease, hunger, and great losses follow.
- 2) Their enemies. The picture here is of nations coming against Jerusalem, to destroy her.
- 3) The destiny of the world. What will it be with one war

following another in an endless line, with no apparent end.

So there is hope, but not in man, not even in the people of God, but in God Himself. Regardless of how terrible things may get, the people have a stronghold and a place of refuge in God.

Let us consider the three questions I suggested a moment ago. The first one is:

I. WHO IS HE?

There are five names, or titles, for God given in this Psalm. They are:

- 1) God.
- 2) The most High.
- 3) The Lord of hosts.
- 4) The God of Jacob.
- 5) The Lord.

"God" is used by itself five times. See verses 1, 4, 5 (2x), and 10.

"The most High" is used once: verse 4.

"The Lord of hosts" is found in verses 7 and 11. "The God of Jacob" appears in the same two verses.

"The Lord" is the Name in verse 8.

So if we want to know WHO is God is, we have these five names, of titles, to help us.

A. "God."

This is Elohim, the God of creation. While the term elohim is often used of heathen God, yet in such a context as Psalm 46:1 we know that the Psalmist means the one, true God, One Who is God and not man, mighty and glorious in His power, surpassing all other gods in His Person, the God of heaven and earth.

There is no question but this is the God that the Psalmist had in mind.

B. "The most High."

This name first appeared in the OT in Genesis 14 in connection with Melchizedek. (See verses 18, 19, 20, 22.)

This means that He is supreme over all. It speaks also of His sovereignty. It is an indication not only that the One Who founded all of creation, but He owns it; He is the possessor of the universe in which we live. It belongs to Him.

C. "The Lord of hosts."

Hannah seems to have been the first one to use exactly this Name for the Lord, but it did appear before as "God's host," etc. Cf. Gen. 32:2.

"Lord" is, of course, Jehovah, speaking of His eternal, unchanging character. So He was "the Lord of hosts," He continues to be "the Lord of hosts," and always will be "the Lord of hosts." This means that all of the hosts of the universe, both angelic and human, are under His command and submissive to His authority. There is no limit to His own resources, nor is there any limit to the powers which He can call into action whenever the need requires that He do so.

D. "The God of Jacob."

Both times that this title appears, it is used with "the Lord of hosts." In the one we see God's mighty power; in other, His grace. He Who is the Sovereign over all created beings has condescended to identify himself, not here with Israel (Jacob's new name), but with Jacob, his original name. Here we see Jacob in his frailty, in his need, and "God" linked with him.

Sometimes we bring our troubles upon ourselves. That is when it is good to remember that our God is "the God of Jacob."

E. "The Lord."

This is not the last name to be used (it is in verse 8), but it is the last to be introduced when standing by itself. Again we see that He is the Eternal One, the unchanging One, the One Who stands by His Word, the One Who is never insufficient for any or all of the needs of His people, regardless of what they may be. He is "the Lord."

One of the first ways to get acquainted with God is to get acquainted with His Names and Titles. These tell us Who God is. Knowing Who He is forms the foundation for our peace and our hope.

But let us go on to the second question:

II. WHAT IS HE?

You might feel that I have already answered that question, but here I have to three words. He is:

- 1) Our refuge.
- 2) Our strength.
- 3) Our help.

A. Our refuge.

Although this word appears three times in our text, the Psalmist used one word in verse 1; he used another word in verse 7 and 11.

The Word in verse 1 means One we can trust; in verses 7 and 11 it means "an inaccessible impregnable situation," or "a high place or tower" (Wilson's Word Studies, p. 344).

When we put these two words together, we have some very precious truth. When we flee to God, we flee to One Who will not betray us, nor fail us. And He is One Who is so high that no harmful thing can reach us. This does not mean that we will not suffer, but it means that whatever the trial may be, the outcome in the hands of God will be GOOD!

B. Our strength.

This does not just mean that He will give us strength (although He does that), but it means that He Himself will be our Strength. This is also a Name of God. It was this that Moses had the children of Israel sing about when they first came through the Red Sea. Cf. Exodus 15:2a.

Cf. what Paul said in Phil. 4:13. Also Phil. 2:13.

C. Our help.

Notice this not only in verse 1, but also in verse 5 --the same root word.

It means that we do not have to wonder as to whether or not He will help us. We do not have to wonder if ours is a case that He will take. Nor do we even have to consider whether or not we are worthy. He is our help. He was Israel's help, time and time again. This is a guarantee that when we come to God, He will not turn us away. He will not even turn us over to

others. He is our help.

This brings me to my last question:

III. WHERE IS HE?

All that I have told you about the Lord up to this point is good, and what I am about to point out makes it all better!

Where is He? Is He hard to find? Can it be that we will not be able to find Him when we need Him? What does this Psalm tell us?

Look at verse 1. He is not only our Help, but "a very present help." See also verses 5 and 7 and 11. He is "with us," meaning not only that He is on our side, but He is here, now, wherever you are, and wherever I am. We do not have to go looking for Him.

The Lord's word to Joshua is a word we can lay hold of, too. You will find it in Joshua 1:9. Listen to it.

Have not I commanded thee?
 Be strong and of a good courage;
 be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed:
for the Lord thy God is with thee
WHITHERSOEVER THOU GOEST.

Concl: Is there anything else that we need? Such truth, as the Psalm seems to indicate, spans all of time up to and including the time when the Lord brings all things on the earth to a glorious conclusion.

As I pray for you, my family, other people of God, and myself, I am reminded every day that we are people who have a lot of troubles. We are a greatly blessed people, but we are also a troubled people. How wonderful it is to know that we have a God Who can handle these trouble! He turns them into blessings. He stands ready to help us always, and often helps us even before we call upon Him.

Let us take these great truths to heart that, whatever our troubles may be, we may be able to glorify Him for all that He had made Himself to be to us!