

Psalm 46

A City Unshaken

1-3 God is in the Tumult

We live in a world which seems to be constantly facing the possibility of world catastrophe whether in the form of the climate emergency, pandemics, or a nuclear holocaust. This psalm can face the future unafraid because its opening phrase means exactly what it says. Our true security is in God, not in God *plus* anything else. Both this confidence and the threat to it are now spelt out.

1 *Refuge* gives the defensive or external aspect of salvation: God the unchanging, in whom we find shelter. *Strength* probably implies the dynamic aspect: God within, to empower the weak for action. Both are summarised in the words *an ever-present help in trouble*, where the term *very present* has implications of His readiness to be 'found' and of His being 'enough' for any situation.

2,3. This is not only a very powerful word picture, built up of the two things that are most immutable and impregnable, the earth and the mountains, over against, the symbol of what is most restless and menacing, the sea; it begins to contemplate the end of the whole created order, by which the earth, the mountains and the waters were set in place as described in Psalm 104:5-9.

4-7 God is in His city

From the upheaval of nature, the psalm turns to the raging of humanity, and a city under siege.

4. With God, the waters are no longer menacing seas but a life-giving river. *The city of God* is one of the great themes of the Old Testament and especially of the Psalms, where the present psalm and the next two form a memorable group. God's choice of Zion, or Jerusalem had been as striking as his choice of David, and the wonder of that keeps breaking through.

5. The promise *she shall not be moved* gains special force from the repetition of the same word, *moved* used of the mountains in verse 2 and of the kingdoms - verse 6.

6. As in some other places, judgment is seen here in both its aspects: first the outworking of the inherent instability evil, where the fitting sequel of *to rage* is to be insecure; and secondly the intervention of God, whose *voice* will be as decisive in dissolving the world as it was in creating it.

7. The first line of this stirring refrain speaks of might and the second line speaks of grace, by the mention of Jacob, Gods chosen. The word *refuge*, here and in verse 11 is distinct from that of verse 1 and implies inaccessible height.

8-11 God exalted in the earth

This is a vision of things finally to come, although the victories of the present are a foretaste of them. The word for *behold* translated Come and See in the NIV is generally used for seeing with the inward eye. Although the outcome is peace, the process is judgement. The reassuring words, *he makes wars cease* are set in the context not of gentle persuasion but of a world devastated and forcibly disarmed (v8,9b). This sequence, with tranquillity on the far side of judgment, agrees with Old Testament prophecy and with the New Testament (e.g. Isaiah 6:10-13, 9v5, Daniel 12 v 1; 2 Peter 3 v12-13)

10.11. So too, the command *Be still...* is not in the first-place comfort for the harassed but a rebuke to a restless and turbulent world: 'Quiet!' It resembles the command to another raging sea: 'Peace! Be still!' And the end in view is stated in terms not of humanity's hopes but of God's glory. His firm intention 'I will be exalted' is enough to arouse the resentment of the proud but the longing and resolve of the humble.