

Life: The shelter of God's peace

December 20, 2014

• *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Jan. 4 focuses on Psalm 46:1-11.*

Introduction

This psalm is a manifesto of God's strength and a resounding expression of the author's rock-solid confidence in God as his covenant Lord. The dynamic observations of God's strength expressed in this psalm inspired Martin Luther to pen his famous hymn *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. By examining and applying this psalm, we can learn how to apply the grand statements of God's strength to issues we face daily.

Overview of Psalm 46

Psalm 46 divides into three sections, verses 1-3, 4-6, and 8-10, with refrains at verses 7 and 11. The refrain delivers a colossal truth that generates the psalm's statements of confidence. Verse 7 is the high point and dramatic center of the psalm. Verse 11 repeats verse 7, providing a resounding conclusion.

The central idea in verse 7, and the entire hymn, is the strengthening presence of the "Lord Almighty" (NIV) or "Lord of hosts" (ESV, NASB, KJV) or as Luther's hymn reminds us, "Lord Sabaoth." The entire psalm describes the Lord's almighty power and its implications for his people.

Because verse 7 is central, verse 1 delivers a fortissimo trumpet fanfare for the earth's Almighty God. The intervening verses describe God's strength, in rising crescendo, until verse 7 declares Israel's Lord is this Great, Almighty God. Psalm 46 actually is an instruction piece based upon the Hebrew names for God. Three Hebrew names for God are featured in the psalm, and a fourth is referenced indirectly.

The name "God" frequently appears in Psalm 46. Learners should count the occurrences of the word "God" and the pronouns referring to him. This is the standard reference name for God, used by all people. The author personally knows God and creatively describes the Lord of the covenant as the great Almighty God.

One name of God curiously not found in Psalm 46 is El Shaddai, meaning "God Almighty." The word Shaddai derives from the Hebrew word for mountain, which is used by the Old Testament's as an image of strength. El Shaddai occurs 48 times in the Old Testament, though 31 of these occurrences pepper the book of Job. Nevertheless, Psalm 46, especially verses 1-6, celebrates the almighty power of God, in essence, describing what the name El Shaddai conveys. Another good exercise is to find every word in this psalm that denotes strength.

The name "God Most High" in verse 4, or El Elyon, is reflected in the single word Elyon, translated "Most High." This name stresses God's holiness, an important observation regarding the Almighty. He is "most high" because he commands countless warriors. He does so for his covenant people. God's "highness" therefore suggests his holiness, or separateness. God is separated for, or committed to, his people. The name "God Most High" helps transition to the next divine name.

"Lord Almighty," or better "Lord of hosts," occurs 279 times in the Old Testament. It refers to the strength of the Lord by declaring his ability to command "hosts." A host is non-specific large number often rendered by the word "army." The name first appears in 1 Samuel 1:3 in a book concerned with the leadership of Israel's army.

The book teaches the vital lesson that Israel's army was God's army. Joined to this earthly army was a heavenly army of angels. God was the Lord of hosts or armies and his strength seen in his ability to command countless combatants willing to serve the Lord with all their strength. Israel's Lord is

overwhelmingly strong and the same person as the Almighty ruler of the world. Such a revelation is rich in practical applications.

Peace is ours because no calamity can overwhelm our God (Psalm 46:1-3)

Verse 1 refers to God as a refuge, strength and ever-present help. This is a revolutionary thought for those who think they believe in God but cannot seem to connect with him. Those who know God can retreat into his powerful arms, experience his life-preserving strength, and witness his ready response to trouble.

The application of verse 1 is not merely finding refuge or help for a problem. Knowing God's strength and protection means one need not fear, even though the earth is overwhelmed. The poetry describes the earth and its strongest elements wavering in fear—the earth gives way, the mountains leap into the sea and the waters roil. But God's people stand firm because the One to be feared is the One who delivers them. Consider the comforting words of Isaiah 26:3: "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."

In the middle of any calamity or turmoil, we can have peace (Psalm 46:4-7)

Verse 4 speaks of a river flowing through Jerusalem. Actually there was no prominent river in Jerusalem. But this is poetry, so the heightened meaning counterbalances the violent fear of God shown in verse 3 by the sea. In contrast Jerusalem's "river" ministers to her. God has accomplished this for his people.

Verses 1-3 state God is present among his people. Verses 4-6 extend this idea by declaring God's presence in His city. He has taken up permanent dwelling among his people. He will not allow his people to fall. In contrast, the ungodly experience the same uproar as the surging sea.

Verse 7 takes the “ever-present” theme and applies it to the “Lord Almighty” or “Lord Sabaoth.” The Lord is actually more than a refuge. He is a fortress.

Peace is ours because no nation—or act of humanity—is greater than our God (Psalm 46:8-11)

The third stanza of the psalm invites people to examine the Lord’s great acts. He has brought desolation, ended wars and terminated violence. God commands the nations to be silent, just as Jesus commanded the storm to be calm. God intends to be exalted among the nations so people will come to know him. Thus, the first step to a right relationship with God is to show him respect and yield to his authority. The end result is to be counted among those who know the Lord Almighty’s presence.