

Psalm 46 & 47

One of the promises given to those who are disciples of Messiah is that “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). As we look towards the day of coming glory, we do so in the faith that we have angelic ministers appointed to watch over us (Heb. 1:14), and that they will deliver us out of all evil. So the promise is given: “the Angel of Yahweh encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psa. 34:7). Though it is true that “many of the afflictions of the Righteous”, it is also true that “Yahweh delivereth him out of them all” (Psa. 34:19). He will not leave nor forsake those who trust in Him, and His power to save – and the knowledge of that fact is a source of much comfort and exhortation to the faithful.

Our readings for the day have brought us to consider three of the Psalms, each of which express total trust in Yahweh, as a shield and provider of salvation in the day of evil. In this short exhortation, we shall consider the themes of two of these Psalms, namely Psalms 46 and 47.

PSALM 46

This Psalm commences by proclaiming how that Yahweh is a source of strength and help:

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear ...” (Psa. 46:1-2).

From these words, we learn that Yahweh is not remote and distant from His Creation, but that He is ever near and present to deliver his children from trouble. He is like a place of refuge from the storm, where the righteous can go to for safety. Again, the Proverbs describe His Name thus:

“The Name of Yahweh is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe” (Prov. 18:10).

Believers are baptised into the Name, and their purpose is to show His Glory. The contrast here is to the tower of Babel, where men sought to construct a tower to elevate themselves, and their own Name (see Gen. 11:4). But for the saints of the Most High God, their objective is to elevate Him, and His Most Glorious Name.

But although Yahweh is our strong tower and refuge, we ought not to suppose that we will be free from troubles during the days of our mortal pilgrimage. The test of spiritual strength is to hold fast in a day of evil circumstance, and to maintain our hold upon that hope which is the anchor to our soul. “Therefore will not we fear ... though the waters thereof war and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah” (Psa. 46:2-3). We must remain strong in tribulation, as it is written that “if thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small” (Prov. 24:10). Notice here, the principle is not that we will be spared the day of adversity, but that rather we must be strong for its duration.

When we survey the world around us, it is true that we see the sea and the waves roaring, as described above. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isa. 57:20-21). But there is “the peace of God which passeth all understanding” (Phil. 4:7) for the righteous. Taking refuge in the Tower of the Yahweh-Name, even when all around us the sea of nations “war and be troubled”, we can find comfort and peace of mind. We do not involve ourselves in the turmoil of men’s affairs, but rather are “neutral observers of events” as Bro John Thomas put it. We know what the ultimate outcome will be, and so we do not fear, but resolve to hold fast until the day of peace and tranquility comes. In that day when

Messiah will be enthroned upon the earth, the sea of nations shall be still, without a single ripple of violence “before the throne there was a sea **of glass** like unto crystal ...” (Rev. 4:6).

By contrast to the raging waves of the sea, Psalm 46 continues to describe a life giving river:

“There is a river, the streams thereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High” (Psa. 46:4).

It has been suggested that this Psalm has its basis in certain events in the life of Hezekiah, and that this “river” is the conduit that he constructed to bring water into the country. This is referred to in the record of the Kings thus: “And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?” (2 Kings 20:20). The context of this event is interesting in this connection, for it was around the time when Jerusalem was besieged by the Assyrians, as recorded in Isaiah chapter 8. Here paradoxically, Assyria is a overflowing river that threatened the safety of the city:

“forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin, and Remaliah’s son; now therefore behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory; and he shall come up, over all his channels, and go over all his banks; and he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel” (Isa. 8:6-8).

Yet Hezekiah trusted in Yahweh his God, and in the waters of Shiloah. But these events also foreshadowed things to come, and the future destruction of the latter-day Assyrian power. Psalm 46 describes the raging of the heathen nations, to be subdued by Messiah when he comes again:

“**The heathen raged**, the kingdoms were moved: he uttereth his voice, the earth melted” (Psa. 46:6)

And again in Psalm 2:

“Why do **the heathen rage**, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against Yahweh, and against his Anointed ...” (Psa. 2:2).

In the folly of seeking to overthrow omnipotent power, the nations shall rage in madness against Immanuel, only to be broken like a potter’s vessel (Psa. 2:9). Having destroyed the 4th Beast power (Dan. 7), the Prince of Peace shall establish both righteousness and harmony in the earth, as nations will learn war no more: “He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.” (Psa. 46:9, see also Isa. 2:1-2). In that day, Yahweh only will be exalted, as the haughtiness of man shall be brought down low. Then it will be proclaimed: “Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth” (Psa. 46:10, see Ezek. 39:23).

PSALM 47

Moving on to consider Psalm 47, we have the same theme of nations being subdued before Yahweh’s people, and again the background appears to be in the days of Hezekiah. The end result is expressed first: “For Yahweh Most High is Terrible; he is **a Great King** over all the earth. He shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet” (Psa. 47:2-3).

In the eyes of Hezekiah, Yahweh is “a great king” – but contrast that to the words of the Assyrian who came up against Jerusalem:

“Rabshakeh said unto them, Say ye now to Hezekiah, Thus saith **the Great King**, the king of Assyria. What confidence is this wherein thou trustiest?” (Isa. 36:4).

Rabshakeh represented the kingdom of men, the Assyrians who were at enmity with Israel. Verse 7 describes how he ridiculed those who trusted in Yahweh, the God of Hezekiah: the real issue was whether or not the gods of Assyria were mightier than the God of Israel. As Hezekiah said to Isaiah the prophet: “this day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of **blasphemy** It may be that Yahweh thy God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master hath sent **to reproach the living God**, and will reprove the words which Yahweh thy God hath heard: wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left” (Isa. 37:3-4). To reproach the people of Yahweh was to reproach their God, and so Assyria’s attempt to annihilate Israel came to nothing. Indeed, Assyria as a nation no longer exists, but Israel has been restored to their land, and will yet be restored to their God.

The defeat of the Assyrian king in some ways foreshadows the defeat of a latter day power of Assyria, in ways that are beyond the scope of our present considerations. But this comes out in Psalm 47, which describes how a confederacy of nations will be subjected to the reign of Messiah: “he shall subdue the people under us, and **the nations under our feet**” (Psa. 47:3). The nations who seek to oppose Yahweh’s Anointed when he comes again, shall have their dominion taken away, and be subject to His rule. The same language is used in Psalm 110: “Yahweh said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies **thy footstool**” (Psa. 110:1) – and Paul elaborates on this, and informs us that “he must reign, till he hath put all enemies **under his feet**. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:25-26). At the last, even death itself shall be destroyed, as all the earth shall be filled with a glorious, immortal race of men who perfectly reflect the glory of their Maker.

By contrast to the nations whose dominion shall have an end, Yahweh has chosen Israel to be His People, and Jerusalem to be the future capital of the world. So Psalm 47 continues: “he shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob, whom he loved. Selah” (Psa 47:4). Being a chosen people, repentant Israel shall be “saved in Yahweh with an everlasting salvation.” They “shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end.” (Isa. 45:17). Their enemies shall have their dominion taken away (Dan. 7:12), and be subject to them, as it is written: “For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; Yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted” (Isa. 60:12).

Psalm 47 speaks of the way in which God shall be lifted up in power as a deliverer for his people: “God is **gone up** with a shout, Yahweh with the sound of a trumpet” (Psa. 47:5). Psalm 68 also uses this language of ascending:

“thou hast **ascended on high**, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that Yahweh Elohim might dwell among them” (Psa. 68:18).

And this passage is cited in Ephesians 4:8 and directly applied to Messiah himself. He ascended from the grave, and was set on high in the heavenlies, far above every earthly power or ruler. And the days are near when he shall rise up from his Throne to contend against the nations: “at that time shall Michael (= Who is like El) **stand up**, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book” (Dan.

12:1). He shall go up with a shout and the sound of the trumpet to execute the judgement written, "for the day of Yahweh cometh, for it is nigh at hand" (Joel 2:1).

In the days to come, Psalm 47 reminds us, there shall be a great sound of singing with joy and gladness of heart:

"sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our king, sing praises. For God is the king of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding" (Psa. 47:6-7).

We must never overlook the power and importance of singing praises to our God. To vocalize our thanksgiving in the offering up the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name (Heb. 13:15) is to offer a sacrifice that is well pleasing in His Sight. The immortal choir shall sing with great gusto for their salvation and deliverance: they shall "sing a new song, saying, thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." (Rev. 5:9-10). We, who are the heirs of salvation have much to rejoice about, and this should be reflected in our hymns and praises before our God.

Psalm 47 ends with a word-picture of the future, when Yahweh will be King, reigning through the personage of His Son:

"God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his Holiness. The princes of the people are gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth belong unto God: he is greatly exalted" (Psa. 47:8-9).

The fact of God reigning will be a fulfilment of the Gospel. Isaiah expressed it thus:

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth **good tidings**, that publisheth peace; that bringeth **good tidings** of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, **Thy God Reigneth**" (Isa. 52:7).

The word "Gospel" signifies "good news", or, "good tidings", and in this place we are expressly told that the Good News will be that Israel's God will reign. His enemies being subdued, the "Great King" shall rule over a subjugated earth, and the blessings of his dominion will extend across the entire globe. Kings shall fall down in worship before him (Psa. 72:11), and the instruction shall go throughout the entire kingdom: "Serve Yahweh with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him" (Psa. 2:10-12). These are the days that we earnestly look forward to, when Yahweh will reign supreme, and his Son shall be united with his brethren as one spirit throughout the ages to come. Let us therefore trust in our Father's power to save, for truly He will deliver us out of the afflictions of our mortal trials, and bring us through to sing His Praises as members of that immortal choir giving Glory to His Name.

Christopher Maddocks