

Psalm 46 - Finding Refuge in Times of Trouble

One of the promises given to those who are disciples of Messiah is: “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” (see 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. For our considerations today, we shall consider Psalm 46:

PSALM 46

This Psalm commences by proclaiming how that God 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 (Mat. 28:19), and their purpose is to show forth His Praises (1 Pet. 2:9). 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 and praise Him: so they can trust in Yahweh, and find safety in His Name.

In this way, our God is a present help in times of trouble. The sentiments are echoed by the writer to the Hebrews: “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, **and find grace to help in time of need**” (Heb. 4:16).

STORMY SEAS

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 roar and be troubled**, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah” (Psa. 46:2-3).

We must remain strong in tribulation, for it is written: “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, we do 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). Again, the Master described the sea of nations of his day:

“there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; ***the sea and the waves roaring***” (Lu. 21:25).

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 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 tranquillity comes. For those who trust in Him, the Lord will ultimately “maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still” (Psa. 107:29). We have an illustration of this when Messiah passed through the stormy sea with his disciples: “there arose a great tempest in the sea insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep”. Here, the Master was at peace, even when all around him there was a stormy chaos. But he stilled the waves: “then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm” (Mat. 8:26). The same Lord that was able to still the troubled waters, will also subdue the sea of nations. 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, 15:2).

The Lord also described those who heard and practiced his sayings:

“Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: ***and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew***, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock” (Mat. 7:24-15).

It is far easier to dig into sand than rock, but the house built upon sand had no foundation to keep it secure in the storm: “and it fell: and great was the fall of it” (Mat. 7:27).

A LIFE-GIVING RIVER

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” alludes to the conduit that he constructed to bring water into “the city of God”, so making it “glad”. 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).

So 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)

Notice that here, the response to the heathen raging, is the uttering of Messiah’s voice. As a commanding officer, he utters his voice, giving the Divine Command to subdue the nations. As Joel describes:

“Yahweh also shall roar out of Zion, and **utter his voice** from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but Yahweh will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel” (Joel 3:16).

Psalm 2 also describes the tumultuous nations in a similar way:

“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)

This is the calming of the raging nations: their wars shall cease and their weapons will be broken and cut in sunder. Isaiah also spoke of this:

“... And **he shall judge** among the nations, And shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruninghooks: Nations shall not lift up sword against nation **neither shall they learn war any more**” (Isa. 2:4).

“BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD”

In that day to come, 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).

Notice the command to **“be still”** – is matched by the words of Messiah to the raging waves: “Peace, **be still**” (Mrk. 4:39). This contrasts greatly with the turmoil of the nations. Whereas men’s hearts are failing them for fear at the things coming upon the earth, the disciple of Christ must wait on their lord, and be still.

When Moses brought Israel out of the land of Egypt, humanly speaking all was lost. The people had the Egyptians behind them, and the sea before them – destruction seemed to be almost certain. But the encouragement was given:

“Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, **stand still, and see the salvation of Yahweh,** which he will shew you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever” (Exo. 14:13).

Also in the days of Jehoshaphat, the nation again faced destruction by a foreign power, and were told:

“Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, **stand ye still, and see the salvation of Yahweh** with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for Yahweh will be with you” (2 Chron. 20:17).

As we journey through life, there are times when adverse circumstances loom large in our minds, and there may seem to be no way out. But we can rest assured:

“God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make **a way to escape**, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13)

And notice that the context of this passage is to do with the miraculous display of Divine Power in bringing Israel through the sea, and the destruction of their adversaries.

The day is yet future when the Almighty shall establish His Dominion upon the earth, but as we have seen, when Messiah comes for that purpose, there will be peace and harmony amongst the nations. Then, it will be said when he utters his voice: “but Yahweh is in his holy temple: let all the earth **keep silence** before him” (Hab. 2:20).

KNOWING ISRAEL’S GOD

The end result of all the things that will take place in the earth, is that Israel’s God will be made known:

“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).

As Isaiah also prophesied:

“And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: **and Yahweh alone shall be exalted in that day**” (Isa. 2:11, 17).

Ezekiel also describes the consequences of Divine Judgment:

“Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am Yahweh” (Eze. 38:23).

This the day spoken of from ancient times:

“there shall be upon every high Mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of waters in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall” (Isa. 30:25).

CONCLUSION

The Psalm then concludes in a similar way as it began:

“Yahweh of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah” (Psa. 46:11).

This is the central theme we have considered: when our lives seem to be in chaos, and the stormy winds beset us round about, we can trust in the power of God to save us. If we implement the commandments of the Lord, and dig deep into the rock for our foundation, we will be able to withstand the stormy blasts of life. Then we can have confidence in “the God of Jacob”, so that rather than to dwell on the difficulties of our circumstances, we must rather focus our attention on the power of God to save us from them. And then we can look towards the day when we shall stand upon the subdued nations, as the sea of glass, having no ripple of violence, but only calm and quietness. This is the hope of true believers: “and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

Christopher Maddocks