

No fear, though the earth give way!

Psalm 46:1-11

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Introduction: All of God's Word is totally relevant in today's society, but certain parts seem to leap off the page because of their "up-to-date" significance, like the Psalm we will explore today. We continue probing the Psalms –"gymnasium of the soul," God's therapeutic counseling sessions for His saints. Today it's another selection from the Sons of Korah, and it reads like a news report hot off the press from the front lines, with releases about natural calamities and disasters of earth-shattering magnitude, the collapse of kingdoms and empires, wars/rumors of wars that only a superpower from beyond this world could ever bring under control, all of which contrasts dramatically with the simultaneous description of a source of peace and security that definitely transcends this world, while at the same time penetrating its deepest recesses and impacting its destiny. See if this is what you hear as you read through this portion of God's Word (Psalm 46).

Psalm 46 is a literary masterpiece, holding together tremendous tensions such as we could only find on a place like earth, which is heaven's creation, but believes itself independent and autonomous, giving rise to such extreme expressions of its rebellion as would eventually manifest in the cruel torture and assassination of God's own Son, but at the same time still under the sovereign control of a gracious, all-powerful LORD whose personal name is Yahweh, "the One who is." Of course, the Sons of Korah didn't have access to *all that* information, but they were in tune with the same Spirit. So we want to see what this amazing ancient literary text (+2500 years old) can teach us today that might make us better followers of Jesus.

First, just a quick word about the structure of the text: it has three stanzas, with the Hebrew word *Selah* after each (from the Hebrew root meaning "lift up"), suggesting a pause. Thought to be a musical term, its use was especially prominent in the Korahite Psalms, and serves us as "thought pause": to stop and think about what that stanza conveyed. So we will go back over the first stanza with three questions ...

Stanza 1:

1) What stands out about God?

He is a refuge, which means He represents a safe shelter, security that's trustworthy. He is also strength, meaning He cares, He'll be present and sufficient; and that strength will be made perfect where? (In our weakness!) The most comforting part is that we can use the 1st-person possessive pronoun with those descriptions: He is ours! And also a very present help, meaning He's dependable –we can count on Him, even in trouble (Heb. distress/straits); we should take this as "foreshadowing"! More trouble to come!

2) What response is expected from us?

“No fear!” Remember the American lifestyle clothing brand by this name? They sold energy drinks, advertising qualities related to extreme sports. “No Fear” was created in 1989, popular in the mid-1990’s, filed for bankruptcy in 2011. A cultural phenomenon that lasted 22 years – a drop in the proverbial bucket. But they clearly didn’t have the formula down, did they? They could announce the idea of “no fear” all day, but couldn’t deliver! What does the Bible say about it? It’s the beginning of wisdom (Ps. 111:10); those who fear God have no fear of bad news, their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord (Ps. 112:7-8). Fear of God alone also leads to life (Prov. 19:23). And this was why Jesus said in Mt. 10:28-31: have no fear of those who kill the body, but only fear the one who gives you a solid understanding of your true worth (**“Don’t be afraid; you’re worth more than many sparrows”**).

3) Under which conditions should we not fear?

(This is where your mind starts collapsing!) **“Though the earth give way”**? Like removed? Like a sinkhole? Pretty drastic! Though mountains fall into the sea, waves roar, mountains tremble! So no fear regarding disasters? Is that what the psalmist is saying? Our world is definitely subject to such calamities, and we have no guarantees that we won’t be involved in one. There are a few places in Scripture where a kind of cosmic cataclysm is actually considered: Ps. 102:25-27, **“In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”** 2 Pet. 3:10, **“The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”** No fear under those circumstances? At least, not a kind of fear that would overcome us if our faith is in God as refuge and strength!

Are we living in those times today? I believe we’re close! ... They say the era of “mega forest fires” has begun, but then followed hard by unprecedented rains and flooding! ... even though drought is still covering much of Europe, with major water shortages predicted, whole forests dying, natural disasters abounding. Europe is being called “a continent in decline,” though we’re not the only one! The subcontinent of India is said to be painfully water-stressed; summer needs will exceed what is available for its desperate population, having just reached a billion and a half, passing up China this spring! What will India do?! The US State Department to the rescue! The Biden Administration has just allocated \$50K to promote transgender ideology in India to “sensitize employees of corporate entities” regarding this issue, “adopt inclusive policies, and create a safe and nurturing environment,” all of which is supposed to “further US foreign policy goals and objectives.” Please excuse the irony, but it feels like we’re on a planet adrift from its moorings – with leaders seriously adrift from good sense!

Stanza 2:

What are the primary images in this stanza?

A river whose streams make glad the city of God. Which city was meant? Jerusalem? There is a literal stream flowing through Jerusalem: the Gihon Spring, which snakes its way through Hezekiah’s tunnel under ground; but probably the meaning is more symbolic of the heavenly city, because **“she will not fall,”** she’s invincible, since it’s God’s dwelling place. Then come still more images of war: nations in uproar, kingdoms falling, God lifting His voice and the earth melting! (More disaster!) Then the psalmist declares: **“Yahweh Sabaoth immanu,”** which means the Lord of hosts, or armies, **is with us!** The psalmist understood the serious nature of the world conflict! And no one less than the Commander-in-Chief, he says, **is with us!** On our side! The God of Jacob Himself is our fortress. Remember who Jacob was? The deceiver, the supplanter who stole his brother’s birthright and lied to his blind aged father? Yet God wasn’t ashamed to be called his God!

How conscious are we of the spiritual warfare raging in our world?

Of course, Ukraine is our closest reference point: 200,000+ Russian casualties, 125,000+ Ukrainian casualties, about 60,000 dead, others M.I.A., 17 million displaced. Putin insists that Western weapons provided to Ukraine only prolong the war but won't change the outcome. Zelenskiy threatens that Russia's attempts to take over the Ukraine will never prevail, then pleads for more help from NATO. How much longer do you calculate we'll have this war hanging on? How badly will Ukraine have to be destroyed? Will God intervene, or will China? Yet 32 more countries are currently in bellicose conflicts, with significant impact on the affected populations and often resulting in a high number of casualties as well as humanitarian crises. There's everything from terrorist insurgency to civil war, drug wars, and ethnic wars, affecting many parts of central and west Africa as well as the Middle East and parts of Latin America. The result is a global refugee crisis of overwhelming proportions, with the number of people forcibly displaced reaching 184 million, 37 million of whom end up as refugees.

HAITI may not be among this group, but it's a definite war zone! And it seems the war is winning there ... over humanity! Local armed gangs impose their own brand of law and fight for territorial rights; no police defend the population, no public services, no drinkable water, no electric service, no medical service (except Doctors without Borders), garbage littering the streets for years contaminating everything, violence an everyday way of life. It's a deteriorating country with no one at the helm. Closer to home, MOROCCO is the greatest producer of hashish in the world, with Ceuta and Melilla as branch offices: just across the straits, you have the Costa del Sol, a beautiful touristic 90-km strip of "organized crime", primary region for marijuana cultivation in Europe, with MARBELLA as capital, known for its luxury, millionaire homes, drugs, assault rifles, score-settling violence. One hundred thirteen organized groups from 59 nationalities distribute the terrain. The density and diversity of criminal groups in such a reduced space is a totally unique phenomenon: it's a kind of hub, a center of coworking, where almost all the organized criminal groups of the world are represented: a U.N. of "mafiosos" in a globalized world. Their product? Crime as a service. If a mobster from Liverpool wants to get into drug trafficking on a large scale, he knows where he has to go – Marbella. Most of us live in such a bubble ... and a bubble is a very fragile thing!

We haven't even touched on the moral battle taking place for the minds of the next generation. But you know it's never off my radar. Just check out the recommended summer reading list for teachers, from the USA's largest teachers' union (National Education Assoc.): a controversial, highly graphic illustrated book [*Gender Queer*] is one of the "Great Summer Reads" recommended to teachers this year. Its highly sexualized content and imagery include illustrations of X-rated sex acts and pedophilia. The crumbling of the foundations starts in education. The moral decadence evident in our culture, seen from the perspective of history, is perhaps the greatest battle we're facing, and it's like a prophecy of doom regarding where our civilization is headed; we can't close our eyes to all of this and pretend it's not happening! The cycles of history are clearly being repeated in Western culture today, even as creation itself groans from the intensity of humanity's overuse and misuse of natural resources. We will reap what we sow, Scripture warns. Only God has sown something in history that's greater than all our sin and selfishness – THAT'S our only hope!

Stanza 3:

Our question here is, what has Yahweh done?

The psalmist says, "**Desolations!**" The ceasing of wars will be HIS doing alone: He "**breaks the bow, shatters the spear, and burns the chariots**" (just as He will have to obliterate the tanks, shatter the AK47's, destroy the cruise missiles and rockets!). That's why He says, "BE STILL" (from the Heb. root *raphah* = hang limp, loosen up, relax, refrain! Until we stop our craving and striving, we'll not know truly that He alone is the sovereign King, and that only He can stop the human warring! But how will He do it?! The Mighty Warrior, Commander-in-Chief of the heavenly armies is the only one capable – in fact, He would come personally! And come He did: to en flesh the divine solution, not

to “pay God back,” but to represent the Father with every breath He took. God is no pauper that He needs someone to pay Him back! His law has never been broken without bringing its consequences to bear on the offender (Gal. 6:7). God's justice is always 100% efficient. Besides, our main problem wasn't broken laws, but broken relationships, broken hearts, a broken covenant. So our God came personally, Yahweh Sabaoth Himself, and He lived a perfect life, fulfilled our human calling – living in perfect relationship with His Father and in perfect love toward His neighbors.

His love was stronger than all our hate, stronger than torture, injustice, suffering, and death – and he loves, values, and treasures you so much that He wants to give you permanent housing with Him for eternity ... instead of simply just that temporary abode of yours that's really so amazing (though it has so many fragile points), yet we get so fixated on it, even though it's in rapid process of deterioration and decay day by day (2 Cor. 4:16), just like the kingdoms of this world (crumbling!) and nature itself groaning over all our mistreatment. That's what Jesus' death and resurrection were also about – fulfilling His final prayer with His disciples: “I want these guys to be with me there in glory!” (Jn. 17:24-25). To believe in Jesus is to believe in ALL there is of Him and what He has revealed about us and life, our purpose and future – in Him – it should be dominating our horizon! But we have to **be still** to see it!!!!!! And He appoints us to be His ambassadors, the messengers of His Gospel of peace. Even if they kill us in this life – which is a good possibility. But we don't have to fear! Just lift your eyes and set them on the real goal, the real fulfillment, the true delight that lasts forever! And the Gospel says, you begin to enjoy those now ... in Christ. Connect to the Psalms! Connect with the Gospel! THIS is where it's happening!