

Resting in the Works of the Lord

Shaped by the Psalms / Psalm 46 / July 5, 2026

Introduction:

Our psalm to be shaped by today is Psalm 46, a psalm of confidence or trust. It is fitting for this type of psalm to follow our study of the Royal psalms because they serve to draw us deeper into the trust we have in the Lord's sovereign care for His people now brought about under the rule of our King, Jesus. Some of my favorites, which I go to often to help my weary heart, are Psalm 16, 27, 91, 121, and 46. Psalm 46 becomes more meaningful when we understand its place in the history of God's people, so I want to open with J. Josh Smith's summary of its historic context. He writes, "During the prophetic ministry of Isaiah, the entire Near East lived in fear of the Assyrians. They were a brutal and barbaric people, intent on taking over. The Assyrians used both psychological and physical threats to weaken and destroy their opponents. They would often surround cities and send messengers into them to taunt the people and encourage them to surrender. If the people did not, the Assyrians would then invade, setting houses on fire, and murdering or raping the inhabitants. Isaiah had already watched as this happened to Israel; now the Assyrians were looking to conquer Judah. A messenger was sent from the king of Assyria to Hezekiah telling him to surrender (Isa 37:17-20). The king of Assyria also sent messengers to tell the people that no god had ever saved anyone from him, and they must not listen to King Hezekiah if he should tell them to trust the Lord (Isa 36:13-20). So King Hezekiah does the only thing he knows to do. When it seems the Assyrian king will soon prevail and even sends him a letter to assure him of that, Hezekiah lays it on the altar, gets on his face before God, and begs God for help. That night, after Hezekiah had prayed, the angel of the Lord went outside the gates of Jerusalem and killed 185,000 of the Assyrian soldiers. Most commentators agree that out of that situation, the people of God wrote Psalm 46 (Boice, Psalms 42-106, 391)" (J. Josh Smith, Exalting Jesus in Psalms 1-50, pp. 321-322). Contemplate the confidence we see being anchored to this powerful moment of God protecting His people as we work through this psalm together this morning. As with Psalm 24, Psalm 46 provides three strophes that move through turmoil from creation in verses 1-3, to turmoil from nations in verses 4-7, before ending in the divine intervention of God in verses 8-11. For our purposes this morning, we will consider the first two strophes together as I see them communicating a similar response. Consider with me how verses 1-7 call us to,

Find Comfort in The Lord's Abiding Presence with His People

The theme of this psalm is stated in the introduction and restated in verses 7 and 11. Look at verse 1, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Refuge is a term used often in the Psalter, appearing for the first time in the Royal Psalm of Psalm 2. It is most often used in an individual voice, enhancing the weight of it when used in the corporate voice here. Refuge and strength together communicate safety found inside a mighty fortress. Yet, note how the focus is on God Himself as the present help in trouble. The idea is not that God simply puts His people in a safe place like a strong fortress. Rather, God's presence with His people is their refuge and strength. Israel struggled to understand this throughout her history, often losing sight of God as her refuge and moving towards trust in their military, or the strength of Jerusalem itself. They repeatedly failed to understand their strength came from the gracious presence of God with them, turning from trusting in the Lord to trusting in man. We are tempted to do the same, are we not? We find comfort in the military might of our country, or the strength of our city's police force. Our feelings of safety come from security protocols, alarm systems, the presence of weapons, or what part of town we reside in. Don't hear me wrong, I am not saying we shouldn't be thankful for and appreciative of some of these things. We should thank God for many of these things. But we need to remember the primary reason for our safety, as believers, is because our God dwells with us. Even our freedoms in this country ultimately exist because our Sovereign God wills them to exist. This truth was seared into my heart as I worshipped freely for years in a Muslim country due to no other reason than God's miraculous intervention willed it to be so.

History has proven any nation's status will vanish in a moment if God decides that is best, regardless of their military strength. So family, be thankful for our freedoms. Be grateful for those who sacrifice and serve our country. Appreciate security teams and protocols. But, never forget, God is the refuge for His people, not any location, military, or security system. The verses that follow solidify this as the psalmist speaks of two dangers, destruction coming from creation and destruction coming from nations. Look at verses 2-3, "Therefore we will not fear though the earth give way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah" In the worldview of that day, the earth and mountains represented two of the most unchanging things, whereas the sea and rivers are seen as chaotic and constantly changing. The imagery pictures a threat to the earth's stability as the strength of mountains are overtaken by the roar of the waters. Yet, in the midst of this, God's people have no reason to fear because God is their mighty fortress. Family, the human heart will always have reasons to be afraid of natural disasters. They often overwhelm our manmade structures, showing their strength. Yet, our awareness of God's strength and protection should move us constantly from fear of these things to rightful faith-filled fear of the Lord. God says in Jeremiah 5:22, "Do you not fear me? declares the Lord. Do you not tremble before me? I placed the sand as the boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass over it." The Lord is never taken back by natural disasters, and we can trust Him to be our refuge in them because they are always subject to His sovereign command. Continue in verses 4-6, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts." As the psalmist moves to trouble that comes from nations raging against God's chosen people and city, several things are striking. First, the transition from troubling seas to a life-giving river remind us of God's perfect control over even that which is thought to be chaotic. Though waters roar to the point of overwhelming mountains, they are calmed inside the city of God and made into sources of life. Family, though the world around may give way, the place where the Most High dwells will remain peaceful and secure. Second, there is no river through the earthly city of Jerusalem. So, either the river is symbolic, the city is symbolic, or both are symbolic. Context suggests the city is Jerusalem and the river is symbolic. However, the prophets consistently speak of a life-giving river running through the New Jerusalem. Therefore, though contextually connected to the earthly city of Jerusalem, I am persuaded Psalm 46 is looking to a fulfillment beyond any earthly city due to the rest of its language. Third, there is a word play between verses 2-3 and 5-6 as the seas and nations roar and rage, while mountains and kingdoms tremble and totter. Chaos and instability may overwhelm creation and kingdoms, but the place where the Most High dwells remains a stable source of joy and peace. What causes this stability? God's presence means that place will not be moved and will receive help. Finally, note what ultimately causes kingdoms to totter in verse 6. The roaring seas don't hold a candle to our God. They might move mountains into the seas, but His voice melts the earth. Just as the Lord exercises perfect power over creation, so He does with the nations. Who can rage against this kind of power? This moves the psalmist to restate the theme of this song in verse 7. Look there, "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah" As we saw last week, Lord of hosts refers to angelic armies who exercise God's sovereign rule over the world. Family, this is the One who is with us, the God who wrestled, provided, and cared for Jacob is our fortress. Before we move on, note how the emphasis doesn't fall on the city, but on God's presence. Though the city is referenced, the song is inviting us to trust in where God chooses to place His presence, not in any particular locale. It's no accident that the New Testament often speaks of our lives as hidden with Christ, the Spirit residing with us, the church as the temple of God, and the heavenly Jerusalem as our true home to which we have already come. The dwelling place of God is not relegated to any local geography. It is wherever God's chosen people, bound to Jesus Christ, are in the world. It is right here, right now, because we are here. Consider, then, the final strophe in verses 8-11, that calls us to,

Dwell On and Rest in the Lord's Strength

As we read these final verses, notice the repetition of earth in relation to the Lord's strength. Look at verses 8-9, "Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire." We are first invited to behold the works of the Lord described in terms of military might and strength, as He is depicted as bringing desolations, breaking, shattering, and burning things. Yet, these desolations are desolations of war and the weapons of war. The repetition of earth points to worldwide peace, not through a passive gentleness of God but through the desolating works of the Lord. Notice how the psalmist, then, continues in verse 10, "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" I have traditionally read this as a gentle encouragement to calm our hearts and know our Lord is God. However, I realized this is a command that is much more forceful in the original language. "Be still" is more of a rebuke that we might read as "quiet!" or "stop!" similar to Jesus' command of the raging seas in Mark 4. Many identify the raging nations as audience of this command, because God's people confidently know He is with them throughout Psalm 46. Yet, it could just as much be a forceful command to our hearts as well. Think about this with me. The earth melting voice of God commands all to stop before Him, assuring both those who oppose Him and those who trust in Him that He will be exalted by all nations of the earth. Family, hear this as the strong and commanding voice of the Lord calling us to recognize who He truly is. Then consider how He says in Isaiah 66:2, "This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word." Our trust in the Lord will grow as we set our minds on the awesome power and might of God, not as we make Him more docile and domesticated. And it is in an awe of our majestic God that the final refrain of this psalm's theme causes our fearful hearts to rest. Look at verse 11 and stand in awe of its truths, "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah" The water calming, earth melting, nation quelling, angel commanding Lord is with us as our fortress. What is causing your heart to fear this morning? Speak this truth to your weary heart. Has some difficulty shaken your confidence in God as your refuge? Maybe it is something of more natural causes like sickness or a recent diagnosis. Perhaps it is something under man's power like political turmoil, rumors of wars, someone's ill dealings with you, or uncertainty about your future. Dwell more on the Lord's strength today so you can rest in it, knowing He is your fortress. Raise your confidence that God's abiding presence with you means you have no need to fear.

Conclusion:

I want to return to this psalm's context as we bring this all to a close. J. Josh Smith's comments are helpful again, "Think about this in terms of the threat of the Assyrians. After the angel of the Lord showed up, there were 185,000 dead soldiers outside the city walls. Their camp was filled with bows, spears, and empty wagons. The only way to dispose of the mess was to burn it. The psalmist invites us to come and see as the smoke is ascending to the sky—every billow a reminder that the Lord is the one who makes wars cease and shatters bows and cuts spears (v. 9). Every page of Scripture is an invitation to come and behold the works of the Lord" (J. Josh Smith, *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 1-50*, p. 324). Why do we read and reread scripture, revisiting the same stories and truths year after year? Because they remind us of the great God who calls us to take refuge in Him. Though God moves in powerful ways today, sometimes what we need to bolster our confidence and trust in Him is simply to recount all the ways He has moved throughout history. The Lord of history is the One who dwells with us. "He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in our time of trouble." As the worship team comes for our time of reflection and response, let me close with two powerful promises from our awesome and powerful God that I believe are particularly relevant for us today. In Matthew 16:18, after Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus says, "on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Family, not even the gates of hell are powerful enough to prevail against the church. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and peoples rage, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress."

Carry the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 with you this week, as He tells you, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Our lives must be anchored to these promises. Christ will build His church. All authority has been given to Him. And He is with us to the end of the age. When we fully grasp these truths, we will become a force for His Kingdom and glory. Would you pray with me as we prepare to respond to God’s Word today?