

## **PSALM 46 – A SONG FOR TIMES OF INSECURITY**

Psalm 46 was written during a national crisis – very possibly when the city of Jerusalem was being attacked by the mighty Assyrians.

The Assyrian army had been sweeping the known world, capturing city after city. Now it was Jerusalem's turn. A prophet named Isaiah said that God had promised to keep Jerusalem safe, but it was evident to the city's inhabitants that Jerusalem wasn't strong enough to survive the attack. They were full of fear.

The writers of this song describe these threats. They don't play down the dangers they face – if anything, they exaggerate them. The imagery in the first few verses describe the world literally falling apart. The land is slipping into the sea, the oceans are roaring, the mountains are shaking.

Perhaps you recognise the feelings of insecurity they're describing.

And yet this song is also full of confident hope. The songwriters believe their God will protect them. As the prophet Isaiah had said, Jerusalem is the city of God – the place God has chosen to make his home. It is 'the holy place, where the Most High God dwells.'

So, sheltering within Jerusalem is like taking refuge in the mightiest of all fortresses. Waters roar all around the city, yet inside there's a peaceful stream of provision. Insecurity rages just over the walls, yet there's safety inside them. Though a dangerous army is literally within sight, the people of Jerusalem know peace.

Their peace flows from knowing that even in the midst of danger, God is with his people and will protect them. Though the walls may be only a few metres high, God himself is his people's defence.

And that's how it proved to be.

As the Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem, its people feared. But when morning dawned, the Assyrian army had mysteriously vanished, with thousands of their own dead in their camp.

What exactly happened to the Assyrian army remains a mystery. The psalmists concluded that this was just another time that God had kept his promises and shielded his people, a reality to which they allude in verse 5.

That's why the second half of the psalm is so confident! God will break every weapon pointed at his people. His power will disarm every threat. When the LORD speaks, the earth melts and enemies are defeated. Because God is with his people, they are secure.

Since Jerusalem had such security, we might be tempted to want to pack our bags and move there! Yet, barely a century after this psalm was written, Jerusalem *did* fall to its enemies.

Why?

Well Jerusalem was supposed to be the place in which the whole world could see what it looked like when the living God and his people lived in harmony. Yet because of the people's consistent rebellion against God, this purpose was continually frustrated. Jerusalem was never all it was meant to be. And so, after countless warnings, God handed it over to their enemies. The prophet Ezekiel paints a vivid image of God leaving the city – his presence departing his people – leaving them vulnerable to attack.

We're left longing for a new Jerusalem – a *better* Jerusalem, where God dwells and keeps his people safe forever.

Centuries later, Jesus' earliest followers say that longing is answered in him. He was given the title 'Emmanuel' – which literally means 'God with us'.

And he was just that – Jesus *is* the Almighty God, who came to earth to be with his people.

But more than that. Through his death and his resurrection, he dealt with our sin so that we can know the security-bringing presence of God now. And one day perfectly and eternally. Even though, like the people of Jerusalem, we fail him.

And the reality of Jesus making his people secure is often pictured in the Gospels.

On one occasion, Jesus and his followers are crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat. A furious storm kicks up. The disciples – several of whom are experienced fishermen – fear for their lives.

Yet in just two words, echoing verse 10 of our psalm, Jesus quietens the wind and flattens the waves.

“Be still...”

Because Jesus is in the boat they are utterly secure. Feeling exposed, weak and helpless as the waters roared around them, they were never truly in danger. The Lord Almighty was with them.

This is the security Jesus’ followers can know today.

Though physically absent, the risen Jesus has promised he will always be with us. In our storms, he is always in our boat. Even when it feels like our world is falling apart, we are never ultimately in danger.

Sometimes Jesus speaks to our storms and says, “Be still.” Our situations can change. Other times he speaks to us, saying, “Peace, be still. I’m with you in this. I won’t let you go.” The anxieties – the storms in our hearts – can be stilled as we know Jesus’ power

over the storm and his commitment to us in it. His death proves that he won't let us go – with us now, and with us forever, beyond death.

You see, when the Bible closes, we get a vision of the New Jerusalem, a physical place where all threat is gone forever as God and his people live in peace together. That future is ours, but even while we are still on the journey there, we have a safe refuge, a hiding-place, a mighty fortress – an ever-present help in trouble.

So, like the psalmists, we can sing of our security within the great power of the Lord Almighty. He calms the roaring waters; he breaks the pointing weapons; he protects us like a mighty fortress.

In moments of fear today, we need not play down the reality of the storms. We can freely acknowledge that our circumstances leave us trembling and anxious; feeling like we're not enough

But, we can also sing Psalm 46 with every confidence: *we are never alone*.

Our God will not fail us.