

Psalm 46.

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The book of Psalms constitutes an exceedingly precious heritage for saints of all dispensations. In it the experiences of the soul while passing through a stormy world are given with a remarkable degree of fulness; and although the different writers were men under law, and therefore unaccustomed to the full grace of Christianity, the most enlightened believer in the present favoured period will never fail to discover much that exactly corresponds with the exercises of his own heart today.

Christ has a large in the book of Psalms, as He Himself told His disciples (Luke 24: 20). His birth into the world, His path of dependence and obedience, His faithful testimony, His sufferings, His death, His resurrection, His present session at God's right hand, His future manifestation as king, and His coming glorious kingdom, including not only Israel, but all the ends of the earth, are dealt with fully by the inspiring Spirit.

Israel has also a considerable place in the book, which does not surprise us when we remember that all the writers — David Asaph, Moses, etc. — belonged to that privileged nation. And because Israel comes so largely before us in the Psalms, the Psalms necessarily contain a vast amount of prophecy as yet unfulfilled. It is of the utmost importance to grasp this fact, else much of the language used will be unintelligible to us. So many glorious statements will be found which have plainly received no accomplishment in the past, that, unless we discern the prophetic character of the book, we shall be in danger of suspecting the inspired writers of using the language of exaggeration.

Psalm 46, while it furnishes a precious meditation for saints in all ages, most distinctly looks forward to the future. Not until the day of the appearing of the Son of Man will it receive its full accomplishment. The psalm that precedes it (Ps. 45.) tells plainly of the coming forth of the great King to take His throne, and the psalm that follows it (Ps. 47) gives us Israel's glad shout of triumph when His throne is established over all the kingdoms of the earth. Must not the intervening psalm therefore have a place in God's prophetic scheme also?

But we must first glance at the inspired heading. "To the chief musician. For the Sons of Korah. A song upon Alamoth." These headings should never be omitted in the reading of the psalms. Unlike the summaries printed in italics in most English Bibles, the headings have been given by the Spirit of God, and should be viewed as part of the psalms to which they are attached. Frequently there is contained in them much food for the soul. "The chief musician." Who is he? Is it not Christ? When He gets all His heavenly redeemed around Himself in the Father's house above He will be the leader of their everlasting song of praise; and when He surrounds Himself with His earthly redeemed in this lower scene He will also be the leader of their song (*cf.* Ps. 22: 22; Heb. 2: 12). He will enjoy more deeply than any the fruits of His own past toil and woe. "The sons of Korah." Who were they? These were the family of the man who led the disastrous revolt in the wilderness described in Numbers 16. When he and his company were swallowed up, God in His mercy spared his sons, as we read, "Notwithstanding, the sons of Torah died not" (Num. 26: 11). These, snatched as it were by sovereign mercy from the very brink of destruction, were afterwards brought into God's sanctuary, and given places of honourable service there (1 Chron. 26). How remarkably typical of our own case! We were once standing on the brink of a more dreadful destruction than they, but God has saved us in His grace and brought us into His own presence, and given us the privilege and joy of ministering before Him.

Are we not justified therefore in claiming a spiritual interest in every psalm dedicated to the sons of Korah? "Alamoth" means "maiden's voices," and has reference to the custom of publishing victory by means of maidens in the song and dance (Ex. 15; Ps. 68: 11). This psalm is therefore one of deliverance and victory. Prophetically, it celebrates just that for Israel by-and-bye; spiritually, it celebrates for US the even greater deliverance that we have experienced at the hands of our God.

Keeping for the moment to the prophetic aspect of things, Psalm 46 seems to find its fulfilment immediately after the appearing of the Son of Man, and before Israel's deliverance from her foes is completed. The beast and his western hosts have been dealt with (Rev. 19: 11-21), and this they joyfully proclaim; yet the horizon is far from clear, a black cloud threatening from the north (Ezek. 38, 39); but as to it they are calm and confident, feeling assured that He who has done so much for them already will not fail to complete what He has begun. So they say, "God is our refuge and strength. a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear. though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah" (ver. 1-3). Tremendous language this! If "mountains" and "the sea" may be viewed symbolically here, as in other parts of the prophetic word (Rev. 8: 8; Jer. 51: 25; Dan. 7: 2-3), general revolution and subversion of authority is referred to. The people of Israel will see much of this *before* the appearing of the Lord Jesus: here they say that if *yet more* of it is to be witnessed they will not fear, because of what God is for His people. Let everything that is stable be overthrown, their hearts will be confident. How different the experience where God is not known — "distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21: 25-26).

Here let us pause, and apply this to our own hearts. We are living in troublous times, when those who seek to be "men of God" have in many things a very painful path to tread. Are our hearts restful and calm simply and solely because we know *what God is* for us? Or do we suffer our hearts to be discouraged by reason of the way? Mark, He is "a very present help" — One always at hand. This cannot always be said of human helpers. In a time of distress and need one's truest friend might chance to be in the Antipodes, and so be inaccessible when most wanted, but this could never be true of our God. Oh, to grasp the fact with a more simple faith, that we have to do with a "*living*" God, and a "*very present*" God ! (Read 1 Kings 17: 1; Heb. 13: 5, 6).

God our refuge is a sweet thought, but in 1 John 4: 16 we have what is yet sweeter, and transcendently higher. "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." Dwelling in God! God our home! What do we know of this in our practical experience? To turn to Him in trouble is one thing, but to make Him the very home of our souls both in sunshine and in storm is quite another. It should be as natural to our hearts to turn to God as it is for a labouring man to turn his steps towards the place he calls home when the toil of the day is done. And what home is to such — a haven of rest from all the vexations and trials of the work-a-day world, a centre where his heart finds comfort and peace — just that should our God be to us at all times. Would that we all knew more of it.

In verses 4-7 — the second section of our Psalm — restored Israel celebrates the blessedness and the security which result from having God in Zion once more. "There is a river, the streams thereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her when the morning appeareth. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved: He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah." Blessing necessarily flows from God's presence, hence the "river," which will have a literal as well as a spiritual fulfilment in the coming day (Ezek. 47: 1). Power is there also — "She shall not be moved." Israel may then say, "If God be for us who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:

31). "When the morning appeareth" (ver. 5, see margin); i.e., when the Sun of Righteousness arises this will be experienced by Israel (Mal. 4: 2). Then "His voice" will be sufficient for the dissipation of all their enemies, however numerous and powerful; no battle need be fought. See Rev. 19: 15-21 for their hosts; and 2 Thess. 2: 8, Isa. 11: 4 for the Antichrist.

Here again we may find an application for ourselves. While Zion is divinely forsaken the Christian assembly is the temple of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 3: 16). Of her it may be said, as in our Psalm: "God is in the midst of her." What a wonderful fact is here! Yet what unbelief has long prevailed in Christendom as to it! To the practical oversight of this great truth, may be traced most, if not all, of the evils that have afflicted the Church from the days of the apostles until now. But the presence of the Holy Ghost is an abiding fact, however unbelieving we may have been as to it. Where His presence is confessed in faith, blessing is experienced (see ver. 4 of our psalm), and there is power (ver. 5). In 1 Corinthians 14: 24, 25 the apostle states what ought to be: the fact that it is little more to us to-day than an ideal should humble us unto the dust before God.

To proceed with Psalm 46. In the concluding section delivered Israel says, "Come, behold the works of the Lord, what desolations He hath made in the earth. 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" (v. 8-9). War is not yet at an end, the sorrowful events of the present time being witness. But when the last great crisis has come and gone, with all its unparalleled horrors and bloodshed, men will delight in instruments of destruction no more. Under the beneficent reign of the great King "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2: 4). Happy time for this poor distracted scene!

God's voice is now heard. "Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (v. 10). Here we have the object and result of all the discipline through which Israel and the world have passed. God is known by the works that He has wrought, and His universal supremacy is indisputably established. Then will be fulfilled the words: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6: 10).

The psalm closes with a repetition of faith's confidence in God. "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (v. 11). The first clause reminds us of Elisha's words to his terror-stricken servant in Dothan, when the Syrians besieged the city in order to take him prisoner: "'Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.' And Elisha prayed, and said, 'Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see.' And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings 6: 16-17). This guardian care of God is as true for us to-day as for the prophet then: He is always with and about His own, that the enemy may do them no harm.

But why does the psalmist twice say "God of *Jacob*?" In 47: 9 we read, "God of *Abraham*." There is surely instruction in the difference. Think of the contrast between the two patriarchs, and the meaning is plain. Abraham was the pre-eminent man of faith and obedience, leaving himself and his affairs in the hands of God in a way that draws forth our admiration to this hour (though he was not perfect); Jacob, on the other hand, though as truly a saint of God as he, was a poor wayward schemer whom God had to pass through much painful discipline ere his heart could really find its all in Himself. After ages of Jacob-like wandering in the earth, Israel will by-and-by find comfort in the fact that Elohim is Jacob's God as well as Abraham's. Do we hesitate to put ourselves down alongside of Abraham, feeling that we find the reflection of our own history rather in Jacob? Well, be it so. He is the God of Jacob, and will never give up even the feeblest and most unbelieving of His people, though He

may chasten them sore for their good and blessing in the end.

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