

God Provides Refuge

Psalms 46:1-7

SS Lesson for 10/17/2010

Devotional Scripture: Ps 31:1-5

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The concept of the outline of the lesson came from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator. This week's lesson teaches how **God Provides Refuge**. The **study's aim** is to show that God will always be our solid refuge and strength. The **study's application** is to remember that when we are afraid of all that is happening around us, we can trust God to be our refuge.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Cliff-hanger Lives

Many novels use “the cliff-hanger” as a literary device. In such cases, a chapter ends with the hero in a precarious situation. Death or disaster seems inevitable. This causes the reader to continue reading to learn how the crisis is resolved. This device may be traced back to a time as early as the classical Greek tragedies. Today this style has found a happy home in television shows, where a cliff-hanger ending makes it more likely that viewers will watch the next installment of a program. Many people see a cliff-hanger aspect to their own lives. We seem to stagger from one crisis to another, never completely escaping the perilous feeling of looming disaster. We weather financial pressure only to be confronted with family disaster. We have illness followed by loss of employment. We lose a friend and barely recover from our grief before we have a serious accident ourselves. Even our church family changes and adds stress to our lives. The preacher leaves. The budget is out of whack. The worship leader commits adultery. The city imposes new regulations on our parking lot. The congregation fights over something that causes a split. It never ends. We may keep it to ourselves, but our lives seem to be cliff-hangers, with disaster waiting just around the corner. Sometimes a crisis is self-inflicted. But often we cannot control the coming of a crisis—it just happens. This seems to be our lot in life. But we can find the strength to endure the present storm and prepare for the next onslaught. This is not from our inner reserves, for they are quickly depleted. It is from our relationship to the rock, the God of our salvation. The Bible does not promise believers that their lives will be trouble-free. The promise is that God will provide stability for us and help us weather the storms that arise. This is not a new strategy. Today’s lesson derives the same message from a psalm written three millennia ago, and its truth still speaks today.

Lesson Background

Psalms 46 is an expression of victory, relief, and thanksgiving. Although the author is not specifically named, the psalm appears to have been written in the aftermath of a significant threat to the city of Jerusalem that had been overcome. The psalm ascribes this wholly to the Lord, showing us the hopeless situation that prevailed. A possible setting for this is during the time of King Hezekiah, who reigned over Judah about 727–696 BC. Hezekiah’s Jerusalem was besieged by the mighty host of Assyria’s King Sennacherib in 701 BC. Sennacherib and his armies had raged through Syria (capital city, Damascus) and northern Palestine, crushing all opposition. The prospect of being conquered by the ruthless Assyrians terrified the trapped residents of the city. Sennacherib later claimed to have confined Hezekiah “like a bird in a cage.” But the people were delivered by one of the mightiest miracles recorded in the Old Testament: the angel of the Lord slew 185,000 of Sennacherib’s troops in their sleep, causing him to retreat to Nineveh (2 Kings 19:35, 36). This surprising rescue was immortalized much later in Lord Byron’s poem “The Destruction of Sennacherib”:

*Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.*

We can imagine the relief and celebration that followed such a victory. However, there were no armies to fete and no generals to acclaim. The victory was entirely the work of God, and the desire to praise him was overwhelming. In this, Psalm 46 has similarities to Psalms 47 and 48, all connected with the "Sons of Korah" (in the superscriptions). Psalm 46 is unique in its directive to sing it "according to alamoah," which occurs in the superscription. This rare word may refer to young women, thus indicating the psalm was intended to be sung by soprano voices (compare 1 Chronicles 15:20). Since this psalm was intended to be sung for a special service of thanksgiving in the temple, it may be an indication that women participated in the musical ministrations of the temple.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Stuart Briscoe, in *What Works When Life Doesn't* (Victor), included a study of Psalm 46 in a chapter titled "When Your Stresses Are Greater Than Your Strengths." He told of a man who went to his doctor complaining about severe headaches. He was told to stop smoking, which he did; but the headaches continued. He was told to stop using alcohol, with the same results. He was told to lose weight, no improvement. Finally it was discovered that he was wearing a size 15 collar on a size 16 neck, causing the problem! There is no way for us to avoid all the stresses life has to offer. Some of us are more prone to stress than others, but even the best of us will at times be faced with situations that cause stress. On those occasions we sometimes wish we could flee like a bird to the mountains, as David was told to do in Psalm 11:1. There is a place for believers to go in times of dire need. Proverbs 18:10 tells us that "the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." The next verse offers a contrast to this: "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit." That kind of security will fail; the Lord never will. In our troubling and uncertain times there is no message more relevant to us today than that which the Psalmist David brings to us this week. He knew what it was to live in fear of his enemies and other uncertainties that crept up on him. Now he shares with us what he had learned during those times about trusting God, who alone is our refuge, even when our private worlds are falling apart. When nothing else is standing, God will still be our refuge. He will not fail. As this lesson is being written, our country and the rest of the world are experiencing a severe recession. Many have lost all their retirement savings, and the future looks bleak in terms of financial security. A sense of hopelessness seems to prevail, and there seems to be no way of recovery for many. Our lesson this week could not come at a better time, for it looks like the difficulties are likely to linger for quite a while, and we need a message of hope. David offers us a divine solution.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

God is Our Refuge Because He is Always Ready to Help (Ps 46:1)

1 God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.

Help with strength (1)

Strength that comes from Jesus (Phil 4:13)

13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Strength that God provides (1 Peter 4:11)

11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Strength that God arms us with (Ps 18:32)

32 It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.

Strength because God is with us wherever we go (Josh 1:9)

9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Strength through our weakness (2 Cor 13:4)

4 For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you.

Strength in God's mighty power (Eph 6:10)

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Help in times of trouble (1)

God helps in troubles by being faithful and the only source of hope (2 Cor 1:10)

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

God helps in troubles by having the ability to rescue from calamities (Job 5:19-27)

19 From six calamities he will rescue you; in seven no harm will befall you. 20 In famine he will ransom you from death, and in battle from the stroke of the sword. 21 You will be protected from the lash of the tongue, and need not fear when destruction comes. 22 You will laugh at destruction and famine, and need not fear the beasts of the earth. 23 For you will have a covenant with the stones of the field, and the wild animals will be at peace with you. 24 You will know that your tent is secure; you will take stock of your property and find nothing missing. 25 You will know that your children will be many, and your descendants like the grass of the earth. 26 You will come to the grave in full vigor, like sheaves gathered in season. 27 "We have examined this, and it is true. So hear it and apply it to yourself."

God helps in troubles by delivering the righteous from all troubles (Ps 34:19)

19 A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all;

God helps in troubles by knowing how to rescue (2 Peter 2:9)

9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

God helps in troubles by providing a way out (1 Cor 10:13)

13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

God is Our Refuge When We have Fear (Ps 46:2-3)

2 Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

3 Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah

Refuge from fear through God's power, love and peace

Faith in the strength of God dispels fear (Isaiah 41:10)

10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Jesus gives a peace that is beyond anything in the world (John 14:27)

27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

God gives us a spirit of power not fear (2 Tim. 1:7)

7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

The love of God drives out fear (1 John 4:18)

18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Refuge from the things that causes fear

Fear of the influence of people (1 Sam 15:24)

24 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the Lord's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.

Fear of rejection and ridicule (John 7:13)

13 But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews.

Fear of people revolting (Matt 14:5)

5 Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.

Fear of people's opinions (Matt 21:26)

26 But if we say, 'From men'-we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

Refuge that provides safety from fear

No fear because through the Holy Spirit we have been freed from slavery of fear (Rom 8:15)

15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

No fear because God is our helper (Heb 13:6)

6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

No fear because God is our refuge and strength (Ps 46:1-3)

1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

No fear of man because man cannot destroy the soul (Matt 10:28-31)

28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

No fear because our trust is in God (Heb 2:13-16)

13 And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." 14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil— 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants.

Refuge that keeps us from being afraid

Don't fear, be ready to die if necessary and pray for God's will to be done (Acts 21:13-14)

13 Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." 14 When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

Don't fear or worry but keep the faith (2 Tim 4:6-8)

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Don't fear, just be faithful and the reward is the crown of life (Rev 2:10)

10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Don't fear, trust God (John 14:1)

14 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

God is Our Refuge Because He is Always Present (Ps 46:4-5)

4 There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.

5 God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.

Present in His tabernacle (4)

A tabernacle not made and served by human hands (Acts 17:24-25)

24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

A tabernacle that exists eternally in heaven (2 Cor 5:1)

5 Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

A tabernacle that has many rooms and is being prepared for believers (John 14:1-4)

14 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going."

A tabernacle whose architect and builder is God (Heb 11:10)

10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

A tabernacle that is greater and more perfect (Heb 9:11)

11 When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.

A tabernacle that is the real sanctuary versus the copy on earth (Heb 9:24)

24 For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

Present for our stability (5)

Stability through trusting God (Ps 112:7)

7 He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.

Stability in God leads to salvation (Matt 24:13)

13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Stability through hope (Heb 10:23)

23 Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Stability through obedience (James 1:25)

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

Stability through maturing in faith (Eph 4:13-15)

3 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

God is Our Refuge Because He is Our Fortress (Ps 46:6-7)

6 The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted.

7 The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

Fortress for our nation (6)

A fortified nation that has God near them (Deut 4:7-8)

7 What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? 8 And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

A fortified nation that has been entrusted with the word of God (Rom 3:1-4)

3 What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? 2 Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God. 3 What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? 4 Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."

A fortified nation that is filled with God's people (2 Cor 6:16)

16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

A fortified nation that is looking for a heavenly country (Heb 11:13-16)

13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

A fortified nation that has been declared holy because of God's mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10)

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Fortress for us as His people (7)

A fortress that is a shield (Ps 18:2)

2 The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

A fortress of salvation (Ps 28:8)

8 The Lord is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one.

A fortress in times of trouble (Ps 59:16)

16 But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.

A fortress that is secure (Prov 14:26)

26 He who fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge.

A fortress in the mountains (Isa 33:16)

16 This is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him.

A fortress in times of distress (Jer 16:19)

19 O Lord, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in time of distress, to you the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, "Our fathers possessed nothing but false gods, worthless idols that did them no good.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The most famous hymn to come out of the Protestant Reformation was Martin Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," written around 1527. It is still sung regularly in churches nearly 500 years later. Luther drew the basic ideas for this hymn from Psalm 46, our focus text for this lesson. Luther transformed the victory over the Assyrians to the Christian victory over Satan. We may see evidence of this in several phrases. Luther's description of God as a "mighty fortress" is derived from Psalm 46:1. Luther pictures God as "our Helper" in the flood of "mortal ills," a paraphrase of the psalm's description in verse 1 of God as "an ever-present help in trouble." Luther identifies God as "Lord Sabaoth" (46:7, same as "Lord Almighty"). Luther states that the devil's "rage" can be endured, for "his doom is sure," a reference to the "uproar" of the "nations" who are powerless before the Lord (46:6). Luther recognizes the might of the voice of the Lord when he claims, "One little word shall fell [the enemy]" (compare 46:6). Luther's final phrase sums up the message of the psalm: "His kingdom is forever." Kingdoms and nations may come and go. Families, careers, and fortunes may wax and wane. But the eternal kingdom of God Almighty does not change and will never fail. There is no end to the reign of our king (Luke 1:33; compare Revelation 11:15). When we are part of the people of God, we are citizens of the eternal city. Our hope and future are secure in the rock of our salvation.

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

"Life is hard. And then you die." I do not recall who said that, but I am pretty sure it was someone famous. Is it true? Well, yes, but it need not be exactly like that. As we travel this earth each day, Christians can take great comfort from Scriptures like this week's text. The psalmist begins by mentioning God. Recent surveys have shown that the number of Americans who call themselves Christians is decreasing. Even those who believe in God (but are not Christians) grow fewer each year. Does that mean God is going away? No, but it does show that more and more people are becoming more and more hopeless. God is still here, and He is still very involved in the lives of His people. That God is our "refuge" means that He is our shelter from danger. We confront danger all the time. Sometimes we are not even aware of the dangers we come across. God protects us from so much. We may not know all the dangers we were up against until we get to heaven, if God chooses to reveal them at that time. The psalmist could have stopped there. God is our refuge. What else do we really need? But God is also our strength. He is mighty. Not only does He provide the shelter we need; He also provides the strength to ward off our enemies. We who have children sometimes have to go into their bedroom at night to remind them that there are no monsters under the bed or in the closet. That may seem silly, but are adults really any different? Do we not need God to tell us and show us that He can take care of any evil? The phrase "a very present help in trouble" reinforces the previous two phrases. Hebrew poetry often follows such a pattern. With "a very present help" the psalmist is pointing out that God always provides the help we need. He never slumbers. He is always there to intervene for us. But we need to ask for His help. Jesus made that clear: "Ask, and ye shall receive" (John 16:24). James pointed out that if we do not receive, our asking may have the wrong motivation (Jas. 4:3). "Trouble" is the Hebrew word for any kind of affliction or adversity. It is a general term, just like the English word. That shows that God can deal with anything. Whatever the problem we face, God is there to deal with it. The next time you face some trouble, and it does not matter what it is, remember this verse. Memorize it now so that you can recall

it. Perhaps the time of trouble will be a job loss. God is your refuge and strength. Maybe the trouble will be among many other people. Maybe you will be on a ship that is sinking. God is your very present help in trouble. He never fails. And when you stay calm and pray for God's deliverance, others will see that and glorify Him. What if God does not deliver you? That is possible. That is exactly what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced (Dan. 3:16-18). He did rescue them, of course. But they were right; He did not owe it to them. If God provides help, it is by His awesome grace, and He does assure His people of deliverance from sin and its consequences.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. God provides all the protection and strength we need to endure trying times (Ps. 46:1)
2. If we fear God, there is no reason to fear circumstances or people (vs. 2-3)
3. God does not promise us freedom from trouble but rather what we need to endure trouble (vs. 4)
4. We trumpet God's grace when we stand unmoved while all around us are disturbed (vs. 5)
5. The wicked should not distress us, for God will eventually end their rebellion (vs. 6)
6. If God is with us, no one can triumph over us (vs. 7)

Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

With all the fearful things that are happening in our world, where can we look for safety and security? Even if they do not affect you personally, you hear about wars, floods, hurricanes, fires, and famine. The nations rage, and kingdoms are moved. You can start to feel weak in the knees, and worse in the heart, about what is happening and what might happen.

God is present (Ps. 46:1)

My older brother was a leader to me for many years. When I was with him, I could fearlessly go places and do things. He was stronger and smarter and knew how to relate to people. He could always find a job or an adventure ready to be explored. We cannot always have some physical, tangible person like that with us. God, of course, is the perfect Person to have with us, but He sometimes seems so far away and spiritual, and here we are, stuck in a physical world. However, He is always with us. He is everywhere all the time. In spite of the fact that we cannot see Him, we know He is right here, right now. Make it your habit to say to yourself, "God is here with me." The best way to do this is to talk to Him constantly. You could pray, "You are here with me." Old-time saints used to refer to this as "practicing the Presence."

Have no fear (Ps. 46:2-3)

As catastrophic as physical events may be, as threatening as human situations may become, your reaction can be faith in His presence, not fear of what is happening. Remember that He has promised that He will coordinate all things for your good and that He will never leave you nor forsake you. The reality is His loving presence; the fearsome is but temporary discomfort.

God will help (Ps. 46:4-5)

These verses may relate to prophecy that we cannot place exactly, but they also certainly speak of God's provision for your peace and security and His continual presence and power. He has anticipated every problem or need you will encounter and made super-adequate preparations for each situation.

God is our fortress (Ps. 46:6-7)

The nations and kingdoms of this world have rarely even been friends of the grace of God. Christians continue to be martyred for their faith under all sorts of governments. Remember that God raises men up for public office as suits His purposes and takes them down as well. The strength of your adversaries will melt if the Lord decrees it. You might take verse 7 as your motto for a daily reminder of His presence. Do not fear mistreatment by governments or men. Fear instead failing to be a faithful witness. You can trace the hand of God in the events of world history. This will greatly strengthen your trust in Him. God is at work in

His world. Evil men may seem to prosper for a while, but it is God who is ultimately in control. He stops wars and destroys the means of war. He raises up nations to do His will. As you see His hand in the affairs of men, you know you can trust in His great care for you. When we finally stop talking and fretting and begin quietly resting in Him, we understand that He will eventually be exalted by every creature in the universe. Remember that every knee shall bow to Him and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (cf. Phil. 2:9-11).