

This is the context for the famous verse 'be still and know that I am God ...' The Hebrew word for 'be still' could be translated 'stop'. The Psalm says; stop war, stop desecration, stop violence, stop tumult and corruption, and then people will 'know that I am God'.

Some feel that being at peace with God is a matter of dwelling peacefully in God's presence, perhaps lighting candles and saying prayers. All that may be laudable, but the thrust of this Psalm is that the call to 'stop' is not a call for restful contemplation. It is an active call to work with God to halt the disruption and degradation of the world in His Name. By responding to this call of God we offer Him the praise that is His due and glory, and as we respond to this call, we will know that God, our God is with us despite the troubles of this world.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Share with others your experience of God's help in times of trouble. Does your experience have any other connections with this Psalm?
2. Do you think that this Psalm is describing Jerusalem, or Zion, as the primary place of God's presence? Look at the arguments for and against.
3. How do feel about the phrase 'be still and know that I am God...' after reading the study? What does it mean to you. Is it a promise or a challenge?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The Psalms are written largely for our encouragement, and this is certainly no exception. It tells us about God's desire to help His people and to be with them in the midst of the most difficult of circumstances. His promises are sure, and if this is what He has said He will do, then He will do it. Sometimes we are tempted to believe that God is absent and unwilling to share the road on which we walk; there are other psalms (e.g. Psalm 10,13,23) which address such feelings, but that is what they are; feelings. We do not always see how God can be present in the most extreme of human circumstances, but when we discover that He is, then our faith is immeasurably helped.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Pray for the peace of your neighbourhood. This could include prayers concerning relationships between neighbours – often a thorny issue, together with crime and vandalism. People's lives are often deeply affected by such matters and evil can persist where it is not confronted and dealt with.*
- *How do you find peace? Ensure that during this coming week you have a time of 'peace' when you draw aside from your normal routine of things and allow God to speak to you about the things on your mind.*

Final Prayer

Jesus, make me ready. Ready to do Your will, ready to live for others, ready to love my neighbour, ready to work for You, ready to witness to Your Name. Make me ready to follow You, the Bridegroom; my Master and Lord. AMEN

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, bring the Kingdom of Your Heaven to our earthly lives. Make us pure in heart and merciful; make us peacemakers, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; make us meek and poor in spirit, and worthy to receive Your blessings. We ask this knowing that we face all kinds of persecution, but far more, longing for Your presence bringing liberation to our souls. We give You all our praise, Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Seasons

Pray for the life of our planet. Pray in earnest about environmental issues and the problems of 'greenhouse gasses' which are changing the seasons in some countries.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for people in Tibet and the political problems there*
- *Pray for those suffering from the cholera epidemic in Africa*
- *Give thanks for the joys of preparing for a coming feast!*

Meditation

Have you waited for a long time?
Waited for something to come in the post,
Waited for an important event to take place,
Waited for someone you love to arrive?

It is only ever 'not worth the wait'
If what is expected never comes, or disappoints,
Making a fool of us either personally or publicly
It's so embarrassing if hope on that which fails ...

And people scoff at us for waiting for our Lord.
As for them, there's no more waiting; God is dead.
But for us who see the emerging eternal signs,
We hope with ever growing certainty in our faith ...

The faith that Christ implanted deep within us
Is mixed with faith and love; always waiting,
For faith in God will never stop until Christ comes.
And all faith's waiting will, one day, be found.

Bible Study - Psalm 46

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to Alamo. A song.

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.*

Selah

⁴ *There is a river*

*whose streams make glad the city
of God,
the holy place where the Most High⁹
dwells.*

*5 God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.*

*6 Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.*

*7 The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

Selah

*8 Come and see the works of the LORD,
the desolations he has brought on
the earth.*

*9 He makes wars cease to the ends of
the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters
the spear,
he burns the shields with fire.*

*10 'Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the
nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.'*

*11 The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

Selah

Review

In the course of the next few days we will study some Psalms, and as we approach Christmas, the Psalms selected will give us some insight into the coming of Christ into the world. We start this small sequence with a short study of Psalm 46, a Psalm that had been used for centuries to praise God. It has never ceased to amaze me that the joy and confidence of a Psalm such as this was written by people who lived a precarious existence on the very edge of sustainability, because of frequent wars and civil unrest. It seems that our ancient forefathers in faith were able to appreciate the presence of Almighty God in the midst of instability, when we who pass whole lifetimes without such fears may be generally less aware of His presence.

Psalm 46 is the first of three Psalms (46,47,48) which focus on Zion as the God's dwelling place with His people if not by name, then as the 'city of God' (46:4), or the 'holy throne' (47:8) or 'God's citadel' (48:3). All of these are Psalms of praise to Almighty God, and Psalm 46 has a wide range of words to express this: 'God is our refuge and strength' (46:1), 'the Most High' (46:2), 'the Lord Almighty' and 'God of Jacob' (46:7,11). These specific forms of address to God are interspersed with magnificent descriptions of God as creator (46:1,2), as present in His city (46:4,5), as conqueror (46:8,9) and finally as a God of peace; 'be still and know that I am God' (46:10).

The superscription for this Psalm (the words before the first verse) indicates that it comes from a collection of the 'sons of Korah'. Korah was a son of Kohath, one of the family clans of the sons of Levi (Ex.6:16), and as such, Sons of Korah were Levitical priests. They were given a special musical role in the Temple because of their family gifting in song and music (1 Chronicles 6:22ff).

When was the Psalm written? It is impossible to date the Psalm. Its language is similar to the great song of praise at the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 15, which is generally reckoned to be one of the earliest compositions in the Bible along with the Song of Deborah in Judges 5; this would make the Psalm very ancient. However, the 'city of God' (46:4), Jerusalem, did not exist as a city of God's people until David captured it in around 1000 years BC (2 Samuel 5). Alternatively, this city could be the same city inhabited by Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18, a scripture which uses the term for God 'Elyon', or 'Most High' also used in verse 4 of Psalm 46. However, none of this is conclusive.

One further interpretation of the Psalm is to suggest that because it does not actually mention 'Zion' itself, the whole point of it is that 'God is our refuge and strength', and He is with His people; as it says in the Psalm's double refrain; 'The Lord Almighty is with us; the

God of Jacob is our fortress' (46:7,11). The 'holy place' (46:4) is therefore God's dwelling with His people specifically in the midst of trouble and distress. I like to read the Psalm in this way; but I also feel quite strongly that the Psalm has very ancient origins, and God has used it to inspire countless billions of His people to take comfort in His presence at times of difficulty and distress.

A refuge at times of disaster The Psalm begins with words of comfort to people in distress (46:1), declaring that we will not fear when our God is with us, even though the 'earth gives way and the mountains fall'. In this picture, the two great symbols of stability, the earth and mountains, succumb to the chaotic primeval forces of water and sea in this natural disaster. The picture is not merely poetic; archaeologists have found plenty of evidence of tsunami type events in the history of the Mediterranean landscape, which would have left a deep imprint upon the minds of ancient peoples, in the same way that tsunamis have in recent times. We face even more catastrophic natural disasters today as our world plunges through excess and greed into the abyss of climactic uncertainty, and faces an unresolved energy crisis.

As Christians, we either pay lip service to faith, or we can truly identify with this Psalm when it says 'God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble'. The Hebrew of the end of this verse could also read 'he lets himself be found in time of trouble' with the implication that He is already there waiting to help humanity today in the many different circumstances in which we find ourselves. Some of us deeply need to know the presence of God in our personal lives, and others are equally deeply concerned to find out how God can help our world today at a time of problems with global warming, when we need to take our husbandry of the planet more seriously. God is ready for all our needs.

Security in the dwelling place of God In Psalm 46 verse 4, the water that was a threat in the previous verses (46:30) is transformed. God has taken the calamitous forces of the initial disaster and transformed them into a source of life for those who dwell in His presence, in the 'city of God'. Jerusalem, although a high mountain, had natural and manmade water sources that were likened to the streams that flowed from the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10ff). The writer of the Psalm believed that just as the Garden of Eden was the first dwelling place of God on earth, the holy city of Zion was His final dwelling place, hence the parallels with Genesis. Christians, however, recall Jesus' saying, 'whoever believes in me ... streams of living water will flow from him' (John 7:38); this reinforces our idea of Jesus as 'God with us' in whom the promises of scripture come true today.

Despite the nations being in uproar, those who put their trust in the presence of God are secure (represented by the 'city of God' 46:6); God is always at hand to help and save, and will 'help her at break of day' (46:5). This last phrase connects with the great saving acts of God of the past, because the words in Hebrew remind us of the time when God helped Israel by saving them from Pharaoh's hordes by drowning them in the Red Sea 'at the break of day' (Exodus 14:27), an event which scripture sees as pointing towards the great saving work of God in Jesus Christ.

Be still ... The final four verses of Psalm 46 represent an amazing turn around. Up to this point, God has been described as our saviour from the disasters of the world. Now, we are called to see the 'desolations' (46:8) that God has brought on the earth by way of judgement; and paradoxically, we find that God's work and presence in the world does in fact stop all war and destruction! He is truly a God of peace! Verse 9 makes all this clear, describing the breaking of all implements of war; this is an international decommissioning overseen by God!