

THE NARROW WAY

THE UNSHAKEABLE PATH TO THE CITY OF GOD



GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH, A VERY PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE.

(PSALM 46:1 ESV)

1. Historical backdrop for Psalm 46: Possibly written in response to a threat to the earthly city of God (Jerusalem) during the time of Hezekiah.

- A. God has been and always will be a very present, well-proved help for the people of God.
- B. We have historical accounts recorded in Scripture testifying to the reality of God's help to his people.
- C. Example: The threat of the large Assyrian army during Hezekiah's reign found in Isaiah 37.
- D. Lessons from Hezekiah's response to the overwhelming threat of the enemy.

1) Humble ourselves and take our petition to the LORD.

- (Isaiah 37:1 ESV) As soon as King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD.

2) We should take note of the LORD's initial warning to Hezekiah: "Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard." One of Satan's main schemes is for us to hear words that cause us to be afraid.

- (Isaiah 37:5–6 ESV) When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, 6 Isaiah said to them, "Say to your master, Thus says the LORD: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the young men of the king of Assyria have reviled me.

3) Be prepared for the enemy to undermine our trust in the LORD and in those who lead his people.

- (Isaiah 37:9–10 ESV) Now the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Cush, "He has set out to fight against you." And when he heard it, he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, 10 "Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah: 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.'"
- (Isaiah 36:14–15 ESV) Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you. 15 Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord by saying, "The Lord will surely deliver us. This city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria."

4) Lay it all out before the LORD.

- (Isaiah 37:14 ESV) Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.

5) Make sure we hear the promises of God.

- (Isaiah 37:35 ESV) For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.

6) Wait on the LORD to do his will.

- (Isaiah 37:35–36 ESV) And the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.

WHY WE ARE NOT TO FEAR ...

2. The people of God are to not fear the things that would move/shake our world since God is our refuge and our strength, 46:1-3.

- (Psalm 46:1–3 ESV) God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah

Trouble ... an event causing distress or pain; straits as in things that firmly press us causing anxiety.

A. We are not to fear because God is our refuge and strength.

B. We are not to fear because God is our very present help in trouble.

Excursus: We need a biblical, working understanding of what it means that God is our refuge and strength ... and that he is our very present in trouble.

- (Psalm 46:1 ESV) God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

I. Looking to God as our refuge and strength is an ongoing, developing spiritual discipline by those who live on the narrow way.

- A. God is our very present help when we seek his refuge and strength in our times of trouble.
- B. God has supplied us with supernatural courage which explains why we are able to not fear.
- C. Conversely this explains why the person who is not walking in obedience on the narrow way is fearful.

So how do we do that?

How do we live where God is our refuge and strength?

- II. God is our refuge and strength when the presence of God is the place to which we run for guidance, shelter and defense—our safe house.

Refuge ... a source of something or someone turned to for assistance or security; shelter from rain or storm, from danger; shelter from falsehood.

Strength ... the attribute, quality, or characteristic of being physically or mentally strong.

- A. Note the parallelism in the text.

*God is our refuge and strength
[God is] a very present help in trouble*

- B. Understood as synonymous parallelism where both lines say the same thing but in a different way, then it seems the principle is that when God is our refuge and strength he is our very present help.
- C. Conversely: When we do not discipline ourselves to seek God as our refuge and strength, then we have no reason to expect his help.
- D. God is our refuge and strength when we bring the concerns of our heart to him and trust him for the resolution to the trouble.
 - (Philippians 4:6–7 ESV) Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Verse 6: we come to him as our refuge and strength with our prayers and petitions. **Verse 7:** he provides shelter by defending our anxious, fearful hearts with the peace of God.

This is what Hezekiah did when he received the threatening letter and spread it before the LORD.

- E. God is our refuge and strength when we live in obedience to his word and do his will.
 - (2 Samuel 22:31 ESV) This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves

true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.

- (Psalm 7:1 ESV) O LORD my God, in you do I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers and deliver me.
- (Psalm 57:1–2 ESV) Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by. 2 I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me.
- (Psalm 94:22 ESV) But the LORD has become my stronghold, and my God the rock of my refuge.
- (Proverbs 30:5–6 ESV) Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. 6 Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.
- F. God is our refuge and strength when we trust him and do not trust in ourselves or our own understanding.
 - (Proverbs 3:5–7 ESV) Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. 7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.
 - (Matthew 7:14 ESV) For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.
 - i. Trusting in the LORD with all our heart is the hard way that leads to life.
 - ii. “Hard” – to be narrowed; to be or become limited in breadth; be made narrow.
 - iii. On the hard way our trust and our wisdom are narrowed down to trusting the LORD alone.
 - iv. Living on the hard way we learn a thankfulness for the narrowing of our focus to the LORD and away from our own understanding of life.
 - v. This person discovers the blessing of reverence and the spiritual fruit resulting from not being wise in his own eyes.

End excursus

THE EXTENT TO WHICH WE ARE NOT TO FEAR ...

- 3. The people of God are not to fear even when confronting cataclysmic changes in the material (physical) or the spiritual (meta-physical) universe in which we live.

- A. In our material/physical world we may face trouble with our health, our employment, the weather, riots, wars, bullies at school or on the job, etc.
- B. In our spiritual/meta-physical world we may be troubled with our thoughts, emotions, religious or philosophical concepts, relationships, etc.
- C. The psalmist gives us a worst-case scenario to assure us of the all-encompassing safety and security for those who seek God's refuge and strength.

The extent to which God cares for those on the path to glory is described in the most far-reaching, effective, radical and extreme terms. We will not fear even if the earth moves and the mountains are shaken into the sea. We will not fear no matter the turmoil of this world whether material or immaterial.

4. The powerful truth of Psalm 46 affirms that we may live courageously and be assured of our safety in the care of God on the narrow way.

A. Paul in the NT states the truth in this way.

- (Romans 8:31–32 ESV) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
- (Romans 8:37–39 ESV) No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

B. Eugene Peterson in The Message states it this way.

- (Psalm 46:1–3 MSG) God is a safe place to hide, ready to help when we need him. 2 We stand fearless at the cliff-edge of doom, courageous in sea-storm and earthquake, 3 Before the rush and roar of oceans, the tremors that shift mountains. Jacob-wrestling God fights for us, GOD-of-Angel-Armies protects us.

C. Refuge verses ...

- (Psalm 57:1 ESV) Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will

take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.

- (Hebrews 6:18–19 ESV) So that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. 19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain.

5. The destination of those on the narrow way is the unshakeable city of God, 46:4-7.

- (Psalm 46:4–7 ESV) There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. 5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. 6 The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. 7 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah
- (Hebrews 12:22–24a ESV) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus ...

6. The narrow way is the unshakeable path into the presence of God, 46:8-11.

- (Psalm 46:8–11 ESV) Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth. 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots 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 of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

Be still ... to stop (discontinue) – to put an end to a state or an activity; to sink, relax, sink down, let drop, be disheartened; to withdraw.