

## Living Fearless: Psalm 46

Fear is a very natural emotion for the human mind, body, and soul to experience. I remember one time climbing a light house with my then 4-year-old son Liam. I was a little timid going up the stairs since I am not a fan of heights. Liam wanted to scale the stairs to get to the top and see the view everyone was talking about, so I went with him. After what seemed like 30 minutes, we got to the top and stepped outside onto the lighthouse balcony. I was a little more timid (some might say a tiny but scared) once I saw how high we were and thought of how hard hitting the ground would be. Yet, fear was not there until I saw my son Liam looking out of the bars down at the ground. I panicked. My body went rigid, my heart began to race, and I instinctively grabbed Liam and pulled him close and quickly got to the brick wall of the lighthouse. I understood the type of fear the grips the mind, body, and soul that day unlike any other time I felt fear. I, to this day do not take my kids to high places like that because of that gripping fear.

Fear, being natural, does not necessarily make fear the proper response to all situations that seem hopeless. Fear in my case was a parental instinct to protect my child. But often, we can see the world, our circumstances or day to day struggles and walk in fear.

***Fear can degrade our hope and trust in the Lord.*** Fear can be a window into the soul to what or whom we actually trust. A.B. Simpson said of fear: ***“Fear is the beginning of failure”***<sup>1</sup>. This statement was said of Israel and their fear of entering the entirety of the promised land the Lord had promised. ***Once we get our eyes off the Lord and onto our situations, we begin to slip into the failure of fear as well.*** The Psalmist in Psalm 46, talking to the people of Israel, writes a beautiful prose on how they could live fearless in the midst of earthly violence, political violence and military violence<sup>2</sup>. I believe the Psalmist gives both Israel and us the answer to the question:

**How can we live fearless in hard times? READ- Psalm 46**

***“God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present<sup>h</sup> help in trouble.***

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<sup>1</sup> Simpson, Benjamin. Nelson, Marv. *The Land of Promise* pg. 66

<sup>2</sup> Goldingay, J. (2006). *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms 42–89* (T. Longman III, Ed.; Vol. 2, p. 66). Baker Academic.

<sup>2</sup> *Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,  
 though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,  
<sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam,  
 though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah*  
<sup>4</sup> *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
 the holy habitation of the Most High.*  
<sup>5</sup> *God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;  
 God will help her when morning dawns.*  
<sup>6</sup> *The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;  
 he utters his voice, the earth melts.*  
<sup>7</sup> *The LORD of hosts is with us;  
 the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah*  
<sup>8</sup> *Come, behold the works of the LORD,  
 how he has brought desolations on the earth.*  
<sup>9</sup> *He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
 he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
 he burns the chariots with fire.*  
<sup>10</sup> *“Be still, and know that I am God.  
 I will be exalted among the nations,  
 I will be exalted in the earth!”*  
<sup>11</sup> *The LORD of hosts is with us;  
 the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah” (Psalm 46, ESV)*

There is much speculation as to who wrote this Psalm and when it was written. It is clear, contextually speaking, that there are many things happening around the Israelites that would cause fear, panic and a loss of hope. Goldingay states: ***“The psalm contains no concrete indication of a chronological setting, though the Assyrian invasions provide a backcloth for imagining the psalm’s use (e.g., 2 Kings 17–18)”***<sup>3</sup>. With this historical timeframe in view, some commentators attribute this Psalm to King Hezekiah. Many commentators also call this the hymn of trust, but there is not mention of the word trust within the Psalm. One can assume the need for trust within the context of the Psalm, but the only emotion or attitude seen within this Psalm is that of fear. Goldingay states also: ***“...the only attitude it refers to is fear, the fear that it abjures. What it talks about is God and the security God means”***<sup>4</sup>. Based on this in view, we can see the structure of the Psalm then desires to deal with fear, the fear that the violence of the earth, the violence of politics and the violence of the military inspire and are most likely inspiring in the lives of those reading, singing, or hearing this Psalm.

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<sup>3</sup> Goldingay, J. (2006). *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms 42–89* (T. Longman III, Ed.; Vol. 2, p. 65). Baker Academic.

<sup>4</sup> IBID, 65

Goldingay gives more insight to the background and context of this Psalm: ***“Like a praise psalm it declares the great truths about God on which the worshippers base their confidence, and like a praise psalm it assumes that these truths need to be heeded by the nations”***<sup>5</sup>. The idea of trust then can be traced back to this confidence the Lord brings to His people. These big truths attributed to The Lord (Yhwh) are in the form of a hymn and it is worth pointing out that there are allusions to the Red Sea deliverance within Psalm 46. Essentially the Psalmist is taking them back to the biggest moment of fear for the Israelites and how the Lord delivered them from that scenario. ***If the Lord delivered them then, he can and will deliver them now.*** This truth can encourage the believer today as well. Think back, where did the Lord show up and prove Himself to be the deliverer in your life and the dispeller of fear in your situations?

We can live fearless lives. The Psalmist essentially assures us of this truth when he states: “Therefore, we **will not** fear...”. To the Psalmist, it is not in question, it is a point of fact. What evidence then does he give us to this ability to live fearless? What practical applications can we enact in our lives to live fearless in hard times? I think we can find three main applications and the first is the action of *belief*.

### **1. Believe: The Lord’s strength scatters our fear and brings us safety (vs. 1-3)**

Assuming this Psalm is written during the Assyrians invasions in 2 Kings, the people would need assurance from the Lord. They would be looking at their circumstances and panicking over what an invasion by Assyria could mean for them. More persecution, more incarceration, more oppression, and more slavery. Despite this scenario (or a different one like it in Israel’s history), we see in the first colon (line in the poem) the promise of the Lord as a refuge and as their strength. In Hebrew, the word for refuge is <sup>†</sup>מִקְוֵה and it means: “refuge, or shelter”<sup>6</sup>. The Hebrew language, much like the Greek language does not just inspire ideas to come to mind, but also pictures that spark the imagination.

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<sup>5</sup> IBID, 65

<sup>††</sup> prefixed, or added, or both, indicates ‘All passages cited.’

<sup>6</sup> Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). In *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 340). Clarendon Press.

Picture a giant storm raging around you, but a shelter that is sure to withstand the storm is there for you to run to. Picture also a war that is waging around you, but you know there is a city or country you can flee to find refuge in, to be safe. This is the image **מִקְדָּשׁ** gives. This is who God is to them and who God is to us.

The Psalmist follows up the word “refuge” with the word “strength”. When the Lord provides refuge, he does so with strength. Despite what may seek to come against Israel, with Him as their refuge, His strength will sustain them, and he cannot be overcome. This is to encourage us as well because He is the believer’s refuge and strength too. When we take our eyes off the Lord and on to our circumstances, we begin to waver in our belief that He is a strong refuge who can protect us. Hubbard reminds us of the importance of owning this truth deep within: “It is one thing to confess God **is our** “refuge”; it is another to resolve **therefore we will not fear**. Confessing what we should believe is easy; bringing our hearts to feel that confessed security is monumental”<sup>7</sup>.

The Psalmist gives this absolute statement of confidence in light of the strong refuge that is the Lord will provide His people. The sheer certitude of this statement is deep. He does not question the lack of fear, but admits with Him as our refuge and strength, fear just leaves. Yet, as in the images brought forth from the language, the person in need of a strong refuge must turn to that refuge and run into its shelter. This is faith. This is belief. For us to confidently dispel fear, we must run to the one who is our strong, unyielding shelter. Believing Him and taking him at his word is the beginning of living fearless. As Wiersbe asserts: ***“The earth may change, the mountains may be hurled violently into the sea, there may come earthquakes and tidal waves, but all things are in the control of our sovereign Lord”***<sup>8</sup>. The earth itself may seek to destroy our refuge, but even it is not capable of destroying our God! This needs to be a cry of our hearts, when it is, ***fear is killed, and hope is kindled!***

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<sup>7</sup> Hubbard, R. L. J., & Johnston, R. K. (2012). Foreword. In W. W. Gasque, R. L. Hubbard Jr., & R. K. Johnston (Eds.), *Psalms* (p. 209). Baker Books.

<sup>8</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (2004). *Be worshipful* (1st ed., p. 173). Cook Communications Ministries.

After the Psalmist describes who the Lord is to the Israelites through the violence of creation, he moves to the violence of politics. He uses the *selah* to separate out the thought process. Swanson defines *selah* as: “an unknown musical or liturgical marker, **translates “pause”**; **note:** (NA<sup>b</sup>) uses apparently as a stanza marker”<sup>9</sup>. It creates a natural transition of thought. Seeing the thread of living fearless, we come to the second application of doing so here and the second is the action of *realizing*.

## **2. Realize: in The Lord’s presence, we will experience His power and His protection (vs. 4-7)**

If the Lord’s power can withstand whatever the earth can bring, so too can He overcome and overpower any geopolitical force seeking to destroy the Lord’s people. The Psalmist masterfully connects the idea roaring and foaming waters to the stillness of a river. Hubbard says of this: “This section begins with a surprise. As we continue to hear of waters, we expect to hear of chaotic and destructive waters, but instead we hear of life-giving and joy-giving waters (contrast Ps. 42): **There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God**”<sup>10</sup>. No longer are there waters of destruction, but a river that brings gladness. Where one body of water elicited the possibility of fear and overwhelming destruction, this body brings a much more peaceful emotion.

### ***The Psalmist then answers the unspoken question: what then brings the difference?***

His answer is the presence of the Lord Himself. Where these rivers flow is within the City of God. The city where the Lord has His habitation. Habitation here is מִשְׁכָּן and it means “abode, dwelling-place, ‘tabernacle’”<sup>11</sup>. This City is where the Lord (Yhwh) dwells. His presence changes everything. This will elicit to the believers mind the imagery used by John in Revelation 22:1-5, where this river within the City of God flows from the throne of God and in His presence, with

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<sup>b</sup>NAB New American Bible

<sup>9</sup> Swanson, J. (1997). In *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>10</sup> Hubbard, R. L. J., & Johnston, R. K. (2012). Foreword. In W. W. Gasque, R. L. Hubbard Jr., & R. K. Johnston (Eds.), *Psalms* (p. 209). Baker Books.

<sup>11</sup> Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). In *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 1015). Clarendon Press.

Him upon the throne everything has been brought back to what it was meant to be. From a Garden (Gen. 1) to a city (Rev. 22).

Hubbard expands the imagery also to other areas of the Old Testament: "...this river of Psalm 46 is probably an image depicting **the holy place** (i.e., the sanctuary) **where the Most High dwells** as the source of life for the city of God. This image is developed later in Ezekiel's vision of a new temple after the restoration from exile (47:1–12)"<sup>12</sup>.

The key factor in all of these OT and NT narratives is the presence of the Most High (Yhwh). The imagery of the Lord in His City and on His Throne negates the powers of all other kings upon their thrones. In vs. 5, when the Psalmist mentions the dawn of the morning, we see a harkening back to the deliverance of Israel by the parting of the Red Sea. Pharaoh lost on that site and the Lord won. Pharaoh was considered the son of Rah, the god who controlled all things, but there he met his match and fell to the Most High, who was present in that day of need. It is no accident then that the Psalmist moves into the political powers coming against Israel in their day.

The Psalmist describes the futility of kings and kingdoms by declaring "***The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts***" (vs. 6). At the voice of the Lord, the earth was created and at his voice, kings and kingdoms stand no chance. The word imagery of "melts" is the Hebrew word גָּלַגַּל: which means "***1. to wave, sway backwards and forwards, undulate, to soften, disperse, to begin to move, come apart...***"<sup>13</sup>. The Lord utters his voice and kingdoms fall apart. The image that comes to mind for me is the heat applied to a pork butt. When the pork is done right, it falls apart in your hands. The kings of this world simply fall apart in Yhwh's hands when he speaks.

As believers, this promise is for us too. It starts with Him and His presence. When we abide where He abides, no king or kingdom can come against us. They will rage around us, totter near us, but they cannot destroy us because our King is the King above all Kings. His presence

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<sup>12</sup> Hubbard, R. L. J., & Johnston, R. K. (2012). Foreword. In W. W. Gasque, R. L. Hubbard Jr., & R. K. Johnston (Eds.), *Psalms* (p. 209). Baker Books.

<sup>13</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000). In *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., p. 555). E.J. Brill.

brings the calming river. His presence brings the power of His voice to our present day “kingdoms”. We need to then abide in Him. Be where He is. Too often, in our geopolitically obsessed world we abide in front of our televisions more than we abide in His Word. We spend time scanning the internet then we do seeking His face.

Are you living fearful? If you are, you are abiding in the wrong places. If you are fearful you are looking to the wrong king for safety. Allow your level of fear to be an indicator of where you are abiding. Adjust your life in such a way from those things that take you into a different abode then the Presence of the Most High! He closes this stanza by saying: **“The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” (vs. 7)**. The Psalmist brings the reader or hearer back to the presence of God and declares Him to be our “fortress”, which harkens back to the “refuge” motif in the beginning of the Psalm. Here though, the word for fortress is the Hebrew word מְצֻדָּה which means: “secure height, retreat”<sup>14</sup>. The imagery is similar to that of refuge, but this seems to remind the people that His Kingdom is not of this world (earth), but of a much higher plain, one in which is unreachable by any king or kingdom and is so “other than” that it can never be taken.

The Psalmist then issues another *selah* to indicate a shift in thought. He moved from the violence of the earth to the violence of the kingdoms of the earth to now the violence of the armies of the earth. The kings were only as strong as the military they commanded, and the armies were only as strong as the weapons they wielded. Continuing with the thread of living fearless, we come to the third application of doing so in the final stanza of the Psalm and the third is the action of *rest*.

### **3. Rest in knowing The Lord is the ruler who reigns over all (vs. 8-11)**

The Psalmist beckons the reader or hearer to **“Come, behold (see)...”**. He is purposefully seeking to get the Israelites eyes off something and onto someone. The works, troubles, wars, and toils of earth (used 5 times within this short Psalm) are all around you, easy to be distracted by.

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<sup>14</sup> Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). In *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 960). Clarendon Press.

The Psalmist is saying: “Shift your focus” not only with your eyes, but with a sense of movement as well. The word for “come” in Hebrew is  $\text{בָּרֵךְ}$  which means: “go, come, walk”<sup>15</sup>. Essentially: walk away from what you’re focusing on and “behold” or “see” God’s work and his power over the earth!

I enjoy Goldingay’s commentary here: “Suddenly and unannounced, Yhwh then speaks...They are to stop asserting themselves, behaving like the seas pointlessly hurling themselves against the land that they are never going to overwhelm”<sup>16</sup>. The people are toiling under the illusion that they could do something about these armies and their weapons, but they are to walk away from those thoughts and too the Lord and the vision of His mighty works! The Lord enters with His voice to awaken the people to the reality of who He is and what He can do. The Psalmist then gives examples of what destructive work Yhwh can do to the weapons of war, thus crippling the armies who wield them. “Yhwh brings about this termination by destroying the weapons of war. Here the first colon refers to the disabling of the offensive weapons of the individual soldier, the weapon with which he kills from a distance and the weapon with which he kills in hand-to-hand fighting. The parallel colon refers to the soldier’s means of defense, using another *yiqtol* but one that goes beyond breaking to burning. It means there will be no more fighting; soldiers cannot fight without shields”<sup>17</sup>.

When we pause long enough to reflect on His mighty power and the utter futility of his foes, we can rest in knowing He is in charge, and he truly does rule and reign over any enemy who would seek to destroy Him or His people. War is real and the weapons being used against the Israelites are present, but they can walk fearless in the middle of such turmoil because the Lord is with them and when they behold His works, power, and rule they will be at peace knowing He is and always will be the victor!

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<sup>15</sup> Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). In *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 229). Clarendon Press.

<sup>16</sup> Goldingay, J. (2006). *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms 42–89* (T. Longman III, Ed.; Vol. 2, p. 72). Baker Academic.

<sup>17</sup> Goldingay, J. (2006). *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms 42–89* (T. Longman III, Ed.; Vol. 2, p. 72). Baker Academic.

The Psalmist then moves to an utterly important task for the Israelites, the task of “being still”. Here, many have used the phrase “be still” in only one way, that of quiet contemplation upon the Lord as the Lord, which is certainly a decent contextual rendering, but there is more. The word for “be still” in Hebrew is **רַפָּה**: which means “to grow slack, release, let go, to wither, or collapse”<sup>18</sup>. We can see then- “In this explosive context, “be still” is not an invitation to tranquil meditation but a command to allow God to be God, to do his work of abolishing the weapons of war”<sup>19</sup>. The Psalmist connects “be still” to “knowing” which is **דָּע** which means: “to notice; hear of; learn; observe; realize”<sup>20</sup>.

In essence the Israelites are then to pause, stop, stop toiling, let go of their fight and release it to the Lord. Stop arresting control or seeking to. He is God and they are not. They then are to realize that He is God. He is the victor. He is the King. He is the safe place; He is the ruler of the heavens and of the earth. I think of the worrying mother who is not still. She constantly is fussing over her children, never releasing them to the Lord and always frazzled about their future. She simply needs to “be still” still her heart, still her worries and her work and allow the Lord to take control.

There is a sense where we too need to pause. We need to stop worrying and stressing about all that is transpiring around us and release it all to the Lord. Wiersbe encourages us: “There is a time to obey God and act, but until then, we had better take our hands off and allow Him to work in His own time and His own way. If we seize His promises by faith with both hands, we won’t be able to meddle!”<sup>21</sup>

This is the rest we can have- He is the ruler and reigner over all things and we can add nothing to His rule and reign by our worrying. The only thing we can do is make it worse. Only He can make it better! In the end, he will be exalted, lifted up and worshiped. All wars will cease, all political maneuvering will end and all of creation will be made right and here’s the message:

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<sup>18</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994-2000). In *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., p. 1276). E.J. Brill.

<sup>19</sup> Hubbard, R. L. J., & Johnston, R. K. (2012). Foreword. In W. W. Gasque, R. L. Hubbard Jr., & R. K. Johnston (Eds.), *Psalms* (p. 209). Baker Books.

<sup>20</sup> IBID, 390

<sup>21</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (2004). *Be worshipful* (1st ed., p. 175). Cook Communications Ministries.

we cannot do anything to bring this about. When we rest, when we cease striving, when we stop looking around, we will easily see that the Lord is our fortress, and ***He is the one with all power to protect and provide.***

May we resolve to be a people who seek to *believe* in His strength, realize the importance of His presence and *rest* in knowing He is the Lord with all power and that we are not. Then and only then can we live fearlessly in this world. Walking in this way will thwart the lies and attacks of the enemy and we will be a people who find their strength and hope in abiding in Him!

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