

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The confidence of believers in God, Psalm 46:1-3. The privileges of the Church, Psalm 46:4, Psalm 46:5; her enemies, and her helper, Psalm 46:6, Psalm 46:7. God's judgments in the earth, Psalm 46:8, Psalm 46:9. He will be exalted among the heathen, and throughout the earth, Psalm 46:10, Psalm 46:11.

The title in the Hebrew is, "To the chief musician for the sons of Korah; an ode upon Alamoth, or concerning the virgins:" possibly meaning a choir of singing girls. Some translate the word secrets or mysteries; and explain it accordingly. Calmet thinks it was composed by the descendants of Korah, on their return from the Babylonian captivity, when they had once more got peaceably settled in Jerusalem; and that the disturbances to which it refers were those which took place in the Persian empire after the death of Cambyses, when the Magi usurped the government. Many other interpretations and conjectures are given of the occasion of this fine ode. Houbigant thinks it was made on occasion of an earthquake, which he supposes took place on the night that all Sennacherib's army was destroyed, Dr. Kennicott thinks that alamoth means a musical instrument. All I can pretend to say about it is, that it is a very sublime ode; contains much consolation for the Church of God; and was given by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit.

Verse 1

God is our refuge - It begins abruptly, but nobly; ye may trust in whom and in what ye please: but God (Elohim) is our refuge and strength.

A very present help - A help found to be very powerful and effectual in straits and difficulties. The words are very emphatic: "עזרנו עזרנו" "עזרנו עזרנו" "עזרנו עזרנו" (ezerah betsaroth nimtsa meod), "He is found an exceeding, or superlative help in difficulties." Such we have found him, and therefore celebrate his praise.

Verse 2

Therefore will not we fear - Let what commotions will take place in the earth, we will trust in the all-powerful arm of God. Probably the earthquake referred to, here means political commotions, such as those mentioned under the title; and by mountains, kings or secular states may be intended.

Verse 3

Though the waters thereof roar - Waters, in prophetic language, signify people; and, generally, people in a state of political commotion, here signified by the term roar. And by these strong agitations of the people, the mountains - the secular rulers, shake with the swelling thereof - tremble, for fear that these popular tumults should terminate in the subversion of the state. This very people had seen all Asia in a state of war. The Persians had overturned Asia Minor, and destroyed the Babylonian empire: they had seen Babylon itself sacked and entered by the Persians; and Cyrus, its conqueror, had behaved to them as a father and deliverer. While their oppressors were destroyed, themselves were preserved, and permitted to return to their own land.

Verse 4

There is a river, the streams whereof - The Chaldee understands the river, and its streams or divisions, as pointing out various peoples who should be converted to the faith and thus make glad the city of God, Jerusalem by their flowing together to the worship of the true God.

But the river may refer to the vast Medo-Persian army and its divisions: those branches which took Babylon; and, instead of ruining and destroying the poor Jews, preserved them alive, and gave them their liberty; and thus the city of God, and the tabernacle of the Most High, were gladdened.

Verse 5

God is in the midst of her - God will not abandon them that trust in him; he will maintain his own cause; and, if his Church should at any time be attacked, he will help her and that right early - with the utmost speed. As soon as the onset is made, God is there to resist. As by the day-break the shadows and darkness are dissipated; so by the bright rising of Jehovah, the darkness of adversity shall be scattered.

Verse 6

The heathen raged - There had been terrible wars on all hands, and mighty states were crushed, when the poor Jews were, by the especial favor of God, kept in peace and safety. Kingdoms were moved while they were preserved.

He uttered his voice - These words seem to refer to thunder, lightning, and earthquake. The expressions,

however, may be figurative, and refer to the wars and desolations already mentioned. God gave the command; and one empire was cast down, and another was raised up.

Verse 7

The Lord of hosts is with us - We, feeble Jews, were but a handful of men; but the Lord of hosts - the God of armies, was on our side. Him none could attack with hope of success, and his legions could not be over-thrown.

The God of Jacob - The God who appeared to Jacob in his distress, and saved him out of all his troubles, appeared also for us his descendants, and has amply proved to us that he has not forgotten his covenant.

Verse 8

Come, behold the works of the Lord - See empires destroyed and regenerated; and in such a way as to show that a supernatural agency has been at work. By the hand of God alone could these great changes be effected.

Verse 9

He maketh wars to cease - By the death of Cambyses, and setting Darius, son of Hystaspes, upon the Persian throne, he has tranquillized the whole empire. That same God who for our unfaithfulness has delivered us into the hands of our enemies, and subjected us to a long and grievous captivity and affliction, has now turned our captivity, and raised us up the most powerful friends and protectors in the very place in which we have been enduring so great a fight of afflictions.

He breaketh the bow - He has rendered useless all the implements of war; and so profound and secure is the general tranquillity, that the bow may be safely broken, the spear snapped asunder, and the chariot burnt in the fire.

Verse 10

Be still, and know that I am God - חָרָה אֶפְרַיִם (harpu), Cease from your provocations of the Divine justice; cease from murmuring against the dispensations of his providence; cease from your labor for a season, that ye may deeply reflect on the severity and goodness of God - severity to those who are brought down and destroyed; goodness to you who are raised up and exalted: - cease from sin and rebellion against your God; let that disgrace you no more, that we may no more be brought into distress and desolation.

Know that I am God - Understand that I am the Fountain of power, wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth.

I will be exalted among the heathen - By the dispensation of punishments, the heathen shall know me to be the God of justice; by the publication of my Gospel among them, they shall know me to be the God of goodness.

I will be exalted in the earth - I will have my salvation proclaimed in every nation, among every people, and in every tongue.

Verse 11

The Lord of hosts is with us - Having heard these declarations of God, the people cry out with joy and exultation, The Lord of hosts, the God of armies, is with us; we will not fear what man can do unto us.

The God of Jacob is our refuge - He who saved our fathers will save us, and will never abandon his people in distress.

Selah - This is a firm, lasting, unshaken, well-tried truth.