

The Christian and the Atomic Age

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GOD is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

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

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

4 There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most high.

5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.

6 The heathen 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.

8 Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth.

9 He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.

10 Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

11 The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

The 46th Psalm was probably written to commemorate some great national testing and deliverance. Some think it celebrates the delivery of Jerusalem from Sennacherib when 185,000 Assyrians were slain in a single night (Isa. 36-37). Prophetically the psalm looks forward to the final destruction of the enemies of Israel and the establishment of the millen-

nial kingdom. However, this psalm has a wonderful personal message of comfort to all of God's people, especially in their trials. It is said that the 46th Psalm, together with the Wartburg Castle in which the Saxon king protected Luther, inspired him to write the great reformation hymn, "A Mighty Fortress."

How true it is that God is our refuge and a "very present help in trouble." Many will testify that their most blessed and intimate experience of the peace and presence of God came in the time of their greatest trial. But this psalm has a peculiar message of comfort and instruction for these days of world confusion and fear.

Its divisions are indicated by the word "selah," which occurs at the end of verses three, seven, and eleven. The meaning of "selah" is uncertain. Most likely it is a musical term which aided the choirs of Israel in the singing of the Psalms.

The first division of this poem emphasizes the comfort of God in a time of greatest trouble. This is the theme of the song. The theme is concisely stated in verse one, and repeated twice as the conclusions of the second and third sections in verses seven and eleven.

This comfort of God delivers us from fear in the face of earth-shaking calamities. "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed . . ." (or shaken). Great earthquakes, landslides of mountains into the oceans, and tidal waves are used as figures of the nations in commotion. Doubtless there will be great physical disturbances during the tribulation period, and it is possible that these opening verses are to be taken literally. However, the rest of the psalm would indicate that the primary reference is to the political disturbances of the nations. Everywhere today there are social and political upheavals. Special crises areas, such as Cuba, Berlin, the Congo, Israel, and Southeast Asia; encircle the globe. Everywhere there is unrest, apprehension, and fear.

Much of the world's fear is caused by the threat of destruction imposed by modern atomic weapons. The units of measure for atomic energy are awe-inspiring. A kiloton equals the energy or explosive power of one thousand tons of TNT. A megaton equals the explosive power of one million tons of TNT. A kilomegaton equals the explosive power of one billion

tons of TNT. The Nagasaki bomb was in the 20-kiloton class. Modern thermonuclear bombs are in the twenty-megaton class. Russia has evidently exploded a fifty-megaton bomb and threatens to make one twice as powerful.

The bombs stockpiled by Russia and the United States are measured in kilomegatons. The exact figures are not known but Russia is estimated to have a stockpile of twenty kilomegatons, and the United States thirty-five kilomegatons. We are told that thirty-five kilomegatons, in the form of TNT, would fill a freight train from the earth to the moon and back fifteen times. One modern thermonuclear (hydrogen) bomb contains more energy than all the explosives used in World War II, perhaps more than in all past wars together.

For the first time in history the nations possess the weapons that could destroy most of the world's population. The prophecy of Revelation 9:18 that one-third of men should be killed in a single judgment is now credible even to unbelief.

No wonder that the nations are seeking desperately for some form of arms control and disarmament that might lead to peace. This was the subject of President Kennedy's speech to the United Nations on September 25, 1961. In this address the President used the words *peace* and *peaceful* thirty-four times. In contrast to this hope for peace, the present world tension was described as a "reign of terror." The Bible student would almost automatically be reminded of two verses of Scripture: "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3). "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Luke 21:26). It seems self-evident that these days must be very close to the coming of the Lord.

The second division of the psalm (vv. 4-6) explains why the people of God need not fear the day of the breakup of nature and nations. They are sustained by the water of life in the immovable city of God. This is the spiritual Jerusalem (Gal. 4:26), the "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

This part of the poem strongly suggests protection and deliverance for the people of God from the judgments upon the

nations. His people are with Him in the glad, safe city when His voice is uttered in judgment. The help that God gives is "right early," or literally "when the morning dawns." This would remind us of Peter's words about the coming of Christ: . . . "Until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (2 Pet. 1:19b).

All of this is in harmony with Paul's description of the rapture and the day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:1-11. Sudden destruction comes upon the world (1 Thess. 5:3), but this is preceded by sudden deliverance for the saints (1 Thess. 4:17). The Thessalonian passage, like the 46th Psalm, emphasizes the comfort that the assurance of safety should be to the child of God (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:9-11).

The sixth verse of the 46th Psalm ends with this brief and graphic picture of judgment: "He uttered his voice, the earth melted." It is a comfort to know that apocalyptic judgments will not be imitated by Russia, or any other nation, except when the Lord utters His voice. The atomic age will not hasten or delay the timetable of God.

However, it is interesting to note that the expression, "the earth melted," suggests the result of atomic power. Peter uses similar but more detailed language to describe the judgments of the end of the age (2 Pet. 3:10-12). Science has learned a little about the melting power involved in the fission (atomic bomb) and fusion (hydrogen bomb) of the nucleus of the atom. It is not unreasonable to suppose that God may use the terrific power of the infinitesimal building blocks of the universe (the atoms) to accomplish the earth's judgment and purification.

The second division of the psalm closes with the refrain: "The LORD of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge" (v. 7). The nations seek their power and safety in confederations. The saints are safe because of their personal relationship to Jehovah of hosts and the God of Jacob. Jehovah of hosts is the God of all power. He commands the hosts of heaven and yet His power is not dependent on His armies. He has but to utter His voice to defeat His enemies. He is also the God of Jacob—the covenant-keeping God of all grace. Thus He is a safe refuge for helpless sinners.

The last division of the psalm (vv. 8-11) describes future

kingdom blessing. Additional details of the millennial reign of Christ are found in many Old Testament passages, characteristic of which are Isaiah 11 and Jeremiah 31. In this passage the emphasis is upon the blessing of universal peace, as contrasted with the previous commotions of the nations. Universal peace will not be established by the United Nations, but by the unilateral action of the Lord.

In contrast to the previous uproar and activity of the nations, they are now to "be still" and to listen to the wisdom of God. Then there will be in reality a world-wide United Nations with God as the presiding officer. How comfortable it will be to the peoples of the earth, when God is exalted in the council of the nations!

As previously noted, the psalm closes with the third repetition of its theme. The atomic age only emphasizes the comfort of knowing the God of all power and the God of all grace. The atomic scientists of the nations are conducting frantic research for a super bomb which would result from a technological breakthrough that would give its inventors a decisive power advantage. The Christian has already achieved his power breakthrough in Christ, and works and prays that others may share his secret. He is concerned about the atomic age but under no "reign of terror." He knows the One who designed the atom and who holds its parts together (Col. 1:17). He looks for deliverance from the judgments of the tribulation period. However, if a World War III should begin before the rapture, he knows that the worst that an atomic bomb could do to him would only usher him into his best estate (Phil. 1:23). "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Ps. 46:2).



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