

"A Mighty Fortress" #29 "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!" (Psalm 91:2)

Words & music written by Martin Luther, son of poor German miner. Born November 1483, ordained a priest in 1507 after two years as a monk. (Catholic) Nailed his 95 Thesis to door of cathedral in Wittenberg in 1517, was excommunicated in 1520. Leader of reform movement in 16th century Germany against Roman Catholic Church.

Given asylum at Wartburg Castle in 1520, used time to translate New Testament from Greek to German and wrote hymns in language of common people so they could understand their religion. Some think this castle and its security was in mind when he later wrote this hymn.

This was one of the most powerful hymns of the Reformation movement. It was apparently produced in 1529 at Coburg when Luther was 45 for the Diet of Speier (or Spires) and published in a Wittenberg hymnbook that same year. Our English translation of this hymn was done in 1852 by a Harvard professor, Frederick Henry Hedge (1805-1890). It was first published in the 1853 "Hymns for the Church of Christ." The version of the melody as we know it is taken from the arrangement and harmonization of a German composer named, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). His 1717 Cantata #80 is based on the hymn.

There were originally 4 stanzas in all, but most of our books have only three, with the third made up of sections taken from Luther's stanzas 3 and 4.

Much like our text it presents God a source of protection.

Verse 1 - A Fortress & Bulwark

*"A mighty fortress is our God, A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, And armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal."*

"Bulwark" - a defensive wall around a fortress which serves as a refuge:

Psalm 94:22 *But the Lord has been my stronghold, And my God the rock of my refuge.*

Psalm 46:1-2 *God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea;*

Psalm 31:1-4 *In You, O Lord, I have taken refuge; Let me never be ashamed; In Your righteousness deliver me. Incline Your ear to me, rescue me quickly; Be to me a rock of strength, A stronghold to save me. For You are my rock and my fortress; For Your name's sake You will lead me and guide me. You will pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me, For You are my strength.*

Of course, needing such a bulwark implies that we have a foe against whom we require protection

1Peter 5:8 *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

Verse 2 - Put your Trust in God not Self

*"Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right One [Man] on our side, the Man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth [is] His name, From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle."*

Since God is our refuge, we must look to Him for strength and not ourselves:

Psalm 91:2 *"My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!"*

Psalm 18:1-3 *"I love You, O Lord, my strength." The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, And I am saved from my enemies.*

God provides strength we need through the right One, Jesus. He became human so that He can aid us

Hebrews 2:17-18 *Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.*

But He is not only man; He is also Lord Sabaoth (of Hosts) as used in Romans 9:29, James 5:4

Verse 3 - God Is Always Victorious

*"And though this world, with evil filled, Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim, We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, For lo! his doom is sure;
One little word shall fell him."*

The world is filled with evil and thus threatens to undo us

1John 2:16 *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.*

James 4:4 *You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

Despite this, God's Word will give us victory

2Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

This victory is assured to God's people because the doom of the prince of darkness has already been declared
Revelation 20:10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Matthew 25:41 Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

Verse 4 - God is Forever

*"That word above all earthly powers--No thanks to them--abideth;
The Spirit and the gift[s] are ours Through Him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go, This mortal life also;
The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever."*

His Word protects us by developing our faith in Him

1Peter 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

With this, no matter what happens here, we can enter Heaven victorious

Matthew 10:28 Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

2Peter 1:10-11 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

Truly "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

Wayne S. Walker