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What are heaven's armies

Editorial Note: It’s the middle of March 2020, and the coronavirus is beginning to hit the U.S. in a big way. We’ve never seen anything like this in my lifetime. As followers of Jesus Christ, we know that our hope doesn’t depend on this world, especially when trials ambush us. But we need to be reminded and comforted. We need to hear from the Lord. In such times we often turn to the book of Psalms. Our pastor preached on Psalm 46 when this crisis was beginning and encouraged us to memorize it. I learn best by reading and writing. I hope my reflections will encourage you and those you love. Grace and peace. Psalm 46:6-7 (Reflection 4) “6 Nations rage, kingdoms topple; the earth melts when he lifts his voice. 7 The LORD of Armies is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.” (CSB) In this portion of the Psalm, we see a stark contrast between the craziness of earth and the steadfastness of our Lord. Pretty much our daily experience, wouldn’t you say? One thing is happening with the “nations, kingdoms and the earth,” while a very different and far better thing is going on with “the Lord of Armies … the God of Jacob.” This means that we can’t trust our world to give us security or comfort or hope ultimately. That only comes from the Lord. So, the first order of business is to stop trying to find reassurance from our newsfeeds. We may get bits and pieces of good news, but nothing consistent and deep and lasting to sustain us. The nations rage. In the Greek Old Testament the idea is that the nations were stirred up, meaning they were shaken or unsettled. Our world is terrified and confused to be honest. Just look around. Kingdoms fall down. Even the most stable of governments or kingdoms can be thrown into a downward spiral pretty quickly. God makes his voice heard and the earth is shaken, the earth melts. The Psalmist doesn’t tell us how God’s actions frighten the nations but somehow, they do. Does God do something directly or does he simply allow this sinful world to go its own way for a bit? We don’t know. But the end result for our world is the same – an unsettled fear. The panic these days is almost palpable. But as God’s people, we are not left hopeless. The “Lord of Armies” is with us. Again, this could be translated, “the Lord of powers” or “the Lord who is the strongest of all” is with us. This is a military term suggesting that God is with us as our Warrior God. He is fighting for us. The “God of Jacob [or Israel] is our helper.” Our God has been the God of his people from the very beginning. The God of our ancestor Jacob whose name was changed to Israel, this God is our helper, protector and stronghold. How exactly is God with us? First, when the emotion of fear comes our way (and it will), we have the privilege of talking to the Lord about it. We can have a conversation with him anytime, anywhere – “Lord, I’m scared … a lot … but I trust you” or “Lord, this all feels very panicky and unsettling, so replace my worries with a strong confidence in you.” Second, the Holy Spirit within us will bring us comfort and peace, often in unexpected ways and at just the right time. Third, we have each other. We may be social distancing, but we are part of a family who cares for each other. And thankfully, we’re just an electronic communication away from the reassuring human voice of a fellow Christ follower. God is with us: prayer, the Spirit and the Church. Prayer: Father, you know us better than we know ourselves. You love and care for us better than we love ourselves. You can protect us better than we can protect ourselves. We confess our fears and worries but even more, we confess our trust in You, the One who fights for us, the One who has always been the God of your people. Thank you for giving us the privilege of prayer to pour out our thoughts to you, for giving us your Comforting Spirit who reassures us constantly, and for giving us each other to love and to be loved. Amen. By Dr. J. Scott Duvall, J.C. and Mae Fuller Professor of Biblical Studies. Read more from Dr. Duvall's Psalm 46 series. Tags: COVID-19 Faculty/Staff Psalm 46 series Please see the links to our EXTRA Bible Study notes at the bottom of the page. Lord of hosts, You ride out to establish justice and to make all things right. [11] I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. [12] His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. [13] He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. [14] The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. [15] Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. [16] On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. [17] And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, [18] so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small.” [19] Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. [20] But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. [21] The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. Scripture taken from the THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION, NIV Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. What is the nature of the sword Jesus uses? Read More Click here to sign up to receive the EXTRAs via email each quarter. The bulk of Isaiah 47 consists of God’s taunting condemnation of Babylon. But verse 4 is an interjection by the prophet, speaking on behalf of Israel: “Our Redeemer—the LORD Almighty is his name—is the Holy One of Israel.” The phrase translated here as “Lord Almighty” is also translated as “Lord of hosts” (NRSV, ESV, KJV). It renders the Hebrew phrase yhwh tzeva’ot. Yhwh is the name of God (Yahweh). Tzeva’ot means “armies.” We know the phrase yhwh tzeva’ot in the second verse of Martin Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress”: Did we in our strength confide, Our striving would be losing; Were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God’s own choosing: Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He; Lord Sabaoth, His name, From age to age the same, And He must win the battle. “Lord Sabaoth” is a traditional transliteration of yhwh tzeva’ot. If you say tzeva’ot out loud, it will sound rather like “Sabaoth.” What does it mean for God to be the Lord of armies? First of all, in the Old Testament, he is the commander in chief of Israel’s armies. Beyond this, he is also the Lord of the armies of heaven, the angelic forces that do his bidding on earth. The name yhwh tzeva’ot conveys God’s authority and might. He is stronger than any other power on earth and has authority to command the very forces of heaven to do his bidding. The phrase yhwh tzeva’ot reminds us of God’s authority and power. And this can be a great encouragement when we feel weak or defeated. Martin Luther was so right when he wrote, “Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing.” But when we trust in God’s superlative strength, our striving is not in vain. Whether we’re on an exhausting mission trip, working through a difficult family issue, or dealing with a tricky HR situation at work, the Lord Almighty, the Lord of armies, Lord Sabaoth is with us. We can confide in his strength. We can share in his victory. QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER: Do you live as if God is truly yhwh tzeva’ot? Do you have confidence in God’s power? Why or why not? How have you experienced God’s strength and authority in your life? PRAYER: Gracious God, you are indeed yhwh tzeva’ot. Lord Sabaoth is your name. You command the forces of the universe, even the hosts of heaven. You are the Lord Almighty! All praise, glory, and honor be to you. Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are filled with your glory. Hosanna in the highest! Blessed are you, Lord Jesus, because you have redeemed us by your strength. Blessed are you, Lord Jesus, because you became weak for our sake. Blessed are you, Lord Jesus, because all authority in heaven and on earth is yours. Amen. Photo by Yoann Boyer on Unsplash. Explore more at the Theology of Work Project online : What About All Those Demons? Part 2

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