

A mighty fortress is our God

Ein feste burg ist unser Gott

MARTIN LUTHER (1483–1546)

translated by FREDERICK H. HEDGE (1805–1890)

The 46th Psalm. God is our refuge and strength, etc.

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.

Did we in our own 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.

And though this world, with devils 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.

That word above all earthly powers—
No thanks to them—abideth,
The spirit and the gifts 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 for ever.

The 46th Psalm... A mighty fortress... amid the flood: The God of Jacob is our fortress. *Psalm 46:7*; God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam. *Psalm 46:1-3*

Lord Sabaoth: The LORD of hosts [LORD Sabaoth] is with us. *Psalm 46:7*
From age to age the same: German: “And there is no other God” (*Und ist kein ander Gott*, cf. *Isaiah 45:21*).

Should threaten to undo us: German: “Desire to devour us” (*und wolt uns gar verschlingen*, cf. *1 Peter 5:8*).

God hath willed His truth to triumph through us: The accuser... has been thrown down, ... and they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. *Revelation 12:10-11*

English text: Frederic H. Hedge and Frederic D. Huntington, *Hymns for the Church of Christ* (Boston, 1853). Emendation by AFM: a translation of Luther's epigraph.
German text: Joseph Klug, *Geistliche Lieder auff's new gebessert* (Wittenberg, 1533), via *Hymnology Archive*.

Original German (with Latin epigraph):

Der xlvi. Psalm / Deus noster refugium et virtus / etc.

Ein feste burg ist unser Gott
Ein gute wehr und waffen
Er hilfft uns frey aus aller not
die uns itzt hat betroffen
Der alt böse feind
mit ernst ers itzt meint
gros macht vnd viel list
sein grausam rüstung ist
auff erd ist nicht seins gleichen.

Mit unser macht ist nichts gethan
wir sind gar bald verloren
Es streit für uns der rechte man
den Gott hat selbs erkoren
Fragstu wer der ist?
Er heist Jhesus Christ
der Herr Zebaoth
Und ist kein ander Gott
das felt mus er behalten.

Und wenn die welt vol Teuffel wer
und wolt uns gar verschlingen
So fürchten wir uns nicht so sehr
Es sol uns doch gelingen
Der Fürst dieser welt
wie sawr er sich stellt
thut er uns doch nicht
das macht / er ist gericht
Ein wörtlein kan jn fellen.

Das wort sie sollen lassen stahn
und kein danck da zu haben
Er ist bey uns wol auff dem plan
mit seinem Geist und gaben
Nemen sie den leib
gut / ehr / kind und weib
las faren dahin
sie habens kein gewin
das Reich mus uns doch bleiben.

The Prince of Darkness grim: German: “The prince of this world” (*Der Fürst dieser welt*, cf. *John 14:30*, KJV).

His rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure: The devil has come down to you in great wrath. *Revelation 12:12*; The devil... was thrown into the lake of fire. *Revelation 20:10*

That word above all earthly powers: The Word... Jesus Christ. *John 1:1,17*;
Christ... far above all rule and authority and power. *Ephesians 1:20-21*

Let goods and kindred go: German: “Goods, honour, children, wife” (*gut / ehr / kind und weib*, tr. Carlyle)

The body they may kill: Do not fear those who kill the body. *Matthew 10:28*

God's truth abideth still: My words will not pass away. *Matthew 24:35*

His kingdom is for ever: Of his kingdom there will be no end. *Luke 1:33*, cf. *Daniel 4:3*