

A Mighty Fortress is Our God

A Study of the Great Hymn by Martin Luther

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- Introduction
 - The hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” (lyrics and tune) was written by Martin Luther circa 1529.
 - This hymn was originally written in German under the title “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott”.
 - The words are mostly original, although the first line does seem to paraphrase some of Psalm 46.
 - This hymn has been referred to as the “Battle Hymn of the Reformation” because it increased support for the Reformers’ cause.
 - It has been translated into English at least 70 times as well as into many other languages.
 - We will use the English translation from our hymnal done by Frederick H. Hedge (1805-1890).
 - We will go through this hymn line-by-line, examining all of the incredible doctrine written into this hymn by Martin Luther.
- Verse One
 - **“A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;”**
 - God provides us with protection and refuge from our troubles [Psalm 46:1; 62:7-8].
 - His provision of strength and protection are based upon His lovingkindness [Psalm 59:16-17].
 - We can count on God in times of trouble because He will never fail us [Psalm 9:9-10].
 - **“Our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.”**
 - God graciously provides us with help in time of need [Heb 4:16].
 - He has also provided us with a Helper who is always with us [John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27].
 - With God’s help we can overcome even when we are overwhelmed by the troubles of this world [John 16:33; 1 Cor 10:13; 2 Cor 4:7-18].
 - **“For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe.”**
 - Satan has been an enemy of mankind from the very beginning [Genesis 3:1-15].
 - When Jesus came to the earth, Satan was so bold as to attempt to lead Him into sin [Luke 4:1-13].
 - Satan has always been a deceiver [John 8:44] and continues to deceive and makes accusations against us day and night [Rev 12:9-10].
 - **“His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal.”**
 - Satan is a very crafty schemer [Gen 3:1; 2 Cor 11:3; Eph 6:11 cf. 4:14].
 - In God’s permissive will, Satan wields great power [Luke 10:19; Eph 2:2; Heb 2:14; 1 John 5:19].
 - Since his fall, Satan has been filled with hatred [Ezek 28:16; Job 1:8-11; 2:3-5; 1 Pet 5:8].
 - Even as a fallen angel, Satan is the ruler of this world [John 12:31; 14:30; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 6:12].

- Verse Two
 - **“Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;”**
 - The angels were created by God with mighty strength [Psalm 103:20].
 - Even the fallen angels remain stronger than humans [2 Pet 2:10b-11].
 - We will fail in our attempts to stand up to Satan and the fallen angels unless we utilize the strength of God [1 John 4:4; Eph 6:10-11].
 - **“Were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God’s own choosing:”**
 - Jesus Christ has overcome Satan’s world system [John 16:33].
 - We overwhelmingly conquer our adversaries through Christ [Rom 8:37; 2 Cor 2:14].
 - God chose His own Son to be the One who would come to this earth in the likeness of sinful flesh [Rom 8:3] and be our Savior [Mt 12:18; Luke 9:35].
 - **“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.”**
 - Jesus Christ is the Lord of Sabaoth (Hosts, Angels) [Rom 9:29 cf. Isa 1:9; 5:7-9, 16, 24; Jas 5:4].
 - Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever [Heb 13:8].
 - In the future, Jesus will be victorious at the Battle of Armageddon against the forces of Satan [Rev 19:15-16] and defeat Satan forever [Rev 20:10].
- Verse Three
 - **“And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,”**
 - Satan’s world system is our enemy [Jas 4:4].
 - We live in this world, but we are not of this world [John 17:14-16].
 - This world is filled with demons [Luke 8:26-39].
 - Satan, along with his fallen angels and demons, is opposed to us [Matt 13:36-40; Acts 13:8-10].
 - **“We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:”**
 - The only thing we should ever fear is God Himself [Deut 6:13; 1 John 4:17-18].
 - God exalts His word in accordance with His name [Psalm 138:2] and His righteousness [Isa 42:21].
 - God’s word stands forever [Isa 40:8] and accomplishes all that He wills [Isa 55:11].
 - As His word dwells richly in us [Col 3:16], it gives us victory over sin [Psalm 37:31; 119:9-11, 41].
 - **“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.”**
 - With the armor of God, we can stand up to all the rage of the devil [Eph 6:10-17].
 - Even though he rages on, Satan’s fate is already sealed [Matt 25:41].
 - Satan is condemned by the truth that he is a liar and the father of lies [John 8:44].

- Verse Four
 - **“That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;”**
 - The one little word from verse three – liar – still stands today as an accusation against Satan.
 - This is true even though earthly powers would like to deny it.
 - This world is under the control of the power of Satan [John 12:31; Eph 2:2; 1 John 5:19].
 - **“The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth:”**
 - Every believer has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit [Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 1:21-22].
 - We receive this indwelling of the Holy Spirit at the moment of our salvation along with at least one spiritual gift [1 Cor 12:4-11; 1 Pet 4:10].
 - This was done by the power of God Himself who is on our side [Rom 8:31; 1 John 4:4].
 - **“Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;”**
 - We should not be focused on nor attached to earthly things [1 Jn 2:15-16].
 - Instead, our focus should be on heaven and heavenly things [Col 3:2; Phil 3:18-21].
 - We should be focused on Jesus [Heb 12:2] to the point that our family and even our life becomes less important [Matt 10:37; Luke 14:26].
 - **“The body they may kill: God’s truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever.”**
 - We should not fear those who can kill the body but have no power over the soul [Mt 10:28; Luke 12:4].
 - No matter what Satan, his minions, or his world system may do, the word of our God stands forever [Isa 40:8; Matt 5:18; 1 Pet 1:25].
 - Just as God’s word stands forever, so His kingdom will be forever [2 Sam 7:12-16; Luke 1:32-33].
- Conclusions
 - All good hymns reflect biblical truths and/or biblical principles.
 - A Mighty Fortress is Our God is particularly rich in references to God’s word.
 - Martin Luther touched upon many important biblical concepts in this hymn.
 - Because it so clearly tied to Scripture, it was well suited to be the “anthem” for the Reformation in its battle against Roman Catholicism.