



When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done. They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the LORD, they shall cry aloud from the sea. Wherefore glorify ye the LORD in the fires, even the name of the LORD God of Israel in the isles of the sea. (Isaiah 24:13-15)

It is such a delight to see the fulfilling of the Words of the Lord before our very eyes. Though they may search diligently in the great cities of the world to hear the Word of the Lord, they shall not easily find it; in fact, the dwellers of great cities may never again find the Word of the Lord. *“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.”* (Amos 8:11-12) They shall not find that Word in their man-made new bibles, nor in the dark by-ways of streets. But the Isles of the Sea yet remember the Lord, and their voices will rise, and have risen, in praise of the God of their fathers.

The hymn that is the subject of our study for today was the theme for the 50th Jubilee Celebration of our Anglican Orthodox Communion on the 15th of November (this year) in the Solomon Islands – presided over by Bishop Zephaniah Legumana. The deep, rich voices of the men; and the high shrill yet melodious voices of the women, rose in majestic harmony and glorious praise to the very threshold of God’s Heaven. How remarkable that God has such a strong fortress of faith in the islands of the sea while the great cities forget their Maker!

O God, Our Help in Ages Past

Text: Isaac Watts, 1674-1748 Tune: ST. ANNE

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home:

Under the shadow of thy throne,
thy saints have dwelt secure;
sufficient is thine arm alone,
and our defense is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,
or earth received her frame,
from everlasting thou art God,
to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight
are like an evening gone;
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all its sons away;
they fly, forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
be thou our guide while troubles last,
and our eternal home!

The words to this hymn were written by Isaac Watts, the non-Conformist who embarked upon a new dimension of hymnody by departing from precise scriptural wordings (such as the Psalms) and included in his hymns the spiritual experiences and emotions of the committed Christian.

The storms of life often beat heavily upon the roof of the Christian soul. The crashing of lightning and gale force winds seem to be on the verge of taking away all that is in its way. Yet, the true Christian is accustomed to a regular rendering of prayer daily, and the storm makes no exception. If his faith is of a steadfast nature, he may not even pray that he be spared, but only that the Lord's will be done in the storm. The Lord so loves to hear this kind of prayer. "...*thy will be done*..." It may so be that the whole roof is torn away to make way for a far more opulent mansion, or the Lord may still the winds and torrent in His own time. But the inhabitant is safe, always, in the arms of Jesus, our Lord. The hymn is most often sung to the tune of St. Anne and is intended to paraphrase the meaning of the majestic Psalm 90.

There has not been a day in the life of the elect in which God has not been his help, and there shall never a day come in future years when God forgets His chosen vessel. He is the Ancient of Days, true; but He is also the God of all Eternity Future.

There never was a time, nor will there ever be a time, when He was not, or will not, be, "The Great I AM."

God is truly our shelter in the storm just as surely as He was that cleft Rock to which Mr. Toplady makes reference as the Rock of Ages. As we huddle in the very shadow of the Throne of God, His mighty outstretched Arm will provide complete protection and safety. His wings are sufficient to cover each of His dear children.

It is beyond our comprehension to understand that God existed before time itself, but He has so existed from Eternity Past. In a sense, there is no such thing as Eternity past for that would imply a limit on eternity continuing into the future. It is for this reason that God, above and apart from the dimension of time, is the Great I AM at all points of the spectrum. Of course He predates the Hills, mountains, rivers, and seas because He made them and conceived of them while the earth was yet in the mist of the veil of time.

The observation God takes on His Creation is quite different from ours. He is not limited by the perspective of the space-time continuum. A thousand years are even less than a vapor to Him. We observe other fellows who are living in immorality and make a hasty judgment that condemns them to hell. We cannot see the future, only the present. Our judgments would have sent men such as John Newton to the gallows of Hell long before the Lord had sent a flaming and Holy Spirit into his heart and made all things new. God sees the end and the beginning, but our view is limited to mid-course.

The words of the following stanza bear heavily on my mind as I visit the cemeteries of strange and new churches to which I am invited to speak. Looking at the graves stones, I see some very important dates – the date of birth (separated by a dash) and the date of death. The first and the latter are not so important as that dash in between, for that represents the fullness of a person's life. I wonder what that dash will include in all of my life and of yours, dear Reader?

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all its sons away;
they fly, forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.

This stanza is only partially true. Those wicked and rebellious souls who have rejected God will certainly be just as forgotten as the Rich Man who refused the crumbs to Lazarus, but Lazarus is not forgotten, for his name is recorded in the Book of Life. Who needs a name in the fires of Hell? The Lord, our Redeemer, keeps excellent books; and His memory is unfailing of His saints.

We need God to be our constant Guide, not just while troubles last:

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home:

The following prayer taken from the Family Prayer section of the Prayer Book has a beauty of truth and reverence that is seldom equaled. It is so because it reflects Scriptural Truth:

At Night.

O LORD, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in thy mercy grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.

There does, indeed, remain a Sabbath Rest for the people of God. If we are faithful, we shall enjoy that rest in the here and now and, certainly, in the eternity to come. If it is Christ who does His labors through our organs, we are in perpetual rest ourselves. When we undertake to do the work of the Lord, if we have prayed and known of his blessing for it, the labor will not be work, but a divine and happy pleasure. Try it!