



A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD

Words and Music by MARTIN LUTHER

Long ago, persons lived within a fortress equipped with shops and provisions to meet their every need. God is like a fortress for all of us who rely on Him. We can LIVE WITHIN HIS CONSTANT PRESENCE as he MEETS EVERY SPIRITUAL NEED for COURAGE, WISDOM, HOPE, and LOVE! This is our FAITH!

Martin Luther must have felt that way about God, too, when he wrote, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God, a bulwark never failing.” Luther’s life is filled with courageous adventures – masked horsemen, being made prisoner in a castle, the threat of being burned as a heretic – but most important, many of the denominations we know today originated through Luther’s Reformation beliefs. See what you can discover about these events in Luther’s life. (Your director surely will have a book to help you find out about them.)

The 95 Theses _____

Romans 1:17 _____

Diet of Worms _____

His work at Wartburg _____

To us choristers it is especially important to know that Luther helped return to the people themselves the opportunity of singing hymns in their own languages after 1,000 years of church music being controlled by the church authorities. He wrote: “I wish, after the example of the Prophets and the ancient Fathers of the church to make German psalms for the people . . . so that the word of God may dwell among the people by means of song also.”

Luther’s hymn “A Mighty Fortress” is based on Psalm 46. Some people think that Luther paraphrased the first three stanzas of his great hymn from Psalm 46 but wrote the fourth stanza as his own commentary on what the psalmist had said. This may be true, for the 4th stanza does not refer to the psalm at all. One should never sing only the first stanza alone for it ends with the thought that Satan has more power than God. The other stanzas bring out the full meaning. See if you can find three of the scripture verses reflected directly in the hymn:

The original tune, which may be based on an early Gregorian chant, appeared like this. Compare it with today’s hymn tune setting.



Listen for Luther’s tune in the Finale of Mendelssohn’s *Reformation Symphony*, in Wagner’s *Kaisermarsch*, in Nicolai’s *Fest-Overture*, in Meyerbeer’s opera *Les Huguenots*, and in Bach’s cantata based on it.

Above all, when you are faced with difficult choices, remember Luther’s words: “My conscience is bound in the Word of God” – and I’ll turn to the teachings of the Bible to make my decisions, confident that:

“ . . . God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.”