

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott
Martin Luther, 1529
Tr. composite

8.7. 8.7. 5.5. 5.6. 7.

Ein feste Burg
Martin Luther, 1529
Setting: Johannes Eccard, 1597, adapt.

1 A might - y For - tress is our God, A trust - y
2 With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our
3 Though dev - ils all the world should fill, All ea - ger
4 The Word they still shall let re - main Nor an - y

Shield and Weap - on; He helps us free from ev - 'ry
loss ef - fect ed; But for us fights the Val - iant
to de - vour us, We trem - ble not, we fear no
thanks have for it; He's by our side up - on the

need That hath us now o'er - tak en. The
One, Whom God Him - self e - lect ed. Ask
ill, They shall not o - ver - pow'r us. This
plain With His good gifts and Spir it. And

old e - vil Foe Now means dead - ly woe;
ye, Who is this? Je - sus Christ it is,
world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will,
take they our life, Goods, fame, child, and wife,

Deep guile and great might Are his dread arms in
Of Sab - a - oth Lord, And there's none oth - er
He can harm us none, He's judged; the deed is
Let these all be gone, They yet have noth - ing

fight; On earth is not his e qual.
God; He holds the field for - ev er.
done; One lit - tle word can fell him.
won; The King - dom ours re - main eth.

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

MARTIN LUTHER wrote “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God (*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*)” as a metrical setting of Psalm 46, though it may more accurately be said to have been loosely inspired by the Psalm. Its first extant appearance is in Andreas Rauscher’s 1531 Erfurt reprint of Joseph Klug’s *Geistliche Lieder auff’s new gebessert*, Wittenberg, 1529. Klug’s 1529 hymnal is now lost, but was most likely the first publication in which Luther’s hymn appeared in print.

As striking as Luther’s text is, just as striking and memorable is the melody he composed to accompany it, which he drew from Gregorian predecessors. The tune “Ein feste Burg” is much more heavily syncopated and complex than the tunes for Luther’s earlier (and more literal) Psalm settings, and much more finely tailored to match the underlying text. The perfect wedding of text and tune is perhaps best illustrated by the sixth line of the second verse, “Er heißt Jesus Christ” (translated in the English version as “Jesus Christ it is”), in which the melody climbs until reaching its pinnacle with the name of Christ.

“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” is included in all the major Lutheran hymnals. The translation used for the Free Lutheran Chorale-Book is that found in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 1941, No. 262, which first appeared in the 1868 Pennsylvania Lutheran Church Book and is a composite drawn from the translations of Thomas Carlyle and W. M. Reynolds, with the first line from Frederick H. Hedge’s famous 1852 translation. The result is a text that is practically word for word reflective of Luther’s German, while still retaining the original meter and rhyme scheme. *Lutheran Worship* and the *Lutheran Service Book* contain a version of this translation that is slightly altered to soften the ending of the fourth stanza: the earlier “Let these all be gone, / They yet have nothing won” is changed to “Though these all be gone, / The victory has been won.” The earlier version is closer to Luther’s original, expressing a shocking nonchalance at the prospect of losing one’s family. Compared to the gain of the kingdom of God, however, even the loss of the supreme earthly blessings of child and wife cannot dim the deep-seated joy of the Christian.

The music used for the Free Lutheran Chorale-Book is largely adapted from Johannes Eccard’s 1597 setting for five voices. Both text and music may be freely used and reproduced for any purpose whatever, and are offered with the prayer that they may serve for the edification of Christian people everywhere. For more information, visit the Free Lutheran Chorale-Book at:

🔗 www.lutheranchoragebook.com 🔗

THE HYMN

A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD

ADAPTED FROM THE 46TH PSALM BY

Dr. Martin Luther

The Free Lutheran Chorale-Book
Davenport, Iowa
2017