



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 61

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- This Psalm is titled *To the Chief Musician. On a stringed instrument. A Psalm of David*
- The title indicates, as it was mentioned in previous Psalms, that it was directed toward the *Chief Musician*, whom some suppose to be the Lord God Himself, and others suppose to be a leader of choirs or musicians in David's time, such as Heman the singer or Asaph
- *On a stringed instrument*, It is probably the name of a musical instrument of eight strings, perhaps a harp, which was touched by the hand, or with a feather or bow

Introduction



- According to the title David is the author of this Psalm
- David was often in trouble; however, we do not know the life circumstances which prompted this Psalm
- From the Psalm itself it is evident that it was composed by one who was in exile 61:2, and by one who was a king 61:6
- So, it seems that it was written after he came to the throne
- Most likely David composed it when he was driven into exile on the rebellion of Absalom, and when he was still beyond the Jordan 2 Samuel 17:22, and when his life was yet in danger



Introduction

- Some think it might have been written when he was in the land of the Philistines, being obliged to fly there from Saul
- But most believe that the period of Absalom's rebellion has been the most appropriate suggestion
- Psalm 42:1-11 and Psalm 43:1-5 refer to the same period and have the same general characteristics
- In later times the Psalm was naturally adopted as a prayer of the nation in its dispersion, and the king was interpreted to refer to the Messiah



Introduction

The Psalm Outline

- Crying Out For Rescue 61:1-2
- Praising God For His Past Mercies 61:3-4
- The Answer To The Prayer 61:5-7
- Praising God Forever 61:8



Crying Out For Rescue 61:1-2

- David begins by calling on God, pleading for God to listen to him
- He was in distress which was vocally expressed with great eagerness and persistence
- To run to God by prayer for comfort is the most necessary thing for a sad soul
- And David knew well that God was his first and best hope in time of trouble
- Then in verse 2, he describes his sense of distance from God and his agony
- David was on the run at the time, and far away from home



Crying Out For Rescue 61:1-2

- This is the voice of an exile; a man far from the city which he loves most; yet even at *the end* of the land he says he will cry unto God; because no one is out of His reach
- Even when he feels as though he is as far from God as he can possibly be, he will still call out to God with a confidence that He will hear and respond
- He was losing hope, as his heart *is overwhelmed* with grief and sorrow and ready to sink, and fail and die, but God is our ever-present hope, even *from the ends of the earth*
- He had no strength in himself; if he depended on himself, he could not be safe



Crying Out For Rescue 61:1-2

- So, the image here is of David seeking refuge from his enemy and asked God to lead him to *the rock* that is higher up
- In those moments when his heart was *overwhelmed*, he perhaps needed: *the rock*, a place of stability and security, something strong enough to protect him
- He needed a rock *that is higher than I*, a place above himself, above his wisdom, above his abilities
- He needed God to *lead* him to that rock
- David was unable to get to the firm-footed place above his crisis on his own



Crying Out For Rescue 61:1-2

- Some believe that David, when his son Absalom rebelled against him, and he had to escape from Jerusalem, became as though expelled, rejected, and exiled to *the end of the earth*
- David knew that salvation was out of his reach, so he prayed for God to lead him to the rock of salvation that was beyond his grasp and His grace would lift him up high, where no one can reach him
- Of course, the Rock David desires and longs for is God Himself and Christ is the rock of our salvation
- God's power and promise are a rock that is higher than we



Crying Out For Rescue 61:1-2

- Rock symbolizes God's strength, His power, His unchanging stability, His limitless might
- He is the Rock of Salvation, the Rock Eternal, the Rock of Israel, and the Rock of Refuge
- This cry could be of the people captivated in Babylon, far away from Jerusalem, who cried to God in their grief, with their hearts abiding on the Rock of hope
- Or could be the cry of someone taken over by the devil; and feeling far from God

Praising God For His Past Mercies 61:3-4



- David remembered that God had answered such prayers in the past
- In the past God *Himself* had been a *shelter* and *strong tower* for David
- *A strong tower from the enemy*, From Satan the devouring lion
- St. Augustine says, “For Christ Himself is the tower, Himself for us has been made a tower from the face of the enemy, who is also the Rock whereon has been built the Church. Are you taking heed that you be not smitten of the devil? Flee to the Tower; never to that tower will the devil’s arrows follow you: there you will stand protected and fixed.”

Praising God For His Past Mercies 61:3-4



- *I will abide in Your tabernacle forever*, In his exile he prays that he may once more be received as God's guest, to enjoy His protection and hospitality, to dwell in the place which He has consecrated by His Presence (Psalm 15:1)
- This expresses the confident assurance that he would be restored to his home, and to the privileges of public worship
- He determines that the service of God shall be his constant duty; and all those who expect to find God their shelter and strong tower must make it so
- None but His servants have the benefit of His protection

Praising God For His Past Mercies 61:3-4



- The word *tabernacle* is simply the word for *tent*
- It refers to the sacred tent which was erected for the worship of God
- Within the *tabernacle* were the ark, the tablets of the law, the table of showbread, etc.
- David regarded it as a great privilege to abide near that sacred tent; near to the place of public worship; near to the place where God was supposed to dwell
- David speaks of abiding in God's tabernacle *forever*, because it was a type and figure of heaven, Hebrews 9:8,24

Praising God For His Past Mercies 61:3-4



- *I will trust in the shelter of Your wings*, It is a picture of warmth, intimacy, and protection, of a mother bird spreading out her wings to protect her chicks from danger in the shelter of her wings
- In a similar way, Scriptures tell us that there is safety *in the shelter of Your wings*, as Jesus mourned over Jerusalem's stubborn rejection, he called out, *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”* (Matthew 23:37)

Praising God For His Past Mercies 61:3-4



- Or, as that which marked and surrounded the interior of God's tabernacle of meeting and the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant, which included the designs of cherubim and their *wings*
- But to take advantage of that secret place, that secure place in God, one must give up his sense of independence
- *A shelter...a strong tower...Your tabernacle...the shelter of Your wings*, With image after image, David built upon the idea of *the rock that is higher than I* first stated in verse 2
- No one image could fully express the greatness of God's help to David

The Answer To The Prayer

61:5-7



- David is referring to past vows of grateful loyalty and faithfulness to God, which he continued to honor
- God *heard* these vows and responded to them, giving David rule over God's people *the heritage of those who fear Your name*
- His troubled mind became calm, for he looked upon the blessing as already granted
- He considered, no doubt, that what he had asked would be bestowed
- *the heritage*, may also mean the heavenly glory, the incorruptible inheritance, the gift of God to His children; through the death of Christ the Savior

The Answer To The Prayer

61:5-7



- St. Augustine comments, “Let us continue therefore in the fear of God’s name: the eternal Father deceives us not. Sons labor, that they may receive the inheritance of their parents, to whom when dead they are to succeed: are we not laboring to receive an inheritance from that Father, to whom not dying we succeed; but together with Him in the very inheritance for everlasting are to live?”
- In verses 6 and 7, the process of praying worked to change David’s focus from the temporal to the eternal, from the problems of earth to the glories of heaven

The Answer To The Prayer

61:5-7



- From speaking of the people in verse 5, David passes to speak of himself
- His life had been in danger: but now the danger was over
- The long life which was one of God's special blessings under the old covenant (Exodus 23:26; 1 Kings 3:11; Proverbs 3:2) was promised specially to the king (Psalm 21:4)
- It may mean that David here was looking more toward eternal life in God's presence
- However, many scholars questioned what he means by the king

The Answer To The Prayer

61:5-7



- So, some say that David prays for the extension of his own life; or, if not exactly of his own life, then for the continuation of his reign upon the throne
- Others suggest that it is a prophecy of One greater than David
- David elevated above himself and above earthly things, abiding in the spiritual tabernacle under the shelter of God's wings, prays for prolongation of days for the true King, the ideal King, Messiah, of whom David and his house are types
- Because these words could not be applied to human, it is a prophecy of One greater than David; and thus, the Targum translation here interprets 'king' by 'King Messiah'

The Answer To The Prayer

61:5-7



- St. Augustine supports this meaning, he says, “This is therefore the King of whom we are the members. A King Christ is, our Head, our King. Thou hast given to Him days upon days; not only those days in that time that hath end, but days upon those days without end.”
- *He shall abide before God forever*, He shall sit enthroned before God for ever, an allusion to the promise of eternal dominion to the house of David, enjoying His protection
- However, David could only say this in reference to himself in a very limited way

The Answer To The Prayer

61:5-7



- He could say it without limitation of the Messiah that was promised to come from his descent (2 Samuel 7:11-16)
- It is a Messianic Psalm this is why the everlasting kingdom of the Christ alone fulfils its prayer
- *prepare mercy and truth*, If literally understood of David, is a prayer that the Lord would show him favor and kindness, and perform His promises to him, so his life would be preserved from the conspiracies of his enemies, and his kingdom be established
- Or that he might be granted to use mercy and be merciful with his people and administer justice
- But these words are applied to the Messiah

The Answer To The Prayer

61:5-7



- *“Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.”* (Psalm 85:10); Jesus’ life shows us how God has brought Mercy & Truth together for a purpose in His plan for man
- St. Augustine says, *“He shall abide before God forever; according to what, or because of what? ‘His mercy and truth who shall seek for Him?’ He says also in another place, ‘All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth, to men seeking His testament and His testimonies.’ Mercy is spoken of, because our merits God regarded not, but His own goodness, in order that He might forgive us all our sins and might promise life everlasting: but truth is spoken of, because He fails not to render those things which He has promised.”*



Praising God Forever 61:8

- David began the Psalm desperately crying out to God with a heart that was fainting and *overwhelmed*
- But it ends with praise, honoring the character of God as expressed in His *name*, and doing so *forever*
- It concludes with David's commitment to both sing praises and live out his faith day by day, trusting God and enjoying His presence
- David knew he had an unending obligation to thank and honor God
- It could and should be done *daily* and that *forever*



Praising God Forever 61:8

- The whole Psalm indicates a fervent desire to be engaged in the worship and service of God
- A desire to be with Him and to enjoy His favor on earth; a confident hope that he would be permitted to enjoy His presence forever
- God is unchangeable, faithful and keeps His promises, we ought to be also faithful and *daily perform our vows*



Discussion

- What did David say in this Psalm that illustrates his faith in God?
- What is a strong tower?
- Why do you think David longed to dwell in God's tabernacle and take refuge in the shelter of His wings?
- What images did David use to describe what God had done for him?

Discussion



- What kind of relationship did David have with the Lord?
- How did David plan to demonstrate his own faithfulness to God?
- What do we learn about dealing with difficulties in our own lives from this Psalm?
- Is there a pattern that we can follow in this Psalm?
- What choices does the psalmist make in this Psalm?