



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 71

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# Introduction

- This Psalm has no title in Hebrew
- However, according to the Vulgate and Septuagint, the title is: *A Psalm of David, of the sons of Jonadab, and of the first captives*
- As to authorship and date, according to the Hebrew, there is no name
- The Psalm is voiced from the perspective of an individual in a latter stage of life capable of reflecting on all stages of life, (71:9,18)
- Verse 21 suggests the author of the Psalm could have been a leader



# Introduction

- Many commentators believe David is the author and the Psalm is his prayer and trust in God in his latter years under the crisis of Absalom's rebellion
- Both the subject and style show it to be David's
- Others attributed it to Jeremiah, but with no strong evidence
- The resemblance between this Psalm and Jeremiah's writings, has led many critics to ascribe it to that prophet
- An assumption was made by the fact that it is, in great part, an adaptation of other Psalms, chiefly 22, 31, 35, and 40, since such dependence on older writings is a prominent feature in Jeremiah



# Introduction

- St. Jerome and others interpret it as a prophecy concerning the sufferings and resurrection of the Messiah
- The Psalm has many references to other Psalms
- 71:1-3 is quoted almost exactly from Psalm 31:1-3
- The thoughts of 71:5 seem to be suggested by Psalm 22:9-11
- Do not be far from me 71:12 echoes Psalm 22:11
- 71:13 is similar to Psalm 35:26
- 71:13,18 carries the thoughts of Psalm 22:22 and 22:30-31



# Introduction

## Psalm Outline

- Trusting the Lord Who Delivers His People 71:1-5
- Describing God's Kindness from Youth to Old Age 71:6-9
- The Psalmist Pleads Against his Enemies 71:10-13
- The Psalmist Rejoices in Hope 71:14-16
- He Returns to Prayer Again 71:17-18
- Revived by the God Who Does Great Things 71:19-21
- Praises and Thanksgiving 71:22-24

# Trusting the Lord Who Delivers His People 71:1-5



- Many Psalms begin with the description of the psalmist's need
- However, David begins this Psalm by openly declaring that he has put his hope and trust in the Lord
- The psalmist was confident that such trust in the Lord would lead to vindication and that he would *never be put to shame*
- David, mindful of God's promises to those who put their trust in Him, and not presuming on his own strength, exclaims, *In You, O LORD*
- He did not rely upon his own ability but trusted in God's sovereignty

# Trusting the Lord Who Delivers His People 71:1-5



- David is asking God to not let him down and not let him be put to shame by the outsiders because of his trust in Him
- The believer has no reason to be ashamed of anything in this life but sin and the imperfection of his own righteousness
- Because the psalmist trusted in God, he boldly asked God to act righteously on his behalf, and to *deliver* him
- He asked that the *righteousness* of God work on his behalf
- He is telling God, “I fly to You in my present trouble, and ask of You *to deliver and rescue me* from the hands of my persecutors

# Trusting the Lord Who Delivers His People 71:1-5



- *in Your righteousness*, with that justice that prompts You to punish the wicked, and free the innocent
- When the sinner utters this prayer, he beseeches God to deliver him by Jesus Whom He has made Judge of all the world
- *Deliver me in Your righteousness*, Because He is the Justice of God, the King Who reigns in righteousness, and executes judgment and justice in the earth
- Being Just, He would never forsake those who have put all their trust and confidence in Him



# Trusting the Lord Who Delivers His People 71:1-5



- And his claim on God's justice is based on his trust in His promise, which He obligates Himself to fulfil, that He may be justified in His sayings
- And, for effect, he repeats the prayer, saying, *Incline Your ear to me, and save me*, hear my humble voice, save me in the present danger
- *cause me to escape*, The danger seems to be pressing and present such as that of Absalom's
- *Incline Your ear*, Some scholars applied this verse to Christ who had humbled Himself and bent down, by taking upon Himself our form, and became subject to the Cross for our sakes

# Trusting the Lord Who Delivers His People 71:1-5



- David now explains more clearly what he wants from God, and that is, that God should protect him like a city strongly fortified, and incapable of being penetrated by the enemy
- He uses three words to describe what he is looking for from God: *deliver, escape, and save*
- David wants the Lord to continue to be his rock and come to his deliverance, rescue, and salvation
- He proclaims that his experience with God is, *You are my rock and my fortress*
- This call and confidence is based upon God's righteousness and His promises

# Trusting the Lord Who Delivers His People 71:1-5



- We can assume from these words that David is being unjustly treated and he wants God to bring justice through judgment upon his enemies
- This is very appropriately said, when David was driven out of his house and palace at Jerusalem, by his son
- St. John Chrysostom comments on this kind of prayers and says, “Prayer should be the means by which I, at all times, receive all that I need, and, for this reason, be my daily refuge, my daily consolation, my daily joy, my source of rich and inexhaustible joy in life.”

# Trusting the Lord Who Delivers His People 71:1-5



- *To which I may resort continually*, In times of danger and distress, for safety, *“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe.”* (Proverbs 18:10)
- Here we see a weak man, but he is in a strong dwelling; his security rests upon the tower in which he hides
- The source of the psalmist’s misery is revealed in verse 4
- There was a *wicked* man, *unrighteous and cruel* who seemed to have the psalmist under his control
- From this he needed God to *deliver* him

# Trusting the Lord Who Delivers His People 71:1-5



- It is characteristic of David to single out from his adversaries an individual man, from whom he especially asks to be delivered (Psalm 13:2,17:13,18:17,48,35:8,41:6,9,11,55:13,14)
- He may mean here Absalom his son who rebelled against him
- He may not only intend him, but all those wicked men that had joined with him, Achitophel, and their servants, for this Psalm altogether corresponds with Psalm 31, which, by general consent, talk about Absalom's persecution
- Looking at the passage in a spiritual sense, *the wicked* may mean the devil to the sinner

# Trusting the Lord Who Delivers His People 71:1-5



- The psalmist proclaimed his *hope* and *trust* in *Lord GOD*, the Master and covenant God of Israel
- It was not just that his hope was in God; He was his *hope*
- *You are my trust from my youth*, David had always trusted in God and had always found Him a helper
- God's righteousness is the basis for David's confidence, a confidence he has had from his youth
- All that he was, and all that he possessed, he owed to God; and he felt now that God had been his protector from his earliest years

# Describing God's Kindness from Youth to Old Age 71:6-9



- God's care for David does not only go back to his youth, but goes even back to the beginning of his life, *out of my mother's womb*
- God had sustained him from his earliest years and since He had shown His power in keeping him, and manifested His care for him, there was ground to pray that God would keep him still, and that He would guard him as old age came on
- Seeing God's care and help to him from the earliest age, the psalmist appealed to God's continued care, and in turn he promised *praise* to God that was just as continual
- God knows us before we know anything

# Describing God's Kindness from Youth to Old Age 71:6-9



- *My praise shall be continually of You*, Where goodness has been continuously received, praise should constantly be offered
- Some fathers relate verse 6 to infant baptism rite
- Some interpret it as the words of our Mother the Church, who bears us to God in the Sacraments
- St. John Chrysostom has many sayings addressing teaching the children about God's wisdom since early age, he says, "Let everything take second place to our care of our children, our bringing them up to the discipline and instruction of the Lord. If from the beginning we teach them to love true wisdom, they will have great wealth and glory than riches can provide."



# Describing God's Kindness from Youth to Old Age 71:6-9



- *I have become as a wonder to many*, Because of the many adversities and attacks, many people were amazed at the Psalmist
- Many of those who saw his sufferings regarded him as a typical example of divine chastisement, but his faith has remained unshaken throughout
- David's life was a sign and a marvel to many people due to his ability to praise God continually and trust in God as a refuge even though he is in the hand of the wicked
- They were in *wonder* that a man – especially one so committed to God – could be so afflicted

# Describing God's Kindness from Youth to Old Age 71:6-9



- Despite it all, he found a *strong refuge* in God Himself
- This, *wonder*, might be either from the number of the tribulations which had come upon him
- Or from the narrow escapes which he had had from death
- Or from the frequency of the divine intervention on his behalf
- Or from the abundant mercies which had been manifested toward him
- The connection makes it probable that he refers to the unusual number of afflictions which he faced, and the frequency of the divine intervention on his behalf when there was no other refuge, and no other hope

# Describing God's Kindness from Youth to Old Age 71:6-9



- St. Augustine, taking a spiritual view of this passage, says, that “he who despises the things of this world, patiently submits to injury, and thus goes in a contrary direction to that of mankind, may be called a wonder and a prodigy. Such was John the Baptist, Christ Himself, Peter, Paul, and the other Apostles; such were all the martyrs and confessors, and others, who were looked upon by the wise ones of the world as fools, yet could truly say, *I have become as a wonder to many.*”
- Everyone and anyone has the ability to become a wonder and a sign to many through his trust in God when suffering and to amaze people in his faith through life's difficulties

# Describing God's Kindness from Youth to Old Age 71:6-9



- *But You*, David is re-directing his attention from himself and the enemy who are around him to God his *strong refuge*
- Because God had been so faithful as a *strong refuge*, the Psalmist was determined to speak *praise* unto God and speak of His *glory*
- This shows that his heart was affected with the goodness of God to him, and that he had a deep impression and sense of it; *“for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”* (Luke 6:45)
- David knew the faithfulness of God through his younger years and now asked that God continue that faithfulness in his *old age* and as his *strength fails*

# Describing God's Kindness from Youth to Old Age 71:6-9



- He knew that *man's* strength diminishes with old age, but *God's* strength does not
- The Lord never *casts off* nor casts away His people; they are near unto Him
- The Lord had been the guide of David's youth and now he desires He would be the staff of his old age; at which age he was when Absalom rebelled against him
- Some question in what sense Christ, Who never knew old age of body, can use these words of Himself?

# Describing God's Kindness from Youth to Old Age 71:6-9



- Some scholars take it either of the physical and mental exhaustion of the Passion, like in its wasting effects to old age
- Or, with yet deeper meaning, of His crucifying our old man in His own Person
- *Do not forsake me when my strength fails*, An appeal to the Divine compassion
- This is also the cry of each member of the Church for himself
- So, we ought to pray that God will hear us, and will give us, even in extreme age, strength to say with His Martyr, St. Polycarp, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”

# The Psalmist Pleads Against his Enemies 71:10-13



- The psalmist's weakness encourages his enemies to make their attacks
- They begin by *speaking against him*
- David had many enemies, as Ahithophel, and others, who spoke against him to the people, and thereby drew many with them into rebellion against him
- And particularly Shimei spoke against him, and cursed him, calling him a bloody man, a man of Belial, 2 Samuel 16:7
- Even in David's old age times of suffering still came and enemies still pressed against him

# The Psalmist Pleads Against his Enemies 71:10-13



- The attack of the enemies is with their tongues
- They claimed that God had forsaken him, and that therefore, they would arise and punish him, or treat him as an outcast from God
- The psalmist knew what his adversaries said against him
- He knew they claimed that *God has forsaken him and there is none to deliver him*
- His adversity made them think God was no longer with him, so it was a good time to attack *pursue and take him*



# The Psalmist Pleads Against his Enemies 71:10-13



- *God has forsaken him; Pursue and take him*, This is the very advice that Achitophel gave, which, however, had no effect, as God did not allow it to happen, 2 Samuel 17
- Notice how David's suffering is viewed in two different ways
- The enemies see David's problems as a sign that God had forsaken him
- David saw himself as a sign of his faith in God despite the trials
- These can also be applied to the Passion of Christ and of that Council of the Pharisees gathered after the raising of Lazarus conspiring against Him

# The Psalmist Pleads Against his Enemies 71:10-13



- And of the mocking suffered by Christ upon the Cross, when His cry was, *“My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me”* (Matthew 27:46), and theirs was, *“He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him;”* (Matthew 27:43)
- Good men may seem to others to be forsaken of God; and they themselves may sometimes think they are
- They may be forsaken for a short time, when God withdraws His gracious presence, or does not come immediate for help; but always according to His will
- With determined enemies as described in the previous verses, the psalmist needed God’s help *soon*

# The Psalmist Pleads Against his Enemies 71:10-13



- He felt as if delayed help was no help at all
- While they were taking measures against David, he had turned to God for protection, who, without any trouble, could weaken and ruin them all, as He really did
- *O God, do not be far from me, As they boast about God being away from him, but rather make haste to my help, to save him from them*
- This was the help the psalmist asked for, *Let them be confounded and consumed ... Let them be covered with reproach and dishonor*

# The Psalmist Pleads Against his Enemies 71:10-13



- He wanted God to strike his adversaries with confusion and weakening, with disapproval and dishonor
- He not only wanted them defeated, but also humiliated
- By God's *hastening to help*, let Absalom's counselors be *confounded*, their plots fail, disappear, and vanish
- *Let them be covered with reproach and dishonor*, A repetition
- *adversaries of my life*, That hated him as the devil hates the godly men
- All wicked men are like Satan, full of enmity against God and all good men; and such were David's enemies



# The Psalmist Rejoices in Hope

## 71:14-16

- Even with the reproachful view of the people, David puts his hope in God continually
- He now stirs himself up to praise and thanksgiving, He will never cease to hope; he will praise God more and more
- He will trust in God whatever may be the number, the power, and the confidence of his enemies
- None of these things shall make him despair, for as long as he has God, he has every ground for hope
- *I will hope continually*, Not merely when he is afflicted by the enemies



# The Psalmist Rejoices in Hope

## 71:14-16

- St. Augustine remarks that God's justice deserves all praise, even were He to condemn all mankind, but seeing that He has shown us mercy, we add that praise to the glory of His Name
- *My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness, With which God punishes the wicked*
- *Your salvation, Through which You free and save the innocent,*
- *all the day long, That is, constantly*
- *And Your salvation all the day, both temporal and eternal; the glory of both, and praise for the same*

# The Psalmist Rejoices in Hope

## 71:14-16



- David declares that he will praise God more and more and his mouth will continue to tell of God's righteousness
- How often does our suffering cause us to doubt God's righteousness!
- But David was happy to testify of both God's *righteousness* and His *salvation*, and to do so all day long
- He felt the entire day was needed because he did *not know* the *limits* of God's *righteousness* and *salvation*
- This is also is the voice of the Bride, the Church

# The Psalmist Rejoices in Hope

## 71:14-16



- The *righteousness and salvation* is He of whom St. Paul says that “*Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*” (1 Corinthians 1:30)
- Of whom Simeon said, “*My eyes have seen Your salvation.*” (Luke 2:30)
- *all the day*, That is, according to some, both in the day of prosperity and the night of sorrow
- Or, means the day with the night, because night serves day, not day night





# The Psalmist Rejoices in Hope

## 71:14-16

- The night is our flesh, and the day is righteousness, and whatever is done in the flesh is of the night, while deeds of righteousness belong to the day
- And there is also another meaning, that of the everlasting praise of Christ where is no darkness at all
- *I will go in the strength of the Lord God*, Looking forward, the psalmist was confident in God's *strength*, despite his sense of diminished personal strength with advancing years
- He will attribute his deliverance to no strength, or efforts, or righteousness of his own but to God's righteousness

# The Psalmist Rejoices in Hope

## 71:14-16



- He will adhere entirely to God's omnipotence
- In it he will confide and will hide himself in it as he would in a secure fortress; and thus, *I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only*
- The psalmist is saying that he will not consider any human counsel, or his own strength, but he will remember and bear in mind *righteousness, of Yours only* by virtue of which God keeps His promises and through which He punishes the wicked and crown the godly

# The Psalmist Rejoices in Hope

## 71:14-16



- David declares that we do not know or comprehend the sum of God's righteousness
- Who are we to think that we understand the plan of God?
- Who are we to think that we know what is fair and just and what is not in our lives when we do not have the full knowledge that God has?
- All virtue, and all grace, to God; all evil, or sinful, to himself, saying with the Apostle, "*But by the grace of God I am what I am.*" (1 Corinthians 15:10)

# The Psalmist Rejoices in Hope

## 71:14-16



- And also, *“For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”* Galatians 6:3
- The Apostle also says, such persons are, *“ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.”* (Romans 10:3)

# He Returns to Prayer Again

## 71:17-18



- God had guided and instructed him from his earliest years
- God taught him to trust in His power
- Therefore, he, being an unarmed youth, fought with a bear and a lion, and conquered both them and the giant Goliath
- It was something that benefited him to his older years
- He will declare *the wonderful works* God enabled him to do in his youth
- As the psalmist saw God's *wondrous works*, and had an experience of them, he declared them to others for their encouragement, and to the glory of God

# He Returns to Prayer Again

## 71:17-18



- St. Augustine asks, What has God taught him? He answers, “That of Your righteousness alone I ought to be mindful. For reviewing my past life, I see what was owing to me, and what I have received instead of that which was owing to me. There was owing punishment, there has been paid grace: there was owing hell, there has been given life eternal.”
- David had *declared* God’s *wondrous works* by public praise; he had done it by his writings; he had done it by maintaining and defending the truth
- To be *taught* from one’s *youth* displays stability and consistency

# He Returns to Prayer Again

## 71:17-18



- Verse 17 words may apply to Christ or to the Church
- *You have taught me*, Is Jesus's, "*as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.*" (John 8:28)
- He also said, "*My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.*" (John 7:19)
- It is also the voice of the Church, *You have taught me*; referring all her gifts to Him as her Teacher, Who said, "*And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.*" (Matthew 23:10)

# He Returns to Prayer Again

## 71:17-18



- Then David prayed for the continued presence of God so that he could *declare God's* strength to a new *generation*
- He even in his *old age and grayheaded*, does not lean upon his long experience, nor upon his wisdom, popularity, material possibilities, or temporal authority; but he remains leaning upon God, and asks Him not to forsake him
- A repetition of his request in verse 9 but with a reason
- He calls on God to sustain him in his old age, not for his own sake, but that he may impress on the rising generation God's might and marvelous acts



# He Returns to Prayer Again

## 71:17-18



- Some scholars take it of the coming of Antichrist in the last times, when the faith of the Church has become weak
- St. Augustine says, “God’s Might is Christ; Do not let them rejoice; those who say: [Christianity will only be for some time]. Let there be someone “to declare Your might to all generations to come” (18)’ namely, to the end of the world; as once it is the end of the world, there would be no generation to come.”

# Revived by the God Who Does Great Things 71:19-21



- David continues to describe the righteousness of God, and praise Him for this attribute
- He explains the meaning of the showing forth God's power to the generation that is to come, and says, *Your righteousness* that is to say, I will announce Your power united with your justice
- God is all powerful, but He is still most just; He can do what He wills, but He wills nothing unjust
- His *righteousness* includes His faithfulness in fulfilling His divine promises and reaches unto heaven, as the mercy, truth, and faithfulness of God, are said to do, Psalm 36:5

# Revived by the God Who Does Great Things 71:19-21



- God's *power* is shown in His setting man free, His *righteousness* in causing His Son to die for us
- The surpassing *righteousness* and power of God made him ask, *O God, who is like You?*
- It is, according to St. Augustine, the cry of Adam, after he had sinned by tasting of the fruit, whereof the serpent told him, "*in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" (Genesis 3:5), and had thereby lost the likeness which he had before, as being made in the image and likeness of God

# Revived by the God Who Does Great Things 71:19-21



- *You, who have shown me great and severe troubles*, Or rather, who has caused us to see or experience great trials
- *great* in their variety and bitterness, some outward, such as he endured when persecuted by Saul; and afterwards in his own family, by Ammon, the murder of him by Absalom, and Absalom's rebellion against him; the curses of Shimei, etc.,
- And some inward, arising from the corruptions of his heart, the hidings of God's face, and the temptations of Satan
- He understood that all things were in God's hands and that if he had experienced *great and severe troubles*, that too was *shown* to him by God

# Revived by the God Who Does Great Things 71:19-21



- David consoles himself in his present trouble, by the fact of having escaped, through God's assistance, from other trials
- God has shown him *great and severe troubles*, and he will also show him great mercies
- That same God could also *revive* him, bringing him *up again from the depths of the earth*
- David's trust in God was unshakable and make us wonder, how could he had this kind of strength all of his life through all the tragedies and sufferings he endured?
- Could the Psalm be understood of Christ?

# Revived by the God Who Does Great Things 71:19-21



- This and the preceding verse might be applied to His resurrection from the dead; Ephesians 4:9; and to the resurrection of the saints; on which the faith of Christ and His people is applied
- According to St. Augustine, *revive me again, And bring me up again from the depths of the earth* is to be understood of the wretchedness of mankind after the Fall, and the bounty of God in lifting it up from the depth of sin by the message of salvation, and giving it new life in Christ

# Revived by the God Who Does Great Things 71:19-21



- Verse 21 is more than a prayer, this was a confident proclamation
- Though he was older in years, he still expected that God would *increase* his *greatness* and continue his *comfort*
- David now predicts not only his delivery from the power of Absalom, but blessings, glories, and comforts more than he asks for, and beyond what he seeks
- As a king, David grew in influence and power
- *And comfort me on every side*, It denotes the abundance of comfort, which should come as it were from every side, and embrace him

# Praises and Thanksgiving

## 71:22-24



- David after predicting his delivery from the power of Absalom, he promises all manner of thanks in his heart, with his lips, and with all sorts of musical instruments
- It would be a song celebrating God for what He has done, *Your faithfulness*, and for who He is, *O Holy One of Israel*
- *O Holy One of Israel*, This is the first time that this title of God occurs in the Psalms, but it is common in the prophets, particularly in Isaiah
- And as it is one of the very last of his Psalms, it looks forward to the universal kingdom of Christ



# Praises and Thanksgiving

## 71:22-24



- The conjunction of the psaltery and harp seems to imply that the *praise*, of which David here speaks, is to be public praise in the sanctuary, accompanied by the usual sacred music
- And St. Augustine points out that the main difference between the psaltery and harp is that the former has the hollow sounding-board placed above the strings, and the latter has it below
- And because the Spirit is from above, flesh from the earth; there seems to be signified by the *psaltery* the Spirit, by the *harp* the flesh

# Praises and Thanksgiving

## 71:22-24



- He will not only thank and praise the Lord with the harp and psaltery, but his mouth shall send forth its notes, *when I sing to You And my soul*, his life, *which You have redeemed* shall also praise Him
- His whole, body, heart, and spirit, delivered from danger, will join in the glad thanksgiving
- Most scholars agree in seeing here the union of bodily and spiritual praise of God, the harmony of will and deed, of heart and life, when the body is subdued to the spirit, and obeys its rule with gladness

# Praises and Thanksgiving

## 71:22-24



- St. Augustine explains that the lips may not express what is inside man
- One may smile, yet his smile does not reveal an inner peace, nor a rejoicing soul
- So, he says, “Because lips are not possible to speak of both belonging to the inner and to the outward man, it is uncertain in what sense lips have been used: therefore, he followed with, *And my soul, which You have redeemed.*”
- And it is not once or twice that *My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness* but *all the day long*

# Praises and Thanksgiving

## 71:22-24



- At all times he shall meditate with chanting the praises of God's justice, *For they are confounded, For they are brought to shame Who seek my hurt*
- The word *talk* means properly to meditate and it denotes here fullness of heart, and language naturally flowing out from a full soul
- Some interpret *all the day long* as the everlasting day of eternity, during which the song of the redeemed shall ever ascend before the throne of God, when the enemies of our souls have been brought to everlasting shame

# Praises and Thanksgiving

## 71:22-24



- The Psalms often conclude in this way
- They begin in trouble, they end in joy; they begin in darkness, they end in light; they begin with a dishearten and depressed mind, they end with a triumphant spirit; they begin with prayer, they end in praise



# Discussion

- What is the dominant theme of this Psalm?
- What did David recognize about God's help in the past?
- What weaknesses were David's enemies trying to take advantage of?
- What renewed commitment did David make to God in his old age?



# Discussion

- How is the Lord's righteousness described?
- What commitment to the Lord concludes this Psalm?
- What does it mean for God to save by righteousness?
- What does this Psalm teach us about God's character?