

PSALM 71

Prayer of an Old Man for Deliverance.

INTRODUCTION.

- A. From Roy H. Enoch (5-17-95).
- B. By David, a song sung by the sons of Johadab, and the first that were taken captive.
- C. This superscription was in the Septuagint, or Greek version of the OT. Modern scholars seem to usually disagree with ancient superscriptions, but certainly are not in a better position to know.
- D. Bro. George DeHoff says, "David wrote this psalm in his old age. He was beset by many enemies and so near death that he could feel himself sinking into the earth. He was an old man (71:2,18); but old age had not dried up his hope or weakened his religious spirit (71: 5,15,20).
- E. Among the scholars who do attribute it to David, the rebellion of Absalom is one of the common suggestions of a specific crisis.
- F. Twenty-three lines in this psalm are found in other psalms of David. It seems more logical to believe that David remembered expressions that he had used before, than that some other writer had compiled it from the study of David's psalms. These lines from David certainly makes the psalm sound like David's psalms, and it is natural to study it from this perspective.
- G. Coffman uses eight divisions for his study of the psalm.
 - I. A Plea for Deliverance (71:1-4).
 - II. God has Helped Him all of His life (71:5-8).
 - III. A Special Plea in a Time of Old Age (71:9-12).
 - IV. An Imprecation Against Enemies (71:13).
 - V. A Pledge to Keep on Praising and Trusting God (71:14-16).
 - VI. Pleading a Life Spent in God's Service (71:17-19).
 - VII. A Prophecy of the Resurrection (71:20).
 - VIII. A Pledge of Continual Praise (71:21-24).

THE TEXT.

- 71:1** In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge;
Let me never be ashamed.
- 2** In Your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
Incline Your ear to me and save me.
- 3** Be to me a rock of habitation to which I may continually come;
You have given commandment to save me,
For You are my rock and my fortress.
- 4** Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked,
Out of the grasp of the wrongdoer and ruthless man,
- 5** For You are my hope;
O Lord GOD, *You are* my confidence from my youth.
- 6** By You I have been sustained from *my* birth;
You are He who took me from my mother's womb;
My praise is continually of You.
- 7** I have become a marvel to many,
For You are my strong refuge.
- 8** My mouth is filled with Your praise
And with Your glory all day long.
- 9** Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
Do not forsake me when my strength fails.
- 10** For my enemies have spoken against me;
And those who watch for my life have consulted together,
- 11** Saying, "God has forsaken him;
Pursue and seize him, for there is no one to deliver."
- 12** O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, hasten to my help!

- 13 Let those who are adversaries of my soul be ashamed *and* consumed;
Let them be covered with reproach and dishonor, who seek to injure me.
- 14 But as for me, I will hope continually,
And will praise You yet more and more.
- 15 My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness
And of Your salvation all day long;
For I do not know the sum *of them*.
- 16 I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD;
I will make mention of Your righteousness, Yours alone.
- 17 O God, You have taught me from my youth,
And I still declare Your wondrous deeds.
- 18 And even when *I am* old and gray, O God, do not forsake me,
Until I declare Your strength to *this* generation,
Your power to all who are to come.
- 19 For Your righteousness, O God, *reaches* to the heavens,
You who have done great things;
O God, who is like You?
- 20 You who have shown me many troubles and distresses
Will revive me again,
And will bring me up again from the depths of the earth.
- 21 May You increase my greatness
And turn *to* comfort me.
- 22 I will also praise You with a harp,
Even Your truth, O my God;
To You I will sing praises with the lyre,
O Holy One of Israel.
- 23 My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to You;
And my soul, which You have redeemed.
- 24 My tongue also will utter Your righteousness all day long;
For they are ashamed, for they are humiliated who seek my hurt.

COMMENTS.

A. A Plea for Deliverance.

[v1-3] These verses are found in Psa. 31:1-3 and certainly sound like David. "...You are my rock and my fortress" of 71:3 is also found in Psa. 18:2.

[v4] "Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man." This is so characteristic of David that it is found in at least six psalms attributed to him: Psa. 13:2; 17:13; 18:17,48; 35:8; 41:6,9,11; 55:13,14.

B. God Has Helped Him All of His Life.

We should all feel this kind of gratitude regardless of our age, but the older we get, the more we should feel that it is true. But if we have focused on the world and suffer for it, there is a tendency to blame God for problems caused by our own sins.

[v5] "...You are my hope..." is also found in Psa. 29:7 and 40:4.

[v6] "By You I have been upheld from birth;" is the thought of Psa. 22:9,10.

[v7] "I have become as a wonder to many..." The word "wonder" here is sometimes translated "portent" or "sign" and refers to "a miracle; by implication, a token or omen" and translated in the KJV as "miracle, sign, wonder", Strong's Lexicon. David is saying that many times in his life, people could see God working to deliver and protect him. What greater example than when a shepherd boy with a sling and stone killed a champion gladiator who was over 9 feet tall and with heavy armor and mighty weapons.

C. A Special Plea in a Time of Old Age.

[v9] "Do not cast me off in the time of old age..." This could be written by a young man thinking of the frailty of old age, but it is much more natural to think of it as an old man reflecting on his vulnerability. This is one of the verses that leads us to identify the psalm as written by an old man. The most beautifully poetic description of the frailty of old age that I know of is Eccl. 12:2-5.

[v10,11] "...my enemies speak against me...take counsel together, saying, God has forsaken him; pursue and take him, for there is none to deliver him." I can think of no example to illustrate this as Ahithophel's counsel to Absalom; see 2Sam. 17:1,2.

[v12] "O God, be not far from me..." There are few expressions more common to David, as in Psa. 22:1,11,19; 35:22 and many more. "...make haste to help me." This is another common plea of David: Psa. 38:22; 40:13; 70:2, etc.

D. An Imprecation Against Enemies.

[v13] "Let them be confounded...who are adversaries if my life..." David does not seem to be asking for personal vengeance but that God's just punishment be according to their deeds. This language is found in at least five times in David's psalms: 41:7,9; 53:5; 35:4; 40:14; 70:2.

E. A Pledge to Keep on Praising and Trusting God.

[v14,15] "...I will hope...my mouth will tell..." David intends to continue to be optimistic and thankful for God's blessings. "...and will praise You more and more." He intends to express his gratitude publicly to others for the glory of God. "My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation...for I do not know their limits." We also need to realize that we cannot know the limits of God's blessings, and yet we sometimes limit what blessings we can receive.

F. Pleading a Life Spent in God's Service.

Where the previous verses were in the future tense, these three are in the past tense. He is now reflecting on God's past blessings.

[v17-19] "...from my youth...now...when I am old and gray headed..." Here David plainly declares that now he is old. He realizes that in old age he has a special need for God's blessings. In youth, one may feel that he is invincible, but in advanced age, one feels more vulnerable.

[v18] "...do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation...to everyone who is to come." Gratitude desires to express itself to others and to extol the benefactor. These glorious psalms certainly do declare David's praise for God to generations to come.

G. A Prophecy of the Resurrection.

[v20] Coffman points out that some ancient manuscripts have plural pronouns for "us" which would seem to indicate that David is speaking of the nation of Israel as well as himself. Therefore, the ASV has the plural but the other translations that I was able to check have the singular.

This is the only time in the Bible that I could find this expression, "revive me again" that is used in a beautiful song that we sometimes sing. The song makes many other applications besides the resurrection.

H. A Pledge of Continual Praise.

[v21] "You shall increase my greatness..." This seems to be more appropriate for David than the others who wrote psalms. The references to the "lute" and the "harp" are more characteristic of David than others.

It has been suggested that this psalm teaches that old age is not a time to quit, but of increased fervor and praise which comes from gratitude.

(Coffman was 85 when he wrote his commentary on Psalms in 1991. Now in 1995 he is 89 and still working.)