Psalm 61 — A Rock Higher Than I

1.0 Introducing Psalm 61

- Psalms 52–55 are “Maskils,” 56–60 are “Mikhtams,” and 61–67 contain a number of related themes.

2.0 Reading Psalm 61 (NAU)

61:1 A Psalm of David.
Hear my cry, O God; Give heed to my prayer.

61:2 From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart is faint; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

61:3 For You have been a refuge for me,
A tower of strength against the enemy.

61:4 Let me dwell in Your tent forever; Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings. Selah.

61:5 For You have heard my vows, O God; You have given me the inheritance of those who fear Your name.

61:6 You will prolong the king’s life; His years will be as many generations.

61:7 He will abide before God forever; Appoint lovingkindness and truth that they may preserve him.
61:8 So I will sing praise to Your name forever, 
That I may pay my vows day by day.

For the choir director; according to Jeduthun.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 61

3.1 Outline

I. David’s Petition for Personal Protection (vv. 1-4)
II. David’s Petition for Dynastic Perpetuation (vv. 5-8)

3.2 Notes

• v. 1 “cry”
  ■ The Hebrew word for “cry” normally refers to a ringing shout of joy or victory, but can be used of prayer.
  ■ Here, it may “refer to a prayer customarily sung to a melody.”—Amos Hakham, Psalms with the Jerusalem Commentary, Koschitzky Edition, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2003), 2:28.

• v. 2 “From the end of the earth”
  ■ David is evidently far from home.
    ✓ This could have been while he was on a military campaign.
    ✓ Or, it might have been during his “exile” when Absalom rebelled and David fled to Ammon.
  ■ It is possible that the writing of this psalm was related to the preceding psalm (Psalm 60).
    ✓ Aram-zobah (60:1) was along the Euphrates on the very fringes of the region where Israel was located.
    ✓ Note similar phraseology in Psalms 65:5; 67:7; and 72:8.

• v. 2 “the rock”
  ■ David employs the imagery of a rock or cliff to describe God.
  ■ Such imagery occurs approximately 20 times in Psalms.
  ■ See Psalms 18:2, 31, 46; 27:4-6; 62:2, 6, 7

• v. 2 “that is higher than I”
  ■ The rock is too high for David to climb himself—He needs God’s help.
  ■ The rock is actually God Himself. David is king, but God is higher, more powerful, more in control.
  ■ “Lead me”: David needs to be led to God.
    ✓ No one comes to God on their own.
    ✓ Even as believers we are dependent upon the intercessory ministry of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:26-27).
- **vv. 3-4** Additional Metaphors
  - **Refuge**: a place to which to flee from danger.
    - See Psalms 18:2; 31:2; 62:7; 71:3; 94:22.
  - **Tower**: the ultimate place of refuge in a fortress.
  - **Tent**: perhaps a reference to the Tabernacle itself.
    - “Dwell” = “sojourn” or “live as a resident alien.”
  - **Shelter of God’s wings**: the protective presence of God.
    - See 57:1; Matthew 23:37; Ruth 2:12.

- **vv. 5, 8** “vows . . . vows”
  - References to vows form an inclusio around the second stanza of this psalm.
  - Some interpreters take these two verses as conclusions to both the first and second halves of the psalm.

- **v. 6** “the king’s life”
  - Even though David is speaking about himself, he makes the request in the third person.
    - See the same kind of transition in Psalms 28:7-8 and 63:8-11.
  - David thus bases his request on the promises of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7:16 rather than his own personal merit.

- **v. 7** “abide”
  - David attributes permanent residence to the Davidic king, while recognizing his own temporary status (compare verse 4).

- **vv. 7, 8** “forever . . . forever”
  - “Whether this prayer was by David or is for David, ultimately it is about and is fulfilled in the Messiah.”—James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), 2:506.

- **Subscription**: “according to Jeduthun”
  - Jeduthun was one of the choirmasters (along with Heman and Asaph) appointed by David (1 Chronicles 16:41-42; 25:1-6).
    - See heading for Psalms 39 and 77. The musical portion (“For the choir director, for/acording to Jeduthun”) should be placed at the end of Psalms 38 and 76.
  - David either committed the psalm to Jeduthun for performance or he requested the psalm be sung in a style of music that Jeduthun invented.
4.0 Singing Psalm 61

Singing Psalm 61

Safety in God
(Tune: “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”)

1 When, overwhelm’d with grief,
   My heart within me dies,
   Helpless, and far from all relief,
   To heav’n I lift mine eyes.

2 O lead me to the rock
   That’s high above my head,
   And make the covert of thy wings
   My shelter and my shade.

3 Within thy presence, Lord,
   For ever I’ll abide;
   Thou art the tower of my defence,
   The refuge where I hide.

4 Thou givest me the lot
   Of those that fear thy name;
   If endless life be their reward,
   I shall possess the same.

— Isaac Watts

5.0 Praying Psalm 61

- O God, hear my prayer. [v. 1]
- Lord, lead me and protect me, for I am weak and exhausted. [v. 2]
- Let me find refuge and rest in You. [v. 4]
- Father, send Your Son again to reign as King over His kingdom. [v. 6]

6.0 Applying Psalm 61


- “Faith’s greatest triumphs are achieved in her heaviest trials.” (2/1:40)
- “He who communes with God is always at home.” (2/1:41)
- “There should be a parallel between our supplications and our thanksgiving. We ought not to leap in prayer, and limp in praise.” (2/1:42)