

# Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School  
Placerita Baptist Church  
2006

by  
William D. Barrick, Th.D.  
Professor of OT, The Master's Seminary



## 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.
- “The psalmist’s longing for God (vv. 1-5) is a familiar motif in the Psalms as an expression of deep love for God arising out of great adversity (cf. Pss 20; 21; 27; 42; 43; 63).”—Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 5:417.

### 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 **dw**ell in Your **te**nt forever;  
Let me take refuge in the **sh**elter of Your wings. **Selah.**

**61:5** For You have heard my **yo**ws, 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 **ab**ide 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/according 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

##### Safety in God

(Tune: "Blest Be the Tie That Binds")



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>1</b> When, overwhelm'd with grief,<br/>My heart within me dies,<br/>Helpless, and far from all relief,<br/>To heav'n I lift mine eyes.</p> <p><b>3</b> Within thy presence, Lord,<br/>For ever I'll abide;<br/>Thou art the tower of my defence,<br/>The refuge where I hide.</p> | <p><b>2</b> O lead me to the rock<br/>That's high above my head,<br/>And make the covert of thy wings<br/>My shelter and my shade.</p> <p><b>4</b> Thou givest me the lot<br/>Of those that fear thy name;<br/>If endless life be their reward,<br/>I shall possess the same.</p> |
|--|---|

— 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

The following are all cited from Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (reprint; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 2/1:39-42.

- "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)