

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

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by

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## Psalm 71 — A Refuge in Old Age

### 1.0 Introducing Psalm 71

- Some commentators believe Psalms 70 and 71 should be one psalm. See notes on Psalm 70 for more information.
- Psalm 71 echoes a number of Davidic psalms:
  - ✓ Verses 1-3 parallel 31:1-3.
  - ✓ Verses 9-12 have similarities with 38:21-22.
  - ✓ Psalm 35 has a number of parallels (35:2 with 71:12; 35:26 with 71:13; 35:10 with 71:19; 35:28 with 71:22-24).
- Some (e.g., Perowne) believe Jeremiah composed this psalm.

### 2.0 Reading Psalm 71 (NAU)

**71:1** In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge;  
Let me never be ashamed.

**71:2** In **Your righteousness** deliver me and rescue me;  
Incline Your ear to me and save me.

**71:3** 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.

**71:4** Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked,  
Out of the grasp of the wrongdoer and ruthless man,

**71:5** For You are my hope; O Lord GOD,  
*You are* my confidence from my youth.

**71:6** 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.

**71:7** I have become a marvel to many,



### 3.0 Understanding Psalm 71

#### 3.1 Outline

- I. A Prayer of Confidence (vv. 1-8)
- II. A Prayer of Contrition (vv. 9-13)
- III. A Prayer of Commitment (vv. 14-21)
- IV. A Prayer of Celebration (vv. 22-24)



— Steven J. Lawson, *Psalms 1–75*, Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville, Tenn.: Holman Reference, 2003), 356-57

#### 3.2 Notes

- **vv. 1-3**
  - Compare Psalm 31:1-3.
- **v. 2 “In Your righteousness”**
  - The psalmist does not associate deliverance or salvation with God’s mercy, but with His righteousness.
  - God’s right conduct, His justice, provides the psalmist with confidence.
  - See verses 15, 16, 19, and 24.
- **v. 2 “deliver me and rescue me . . . and save me”**
  - Three different Hebrew words are used in this verse to express salvation:
    - ✓ “Deliver” (*natsal*) depicts snatching away from danger our out of the jaws of a wild beast.
    - ✓ “Rescue” (*palat*) refers to bringing to safety.
    - ✓ “Save” (*yasha*’, the same root as for “Joshua” or “Jesus”) generally looks at the result—a complete salvation.
- **v. 3 “You have given commandment”**
  - To whom did God give the commandment to save the psalmist?
- **v. 5 “my hope”**
  - God alone is the psalmist’s hope. Compare 1 Timothy 1:1.
  - The noun used here (*tiqwah*) is the same as the title of the national anthem of the modern nation of Israel (*Hattiqvah*).
  - A different Hebrew word for “hope” (*yachal*) is used in verse 14.
- **v. 7 “a marvel to many”**
  - Becoming a “marvel” is the idea of becoming a “sign” or “portent” representing judgment.
  - Those observing the psalmist’s suffering interpret it as proof of his unrighteousness or wickedness.
  - See Deuteronomy 28:46.

- **v. 9** “in the time of old age”
  - “The unique voice heard in this psalm that sets it apart from the laments in general is the voice of age and diminished capacity expressed by the psalmist. . . . I think there is a danger of so generalizing interpretation so that it is applicable to *everyone* that the distinctive message of the passage is lost.” — Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 975.
  - See verse 18; compare Isaiah 46:4.
  - Turmoil of aging:
    - ✓ Fear of death (vv. 10-11, 20).
    - ✓ Loss of honor and dignity (vv. 1, 21).
    - ✓ Loss of strength (v. 9).
    - ✓ Sense of vulnerability (vv. 4, 11, 18).
    - ✓ Forced dependence (need for “refuge,” vv. 6, 9, 18).
    - ✓ Fear one’s life will be devalued (vv. 7, 11).
  
- **v. 14** “praise You yet more and more”
  - In spite of the unjust attacks of his enemies, the psalmist dedicates himself to testifying about the righteousness and mighty deeds of the Lord.
    - ✓ “My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness *And* of Your salvation” (v. 15).
    - ✓ “I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD” (v. 16a).
    - ✓ “I will make mention of Your righteousness” (v. 16b).
    - ✓ “I still declare Your wondrous deeds” (v. 17).
    - ✓ “I declare Your strength . . . Your power” (v. 18).
    - ✓ “I will also praise You with a harp” (v. 22a).
    - ✓ “To You I will sing praises with the lyre” (v. 22c).
    - ✓ “My lips will shout for joy” (v. 23).
    - ✓ “My tongue also will utter Your righteousness” (v. 24).
  
- **v. 22** “Holy One of Israel”
  - This divine title occurs primarily in Isaiah (25x). It is used only three times in Psalms (71:22; 78:41; 89:18) and only another three times elsewhere in the Old Testament (1 Kings 19:22; Jeremiah 50:29; 51:5).
  
- **v. 23** “which You have redeemed”
  - Deuteronomy 9:26 is the first occurrence. It speaks of “Lord Yahweh” (cp. Psalm 71:5, 16; 2 Samuel 7:22) delivering Israel out of Egypt.
  - This phrase occurs in the Hebrew only six times in the Old Testament.
    - ✓ Deuteronomy 21:8 (not about deliverance from Egypt)
    - ✓ 2 Samuel 7:23 = 1 Chronicles 17:21
    - ✓ Nehemiah 1:10
    - ✓ Psalm 71:23



#### 4.0 Singing Psalm 71

##### Fill Thou My Life (Tune: "I Sing the Mighty Power of God")



Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God,  
In every part with praise,  
That my whole being may proclaim  
Thy being and Thy ways.  
Not for the lip of praise alone,  
Nor e'en the praising heart  
I ask, but for a life made up  
Of praise in every part!

Fill every part of me with praise;  
Let all my being speak  
Of Thee and of Thy love, O Lord,  
Poor though I be, and weak.  
So shalt Thou, Lord, from me, e'en me,  
Receive the glory due;  
And so shall I begin on earth  
The song forever new.

Praise in the common words I speak,  
Life's common looks and tones,  
In fellowship in hearth and board  
With my beloved ones;  
Not in the temple crowd alone  
Where holy voices chime,  
But in the silent paths of earth,  
The quiet rooms of time.

So shall each fear, each fret, each care  
Be turned into a song,  
And every winding of the way  
The echo shall prolong;  
So shall no part of day or night  
From sacredness be free;  
But all my life, in every step  
Be fellowship with Thee.

— Words: Horatius Bonar (1866)  
Music (adapted): William H. Monk (1868)

#### 5.0 Praying Psalm 71

- Be my rock and my fortress. [v. 3]
- Lord, help me trust You from my youth onward. [v. 5]
- O God, fill my mouth with Your praise and Your glory. [v. 8]
- Father, continue to be with me even in my old age. [v. 9]
- Lord, give me continual hope all my days. [v. 14]

#### 6.0 Applying Psalm 71

- All of our lives God, and God alone, must be our hope.
- Throughout our lives we should develop a pattern of praise.
- In old age we produce praise prepared in our prior years.
- "The spirit can be young when the bones are old."—W. Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms* (reprint; Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1973), 2:126.

God's great acts in the past are meant to benefit the people of the future. The notion that the mere passage of time renders Bible truth obsolete is one of the more idiotic of modern ideas. There is nothing more old-fashioned than yesterday's new thinking, and today's, if we had the nous to realize it, is about to go the same way. There is nothing more relevant *to all who are to come* (v. 18) than the vital proclamation of what God did in Bible times, and of the truth that that embodies.

— Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms 1–72*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 248