

## Psalm 71: One Who Lives and Prays the Psalms

**Psalm 71** is a unique voice in Book 2 of the Psalms and easy to hurry past in its simplicity. It is an “orphan” psalm, not having a superscription. It’s also part of the section of Psalms called the Elohistic Psalter (Psalms 42-83) because the word Elohim appears frequently while the word YHWH less so. Here’s the summary of Book 2 from the *ESV Study Bible*:

**Book 2** (Psalms 42-72) From the Davidic voice of Book 1, Book 2 introduces the first Korah collection (42-49, although 43 lacks a superscription), with a single Asaph psalm at Psalm 50. A further Davidic collection is found in Psalms 51-65 and 68-69, including the bulk of the historic superscriptions (51-52; 54; 56-57; 59-60; 63). Once again lament and distress dominate the content of these prayers, which now include a communal voice (Psalm 44, 67 68). The lone psalm attributed to Solomon concludes Book 2 with the Psalms’ pinnacle of royal theology (72, cf. 45)

**Psalm 71** gets “orphaned” again, not mentioned in the notes above! In **Psalm 71**, an individual lament, we hear an aging person of genuine faith praying. This person’s life models what reading, praying, and living the Psalms is all about: a God-centered life hidden in YHWH Elohim, Israel’s personal King/Shepherd who is the supreme and universal God of the whole universe. That’s the stance of one who lives and prays the psalms—hiding out in the safety of YHWH Elohim.

**1. Psalm 71** quotes from three other Psalms (Psalms 31, 22, and 35; all psalms “of David”). Its theme and circumstances belong with Davidic Psalms 69 and 70 (70=40:13-17) and certainly fit with David’s struggles with false accusation and frightening, undeserved assaults.

Allow God to search you and point out current unresolved difficulties in your life and/or in others your life touches.

Read **Psalm 71:1-3** and **31:1-3**. What is your understanding of God as a “rock of refuge...my rock and my fortress”? (refuge=habitation/dwelling, “a home in the rock”) When have you deliberately hidden in God for safety/protection or seen someone else hiding out in God?

**2.** Notice the different words the psalmist uses to address God. (**71:1, 4-5**) (LORD=YHWH=yahweh, the personal name for Israel’s God, a proper noun, see Exodus 3:13-15)

(Elohim=God=an honorific plural used to show honor to a single referent. It is a common noun, not a proper name, that refers to the universal deity who creates and rules the universe. This faithful Israelite thinks of YHWH as his Elohim, his sovereign and master, his personal God above all gods, his only God.)

How do these words for God help you understand God's position in the psalmist's life? In your own life?

3. What do you learn about the psalmist in **71:5-8, 71:17-18, and 20**?

What do you wish you could ask this person?

**71:7** tells us that he has been a "portent, a sign, a model, an example, a warning example" for many. What do you think that means? Who has been that "sign" to you and who might you be "a sign" to?

4. What are his current concerns according to **71:9-13**? Read **71:1, 71:13** and **71:24**. What does he believe God's support of him will do to his enemies? How do you think that fits with Jesus' teaching on loving enemies?

5. What does this aging psalmist experience as he is beset by troubles that apparently could bring public loss of his reputation and disappointment of his hopes for his life? (**71:14-18**) What seems to be his attitude and focus?

How does he explain this experience, and what part does God have in it?

What impact do you think people of faith have when they face their difficulties in humble dependence on God?

6. In his current difficulty, the psalmist turns to God, and particularly to God's *righteousness* (**71:2, 15, 19, 24**). What do you learn about the *righteousness* this psalmist is counting on from his words of lament and trust in **Psalms 71**?

Notice how **Psalms 71** starts in honest supplication and petition. As the prayer continues, his requests begin to be sprinkled with *praise*. (**6c, 8**) This "*speaking well of God*" is intertwined with realistic observations about his age, current difficulties, and past history of "troubles and calamities." No sugar-coating!

As it concludes, this prayer becomes *praise* (**71:22-24**). What stands out to you about these closing expressions of *praise*, the reasons for them, the impact on the psalmist himself and on you as a reader/prayer/praiser?

Time and trouble shape the context of faithfulness in this psalm. The psalmist ends up commending all of his life to YHWH Elohim.

Those who pray the psalms are aware that, in spite of their own infidelities to God over the years, God has nonetheless remained faithful. Were that not the case, they would not be praying the psalms at all. (Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*, p. 139)

Lord, do not let advancing age increase either pride or worry in me. Instead let me grow in humility....and patience...(Kellers, *Songs of Jesus*, p. 162)