

PSALMS

Chapter 61

¹ Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. ² From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. ³ For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. ⁴ I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings. *Selah* ⁵ For you have heard my vows, O God; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name. ⁶ Increase the days of the king's life, his years for many generations. ⁷ May he be enthroned in God's presence forever; appoint your love and faithfulness to protect him. ⁸ Then will I ever sing praise to your name and fulfill my vows day after day.

Ps 61 A prayer for restoration to God's presence. The circumstances appear to be similar to those referred to in Ps 42–43. Here, however, a king is involved (v. 6), and if the author was David, he may have composed this prayer at the time of his flight from Absalom (see 2Sa 17:21–29). For another possibility see note on v. 2. Ps 61–64 form a series linked together by the common theme of trust in God when under threat. Structurally, the prayer is framed by a cry to God (v. 1) and a vow to praise (v. 8). The body of the psalm is composed of three couplets: vv. 2–3, 4–5, 6–7. (CSB)

David may have written this psalm when he “fled” during Absalom’s attempted coup (as he says explicitly in Ps 3; cf 2Sm 15–17). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–3, God is my refuge; vv 4–5, dwelling with God; vv 6–7, preserve the king; v 8, constant praise. (TLSB)

61 title See note on Ps 4 title. (CSB)

61:1 Initial plea for God to hear. – The opening verse of this psalm would be an appropriate prayer for a soldier or anyone else in danger far from home. Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Daniel come to mind as people for whom this prayer would have been appropriate. Far from home, we, too must trust in the rock that is higher than we. (PBC)

61:2–3 The prayer. (CSB)

61:2 *ends of the earth*. So it seemed (see 42:6). Possibly the phrase here refers to the brink of the netherworld, i.e., the grave (see 63:9); the psalmist feels himself near death. (CSB)

Exaggeration or reference to border of Israel, to convey the isolation and loneliness David feels. (TLSB)

heart. See note on 4:7. (CSB)

Having exhausted his own physical and emotional resources, the psalmist turns to God for help. (TLSB)

lead me. See 23:2. (CSB)

rock. Secure place (see 27:5; 40:2). (CSB)

Translates two terms: Hbr *sela* , “rock” or “cliff face”; Hbr *tsur*, “massive rock” or “boulder.” Psalms use the terms interchangeably for a place of refuge or hiding. The Lord is “the Rock of my salvation” (89:26). (TLSB p. 843)

Luther: “It is the purpose of the cross and adversities of all kinds to enable one to differentiate between the false and the true faith. God afflicts us in this way in order that our faith may be proved and made manifest before the world, with the result that others are attracted to the faith” (AE 30:17). (TLSB)

higher than I. The place of security that he seeks is beyond his reach; only God can bring him to it. Since God is often confessed by the psalmists to be their “rock of refuge” (31:2; 71:3; see also 18:2; 62:2, 6–7; 94:22), it may be that God himself is that higher “rock” (the secure refuge) that the psalmist pleads for (see v. 3). Or it may be the secure refuge of God’s sanctuary (see v. 4; see also 27:5). (CSB)

61:3 The reason he appeals to God: God has never failed him as a refuge. (CSB)

foe. If this is a prayer when faced with death, death is the present foe (see 68:20; 141:8; Job 33:22; Isa 25:8; 28:15; Jer 9:21; Hos 13:14; see also 1Co 15:26). See note on 49:14. (CSB)

61:4–5 Longing for the security of God’s sanctuary (see 27:5 and note). (CSB)

61:4 *dwell in.* See note on 15:1 (Not as a priest but as God’s guest in his holy, royal house, the temple.). (CSB)

tent. Residence (see 2Sa 6:17; 7:2; 1Ki 1:39; 2:28–30). (CSB)

Perhaps the tabernacle in Jerusalem (God’s embassy on earth), but it may be more general—to live with God and enjoy His blessing forever (cf 23:6; 27:5; Heb 9:11–12). (TLSB)

These terms look beyond earthly security and the establishing of David’s dynasty in Jerusalem to the Messiah’s eternal kingdom. (PBC)

shelter of your wings. See note on 17:8 (Metaphor for the protective outreach of God's power.). (CSB)

Figurative for God's protection and providence. "He has taken us as His own property under His shelter and protection so that He may govern us by His righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and blessedness" (LC II 30). (TLSB)

SELAH – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. "The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers" (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

61:5 The reason for his longing: Either (1) because God has been so responsive to him in the past, or (2) confidence that his longing is about to be satisfied. (CSB)

my vows. The vows that accompanied his prayers (see 50:14; 66:14; see also note on 7:17). (CSB)

Promises to God. (TLSB)

Hbr *neder*; a peace offering (Lv 7:16; Nu 30:3–4) by which a worshiper is bound to God with a promise; a thank offering (Nu 21:1–3; cf Na 1:15) requesting God's favor and praising Him for success in fulfilling a promise (Ps 22:25; 50:14; 116:17–18). A vow and its offering are not distinguished (see concluding paragraphs). See pp 170–71. Clean animals or even service was offered with a vow. Both men and women made such vows (Nu 30). Related vows include the Nazirite vow (Nu 6) and "devotion to destruction" (TLSB p. 7)

heritage. A place with God's people in the promised land, together with all that the Lord had promised to give and to be to his people (see 16:6; 37:18; 135:12; 136:21–22). (CSB)

The Promised Land, its people, and ultimately salvation (cf Heb 11:8–10). (TLSB)

those who fear. See 60:4 and note (Your people, in distinction from the nations.). (CSB)

your name. See note on 5:11. (CSB)

61:6–7 Prayer for the king's long life. The king himself may have made this prayer—such transitions to the third person are known from the literature of the ancient Near East—or it may be the prayer of the people, perhaps voiced by a priest or Levite. Later Jewish interpretations applied these verses to the Messiah. They are fulfilled in Christ, David's great Son. (CSB)

61:6 May the king live forever (see note on 45:6 – Such was the language used with respect to kings (see note on 21:4). It here gains added significance in the light of God's covenant with David (see 89:4, 29, 36; 132:12; 2Sa 7:16). In Christ, the Son of David, it is fulfilled.). (CSB)

God promised David that his descendant would rule forever (2Sm 7:16, fulfilled in Jesus, the messianic King). (TLSB)

61:7 *enthroned in God's presence.* See note on 41:12 (As the royal servant of Israel's heavenly King.). (CSB)

love and faithfulness. Personified as God's messengers (see notes on 23:6; 43:3; see also note on 26:3). (CSB)

Attributes personified as guardian angels. (TLSB)

61:8 The vow to praise (see note on 7:17 – A vow to praise. Many prayers in the Psalter include such vows in anticipation of the expected answer to prayer.). (CSB)

The right response to God's saving acts is praise, which David promises to do every day (cf 7:17). (TLSB)

Ps 61 David turns once more to God for help in time of need, asking God to restore him to his throne in Jerusalem and bless him in the years and generations ahead. God often uses difficult times to strengthen our faith and redefine our priorities. If we have drifted away from the Lord, He can use a reversal of fortune in our earthly circumstance to make us aware of our precarious spiritual situation and bring us back to Him. David's prayer that the King would reign forever (v 7) is ultimately fulfilled in Christ Jesus, who embodies God's steadfast love and faithfulness forever. • O God, let me take refuge under the shelter of Your wings. Amen. (TLSB)