

Psalms 71:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.

Analysis

Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come. This poignant prayer from an elderly believer reveals concern that extends beyond personal survival—the psalmist wants to live long enough to testify to the next generation. 'Old and greyheaded' (ziknah vesevah, זִקְנָה וְשִׁיבָה) marks advanced age, the season when physical strength wanes but spiritual wisdom matures. The prayer 'forsake me not' (al ta'azveni, אַל-תֵּאַזְבֵּנִי) doesn't request escape from death but continued usefulness until testimony is complete.

The purpose clause—'until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation'—reveals the psalmist's driving motivation. 'Thy strength' (zero'akha, זֶרֶקְךָ, literally 'thy arm') represents God's power in action. 'This generation' (dor, דּוֹר) and 'every one that is to come' (lekhoh yavo, לְכֹל-יָבוֹא, literally 'to all who will come') expands the scope—the testimony must reach both present and future. The elderly believer recognizes that their life's primary purpose is witness—displaying God's power to subsequent generations so faith continues.

This verse anticipates Paul's end-of-life testimony: 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness' (2 Timothy 4:7-8). The Christian's concern shouldn't be merely living long but finishing well—completing the testimony God assigned. Jesus prayed in John 17:4, 'I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the

work which thou gavest me to do.' Our goal is the same: remain faithful until our witness is complete, then depart in peace (Luke 2:29-30, Simeon's prayer).

Historical Context

In ancient cultures, elderly members held honored positions as wisdom-keepers and tradition-bearers. Leviticus 19:32 commanded, 'Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man.' Elders transmitted oral traditions, settled disputes, and ensured continuity of cultural and religious identity. Job 12:12 observes, 'With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding.'

However, old age also brought vulnerability. Without modern social security or retirement systems, elderly people depended on family support (the fifth commandment, 'Honour thy father and thy mother,' Exodus 20:12, implied material care). The elderly sometimes feared becoming burdensome or being neglected (Psalm 71:9, 'Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth'). This psalm expresses that concern while reframing it missionally—the goal isn't just survival but completing testimony.

In Judaism, the tradition of *zekenim* (elders) passing Torah to students ensured faith transmission. Rabbi Gamaliel taught Paul (Acts 22:3), who later taught Timothy (2 Timothy 2:2), exemplifying intergenerational discipleship. Early Christianity continued this pattern—older believers taught younger (Titus 2:3-5), and apostolic succession preserved teaching continuity. Modern church often marginalizes elderly members, but this psalm reminds us that older believers' testimony is crucial for faith transmission. Their lifetime of experiencing God's faithfulness provides irreplaceable witness to younger generations.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What testimony of God's faithfulness do you need to pass to the next generation before you die?
2. How can you honor and learn from elderly believers who have witnessed God's strength over decades?
3. What motivates you more—living comfortably in old age or completing your testimony before you die?
4. In what ways can you be intentional about 'showing God's strength to the next generation'?
5. How does viewing your lifespan as opportunity for witness rather than merely existence change your priorities?

Interlinear Text

וְגַם	עַד	זְקֵנָה הֵאָנֹכִי	וְשֵׂיבָה	אֱלֹהֵי יָם	אֶל	תַּעֲזֹב נִי
H1571	Now also when	I am old	and grayheaded	O God	H408	forsake
	H5704	H2209	H7872	H430		H5800
עַד	אֲנִי יָד	זְרוּעָךְ	לְדֹר	לְכָל		
Now also when	me not until I have shewed	thy strength	unto this generation	H3605		
H5704	H5046	H2220	H1755			
יְבֹא	גְבוּרָתְךָ:					
to every one that is to come	and thy power					
H935	H1369					

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 46:4 (Parallel theme): And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.

Psalms 71:9 (Parallel theme): Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.

Psalms 78:4 (Parallel theme): We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.

Psalms 78:6 (Parallel theme): That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children:

Isaiah 51:9 (Parallel theme): Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?

Psalms 22:31 (Parallel theme): They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.

1 Samuel 4:18 (References God): And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.