

Psalm 71:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.

Analysis

Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side. Having praised God's incomparability (verse 19), David expresses confident expectation of future blessing. "Increase my greatness" (תְּרֵב גָּדוֹלָה/terev gedulati) prays for expansion of honor, influence, and impact. Gedulah can mean greatness, dignity, or majesty—not worldly ambition but God-given significance and usefulness in kingdom purposes. David, now aged (verse 18), anticipates continued fruitfulness rather than fading irrelevance.

"Comfort me on every side" (תְּסַב וְתַנְחַמֵּנִי/tasev vetanahmeini) literally means "turn and comfort me" or "surround and comfort me." Nacham (comfort) conveys consolation, encouragement, and restoration after grief or affliction. The phrase "on every side" (tasev—turn, surround) suggests comprehensive comfort addressing all areas of suffering. After describing troubles (verse 20), David confidently expects God's comprehensive consolation.

This anticipates Christian hope of glorification. Believers will be "increased in greatness"—transformed into Christ's likeness with glory (Romans 8:18, 29-30, 2 Corinthians 3:18). God's comfort "on every side" finds fulfillment in the Spirit as Comforter (John 14:16, 26, 15:26, 16:7) and ultimately in resurrection bodies and new creation where God "shall wipe away all tears" (Revelation 21:4).

Historical Context

David's expectation of increased greatness in old age contrasts with ancient (and modern) assumptions that aging means declining influence and fading significance. Biblical theology, however, views faithful longevity as blessing and opportunity for expanded impact. Moses's "strength was not abated" at 120 (Deuteronomy 34:7). Caleb remained vigorous at 85 (Joshua 14:10-11). Zechariah and Elisabeth, though aged, received significant roles in salvation history (Luke 1:5-25).

The prayer for comfort "on every side" reflects David's comprehensive afflictions described earlier in the psalm—enemies threatening life (verses 10-13), reproach (verse 13), multiple troubles (verse 20). Against these many-sided attacks, David seeks many-sided comfort.

Christian theology recognizes present comfort as down payment on future glorification. The Spirit comforts now (Romans 8:26-27, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7), but ultimate comfort awaits resurrection and new creation where "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" (Revelation 21:4).

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does God's promise to increase greatness in old age challenge cultural assumptions about aging and declining relevance?
2. In what ways do you need God's comfort 'on every side'—addressing multiple areas of affliction simultaneously?
3. How does present experience of the Spirit's comfort function as foretaste of ultimate consolation in the new creation?

Interlinear Text

תָּגַלְתִּי בָּבָן
 Thou shalt increase my greatness
 H7235 H1420

וְתַּחֲנֹמֶן
 me on every side and comfort
 H5437 H5162

Additional Cross-References

2 Samuel 3:1 (Parallel theme): Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.

Psalms 23:4 (Parallel theme): Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

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