



Psalm 72 - Prayer for Guidance and Support for the King

Of Solomon.

Introduction

The last psalm of Book 2 is a royal psalm, praying that the heirs of David's line, beginning with Solomon, might have success in the task that God has assigned the king: namely, ruling God's people well, protecting the poor and needy, and bringing blessing to all nations of the earth. Like Psalm 2, this song looks forward to a worldwide rule that embraces in full what the Messiah will accomplish: the OT anticipates the ultimate heir of David, who will take the throne and bring the light of God to all nations, as confirmed by Isaiah 2:1-5 and 11:1-10, and the NT is careful to explain that Jesus, by virtue of his resurrection, has begun to fulfil this task through the Christian mission (Matthew 28:18-20 and Romans 1:1-6). Therefore Christian hymns based on this psalm, such as 'Jesus Shall Reign' and 'Hail to the Lord's Anointed,' have used the song according to its proper meaning. This also explains why Christian witness, when it is true to the messianic picture of the Bible, goes beyond basic Gospel proclamation and also fosters social justice and the moral transformation of whole societies.

The title, 'of Solomon,' can mean that Solomon was the author, just as 'of David' normally means that David wrote the psalm. On the other hand, it could mean that someone, perhaps David, spoke these words about Solomon, setting out the goal for his reign and for the reigns of his heirs.

It is possible to translate the Hebrew here, and in almost all the psalms which reference an author, as 'A Psalm to Solomon,' and some have regarded it as David's psalm to and about his son Solomon and his greater Son, the Messiah. Yet, the most natural way to take the title is as it is given, A Psalm of Solomon and that the line about David in v.20 refers to the collection of Book Two of the

Psalms, which is heavy with David's psalms, separating it from Book Three, which begins with eleven psalms authored by Asaph.

It is also possible that Solomon compiled this second book of the Psalms and composed this psalm as a fitting conclusion for the collection of mostly David's psalms. It is a fitting conclusion, because it unexpectedly does not focus upon David himself, but on the Messiah, the King of kings and the Son of David.

Psalm 72:1-4 - Let the King Judge Your People Justly

The ideal for the Davidic king is that he should promote the well-being of the whole people of God by embodying true piety and by governing in such a way that justice prevails at all times; usually this means protecting the weaker members from the oppressive schemes of the stronger ones. Under such conditions, godliness should thrive among all the people, and thus they would experience the covenant blessings as described in Leviticus 26:3-13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14, where the land looks like a renewed Eden and the Gentiles are drawn to worship the true God. The psalm begins, then, with a prayer for the character and rule of the Davidic king, knowing that the people depend upon God to give him righteousness and justice by which to rule and judge.

- 1 Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.
- 2 May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.
- 3 May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
- 4 May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.

Psalm 72:1-4

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. Solomon began this psalm asking God to bless him as the monarch of Israel, and to bless him with wise judgements and a reign displaying God's righteousness. This was the same heart behind his great request to God: *<<At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I should give you.' And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept*

for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?’>> (1 Kings 3:5-9).

May he judge your people with righteousness. Anticipating the blessing asked for, Solomon announced his intention to rule with righteousness and justice, even for the poor who are so often denied justice.

May the mountains yield prosperity for the people. Sometimes mountains represent human governments in the Bible, and Solomon may have intended this allusion. He had in mind a national government, alluded to as mountains, which blessed the people and local government, the smaller hills, that ruled with righteousness. This godly governance of the king and those who serve him would accomplish at least three things:

1. He will bring justice to the poor. Although they are often denied justice, the king and his government will make sure that justice is administered fairly.
2. He will give deliverance to the needy. The king and his government will rescue those most vulnerable in society.
3. He will crush the oppressor. The king and his government will protect Israel, keeping them free from external domination and from internal corruption.

Psalm 72:5-7 - May People Fear You Because of His Reign

The next section prays for a blessed reign while the sun endures and until the moon is no more, i.e. always until the end of the age. This extension of time suggests that this psalm ultimately refers to the Messiah.

- ⁵ May he live while the sun endures,
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
- ⁶ May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.
- ⁷ In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

Psalm 72:5-7

May he live while the sun endures. This is clearly a reference to God and not the king, for he is the only one who will continue to rule and reign throughout all generations.

May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass. God's presence would then be with his people as broad, as thick, and as good as showers that water the earth.

In his days may righteousness flourish. As God sends such a rich blessing his people would flourish and there would be an abundance of peace, Hebrew *shalom*, that will last beyond comprehension, i.e. until the moon is no more. In a greater sense, it points to Jesus alone. The connection between the righteous and peace is a reminder of Melchizedek, the one who was and is both the King of righteousness and the King of peace (Hebrews 7:1-3).

Psalm 72:8-11 - May All the Kings of the Earth Serve Him

The blessing is to go beyond the borders of Israel: by submitting to the Davidic king, the Gentile kings bring themselves and their peoples under God's own rule; refer to the comment made on Psalm 2:10-12. Verses 8-10 of Psalm 72 give examples of places in the world as the ancient Israelites knew it, as parts of the world standing for the whole world. From sea to sea is as far as the land extends: <<*They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it*>> (Amos 8:12). The River is the Euphrates. Desert tribes, Sheba and Seba refer to inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa.

⁸ May he have dominion from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

⁹ May his foes bow down before him,
and his enemies lick the dust.

¹⁰ May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles
render him tribute,
may the kings of Sheba and Seba
bring gifts.

¹¹ May all kings fall down before him,
all nations give him service.

Psalm 72:8-11

May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. This verse is almost identical to the third part of Zechariah 9:10, which is messianic. Solomon began to lift his vision above a desire for his own reign to be blessed towards the anticipation of the reign of a greater Son of David, Christ the King. This King would have dominion far greater than Solomon. Under David and Solomon Israel had its greatest extent of territory but the Messiah will rule all of the created order.

May his enemies lick the dust. To oppose the King with such a great dominion meant certain defeat. His enemies would be brought low in a way associated with the curse upon the enemy: <<*The Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel'*>> (Genesis 3:14-15).

May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute. It is widely believed that Tarshish was located at the western end of the Mediterranean Sea, i.e. part of modern day Spain. The isles could therefore also be those in the Mediterranean, although this is by no means certain.

May the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. Sheba is believed to have been located at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula, roughly modern day Yemen. In Solomon's time it was ruled by a queen who came to pay tribute to King Solomon (1 Kings Chapter 10 and 2 Chronicles Chapter 9). Seba is mentioned with Egypt and Ethiopia (Isaiah 45:14), and the Sabeans must therefore have been a southern people probably from the Horn of Africa.

May all kings fall down before him. Solomon sang of a king far greater than Solomon ever was. All nations shall serve him, even those from faraway places and islands. This was prophesied in a beautiful word from the prophet Nathan in 2 Samuel Chapter 7, which had in mind both David's immediate son and successor Solomon and David's ultimate Son and successor, Jesus the Christ. Both were in view in 2 Samuel 7:11-16, and both are in view in Psalm 72. The fulfilment in Solomon's day is described in: <<*Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom. The whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind. Every one of them brought a present, objects of silver and gold, garments, weaponry, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year*>> (1 Kings 10:23-25).

Psalm 72:12-14 - He Brings Justice and Relief to the Poor and Needy

Proverbs 31:1-9 portrays the ideal human ruler, and the biblical desire is that the Davidic king embodies that ideal. These verses lay stress on the needy, the poor, and the weak: these are the people most easily subjected to oppression and violence on the part of powerful nobles or regional lords.

- ¹² For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.
- ¹³ He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.
- ¹⁴ From oppression and violence he redeems their life;
and precious is their blood in his sight.

Psalm 72:12-14

For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. The justice and righteousness Solomon prayed for and aspired to regarding his own reign (vv.1-4) will be perfectly fulfilled in the greater King.

He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. His work will go beyond what is thought of today as social work; the greater King will also work to save the souls of the poor and needy. He is required to guide them spiritually as well as morally: <<*for in my wrath I struck you down, but in my favour I have had mercy on you*>> (Isaiah 60:10b), <<*Then the Lord became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people*>> (Joel 2:18), <<*But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity*>> (Luke 10:33).

From oppression and violence he redeems their life, that is, he rescues them so that they may live faithfully for God.

Precious is their blood in his sight. Such a king will not allow the powerful to shed that blood.

Psalm 72:15-17 - May All Peoples Be Blessed in Him

With such a king, Israel would see its crops and people flourish, and the rest of the world would indeed come to know the true God. Long may he live, and may his name endure forever indeed!

- 15 Long may he live!
May gold of Sheba be given to him.
May prayer be made for him continually,
and blessings invoked for him all day long.
- 16 May there be abundance of grain in the land;
may it wave on the tops of the mountains;
may its fruit be like Lebanon;
and may people blossom in the cities
like the grass of the field.
- 17 May his name endure for ever,
his fame continue as long as the sun.
May all nations be blessed in him;
may they pronounce him happy.

Psalm 72:15-17

Long may he live! Commentators debate if the he spoken of here refers to the ransomed man of the previous lines or of the King who ransomed him. Since the previous verses speak of a multitude redeemed and this speaks of one, and because the following verses fit much better with the King, it should probably be regarded that long may he live is both a wish and a declaration for the King.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Solomon wrote things regarding Messiah the King that were perhaps beyond his own understanding. It is possible he never knew how wonderful it would be to say of the King of kings who laid down his life as a sacrifice for sins that after three days in the tomb all would see and say long may he live!

May gold of Sheba be given to him. The greater King would receive gifts and honour and praise. In turn he would bestow great blessing on the earth, an abundance of grain in the land, and upon his people, i.e. may people blossom in the cities.

May prayer be made for him continually. One can think of how prayer could and would be offered for an earthly king, but rarely think of believers praying for Jesus the Christ. Christians can say that they pray for Jesus when they pray for one of his people. There is a sense in which they pray for Jesus when they pray for the spread of his Gospel.

May his name endure for ever. Solomon sensed that this greater Son of David, the greater King, would be more than a great man. He and his fame, and the greatness of his character, would endure forever: <<*God also said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you”: This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations*>> (Exodus 3:15).

May all nations be blessed in him. The wording of this closely follows: <<*and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice*>> (Genesis 22:18), speaking of a particular offspring, the Messiah.

Psalm 72:18-20 - Blessed Be the Lord (Doxology Concluding Book 2)

This does not seem to be part of the psalm itself, refer to the comment made on Psalm 41:13, and yet the prayer <<*may his glory fill the whole earth*>> is appropriate to the theme. To be filled with God’s glory is to be a holy site of worship, where God makes his presence known: <<*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle*>> (Exodus 40:34-35), <<*And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord*>> (1 Kings 8:10-11), and this prayer is that the whole earth be such a sanctuary.

- 18 Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous things.
- 19 Blessed be his glorious name for ever;
may his glory fill the whole earth.
- Amen and Amen.

Psalm 72:18-19

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Solomon was moved to praise when he considered the greatness of Messiah the King. The work in and through Jesus Christ is the work of wondrous things.

May his glory fill the whole earth. The thought of the greatness of God and his work naturally led the heart to long that this blessing be extended through the whole earth and that it not only be touched by, but filled with his glory.

There is also a tragedy in this psalm. As high as it soars with the concept of the king and his reign, there remains the sad disappointment of how quickly the

monarchy in Israel declined after Solomon. There were certainly some good kings after him, but the glory of the kingdom went from Solomon's gold (1 Kings 10:16-17) to Rehoboam's bronze (1 Kings 14:25-28) in only about five years. Eventually, the earthly kings were removed, never to appear again, but one King does still reign and will do <<*while the sun endures*>> (v.5).

²⁰ The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended.

Psalm 72:20

The prayers of David. This is most likely Solomon's postscript on the collection of psalms gathered into Book Two. David authored most of the psalms in Book Two, and Asaph composed the first eleven psalms of Book Three, so this is a good marking point. It should also be noted that these are not only songs of praise and thanksgiving, but also prayers.

David son of Jesse. Because this psalm so exalts the King of kings, Solomon quite rightly did not refer to David with any royal title, although it would be deserved. David happily takes the lower place before the greater Son of David and is simply the son of Jesse, a simple farmer of Bethlehem: <<*The women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi.' They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David*>> (Ruth 4:17), and: <<*Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are all your sons here?' And he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.' And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.' He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.' Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah*>> (1 Samuel 16:11-13).