

Long Live The King

Psalm 72:1 *Of Solomon* [or “For Solomon”].

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son!

² May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice!

³ Let the mountains bear 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 children of the needy, and crush the oppressor!

⁵ May they fear you 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 the righteous flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more!

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

⁹ May desert tribes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust!

¹⁰ May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute; may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts!

¹¹ May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!

¹² For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has 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.

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 the day!

¹⁶ May there be abundance of grain in the land; on the tops of the mountains may it wave; may its fruit be like Lebanon; and may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field!

¹⁷ May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed!

¹⁸ Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

¹⁹ Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!

²⁰ The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.

Psalm 72

A Monarch Pass

Sometimes I wonder if it is possible for us modern people to truly understand and appreciate the parts of the Bible that are so completely foreign to anything we have experienced ourselves. The form of government and especially [a monarchy](#) and their relationship to the people is one such thing. Monarchs are kings and their form of government is very different from what we have.

Ask many people in our country and they will say we live in [a democracy](#). Democracy is as differing a form of

government as you can get from a monarchy. It is rule by pure majority through voting, rather than rule of one with no voting. Perhaps people think we live in this because—other than a failing education system that doesn't teach them anything, this is what they all know from the *American Idols* of the world where they get to vote in the winner. But this is not our government.

We live in a **Republic**, not a democracy. Why? Someone has explained, “The Roman theory was that kings naturally become tyrants, and tyrants get overthrown by their nobles, who in turn eventually begin to misuse their power. Aristocracies are then overthrown by the people, who set up democracies. Democracies are governments ruled by the people but are very unstable because power eventually falls into the hands of mobs and demagogues. Chaos ensues. The people fear for their lives and safety until some very powerful person comes along who can bring order to the chaos. That person then gets made king—and the cycle begins all over again.”¹ Therefore, Republics mix ideas from all three systems simultaneously with checks and balances so

¹ **Rick Kennedy**, “Interpretive Essay,” in *Events that Formed the Modern World: From the European Renaissance to the War on Terror* vol. 1, ed. Frank W. Thackeray and John E. Findling (Denver, ABC-CLIO, 2012), 161.

that hopefully, one won't win over the rest and begin this terrible process. We could argue all day about how well even it can work in a depraved society like ours. But more importantly for now, [a Republic is not a monarchy](#). This is far far away from the world of David and the OT.

It seems to me that for people under some form of self-government, it really is almost impossible to comprehend a Royal Family, a king or a queen, who dictates absolutely everything to you that they so desire. Even in [Britain](#) which still has a monarchy, it looks pretty much nothing like ancient monarchies (or even itself from just a couple hundred years ago) as it wields little power and the queen is basically just a very rich figurehead. Perhaps someone in a place like totalitarian [Venezuela](#) and all the horrors that have come upon that poor nation in recent days could come close to understanding it, but they really only get to see the abuses of tyrants, and do not know from experience what a monarchy was supposed to or could have been.

To begin to understand what it meant to be a king and therefore what his responsibilities were, you have to get inside the heads of the kings themselves and where they believed their power originated. I'm not talking about

centuries into a dynasty, but at the beginning with the origins of monarchies themselves. They believed, across the board, from the ANE to Greece and Rome to Japan and Meso-America, that the king was directly chosen by the god of their nation to rule as his right-hand over his people as a kind of vassal in their stead. Many of them were even called gods themselves, though never in Israel, and all were just men.

Of course, skeptics will say that this so-called “divine right” of the king is nothing but a totalitarian coup of powerful and rich elitists hidden under the ruse of something supernatural, which, of course, doesn’t exist. And so they will deny the words of **Hammurabi** (c. 1810 BC - 1750 BC), sixth king of the First Babylonian Dynasty when he says at the beginning of his famous Code:

At that time [the gods] Anu and Enlil called me, Hammurabi, by name [= commissioned me] to show justice in the land, to destroy the evildoers and those filled with hatred, so that the strong may not oppress the weak, to arise for the people like the sun god to light the land, to care for the welfare of the people ... as Marduk commanded me, to

lead the people and to provide for morality in the land, I placed law and justice in the mouth of the land and cared for the welfare of the people. At that time I issued the following laws ...



Left: Code of Hammurabi (front). Right: Relief from the black diorite stele on which the Code of Hammurabi (18th century b.c.) is engraved (now in the Louvre, Paris): The sun-god (note the rays) installs Hammurabi as king by handing him the royal insignia (scepter and ring) and with them the task of establishing and guaranteeing social order with just laws.²

² Description: Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 212.

Listen to the language of caring for the welfare of the people, especially the weak and poor and you will hear something important for later today. But for now, the point is he was to do this at the direct commissioning and command of the gods, as they said in another place, “**To do on earth what Marduk has done in heaven**” (*Enuma Elish* Tablet VI.112.). Or, the skeptic will deny the words of this 15th century b.c. Egyptian tractate that says, “**Re [or Ra, the creator— and sun—god] has established the king [Pharaoh] on the earth of the living forever and ever, to speak justice to the people and to satisfy the gods, to realize *Maat* (justice, world order) and drive away *Isfet* (chaos).”³ Or he will deny the Holy Scripture when Solomon says, “**As the LORD lives, who has established me and placed me on the throne of David my father, and who has made me a house, as he promised” (1Kg 2:24) to do as David his father told him, “Keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses...**” (2:3).**

³ In Lothar, 211.

“Preposterous! Outrageous! Backwards, unenlightened, unevolved, superstitious, hillbillies. This so-called divine right of kings—there is no such thing. This was just the ancient world’s justification for tyranny and the oppression of the masses.” So say those who presuppose away the supernatural.

Another type of skeptic may agree that this was how it was all presented to the people, but hating the Bible, they will say that Israel was just **copying what the other nations were doing**. It is true that from king Saul to David and Solomon, the Bible teaches that those men were given their throne directly by God himself. In saying this, they were no more copying the nations that you are copying the dictionary whenever you use a word. This is simply the language of the ancient world. Why? *Maybe because it was true!* Certainly, as Bible-believing Christians we are not permitted to believe that the Word is lying about this with Israel.

Just here, you can see something diametrically opposed to democracies, republics, aristocracies, oligarchies, or totalitarian regimes. In every one of those forms of government, **some man or group of people choose the**

leader. God is utterly out of the picture. How can people under such rule really ever begin to grasp the seriousness, the authority, and the power then of a monarchy? This point makes truly hearing the words of our Psalm today difficult, and in its ultimate sense if you can't hear it, you will miss the blessed Gospel of Jesus Christ in it.

I want to make one more point about Israel's king here before digging into our Psalm. It is in a sense true that the Israelites *were* copying their neighbors, for, they wanted a human king. Scripture is perfectly clear that since the establishment of the ark of the covenant, Israel already had a king sitting on the ark-throne ruling over the nation. His Name was Yahweh, and the patriarchs knew him as “Angel of the LORD,” “God,” “Yahweh,” and a host of other names belonging to the Son of God. This Son ruled over Israel for his Father Yahweh in heaven.

But the day came when the people no longer wanted the Son of God to rule over them. They wanted a man like all the other nations had—a physical king, tall and handsome. They rejected Yahweh as their king. So as punishment, God gave them what they wanted. He gave them Saul the Benjaminite. And the things he did in Israel were the stuff of

nightmares. He was wicked, despised God's law, was self-absorbed, didn't care about the people, and he knew not the LORD.

But because they were his chosen people, the LORD would not let their sin overthrow his purposes. He reversed their curse and made a covenant with a man after his own heart. This man was David—the sweet psalmist of Israel. David became king and after him, his son Solomon, wisest of all men, ruled on his throne.

A Song for Solomon

We have seen now over 70% of the songs attributed to David in the Psalter. We have seen how this king **relied completely** upon his God and King in his personal life and for the life of the nation, how he often **repents of his sins** because he was far from perfect, and how his great desire is to **praise and glorify God** above all else. Our song today is **Psalm 72**. It ends Book II of the Psalter with the words, “**The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended**” (**Ps 72:20**). We still have about 30% more of his songs to look at, but this

editorial note concludes the second collection of songs which are mostly comprised of songs of David.⁴

What Psalm 72 does is conclude the second book of the Psalter by returning to and greatly developing a common theme from many of his earlier songs. It is the **theme of the monarchy**. Until now, most of his Royal Psalms have had as their focus God as King. Psalm 72 changes this to focus on **the human king** that God established in his place once the people rebelled. In doing this, Psalm 72 sets us up for at least two very important Royal Psalms in Book III: Psalms 82 and 89. **Much of what we see today we will return to when we come to those.**

But in this song, the focus is on the duties, authority, and blessings that David wanted to come to Israel through his son, **Solomon**. The superscript in the ESV reads, “**Of**

⁴ **Going Deeper:** Don't let such a note bother you. It is clear that the Psalter is a collection of songs that span perhaps as many as 800 years. Someone had to put them together! The earliest psalmist is Moses (Ps 90), and many songs go right on into the Babylonian captivity and fathers. Israel was obviously singing many songs before others were ever written. Therefore, collections of songs were gathered together at various times in Israel's temple worship. Early collections could have been just songs of David (like Book I, and most of Book II). But as time went on and more Inspired songs were recognized as God-Breathed, those collections were themselves put into larger collections until you end up with the Psalter itself. The last verse of Psalm 72 is not saying that all of the songs of David are finished in the Psalter, but that this Psalm marks the end of one of those collections. It seems to me that this note must therefore be very early in date, probably going not much later than the court of Solomon. The collection was already understood to be untouchable by later scribes who left the note here.

Solomon,” making you think that it is a song written by him. The compound word *li-shlomoh* is the name “Solomon” prefixed with the preposition “le” (ל) which can mean “of” or “at” or “for” or “to.” Following things like the early Geneva Bible (1599) and the Targum, the ESV choose “of.” But it seems to me beyond a reasonable doubt that the editor (**vs. 20**) believed this was a prayer *of* David! So, the LXX, KJV, and others to “**For Solomon.**” I believe this is a psalm of David for Solomon.

The song takes the form of a **prayer of hope**. The word “**May**” begins at least 10 of the verses. “May such and such happen.” This is his prayer to God for his son.

The Psalm depicts an idealized hope for a nation that fits precisely with Solomon’s name. His name **Shelomoh**⁵ is related to *shalom* (“**peace**”) and *shillim* (“**make compensation**”). He will be the perfect compensation for David’s dead baby son (**2Sa 12:24**), and in his reign God will give peace and quiet to Israel (**1Ch 22:9**). What did David pray this kingdom would be like? The answer is the content of the song, and in it we learn about the things the king was

⁵ His other name given to him by Nathan the prophet was Jedidiah (“Beloved One of Yahweh” see **2Sa 12:25**).

to do as he carried out dominion for the nation under Yahweh.

As Goes the King, So Go the People

After the superscription, Psalm 72 has **six main parts**. The first five deal with the rule of the king. They discuss his **justice/righteousness (1-4)**, **peace (5-7)**, **dominion (8-11)**, **compassion (12-15)**, and **prosperity (16-17)**. Each section describes the king's duties *and the effects* each particular element of goodly rule will have on the land and the people. If the King was to rule so that it mirrored heaven (“as in heaven, so on earth”), how he ruled became a mirror to what happened to the earth and those under his protection. As goes the king, so go the people. By his rule, he is able to bring blessing or disaster. The final section is a blessing to the King of kings (**18-19**), and its importance cannot be understated.

The Psalm may have a **chiastic structure**.⁶ If so, the central point (12-14) teaches us about the main concern the

⁶ **1a)** Psa 72 Introduction, A psalm of Solomon;

1b) Psa 72:1, Give the King Your judgments and Your righteousness to the King's Son;

1c) Psa 72:2-4, He will judge Your people with righteousness and Your poor with justice;

king is to have for his subjects. He is to deliver the needy and redeem their life. This is something that is needed in the physical world and the spiritual one. As for the physical part, it is something little heeded by most rulers today, and profoundly wrongly applied by others. It is something everyone knows is important on some level, we argue about how it should be done, but the king had no choice but to do it. If he didn't, it eventually meant great disaster for the nation. On both levels, but especially the spiritual one, it is possible to be perfectly carried out only by a perfect Ruler.

Justice, Righteousness, and the Poor (vv. 1-4)

1d) Psa 72:5-7, He shall come down like rain on the grass/ The righteous shall flourish until the moon is no more;

1e) Psa 72:8-11, He shall have dominion from sea to sea, the kings of the earth will bring presents;

central axis) Psa 72:12-14, For He will deliver the needy and redeem their life;

2e) Psa 72:15, That they may live, and that He may give them of the gold of Sheba;

2d) Psa 72:16-17a, There will be an abundance of grain on the earth / His name shall continue as long as the sun;

2c) Psa 72:17b, Men shall be blessed in Him;

2b) Psa 72:18-19, Blessed be the Glorious Name of Lord God of Israel, Let the whole earth be filled with His glory;

2a) Psa 72:20, The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

A little perspective blog.

We actually see this central point in the first point of the song, thus reinforcing its importance all the more. The Psalm begins by helping us understand that **the king is to be just and righteous**. These words are prayed for the king's son who will become the royal heir and ruler of Israel. But what about these words and how should we think about them in our own immediate context in our nation? I think this question is worth looking into briefly, if for no other reason than preparation for the Gospel.

We looked at the word “**righteousness**” last time and saw how this word is almost **non-existent** in modern society. In a similar way, **justice** is rarely spoken of or is badly understood today. What meaning can those words even have in a world where the sexual organs you were born with do not determine gender? When even this kind of objective truth is denied, what possible use could we have for such words?

I want to take this to a very basic level of our current political climate using an observation from **Newt Gingrich** that I heard a few months back. This observation is not political, but moral. All of our politicians talk about wanting justice. It isn't like the word is gone from our vocabulary.

All want justice done against *their enemies*. But what happens when you get to the point in a nation where your greatest enemy is the person on the other side of the aisle who must be punished?

Gingrich observed how even 25 years ago, this was not his experience in Washington. Great enemies in the political arena during the day would have dinner with each other's families later in the evening. **Ronald Reagan** and **Tip O'Neil** famously embodied this, and you do not get any further apart in the political spectrum than these two guys. Gingrich said this kind of thing simply does not happen anymore. We've lost perspective. We've lost our humanity. In the process, we've lost the ability to hear and listen to one another civilly. And in doing so, it has become **impossible to carry out in our form of government this kind of prayer**. Not that it was prayed for us, of course. Nevertheless, I do want us to think about this because in our Republic, we the people are the government. Our politicians are us. They are a mirror showing us what we have become.

The striking thing about this psalm is how **it applies justice and righteousness** in a concrete fashion. **To the poor.** **“May he judge your people with righteousness, and your**

poor with justice!” (2). This is a poetic device of specification. All the people need justice. The poor *especially* need it. In my opinion, the “poor” can be interpreted as poor “spiritually.” This is a very comfortable thing to say, one that won’t get a preacher into too much trouble.

But the psalm also demands that they are also poor physically. Vs 4, “May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor!” It was the God-ordained job of the king to take care of the poor in the society. And all ancient societies at least paid lip service to it, because all were under the same obligation.

What about today? We aren’t in a monarchy. Does this law still apply? I will say unequivocally “yes.” And I do not think it is only the responsibility of the church, though clearly the church-state separation makes this more difficult to know how to respond in a righteous and godly way. But I won’t say how, because I’m not preaching from a place that tells you how, and because I think to some extent God allows cultures to figure that out for themselves.

But I do want to make another observation about our culture and especially our politics with regards to the poor.

This observation concerns two things. The first is the **increasing economic disparity** between our governors and the governed that contributes to making this more difficult for our society to carry out. The second is **the moral hypocrisy** that makes it virtually impossible.

First, the economic disparity. God demands in the law that the king not accumulate much gold for himself (**Deut 17:16**). Why? Because **the corrosion of gold takes place not on the metal, but in the human heart**. Generally speaking, the more wealthy a king is, the more out of touch with those he is supposed to oversee he becomes. Obviously, this isn't *necessarily* true for everyone, nor even for any specific person all of the time. But there is no question that **Solomon's heart** was turned away in part because of how he accumulated his wealth, for his wives turned his heart away. But his wives came to him mostly as political agreements with other kings that made him impossibly wealthy (internet estimates put it at somewhere around \$2.2 *Trillion!*).

If the natural tendency of the human heart is to become corroded here, then perhaps it is helpful to put **the disparity** into perspective. I recently saw a comedian (Gary Gulman) do this when he described how his entire plans for the

weekend changed when he found a \$20 bill in his pocket. Have you ever had that feeling? I used to love going skiing, because on a couple of occasions, I had this happen to me. It was like having a surprise birthday party for myself.

He was comparing **Donald Trump** (and he did this routine before he was even running for President) and **Bill Gates**. People rip on Trump because he is so wealthy. He's worth \$3.5 billion. Gates, who is also very influential on the other side of the political aisle, beats trump in a football game 59-3. So what would be the equivalent of you pulling out a \$20 bill to someone like Gates? Assuming an average net worth of \$100,000 for you (Gulman did it with annual salary, which according to statistics is actually higher than the average net worth!), he has to pull out of his pocket a \$12 million dollar bill! Poor Donald only has to pull out a \$700,000 bill. Solomon would have to pull out an incomprehensible \$440,000,000 bill! These people are not living in the same universe as you and I, let alone the poor.

Then there is **the corruption**. So many examples, but I'll give just one. There is a Representative to the United States Congress whose district has one of the highest murder-rates in the nation. It is poverty stricken, crime ridden, drug

infested. She loves to talk about her opponents despise the poor and how her party takes care of them. She now says these things from the haggard confines of her indoor pool in her 6,000 sq. foot, \$4.3 million mansion located 20 miles *outside* of her district in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Los Angeles. She won't even live in her own district! And she owns two others houses and a time share to boot. She made her wealth entirely as a government employee and her monthly payment on just that one house is more than she makes in a month as a Representative of the United States. Explain to me how this works exactly? She couldn't care less about the poor, because she's too busy accumulating her own wealth through massive corruption to think about them.

The point is, when you have this kind of disparity combined with this kind of hypocrisy and corruption, ours is not a culture that prizes righteousness and helping the poor. We simply don't. Not anymore. We live in one that pays lip service, at best, when what really matters is trying to murder our political opponents.

But David says that it is the responsibility of the king to defend and deliver the poor by crushing *their* oppressors. Only a king could do that (How could that even be done in

a Republic?). David prays with all his heart that his son will do it. And if he does, notice how this first group of verses bears fruit upon the land. “Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness!” (Ps 72:3). Righteousness and justice bears the fruit of prosperity for all the people, including the poor. You can put this in the bank: where you have increasing poverty, crime, drugs, prostitution, and general over-all helplessness, there you do not have justice and righteousness on a political level. That is God’s word. That doesn’t mean that if you have none of these things that justice and righteousness are prevailing. It may very well be the case that it isn’t. But God has made it so that when his king judges in righteousness, the poor will prosper as a general rule, though they will always be in the land. I wanted to spend more time on this than the other sections, because it really is the main duty of the king in the Psalm.

Peace (vv. 5-7)

The second section focuses more on the results of the new action for the king upon the people. That is peace. “In

his days may the righteous flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more!” (Ps 72:7). Peace (*shalom*) is the positive presence of God’s good-will towards his people, where he is not their enemy, not fighting against them, and not neutrally staying away letting them do their own thing (which is to fight against them). You see how the word is paired with “the righteous.” The prayer is for *the righteous* to flourish and peace abound, and it is the righteous and just actions of the king’s son who will be the instrument to bring this about.

This is put more poetically in the preceding verses. “May they fear you while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations!” (5) shows the relationship between the righteous and what makes them righteous, which is first and foremost the fear of God. When Israel went south in the days of the Judges, it was because they did not fear the LORD. But the hope is that through the king, the righteous will fear the LORD forever, as long as there is a sun and moon and even beyond.

This is summed up in the king himself. “May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth” (6). The leadership of the king in justice and

righteousness is like rain that waters the earth, making things green, giving things life, producing food and fruit and abundance and plenty. God made it so that when the king was like this, he would be the very rain of the land. When righteousness and justice do not abound in a land, its leaders are not rain, but are a never setting noon-day sun burning and scorching life away, turning it into a spiritual (and eventually) and physical desert. People do not understand this principle, because they do not see with supernatural eyes any longer. But that's the way God set it up, and so much more in his chosen nation, the nation of Israel.

Dominion (vv. 8-11)

The third section describes the **dominion** (a Genesis 1 theme) and power of the king. Again as a prayer, “**May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!**” (**Ps 72:8**). This is a prayer for the embodiment of the creation mandate, to have dominion over the earth to be realized in the king of Israel. And it was realized in Solomon, who had the greatest extent of the promised land of anyone.

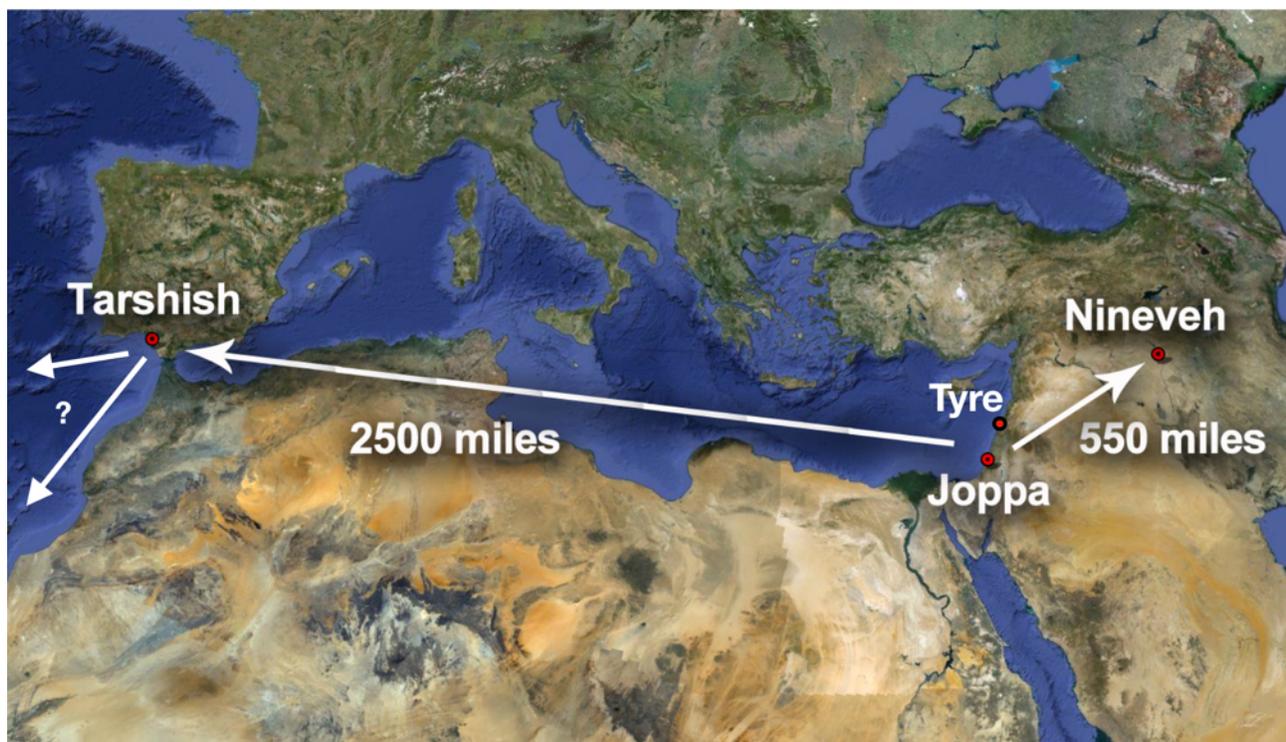


It is through the king's dominion that we see blessings coming not only to Israel, but **to the outside world**. His righteous and just reign of peace brings with it a deep longing in the hearts of the nations to come under such rule. But it does not come by the king extending his rule into the their physical nations, as if he subdues them in a way that Nebuchadnezzar or Alexander did. It comes through magnetism rather than brute force.

When it comes, the kings of the earth pay him tribute. Some do it forcibly. **“May desert tribes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust”** (9). Continuing the

Genesis creation theme, “lick (*lachak*) the dust” is very similar to Satan’s curse where he will eat (*akal*) the dust (**Gen 3:14**). The curse was not that somehow a snake would start eating dirt. Snakes do not eat dirt. Rather, it is a punishment to be humbled to a position ultimately as low as the very stuff man was made from. Here, to lick the dust means to bow down before this great king.

Others do it willingly. “May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute; may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts!” (**10**). Tarshish is basically the most remote place discussed in the OT. It is far to the west and north at the very edge of Spain. Solomon’s rule was so great that he would send ships of Hiram (Hiram was the king of Tyre, a Phoenician—the great sea-kings of the ancient world, Solomon’s friend who gladly helped Solomon build his temple) with the ships of Tarshish on a three year voyage to God knows where and bring back vast quantities of gold and silver, ivory, apes and peacocks (**1Kg 10:22**).



Map: Shows distance and direction of Jonah as well as the location of Tyre and possible routes Solomon and Hiram's ships took

Sheba, of course, is where the fabled **Queen of Sheba** came from to pay tribute to Solomon and to hear his wisdom. Along with Seba, it is located over 1,000 miles from Israel to the south east in the southern region of the Arabia peninsula in today's Yemen, just across the sea from Ethiopia. The point is, the ends of the earth come flocking to the king.

Whether by force or through friendship, “**May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!**” (11). That is what happened through Solomon, and through him, God

was glorifying himself by raising up a little nothing of a people to whom all the kings of the earth will bow down.

Compassion (vv. 12-15)

The **fourth section** of the song talks about the **compassion** of the king to stand up for those who have no one else to defend and save them. Notice how the end of the section (**vs. 15**) recalls the location of Sheba. “**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 the day.**” The NT tells us to **pray in this way**: “**I urge that supplications be made for all people, for kings and all those are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way**” (**1Tim 2:1-2**). How is Paul *not* thinking of Psalm 72 here?

When we traveled to England some twenty years ago, we were able to circumnavigate the entire Isle. We went into many Anglican churches. We noticed that in every single one, it seemed on the hour, a short prayer was offered up which included, among other things, a prayer for the queen.

This was the Church of England's way of formalizing the psalm and epistle's commands.

This prayer to pray for the king continually and invoke blessings upon him takes place **as a result of his compassion** for the needy. **“For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight” (12-14).** Again, this is the central part of the song. We have seen how it is this that is the application of the king's justice and righteousness in the land. The prayer is that king Solomon will not tolerate rigged courts that serve the rich, unequal weighs and false scales that steal money in transactions, public policy that is enacted to deliberately harm the needy of a society.

As king, his responsibility is to protect the poor, the needy, the orphan, the widow, for **this is God's heart**. But as this is a very difficult job, easy to compromise, to forget, to even do the opposite, prayers are to be made that wisdom would be used in carrying out justice. The case of the two prostitutes who had both given birth to babies at the same time (**1Kg 3:15ff**) is a case in point. The one mother

accidentally lay on his baby in the night and it died. So, she took the living baby while the other mother slept, and replaced that one with her dead one, stealing the living baby. Rather than discriminate by not hearing the case of these needy women, and rather than reverse-discriminate by feeling sorry for the woman whose son died, Solomon used wisdom to come to a just decision. “Cut the baby in half and give one half to each mother.” This caused the women whose baby was alive to cry to the king to spare its life and give it to the other woman, thereby revealing that she was the real mother. Solomon gave the boy alive to real her, and upheld righteousness and justice in the land—fairly, for the very kind of people he was supposed to help.

Prosperity (vv. 16-17)

The fifth and final prayer for the king is for his prosperity. Again, the relationship between king and people is seen. It begins with the people. “May there be abundance of grain in the land; on the tops of the mountains may it wave; may its fruit be like Lebanon; and may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field!” (16). Why this prayer?

Just because he likes to prosper? No. Because it is the result of a righteous and just rule of a godly king. “**May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed!**” (17). And thus the glory of the king is established across the whole world, because he is a king who follows God’s law, carrying it out in ways that make all other nations envious, because it brings blessing and peace and long life and fruit to the land and the people.

The King Went Wrong and a Future Coming King

We have seen how many things in this prayer actually applied to the rule of Solomon. He is the king’s son who ruled in the fear of the LORD and righteousness (Ps 72:1), whose kingdom extended from sea to sea (8), and to whom the tribute of kings from the ends of the earth came (10, 15).

But friend, Solomon was not perfect, as he himself concludes in his book of Ecclesiastes. He did not always rule like this. In fact, as time went on, he became more and more disobedient and his rule more and more corrupted. Directly

against the Law of Moses, Solomon started accumulating many horses (1Kg 4:26; cf. Deut 17:16), countless wives (1Kg 11:3; cf. Deut 17:17), and as we have seen massive amounts of gold and silver (cf. 1Kg 9:28, 10:14; cf. Deut 17:17). His heart was turned away to worship other gods (1Kg 11:4) and he did not establish a new copy of the Law to be made in his day (Deut 17:18), thereby ensuring that it would eventually be lost.

He became so corrupted by these things that the people told his son Rehoboam, “Your father made our yoke heavy, now you make it lighter for us!” (1Kg 12:4). Solomon didn’t care about them! This seed of contempt he sowed in his own son bore lewd fruit when Rehoboam said, “My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins. And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to it. He disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions” (12:10-11).

Thereby, Solomon eventually proved the Romans right. Monarchies turn to rot. Their rule can become tyrannical, maniacal, oppressive, totalitarian, horrible. The rest of the history of Israel mostly proves this. It is just here that you need to see the last two verses of the song. For, Psalm 72 does

not end with Solomon, but with the LORD and a blessing upon him. “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.⁷ Blessed be his glorious Name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen” (Ps 72:18-19).

This blessing takes our thoughts not merely to God in his bare essence, as a praise to him for establishing Solomon’s rule. But more specifically, through the chiasm’s parallel verse, it takes us back to vs. 1 and the Son of God—the royal Son.⁸ This is the king most of the Psalter has sung about, and make no mistake, Psalm 72 is ultimately about him, not Solomon. It is a prophecy, a forward-pointing necessity because of Solomon’s failures. And even the Jews saw it before Christ came. The Targum of vs. 1 reads, “O God, give your ordinances to the King Messiah.”⁹

⁷ Along with many of the themes we have seen here, “wondrous things” takes us back to the previous psalm and hints at the person of Christ as we saw last time.

⁸ See n. 6 and how 1b) the King’s Son parallels 2b) the Name of the Lord God and the earth full of his glory.

⁹ **Going Deeper.** The scholarly Targum edition I have has this note for “messiah” in its translation, “In this edition the translation “anointed (one),” rather than “Messiah” has been preferred for TgPss *mšyh*. The reason for this is that *mšyh* is a characteristic word of the Psalter, and it does not seem appropriate to use words like ‘Messiah’ and ‘messianic’ in connection with the MT. A distinction between ‘anointed one’ for what represents MT *mšyh* and ‘Messiah’ for what is additional to MT would seem artificial, though an exception has been made at 61:7, 9 for contextual reasons.” Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara, eds., *The Aramaic Bible: The Targum of Psalms*, trans. David M. Stec, vol. 16 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical

The Gospels help us see this more clearly at the birth of Jesus, thereby helping the Jews of that day to see that indeed, the Messiah of Psalm 72 and the idyllic kingdom it portrays had finally come. In Matthew, the magi-kings giving tribute to baby Jesus (**Matt 2:11**) is a direct fulfillment of Psalm 72.¹⁰ In Luke, Jesus becomes the king who is chiefly driven to help the poor and ease their suffering (starting in Luke 4:18; 6:20; etc.). In Psalm 2, it is the Son of God who is granted dominion over all the earth (Ps 2:8; cf. Dan 7:14, etc.). At his birth, Isaiah's Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6) comes into the world. Throughout his life, the Lord Jesus was constantly showing compassion to the masses, the poor, the widows, demonically possessed, the tax-collectors, the prostitutes, the

Press, 2004). I can certainly understand the point. However, Lothar is surely right to the word in Psalm 72 as THE Messiah when he notes how in the Targum of Psalm 72:17 it “has this Messiah explicitly existing even before the sun, that is, from the creation of the world: ‘His name will be remembered forever and ever, and before the sun existed his name was already determined.’” Lothar, 220. John Gill confirms this interpretation, adding that this is how the Jewish midrash (Yalkut Simeoni, par. 2. fol. 112. 2) saw it. John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, vol. 3, The Baptist Commentary Series (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1810), 822. In the midrash, the name of Messiah is known before the creation of the world.

Also, **Midrash on Psalms, Psalm 72.3**. “Another comment on Give the king Thy judgments O God, and Thy righteousness: here king means the King Messiah, of whom it is said And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse...And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him...And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither decide after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the land (Isa. 11:1a, 3b-c, 4a).” *The Midrash on Psalms*, William G. Braude, Translator (New Haven: Yale, 1959), Yale Judaica Series, Volume XIII, Leon Nemoy, Editor, Book One, Psalm 72:3. <http://www.christiantruth.com/jewishteachingonmessianicprophecy.html>

¹⁰ Lothar, p. 220 observes this, as do various chain reference tools.

outcasts of society. His compassion shows no end and reveals to us the very heart of the Father in heaven. He spoke often of God's law and **justice and righteousness**. He ushered in a kingdom and took his seat as its king at his resurrection and ascension where he now has all **dominion**. In the Church Fathers, he becomes the very rain that falls to water the earth (**Ambrose**, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.8), for he is the water of life and the manna of heaven. His **Name** is above every name and endures forever. And one day, every knee will bow to this king (**Php 2:6-11**).

Christ was not voted King by a democracy. He did not arise to power through a political coup. He is not a tyrant. He was given the position as the Son of God, the one of whom David ultimately sang, his own son yet his Lord.

And therefore, Psalm 72 stands as the great climax of Book II of the Psalter. The previous handful have all used terms that find their great fulfillment in it. All other songs in this collection anticipate it. As do our longing hearts. Because after all our failures and sins, the failures and sins of our own leaders and representatives, and even of God's chosen human kings like David (think of Psalm 53 as part of Book II) and Solomon, we need a perfect King to bring about

in time and space such a kingdom as this. One that makes us pine after and yearn for that which we know is true in heaven, and which God has promised to those who trust in him on earth. One that causes us to bow down in worship and praise the glorious name of God forever. In Jesus, one greater than Solomon is here (Matt 12:42).

As we have seen, the song ends, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.” Luke tells us at his birth, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people” (Luke 1:68). Yes, and even so. David’s prayer has come true. Christ’s dominion is what a monarchy is supposed to be. And it is a reality. He is King Jesus and he does all the wishes of this Psalm perfectly, ruling for God, ruling over the people.

Thank you Lord Jesus.

Long live the King.

May his Name be praised forevermore.

Amen. And Amen.