

# Psalm 72: Long Live the King

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The psalms of the Hebrew Bible were collected over a long period of time. The collections are referred to as "books" within Psalms (1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, and 107-150). Most of the psalms in the first two books are associated with David, but some were written by others (e.g., 42-49 by the Sons of Korah). The last psalm in Book II is attributed to Solomon, although some scholars suggest it was written "for" Solomon by David to be used at a coronation ceremony. Either way, this psalm was likely used at the inauguration of kings or for other royal events among the Israelites.

Frequently Bible students have appealed to Psalm 72 as a prophecy of Christ. The New Testament nowhere quotes it as a prophecy, and several indicators in the psalm demonstrate that the author is speaking of kings in ancient times such as the era of Solomon. The extent of territory that is mentioned fits well with the territory over which Solomon ruled. Some of the words are reminiscent of what the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon. Verses 3 and 16 speak of literal crops and grain, so a mere spiritual application is not in the author's mind. Some of the language sounds exaggerated for Solomon or the kings that followed him, but this is typical for royal court language in ancient times.

Nevertheless, we should examine this psalm carefully for Messianic ideas simply because it is a royal psalm. The royal psalms pointed to an ideal kingly reign, one which David, Solomon, and others never completely fulfilled. Many of them were good kings, even great kings, but Israel was awaiting the perfect King, the Messiah. So Psalm 72 is not a direct prophecy of Jesus Christ, but it is a foreshadowing or a type of him who was to come.

The King of Justice: "Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your

people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor ... For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have 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" (Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14).

The king of Israel was God's "son," and as his son, he needed to possess attributes similar to the Almighty. Therefore, the good king was to be a champion for the poor, the oppressed, and the needy. He cared for and felt compassion for those under his rule who were exploited by evil in society. The king was to reign in justice and righteousness, as God also reigned.

Long Live the King: "May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more ... 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. 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. May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun. May all nations be blessed in him; may they pronounce him happy" (Psalm 72:5-7, 15-17).

Near Eastern royal court language could be quite exaggerated and full of embellishment in describing mere humans as kings. Bathsheba said, "May the lord King David live forever!" as he lay dying (1 Kings 1:31). So statements

like, "Let the king live forever!" only meant, "Let the king live for a long time" (Nehemiah 2:3). Expressions of hope for a long reign due to the blessings of God were tied to the eager desire for prosperity for everyone as the result of a just and righteous kingly reign.

World Wide Dominion: "May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. May his foes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust. May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service" (Psalm 72:8-11).

The king's dominion was from sea to sea, that is, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. It was from the River to the ends of the earth, that is, from the Euphrates to as far as they knew the world existed. This is the territory promised to Abraham, and it is approximately the area controlled by Solomon at the height of Israel's expansion. The prayer was that the children of Israel would have victory over their enemies, security within their borders, and people living in peace in subjection to the king.

Christ as the Ideal King: Human kings like Solomon never lived up perfectly to the ideal. Christ is the typological fulfillment of the ideal king in royal psalms like Psalm 72. Jesus was just, righteous, and compassionate. He was a champion for the lepers, women who had been exploited, children, tax collectors, the blind, the crippled, the sick, and even Gentiles and Samaritans. As the King of kings Christ reigns in justice with a tender concern for others, more than for himself. As Christians we may declare, "Long live Christ the King forever," and we can shout it with no limitations or qualifications. His reign is not limited to a portion of the ancient Near East; he has authority over all things in heaven and earth.