

Psalm 72

"A Prayer for the Spiritual, Political, Economic, and Agricultural Success of the King's Universal Reign" ¹

A Psalm of Solomon

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A1 PRAYER FOR THE RIGHTEOUS QUALITY OF THE KING'S REIGN 72:1-7

B1 Prayer for the King for Personal and Dynastic Righteousness 72:1

C1 {1} Give the king Your judgments, O God,

C2 And Your **righteousness** to the king's son.

B2 Prayer for the King to Pursue Righteousness in His Reign, Protecting the Afflicted and the Needy 72:2-4

C1 {2} May he judge Your people with **righteousness** And Your **afflicted** with justice.

C2 {3} Let the mountains bring peace to the people, And the hills, in **righteousness**.

C3 {4} May he vindicate the **afflicted** of the people, Save the children of the **needy** And crush the oppressor.

B3 Prayer That the Subjects of the King May Fear God, The Righteous Flourishing 72:5-7

C1 {5} Let them fear You while the sun *endures*, And as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

C2 {6} May he come down like rain upon the mown grass, Like showers that water the earth.

C3 {7} In his days may the **righteous** flourish, And abundance of peace till the moon is no more.

¹ A question arises as to how to translate Psalm 72. RSV, NRSV, NASB all reflect the editorial decision that the majority of the verbs should, in the context of Psalm 72, be translated as jussives, in this psalm, the language of prayer. KJV, NKJV, and NIV, for the most part, translate the verbs in questions as imperfects, the language of declaration. The issue is complicated in that, many times imperfects and jussives are indistinguishable in form. There follows, in an addendum at the end of the discussion of Psalm 72, a technical justification for the NASB translation.

A2 PRAYER FOR THE UNIVERSAL EXTENT OF THE KING'S REIGN 72:8-14**B1 Prayer for the Extent of the King's Rule 72:8-11**

C1 For international geographic supremacy 72:8-9

D1 {8} May he also rule from sea to sea ² And from the River ³ to the ends of the earth.⁴

D2 {9} Let the nomads of the desert bow before him, And his enemies lick the dust.

C2 For international regnal supremacy 72:10-11

D1 {10} Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. ⁵

D2 {11} And let all kings bow down before him, All nations serve him.⁶

B2 Arguments in Favor of the King's Extended Rule -- His Protection of the Needy 72:12-14

C1 {12} For he will deliver the **needy** when he cries for help, The **afflicted** also, and him who has no helper.

C2 {13} He will have compassion on the **poor** and **needy**, And the lives of the **needy** he will save.

C3 {14} He will rescue their life from oppression and violence, And their blood will be precious in his sight;

² 72:8 - sea to sea: From the Sea of Galilee to the Mediterranean Sea, the east-west or longitudinal extent.

³ 72:8 - the River: The Euphrates River, the north-south or latitudinal extent.

⁴ 72:8 -to the ends of the earth: Though the extent of Solomon's reign was the greatest of any Israeli king, extending, in effect clear up to the Euphrates River in modern day Syria, it never came close to reaching the ends of the earth. His prayer would never be fulfilled for himself, but it will be fulfilled when Jesus Christ, the ultimate Davidic king, reigns over the entire earth at His Second Coming (Zech. 14, see esp. v. 9). Though Solomon is clearly the referent of this Psalm, its ultimate referent is the Messiah. This is a Messianic psalm with predictive prophecy that will inevitably be fulfilled in and through Jesus, the Messiah!

⁵ 72:10 - Tarshish, Sheba, Seba: **Tarshish** (possibly Tartessus in southwest Spain), **Sheba** (cf. v. 15; present-day Yemen in southwestern Arabia), **and Seba** (in upper Egypt; cf. Gen. 10:7). (Allen P. Ross, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* -[TBKC])

⁶ 72:11 - all kings bow down; all nations serve: This will be fulfilled initially only when Jesus returns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16), and ultimately, when Jesus and the Father reign as co-regents from New Jerusalem over New Earth (Rev. 21:1-22:5).

A3 PRAYER FOR BLESSINGS UPON THE KING AND UPON GOD 72:15-20**B1 Prayer for Blessings upon the King 72:15-16**

- C1 For personal life and health: {15} So may he live, 72:15
- C2 For imperial and economic success: and may the gold of Sheba be given to him;
- C3 For well-wishing from his subjects
- D1 Continual prayer: And let them pray for him continually;
- D2 Continual blessing: Let them **bless** him all day long.
- C4 For agricultural success: {16} May there be abundance of grain in the earth on top of the mountains; Its fruit will wave like *the cedars of Lebanon*; 72:16
- C5 For urban success: And may those from the city flourish like vegetation of the earth.
- C6 For the well-being of His name 72:17
- D1 In perpetuity: {17} May his name endure forever; May his name increase as long as the sun *shines*;
- D2 In reciprocity: And let *men* **bless** themselves by him;
- D3 Internationally: Let all nations call him blessed.⁷

B2 Prayer for Blessings upon the God of Glory 72:18-20⁸

- C1 Blessings extolled upon the wonder-working God of Israel: {18} **Blessed** be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who alone works wonders. 72:18
- C2 Eternal blessings extolled on God's glorious name: {19} And **blessed** be His glorious name forever; 72:19
- C3 A request for the whole earth to be filled with the glory of God: And may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen.
- C4 Postscript – This marks the end of the prayers of David ben Jesse: {20} The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended. 72:20

⁷ 72:17 - all ... call him blessed: The blessings of such a king's rule are reciprocal; he blesses the **nations** (perhaps through trade and peaceful alliances) and they in turn speak well of **him**. (Allen P. Ross, *TBKC*)

⁸ 72:18-20: Verses 18-19 record the second doxology in the book, thus ending Book II (Psalms 41-72). They include words of **praise... to the LORD God... of Israel** and the request that **His glory** be evident everywhere. Verse 20 states that **this** ends **the prayers of David**. However, this probably refers to an earlier collection of psalms, because 18 other psalms after this one are attributed in their superscriptions to David (Pss. 86; 101; 103; 108-110; 122; 124; 131; 133; 138-145). (Allen P. Ross, *TBKC*)

Addendum

A Justification for the Jussive Force of Many Verbs in Psalm 72

By Vernon Steiner, Ph.D., The MIQRA Institute of Biblical Studies, (<http://www.miqra.net/>) in an unpublished memo to this author, included here essentially unedited:

This question touches some of the complex and still unresolved perplexities of the Hebrew verb system, namely, (1) to what extent if any Hebrew verb forms actually grammaticalize tense or time versus something else (I think something else, but that is a huge discussion), and (2) how to determine when this particular verb formation that appears recurrently in Pss 72 (sometimes called "imperfect," now increasingly called "prefixed" or labeled YIQTOL or YQTL) is functioning as a more or less generic "imperfect" (often acceptably translated "will") and when it is functioning as a volitional jussive ("may" or "let"), this latter issue arising from the fact that often, though not always, the "imperfect" and "jussive" are look-alikes. The situation is further complicated by the fact that these decisions cannot be made solely on the basis of morphology (formation), but must factor in clausal and other syntactical and compositional issues. It is a quite technical discussion in Hebrew grammar – one I could develop at some length, although perhaps that is not necessary now. Let me get to some conclusions. If you need more explanation, I can provide it.

1. Both translational possibilities exist for many, but not all, of these verbs because of the ambiguities just noted. RSV, NRSV, NASB versus KJV, NKJV, NIV--both are judgment calls based on certain factors clausal, syntactical, compositional, and otherwise.
2. My own strong preference is for the RSV, NRSV, NASB reading as "jussives" ("may" or "let"), i.e., as invocation or prayer. There are several somewhat technical reasons, but briefly:
 - a. V. 1 introduces the ps with an unambiguous imperative "Give" or "Endow," thus setting the direction of the ps in a volitional path, in which path arguably the jussive more likely flows than the alternative.
 - b. The verbs under discussion in vv. 2ff. are all clause initial, i.e., first place in their respective clauses. The vast majority of clause-initial verbs of this formation are jussive. Large and compelling studies have demonstrated this. Hence, the weight of preponderance.
 - c. Several verses in this ps begin with unambiguously spelled or clearly marked jussives (vv. 8,15,16,17). The initial verb in each of these verses would have an additional letter he at the end if they were ambiguously imperfect or jussive. They are clearly jussive. On contextual analogy one would expect the ambiguously spelled initial verbs in vv. 2-7 likewise to be jussive.

One or two other arguments could be added, but these are sufficient in my judgment to make the reading "May he" or "Let him" down through this psalm the more likely reading than "He will."

EXPANDED ANALYSIS OF PSALM 72
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 October, 2010. Updated November, 2019
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