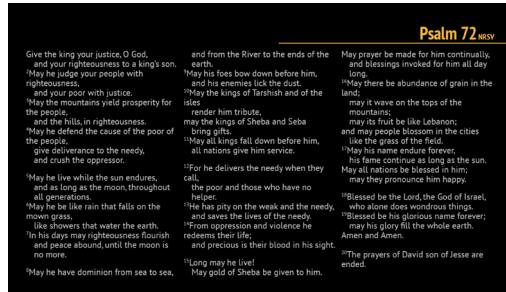


Psalm 72



Welcome to part 4 of our series on the Psalms. This time we are going to look at Psalm 72, but we're going to do something slightly different. We're going to focus on two particular aspects of the psalm. One is a theological aspect, and the other is a formal aspect with regards to the function of the psalm within the wider collection of the Psalter and its theological significance because of the editorial introduction and conclusion to the psalm. You will see in a moment what I mean by that. But let's open and read the first verse and say a little bit more about what the psalm actually wants to achieve: "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."

What we have here is a prayer. In fact, it is an intercessory prayer for a young king, probably, in fact, at the moment of that king's accession to the throne. When we read on through the psalm, in particular in the translation that I'm using here . . . This is the New Revised Standard Version, which, by the way, did you know this? Why is the New Revised Standard Version called the New Revised Standard Version? Well, do you know which one is the Standard Version? Well, the Standard Version, of course, refers to the King James Version, the standard, the gold standard, so to speak. And then the Revised Standard Version would have been the first revision of the King James Bible in the late 1800s, early 1900s. And then the New Revised Standard Version is the second revision of the King James Bible in the 1980s or so. So the New Revised Standard Version, so to speak, is the grandchild of the King James Bible. There you have it.

Anyway, this was just a little fun thing in-between. But coming back to the psalm, in the Bible that I'm using every single verse is phrased as a prayer. May the king do this, may the king do that; may this, that, and the other happen as a consequence of this king's good, benevolent, and God-inspired reign and rule. But there are other translations and other Bibles where many, not all,

Psalm 72 KJV

Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son.
¶He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment.
¶The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.
¶He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.
¶They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations.

Psalm 72 ESV

Of Solomon.

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.
¶**May he live** while the sun endures,
 and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.



Psalm 72 ESV

Of Solomon.

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.
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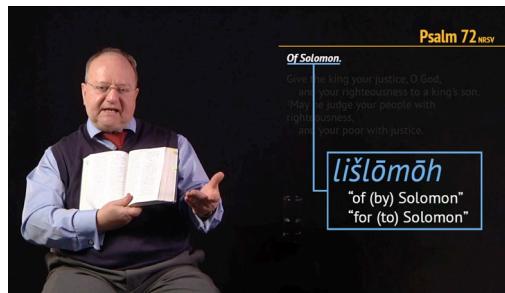
but the vast majority of the verses are not phrased as a prayer but as a statement of fact or as a prediction of the future. This happens because the Hebrew language does not distinguish in the same way as many modern languages do between what is a wish and what is a statement about the future.

And so, in fact, what that means is the dynamic of the psalm has two different meanings. Psalm 72:1 definitely is a prayer, but the rest of the psalm could either be a continuation of that prayer or an expression of the hopes associated with God answering that prayer. Because of the multivalence—the possibility of the Hebrew meaning both—I actually want to say, based on some of the things I was saying in my introduction to this series, that perhaps the poet in his ingenuity intended both meanings. So it is genuinely a prayer for a specific young king at the moment of the accession to his throne.

But at the same time, it may also, actually—and here now we get to the theological heart of the psalm—this psalm may also in fact be a messianic psalm where the poet-priest who is praying this on behalf of and for the king is perhaps not only thinking of one particular son of David at the moment of his accession to the throne, but is perhaps also thinking of the Messiah, God's Anointed One who is to come and rule in a truly ideal and righteous fashion. In fact, in the kind of way in which the psalmist is praying here for one particular son, perhaps even hoping that this king he is praying for might be that Messiah. As it turns out, of course, the king he actually prayed for did not turn out to be the Messiah, because the Messiah was born many hundred years later than that. But nonetheless, I think this is fascinating and intriguing.

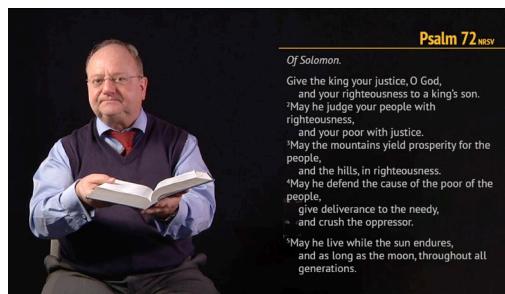
The second point I want to make about this psalm comes from the beginning and ending. And English Bibles, I don't know whether you can see it and the camera can pick this up, but at the beginning of Psalm 72, there is a line in italics above verse 1, which says, "of Solomon." In the Hebrew, this is actually expressed as *lu Shlomoh* with the preposition *lu*, meaning either of, as in of Solomon, indicating Solomon's authorship of the psalm, or the preposition can also mean for Solomon.

Now most of the time in the Psalter when we have this phrase for and then the name of somebody like for David or *lu David*, it means of David or by David and it indicates the author. But when we get to the end of Psalm 72—and again, I'll try to show you



this—the end of Psalm 72, the very last verse here where my finger is says, “The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended.” Oh, hang on. Do we have an error in the Bible? Is there a contradiction? The first verse or the beginning of the first verse in italics here in our Bibles appears to be saying “of Solomon,” by Solomon. The end of the psalm says the psalm is by David. So what now is real?

Well, I’ve already indicated the multivalence, the different ways in which Hebrew can be interpreted. It seems to me that the afterthought, the editorial statement at the end of the psalm, makes it clear that the psalm is written by David for Solomon. And I believe it was written by David really as a response to God’s promise to David in 2 Samuel 7, where God promises to build David a house, a perpetual dynasty, and that God will continue to bless David and bring forth from David a Messiah who would be the Savior of the world. And I believe this psalm suggests at the beginning and the ending that perhaps David at the end of his life was actually hoping that his son Solomon might be that wonderful Savior Messiah King, who would bring all the beautiful promises and expectations that are mentioned in the psalm—of righteousness, of justice, of social justice, of wellbeing, of social harmony, of abundance and happiness for all people across the world—would come true already now, then and there.



For us as modern Christians as we read the psalm, we become aware that in the first coming of Jesus, the Messiah has solved some of our problems, but not all of them. We live in an in-between period where the salvation of God has already begun, but it has not yet been completed. And so I believe we as Christians can continue to pray both for spiritual and for political leaders, that God would help them to give their best and do their best and succeed. We can continue to pray that Jesus would return as God’s King to establish true justice, abundance, and happiness in this world for everybody.

And so this is an incredible psalm of hope, but also a psalm of wistful yearning as we await the full coming of the Messiah that David is praying for in the psalm, and that Jews and Christians the world over and through the centuries have been praying for and continue to pray for. And so, this psalm and myself, and my interpretation of it in this clip, want to invite you and encourage you to faithfully and expectantly pray that God would save us and the whole world.