

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Psalms		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	21		Mason Depew
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REIGN OF THE ROYAL SON

1. Verses 1-7: The King Brings Justice and Prosperity

- a. This psalm is one of only two attributed to Solomon, with the other being Psalm 127. Each of these psalms connects to one of the two great high points of his rule.¹
 - i. The main thrust of Psalm 72, which is asking for God to guide Solomon in ruling well, suggests that Solomon has just acceded to the throne and is grappling with the enormity of his responsibilities.²
 - ii. The wording of verse 1, referring to the king as “the royal son” further supports this setting, since it implies that Solomon is not yet recognized in his own right. He has yet to make a name for himself.
 - iii. I understand the final verse to mean that Solomon recorded these verses as the final prayer of David for his son, when he was too weak to write them himself, possibly when David gave the final instructions we read in 1 Kings 2.
- b. What makes a good king? Many people as they read history are most fascinated by daring conquerors and great builders of empires, but the king of Psalm 72 does not fit that mold.
 - i. A godly king of Israel was to judge according to the Lord’s own righteousness as revealed in the Law of Moses.³
 - ii. Nebuchadnezzar provides us a good counterexample in Daniel 4, wherein we see both his extreme arrogance⁴ and his concomitant disregard for the least of his subjects.⁵
 - iii. Sadly, kings with the character of Nebuchadnezzar have much more often been the rule rather than the exception in human history. Scripture attests to this in many places, but none more poignantly than Ecclesiastes.⁶

¹ I argue in the subpoints that Psalm 72 is about Solomon’s coming to power. Psalm 127 is connected to the Temple because it is a song of ascents referencing the building of the Temple and speaks also of the growth of Solomon’s “house,” i.e., dynasty, which together are the two parts of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7.

² Compare Psalm 72 with Solomon’s famous prayer for wisdom in 1 Kings 3:6-9.

³ Compare these first few verses of Psalm 72 with the command to kings in Deuteronomy 17:18-20, to write their own copy of the Law so they know it well. Note especially that this was so that “his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers,” i.e., so that he would not become proud and think himself above the Law, as kings have so often seen themselves.

⁴ “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” - Daniel 4:30

⁵ “Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.” - Daniel 4:27

⁶ The despair to which abuse of power often drives people is well-represented by the preacher’s words in Ecclesiastes 4:1-3: “Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. And I thought the dead who are already dead more

- c. Pay special attention to the rhetorical pattern that verses 2 and 3 establish: Psalm 72 repeatedly makes a statement which is idyllic but natural, followed by a claim that goes above and beyond what is natural. Even a perfectly righteous human king could never hope to do half of the things this king is supposed to do! With this pattern, Psalm 72 teaches its singers to recognize that the blessings which come from the king's righteousness are actually from the Lord.
 - i. In this way, "May he judge your people with righteousness" is followed by "Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people!" Rivers and fields are the natural source of an ancient economy's prosperity, not mountains. The focus on mountains and hills poetically suggests that this is supernatural prosperity coming from on high, which is to say from God himself.
 - ii. Similarly, "May he defend the cause of the poor of the people" in verse 4 is followed by "May they fear you while the sun endures" in verse 5. Do people today fear any ancient kings? Not really. Is the sun still in the sky? Yes! So once again, the psalm is clearly talking about something more than just Solomon's reign. It is implying that the king's power is totally dependent on God's rule.
- d. The main point these verses show us is that Israel's King was a mediator between God and man. We have talked before from other psalms about how the kings of Israel represented the people before their God, so that when he did well the nation prospered, and when he failed they suffered. Psalm 72 shows us the other side of this coin, too: the King also represented God before the people!
 - i. Verse 6 is a classic expression of the way God provides nourishment for his creation, but applied to the King of Israel: "May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth!" The Israelites were to see this grace coming down to them from the Lord - through Solomon - to feed their families.
 - ii. Notice how similar these promises of prosperity are to the promises of blessings for obedience in the Covenant with Moses.⁷
- e. The result of the mediator-king ruling well is peace, in verse 7. Recall that this is actually the meaning of Solomon's name, which comes from the same root as "Shalom."

2. Verses 8-14: The King's Universal Dominion

- a. These verses call for the biblical promises concerning God's Messiah to come true in the King of Israel.
 - i. The reference to "the River" in verse 8 is almost certainly the Euphrates, which is called the great river in God's promises to Abraham.⁸
 - ii. This promise of land in Psalm 72 goes much further than the land of Canaan, though. It is likely fusing the promises of Genesis 12 and 15 into one statement.⁹

fortunate than the living who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun."

⁷ For example, consider Deuteronomy 28:12, "The LORD will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow."

⁸ "On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.'"

⁹ "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." - Genesis 12:3

- iii. There is also a definite echo of Jacob's blessing to Judah here, that his offspring will rule forever, "until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples."¹⁰
- b. Notice how this king is to be everything Adam should have been: exercising dominion over all the created world, he will be the truest bearer of the Image of God!¹¹
 - i. In this vast empire of the Lord's Anointed, not only the lesser creatures but all the human nations will be united as one, recognizing his perfect rule and serving him gladly. Even the desert tribes, who are typically nomadic and submit to no central government, will bow down before *this* king, according to verse 9.
 - ii. The reference to the "kings of Sheba and Seba" is likely there because the names sound so similar, emphasizing that this Messiah-king will rule over every nation *without exception*, even the ones that are easily confused. Solomon also partly fulfilled this verse, of course, when the Queen of Sheba came to bring him more spices than anyone had seen in Israel before or since.¹²
 - iii. Once again, Nebuchadnezzar provides a perfect foil to this ideal king, since his empire's reign was vast but certainly not forever, as his dream in Daniel 4 clearly showed.¹³ He was also extremely proud of the fact that his empire included so many nations, but he led them to worship a false idol rather than acknowledge the one true God who raised him up.¹⁴
 - iv. In contrast to Nebuchadnezzar, look to Psalm 72:12-14 to see what prompts the nations to bring tribute to God's Messiah-king: not to bribe him, but out of appreciation for his excellent justice *and redemption from death*. Even with all of Solomon's riches, could he have purchased anyone's life back once their blood had already been shed? Again we see the pattern of Psalm 72 looking through Solomon's reign to a greater king who was to come. A king who will absolutely deserve all this tribute and whom people from all over the world will rejoice to serve.

3. Verses 15-20

- a. The first half of verse 15 clearly mirrors verse 10, but specifies gold, which was part of the gifts the Queen of Sheba brought to Solomon. The second half of verse 15 focuses on the appropriate honors this king should receive from his own subjects: they will gladly pray for and bless him all day long, because he is unquestionably worthy.
- b. Verse 16 again goes from something a great human king like Solomon could accomplish to something obviously supernatural. There was indeed an abundance of grain in Solomon's Israel, but grain *on the mountains?! This is clearly not normal; it is a picture*

¹⁰ Genesis 49:10

¹¹ The immediate explanation of the Image of God in Genesis 1 is, "let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." - Genesis 1:26.

¹² "Then she gave the king 120 talents of gold, and a very great quantity of spices and precious stones. Never again came such an abundance of spices as these that the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon." - 1 Kings 10:10

¹³ There is even more language here alluding to the Image of God: "The tree you saw, which grew and became strong, so that its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth, whose leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in which was food for all, under which beasts of the field found shade, and in whose branches the birds of the heavens lived— it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth." - Daniel 4:20-23

¹⁴ "And the herald proclaimed aloud, 'You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.'" - Daniel 3:4-5

of superabundant grace that is unprecedented in history. Only the great and final Messiah-king can bring this kind of prosperity.

- c. Verses 17-19 beautifully tie together, even more explicitly, Israel's King and Israel's God. Both have blessed and glorious names, i.e., absolutely spotless majesty. Both of their names shall endure forever. Both shall be recognized by all the earth. This shows, again, how in partial fulfillment God identified extremely closely with the kings of Israel, and especially Judah as his mediators to the people. But even more wondrously, this sets up expectations for the Messiah, whose glory will be absolutely identical with the Lord's name because he is the Lord God incarnate.
4. Our Savior-King, Jesus Christ fits the bill of Psalm 72 even more gloriously than the Jews could have imagined at the time.
 - a. Does he judge with righteousness, defending the poor? Absolutely. He cannot be deceived or bribed.¹⁵
 - b. Will he reign over the whole creation forever, without exception or interruptions? Most definitely.¹⁶
 - c. Does he shower his people with supernatural prosperity? Undeniably, both now and still more when he returns to earth.¹⁷
 - d. Will all nations bring tribute to them, in thanks for their redemption? His Church spread throughout the world already does this every Sunday. We would also do well to note that Old Testament prophets said the saints of the Lord would rule the nations,¹⁸ and Revelation presents believers as the true kings of their respective nations, not their earthly governments.¹⁹ Therefore, the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 may actually be considered one of the kings prophesied in Psalm 72:11.
 - e. Consider how well Christ cared for those who recognized their need of him! Turning away those who come to him in arrogance like the rich young ruler,²⁰ he welcomes little children and sinners instead. These are the citizens and co-heirs of his Kingdom. "Long may he live," indeed! This, at last, is the final, glorious fulfillment of all the prayers of David, the son of Jesse.

¹⁵ Consider, for example, his pronouncement against the Scribes in Luke 20:46-47, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

¹⁶ "And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!'" - Revelation 5:13

¹⁷ Consider 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

¹⁸ For example, "And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." - Daniel 7:27

¹⁹ "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.'" - Revelation 5:9-10

²⁰ Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17.