

Psalm 72

Epiphany and 2nd Sunday of Advent Year A
Evening Prayer Thursday Week 2
Office of Readings Epiphany and 29th December

The title reads: 'Of Solomon', presenting this as David's prayer for the son who is to succeed him. It is a prayer for whoever carries on the dynasty of David, a prayer for prosperity. This is made on the assumption that the king exercises his power in favour of the poor and needy, in accordance with the commission given him by YHWH*. Psalm 72 concludes Book Two of the psalms. It can be read in conjunction with Psalm 2 (the revolt of vassals), Psalm 45 (the king's nuptials), and Psalm 110.

On the importance of good government see the following from Proverbs:

By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just;
by me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly.

– Proverbs 8:15-16

It is an abomination to kings to do evil, for the throne is established by justice.

– Proverbs 16:12

A wise king winnows the wicked, and drives the wheel over them ...
Loyalty and faithfulness preserve the king, and his throne is upheld by justice.

– Proverbs 20:26,28

Take away the wicked from the presence of the king,
and his throne will be established in justice.

– Proverbs 25:5

If a king judges the poor with equity, his throne will be established forever.

– Proverbs 29:14

This is a messianic psalm. The failure of most of the kings and the end of the Davidic dynasty with the capture of Jerusalem in 598BC led to Messianic hopes:

Some of the kings did what was right, but others added sin to sin.

– Sirach 48:16

Except for David and Hezekiah and Josiah, all of them were great sinners.

– Sirach 49:4

In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'YHWH is our righteousness.'

– Jeremiah 33:15-16

The kingdom of God

Jesus' followers came to identify him as the one promised by God to bring about God's reign in the world. His kingdom has the following characteristics. It is

- an eternal kingdom

He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

– Luke 1:33

- a universal kingdom. This is the point behind the story of the Magi in Matthew chapter two. It is also dramatised in the Pentecost scene in Acts chapter two.

All nations will come and worship before you, for your judgments have been revealed.

– Revelation 15:4

- a kingdom of justice and peace (see the beatitudes: Matthew 5:6,9).

The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

– Romans 14:17

Christ Jesus became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

– 1Corinthians 1:30

A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

– James 3:18

- a kingdom of victory over oppression

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armour in which he trusted and divides his plunder.

– Luke 11:21-22

They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings.

– Revelation 17:14

- a kingdom in favour of the poor

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

– Matthew 5:3

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.

– Luke 4:18

The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.

– Luke 7:22

- a kingdom of vindication and redemption

He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

– Titus 2:14

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

– Matthew 20:28

- a kingdom of one who lives

I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever.

– Revelation 1:18

We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

– Romans 6:9

- a kingdom to be acknowledged by all

At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

– Philippians 2:10

Then I saw another angel flying in mid heaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation and tribe and language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.’

– Revelation 14:6-7

Part One

The foundation of the king’s reign is to be God’s justice.

To govern on any other basis is to abuse one’s power –
an abuse expressed in the following texts.

Let our might be our law of right, for what is weak proves itself to be useless.

– Wisdom 2:11

They sweep by like the wind; they transgress and become guilty;
their own might is their god!

– Habakkuk 1:11

Alas for those who devise wickedness and evil deeds on their beds!
When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in their power.

– Micah 2:1

God will bring about dynastic succession (the handing on of power from the king to ‘the king’s son’) only if the king rules with God’s justice.

He asked you for life; you gave it to him –
length of days forever and ever.

– Psalm 21:4

Give your servant therefore an understanding mind
to govern your people, able to discern between good
and evil; for who can govern this your great people?

– 1Kings 3:9 (Solomon is speaking).

Consider what you are doing, for you judge not on
behalf of human beings but on YHWH’s behalf; he is
with you in giving judgment.

– 2Chronicles 19:6

(words of Joshaphat to the judges he appointed)

**¹Give the king *your* judgments, O God, and *your* justice* to the king’s son
²that he may judge *your* people with justice*,
your poor with right judgment.***

The kingdom of God

³Through the exercise of justice*, may the mountains and hills yield peace for the people.

You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the place, YHWH, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, YHWH, that your hands have established.

– Exodus 15:17

⁴May he defend the cause of the poor* of the people, help* the needy families, and crush the oppressor.

Neutrality in face of oppression is complicity in injustice.

Part Two

The endurance and extension of the kingdom

⁵May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon lasts, from generation to generation.

In the light of a king's face there is life, and his favour is like the clouds that bring the spring rain.

– Proverbs 16:15

⁶May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.

A king's favour is like dew on the grass.

– Proverbs 19:12

YHWH will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth.

– Hosea 6:3

The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.

– 2Samuel 23:3-4 (David's last words)

⁷In his days may justice* flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit.

– Isaiah 27:6

His shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like that of Lebanon. They shall again live beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom like the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon. O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; your faithfulness comes from me.

– Hosea 14:6-8

The “Great River” is the Euphrates.

His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

– Zechariah 9:10

I will set your borders from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates.

– Exodus 23:31

Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

– Psalm 110:1

With their faces to the ground kings shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet.

– Isaiah 49:23

They shall lick dust like a snake, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their fortresses.

– Micah 7:17

The only other mention of Tarshish in the psalms is in Psalm 48:7. The psalmist is speaking here of kings that Israel encounters in sea trade. This present psalm is the only psalm to mention either Sheba or Seba. Sheba (Genesis 10:28) seems to refer to modern Yemen on the eastern shore of the Red Sea in southwest Arabia. Seba (Genesis 10:7) seems to refer to modern Eritrea on the opposite western shore on the horn of Africa. Modern archeology indicates that tradition exaggerated the extent of Solomon’s empire:

Solomon was sovereign over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines, even to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.

– 1Kings 4:21

I delivered the poor who cried, and the orphan who had no helper. The blessing of the wretched came upon me, and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I championed the cause of the stranger.

– Job 29:12-16

‘Lives’ and ‘life’ translate *nepeš*. See the article ‘Being’ in the Introduction.

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

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

**¹⁰May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles pay him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts.
¹¹May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him.**

¹²For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor* who have no one to defend them.

¹³He has pity on the weak and the needy, he saves* the lives* of the needy.

¹⁴From oppression and violence he redeems* their life*; for their blood is precious in his sight.

The kingdom of God

¹⁵Long 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.

¹⁶May there be abundance of grain in the land, waving to and fro in the wind to the tops of the mountains; may its fruit be luxuriant like that of Lebanon; and its sheaves like the grass of the field.

¹⁷May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun. May all nations be blessed in him; may they pronounce him happy*.

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

¹⁹Blessed* be his glorious* name forever; may his glory* fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen.

²⁰The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended.

I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever.

– Revelation 1:18

We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

– Romans 6:9

Compare the name ‘Abraham’ given to Abram (Genesis 12:2; 18:18; 22:18). See also the name ‘Jesus’ given to the son of Mary and Joseph. (Luke 1:33).

These verses mark the conclusion to Book Two (Psalms 42-72). Compare the conclusion to Book One:

Blessed be YHWH, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
Amen and Amen.

– Psalm 41:13

If this was placed before verses 18-19 we could understand it as a conclusion to Psalm 72, David’s prayers for his son Solomon. Standing as it does after the verses which conclude Book Two of the psalter its significance is obscure, as Psalm 86 in Book Three, Psalms 101 and 103 in Book Four, and Psalms 108-110, 122, 124, 131, and 138-145 in Book Five all mention David in their titles.