

STUDIES IN PSALMS

Psalm 71

1. This is indeed a unique psalm in several particulars:—the allusions to old age is one—the nature of such allusions is also unique—how? Could you give another unusual quality about this psalm?
2. The question of authorship is raised—what prevents us from accepting the title—"By David"? Several other authors have been suggested—name two. Rotherham has an interesting suggestion as to authorship—who is it?
3. Read verse twenty of this psalm—is this a reference to life after death—to the resurrection? Discuss.
4. Could this psalm be used to aid the aged today? Read the paraphrase version before you answer. Discuss.

PSALM 72

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A People's Prayer for a Perfect King.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-4, Prayer for King of Royal Descent, that the Divine Attributes of Justice and Righteousness may be Given Him, and that he may exercise them with Fruitfulness and Efficiency. Stanza II., vers. 5-8, Unlimited Continuance, Penetrating Gentleness, Abounding Fruitfulness, and Universal Extension, desired for his reign. Stanza III., vers. 9-11, The Submission to Him of All Enemies and Rivals, is besought. Stanza IV., vers. 12-15, these Petitions are based upon the King's Effective Interposition for the Needy and Helpless. Stanza V., vers. 16-17, Material Prosperity and the Brightening of City Life, entreated; as Rebounding to the Perpetual Praise of the King, and as Realising Ancient Covenant Blessing. Benediction: Closing this Second Book of Psalms, and therewith associating the God of Israel and his wondrous doings with all the Earth, which is thus filled with his glory.

(Lm.) By Solomon.

- 1 O God! thy justice¹ to the King do thou give,
and thy righteousness unto the son of a king;

1. "So Sep. and Jerome in accordance with the parallel 'righteous.'"
Br. M.T.: "just decisions" ("rights"—Del.)

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- 2 May he judge thy people with righteousness,
and thy humbled ones with justice:
- 3 May the mountains bear¹ tidings of welfare to the people,
and the hills in righteousness:
- 4 May he vindicate the humbled of the people,
bring salvation to the sons of the needy;
and crush the oppressor.
- 5 May he continue² as long as the sun,
and in presence of the moon,—
to generation of generations.
- 6 May he come down as rain on meadows to be mown,
as myriad drops replenishing the earth.
- 7 May there be a springing forth in his days of righteousness,³
and an abundance of welfare until there be no moon.
- 8 And may he have dominion from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
- 9 Before him may adversaries⁴ kneel
and as for his foes the dust may they lick!
- 10 The Kings of Tarshish and the Coastlands a gift may they
render,
the kings of Sheba and Seba a present bring near.
- 11 And may there bow down to him all kings,
all nations do service to him.
- 12 Because he rescueth the needy from the mighty,⁵
and the humbled when there is no helper for him:
- 13 Hath pity on the weak and the needy,
and the lives⁶ of the needy saveth:
- 14 From oppression and violence redeemeth their life,⁷
and precious is their blood in his sight:
- 15 "Let him live then! and let there be given to him of the gold
of Sheba;"

1. "The mountains are personified for the messengers who come over them, proclaiming from all parts the prevalence of peace and righteousness —Br. Otherwise, if the verb be rendered "bear"="bring forth": "May peace or well-being be the fruit that ripens upon all mountains and hills" —Del.

2. So Sep. (*sunparamenei*).

3. So in some cod. (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn.

4. "So most moderns"—O.G. 850. Reading *zarim* for *zum*. M.T.: "desert dwellers."

5. So it shd. be (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn. M.T.: "him that crieth out."

6. U.: "their souls."

7. U.: "their soul."

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- so will he pray for him continually,
all the day invoke on him blessing!¹
- 16 May there be an expanse² of corn in the earth unto the top
of the mountains,
and the fruit thereof rustle like Lebanon;
and they of the city bloom like fresh shoots of the earth.
- 17 Be his name to the ages,
in presence of the sun fruitful³ be his name!
May all the families of the ground⁴ bless themselves in him
all nations pronounce him happy.
- 18 Blessed be Jehovah God of Israel,⁵
who doeth wondrous things by himself alone;
- 19 And blessed be his glorious name to the ages,
and filled with his glory be all the earth:
Amen and amen!
- 20 Ended are the prayers of David son of Jesse.
(Lm. None; unless ver. 20 be one.)

PARAPHRASE

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O God, help the king to judge as You would, and help his son to walk in godliness.

2 Help him to give justice to Your people, even to the poor!

3 May the mountains and hills flourish in prosperity because of his good reign.

4 Help him to defend the poor and needy and to crush their oppressors.

5 May the poor and needy revere You constantly, as long as sun and moon continue in the skies! Yes forever!

6 May the reign of this Son⁶ of mine be as gentle and fruit-

1. "The poor man is he who revives and is endowed, who intercedes and blesses; while the king is the beneficent giver. It is left for the reader to supply in thought the right subjects to the separate verbs"—Del.

2. "An abundance that occupies a wide space"—Del. "Expanse(?)"—Dr.

3. Ml.: "propagate," or "be propagated." Some cod. (w. Aram., Sep., Vul.)—"be established"—Gn.

4. So it shd. be (w. Sep., Vul.)—Gn. Cp. Gen. 12:3.

5. M.T.: "Jehovah God, God of Israel;" but some cod. (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.) omit first occurrence of "God"—Gn.

6. The reference seems to look beyond Solomon's son to Jesus the Messiah.

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ful as the springtime rains upon the grass—like showers that water the earth!

7 May all good men flourish in His reign with abundance of peace and to the end of time.

8 Let Him reign from sea to sea, and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.

9 The desert nomads shall bow before Him; His enemies shall fall face downward in the dust.

10 Kings along the Mediterranean coast—the kings of Tarshish and the islands—and those from Sheba and from Seba—all will bring their gifts.

11 Yes, kings from everywhere! All will bow before Him! All will serve Him!

12 He will take care of the helpless and poor when they cry to Him; for they have no one else to defend them.

13 He feels pity for the weak and needy, and will rescue them.

14 He will have them from oppression and from violence, for their lives are precious to Him.

15 And He shall live; and to Him will be given the gold of Sheba, and there will be constant praise¹ for Him. His people² will bless Him all day long.

16 Bless us with abundant crops throughout the land, even on the highland plains; may there be fruit like that of Lebanon; may the cities be as full of people as the fields are of grass.

17 His name will be honored forever; it will continue as the sun; and all will be blessed in Him; all nations will praise Him.

18 Blessed be Jehovah God, the God of Israel, Who only does wonderful things!

19 Blessed be His glorious name forever! Let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and amen!

20 (This ends the psalms of David, son of Jesse.)

EXPOSITION

If we assume that behind this psalm lay many prayers by David taking effect in the mind of Solomon his son by fostering a worthy ideal of what a good king might do for his people and a determination to fulfil that ideal; and that the youthful heir to the throne himself embodied that ideal and that determination

1. Literally, "men shall pray for him continually."

2. Implied. Literally, "they" or "he."

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in a prayer to be used by his people on his accession to the throne,—we shall probably form a correct conception of the origin of the psalm. The deep and wide desire here expressed is worthy of David; the form it assumes is Solomonic to a marked degree; and if, beyond this, there are conceptions going far beyond any which we should have thought it likely that Solomon would entertain,—these we may attribute in part to the educative influence which we have elsewhere seen cause to attribute to the Davidic Kingly covenant communicated through Nathan the prophet, and partly to the free action of the inspiring Spirit on the psalmist's mind. There is certainly one element in the psalm, which might have seemed at first sight better suited to a later reign, such as that of Hezekiah—following the declension of King Ahaz's days, or even of Josiah—succeeding to the corruptions of the reigns of Manasseh and Amon; namely, a background of existing oppression and wrong, loudly calling for relief, and which we can with difficulty imagine David to have bequeathed to his son Solomon. If, notwithstanding this, we feel, as well we may, that at no later period than that immediately succeeding David's day, could there have been, in the atmosphere, such a constellation of bright hopes, ready for recognition and psalmody, as here bursts upon our view, then we must needs see, once more, the Antitype breaking loose from the Type, and going beyond it. And this is, in all probability, what we are here called upon to recognise; for, if, with the Targum, we hold that this Ideal King is ultimately the Messiah, and if we look for Messiah's manifested reign to follow upon the evil domination of Antichrist, it is easy to see what a throng of wicked deeds of oppression, the world over, will be waiting for relief and redress when the Messiah himself ascends the Throne of David.

Not only in respect of manifold oppressions needing royal interposition in order to their removal, do we here perceive an element carrying us beyond Solomon, but in other ways besides; for example, in the universality of his dominion, in the peerless glory of his name, and in the realisation through the Ideal King of the worldwide blessing promised to Abraham. Leaving the thoughtful reader to conceive, as best he may, how mighty the Messianic impulse of the psalm thus appears, it may serve a useful purpose to emphasise one or two of the more obvious characteristics of the Ideal King as here portrayed.

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The central position and causal efficacy of Stanza IV. are remarkable. This stanza is introduced by the only *Because* of the psalm. And here let us note what it is that leads up to this stronghold of the logical sense—that it is nothing less than the Imperial Supremacy which is desired for the Ideal King. Let his *adversaries kneel* before him; let his *foes lick the dust*; let *distant kings* come to *render him homage* with their *rich gifts*; in short, let *all kings bow down to him* and *all nations do him service*; BECAUSE he deserves it—because he deserves it in a peculiar way, with a worth proved by deeds, deeds of pity and love and matchless generosity; for note how the verbs are accumulated in support of this one strong *because*: “because” he *rescueth, hath pity, saveth, redeemeth*, and finally, if Delitzsch is correct in the striking climax to which he brings this stanza, *endoweth*, out of his own royal treasury, the lives that he spareth: —THEREFORE let all kings and nations do him willing homage and service, gladly acknowledging that never such a king bare rule before. Not by doings of power, but by deeds of love, is universal dominion here desired.

And yet there is power behind and along with the love: power wielded by love, power giving effect to love—no pity for the perverters of justice, to the extent of sparing them to be perverters again. No! the implied threats to those who wrong their poor neighbors, are strong as iron, fitted to strike terror into cruel hearts. In order that he may *vindicate the humbled* and *bring salvation to the needy*, let him—so it is expressly desired—*let him crush the oppressor! May his foes lick the dust*. Language like this ought to stand high and clear above the possibility of mistake.

Nevertheless, this Ideal King knows how to be gentle. It is desired that his beneficent influence be *like rain coming down on a mowing*, bringing the crop to perfection before it is cut. How much that beautiful phrase, *coming down*, suggests—of efficacious gentleness, descending into all the nooks and crannies and crevices of actual lowly life. Nor does the psalmist shrink from pointing to actual temporal benefits, anticipated to result from this gentle yet strong king's dominion. In language which it would be a sin to spiritualize, he prays, that, instead of *uncultivated wastes*, agriculture may carry her triumphs, terrace *abovē terrace*, to the summits of the mountains; and then, while the breezes of Lebanon are still upon his cheeks, he thinks of

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the pale-faced *city-dwellers*, and desires that they may *bloom like the fresh shoots of the earth*.

Such is the picture. It is Messianic. But it is unfulfilled. It does not correspond with the spiritual and invisible reign of the Messiah in heaven. It is a mockery of the down-trodden of earth, to treat this psalm as if it were now in course of fulfilment. It is valid, but it is in reserve. It has never yet been fulfilled; but it will be fulfilled in the letter and in the spirit. Why its accomplishment has been so long delayed, must be sought elsewhere. Meantime, a comprehensive study of all the psalms which have a direct bearing on the Kingdom of God, will assist the student to get upon the high-road of correct and successful interpretation. When men are ready to do ungrudgingly honour to the God of Israel, then will the time not be far distant when the *whole earth shall be filled with his glory*. Cp. Intro., Chapter III., "Kingdom."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. There seems to be at least two ideal kings—who are they?
2. All of the characteristics of God's ideal king cannot find fulfillment in anyone in the history of Israel—what is important about this thought?
3. What shall we say of "existing oppression and wrong, loudly calling for relief" if we relate this psalm to the time of Solomon? Discuss.
4. There is the wonderful promise of the universal reign of this king—"his adversaries will kneel before him; his foes will lick the dust, distant kings will come to do him homage—and to give him gifts—*why* will there be such a response to this king?
5. Give five blessings granted because of this king. Discuss
6. When will all these grand descriptions become a reality? Discuss.