

Psalms 72:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son.

Analysis

Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. This royal psalm, traditionally ascribed to Solomon, opens with prayer for the king to receive divine wisdom and justice. "Thy judgments" (תִּשְׁפֹּטְךָ/mishpatekha) refers to God's righteous decisions, legal verdicts, and governing principles. The king needs not his own wisdom but God's revealed justice to rule rightly. "Thy righteousness" (צִדְקָתְךָ/tzidqatekha) is God's own righteous character and covenantal faithfulness that should characterize royal governance.

"The king" and "the king's son" use Hebrew synonymous parallelism—both refer to the same person (likely Solomon, David's son and heir). The designation "king's son" emphasizes dynastic succession and the Davidic covenant's perpetuation. God promised David an eternal dynasty (2 Samuel 7:12-16), and each king's rule tested and displayed that covenant faithfulness.

This prayer establishes that righteous rule derives from divine wisdom, not human cleverness or power. Kings govern as God's vice-regents, implementing His justice on earth. This anticipates Christ, David's ultimate Son, who perfectly embodies divine justice and righteousness (Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:1-5). Jesus is the King who needs no prayer for God's judgments because He IS God's judgment incarnate (John 5:22-27).

Historical Context

Psalm 72's superscription attributes it to Solomon, though Hebrew allows "for Solomon" or "about Solomon" as well as "by Solomon." Ancient Near Eastern royal ideology emphasized kings as channels of divine justice. Egyptian pharaohs and Mesopotamian rulers claimed divine authority for their governance. Israel's king, however, ruled under divine law—subject to Torah and accountable to prophets who spoke God's word to them.

Solomon famously prayed for wisdom at Gibeon: "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad" (1 Kings 3:9). God granted this request, and Solomon's wisdom became legendary (1 Kings 3:16-28, 4:29-34, 10:1-13). Yet Solomon's later compromise—multiplying wives, accumulating wealth, turning to idolatry (1 Kings 11:1-13)—demonstrated that even the wisest king failed to maintain perfect justice and righteousness.

This failure pointed forward to David's greater Son. Prophets foretold a coming King who would rule with perfect justice (Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:1-5, 16:5, Jeremiah 23:5-6, 33:15-16). Jesus fulfilled these prophecies, inaugurating the kingdom of God with perfect wisdom and righteousness.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does this verse establish that righteous governance flows from divine wisdom rather than human cleverness?

2. What does it mean for earthly rulers to govern as God's vice-regents implementing His justice?
3. How did Solomon's wisdom and eventual failure point forward to the need for David's greater Son?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵלֹהִים	מִשְׁפָטֶיךָ	מֶלֶךְ	תְּ	אֶת-מִצְדָּקָתֶךָ	לְבָנֶךָ	מֶלֶךְ
O God	thy judgments	the king	Give	and thy righteousness	son	the king
H430	H4941	H4428	H5414	H6666	H1121	H4428

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 11:2 (Parallel theme): And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;

1 Chronicles 29:19 (Parallel theme): And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all these things, and to build the palace, for the which I have made provision.

2 Chronicles 1:10 (Judgment): Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great?

Psalms 127:1 (Parallel theme): Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

John 3:34 (References God): For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.