

PSALM 72: AN HISTORICAL AND MESSIANIC
CURRENT EXAMPLE OF ANTIOCHENE
HERMENEUTICAL *THEORIA*

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It is an amazing fact that, despite the absence of the term *theoria* (the Greek term usually rendered as “sight,” “insight,” or “contemplation”) from the vocabulary of the Apostolic Fathers, this term (which began to appear quite frequently from the third and fourth Christian centuries forward), should have had so little effect, or any major part, in the current discussions of evangelical biblical hermeneutics, even though the issues are very much the same today as they were then. The founder of the “Antiochene school” or the “Antiochian model,” of course, was Lucian of Antioch (d. AD 312), who along with such names as Julian of Eclanum, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodoret of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428), Severian of Gabala, Jerome (c. 347–420), Theodoret of Cyrillus (c. 393–466) and John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), set the hermeneutical course for some solutions to many of the key problems afflicting evangelicalism’s debates in biblical interpretation today.

One of the few evangelicals who has contributed to this area is Bradley Nassif’s Fordham University doctoral dissertation in 1991¹ on *theoria*. Nassif’s work could supply the help evangelicals need to help them interpret the NT’s use of the OT and in its understanding of the prophetic texts of the older testament. Nassif’s contribution has enormous implications for much of the contemporary debate, though much of that research is basically unrecognized in most instances by evangelicals. The real significance of the *theoria* model is that in addition to the Antiochenes’ quest for the “historical,” “ethical,” “straightforward,” or “rational” meaning of the scriptural text, *theoria* also sought both the homiletical/spiritual aspect as well as the messianic aspects that were also to be found in the text itself rather than attaching ones *ab extra* to the underlying text.

Antiochenes stood over against the Alexandrian School, which used the allegorical method for interpreting Scripture. Nassif² presented the Antiochenes as utilizing four essential features of *theoria*, namely: (1) the ground of all meaning in a text is found in the historical reality of the past event, which may however, serve as a mirror so that one sees, where it is

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¹ Bradley Nassif. *Antiochene Theoria in John Chrysostom’s Exegesis* (Ph.D. diss., Fordham University, New York, 1991).

² *Ibid.* 51.

legitimate, another image of another order while reflecting the people and events of the distant past at the same time in that one single meaning. (2) *Theoria* also at once embraced another posterior reality within the original historical meaning as part and parcel of its vision. (3) The relationship of the historical reality in the text to the ontologically future object can be likened to the way that the mediocre falls short of the perfect, the small of the large, or the image of a person gives way to one who is portrayed. (4) Both the historical and the prophetic, or spiritual, were direct, immediate terms of *theoria*, but in different ways.

It was “Julian of Eclanum, who learned the principle of *theoria* from Theodore while living with him from A.D. 421 to 428, after being exiled from Italy,”³ who demonstrated this method from the apostle Paul’s use of Hos 1:10 (“and it will come about that, in the place where it is said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ It will be said to them, ‘You are sons of the living God’”) in Rom 9:26. Julian explained:

The apostle wants to show us which rule we must follow in the interpretation of the prophetic books. It is this: That when [we hear the prophets] speaking about the Jews, [and] something is promised that goes behind the small circle of people, yet we see it partly fulfilled in that nation, we know from *theoria* (*per theoriam*) that the promise is given for all people. . . . It will not be appropriate to say that the recall from the Babylonian captivity is predicted according to history, and the liberty given by Christ [is] according to allegory. No. The prophet predicted both things together at one time, jointly (*cum sermo propheticus solide utrumque promiserit*) in order that the mediocrity of the first fulfillment would predict the abundance of the second. . . . So what Hosea was saying about the Babylonian times, Paul attributes to the facts of the Savior.⁴

It is from this same Antiochene stance that I propose to interpret the historical and messianic meaning of Psalm 72. Without using the term *theoria*, Willis J. Beecher proposed a very similar approach to interpreting such nuances in Scripture. Beecher did not use the term *theoria*, but spoke of a “generic Interpretation” of messianic prophecy. Beecher described it this way:

A generic prediction is one which regards an event as occurring in a series of parts, separated by intervals, and expresses itself in language that may apply indifferently to the nearest part, or to the remoter parts, or to the whole—in other words, a prediction which, in applying to the whole of a complex event also applies to . . . its parts.⁵

The only major difference between Beecher’s definition and that of the Antiochenes is that Beecher allows for “multiple fulfillments” (rather than the Antiochene “double fulfillment, which could be understood today as equal to a “double meaning” or “double sense,” which ultimately the Antiochenes denied) as the historic “means” or series of historical happenings in that

³ Ibid. 54.

⁴ Ibid. 55, as Nassif cited it from the Latin in A. Vaccari, “La ‘*theoria*’ nella scuola esegetica di antiochia,” *Bib* 1 (1920) 20–22. The English translation is one Nassif commissioned.

⁵ Willis J. Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963; repr. of 1905 ed.) 130.

same prophetic line by which God kept this promise alive in history between the time of the original historic event that occasioned the prophecy and its ultimate fulfillment.

Let us investigate how such interpretation would explain Psalm 72.

I. INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 72

Surprisingly, the NT nowhere quotes from Psalm 72 as a messianic psalm, so this fact in and of itself would limit some from using what they would describe as a Christotelic or an apostolic approach to “reinterpret” the text from a NT standpoint alone since the NT did not give an official interpretation to Psalm 72. Nevertheless, so clear is the picture of the king described in this Psalm, and so extensive and far-reaching are the boundaries of his reign, not to mention the similarities seen between this psalm and the prophecies of Isa 11:1–5 or Isaiah 60–62 that the case for its being a messianic psalm can hardly be diminished, even when taken solely on its own terms apart from any subsequent use or application. Despite the hyperbolic and metaphorical use of language in this Psalm that extended the limits of the reign of this king well beyond the boundaries of Israel, and the times of Solomon or any of the Davidic kings who ruled up to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, Psalm 72 simultaneously celebrated an illustrious and exalted reign of that Israelite king in the day this psalm was written as one who also distinguished himself in peace, righteousness, and benevolent concern for the poor, miserable, and oppressed of his own times as well as final relief in the end times.

It is important to note the Antiochene appeal to the “hyperbolic” language, which is what clued them into noticing how the historical person or event simultaneously embraced the messianic prediction. Hyperbole was not only a matter of a conscious exaggeration, but it is the signal to the prophet that the divine revelation extended beyond the person or event immediately addressed in the text.

II. ROYAL OR KINGSHIP PSALMS

Psalm 72 is one of the “Royal or Kingship Psalms.” It was Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932), who in his influential *Die Psalmen* (1926–28), proposed to interpret the Psalms according to their literary forms. Gunkel highlighted ten Royal Psalms (Psalms 2; 20; 21; 28; 45; 72; 101; 110; 132; and 144:1–11); however, Psalms 101 and 110 did not meet his own criteria, even though they had a setting involving kingship. Since Gunkel had allowed these two psalms with Davidic superscriptions into his category of Royal Psalms, J. H. Eaton⁶ used this additional criterion along with the criteria of the anonymous “I” psalms to develop twenty-four additional characteristics found in these anonymous Psalms resulting in a further fifty-four Royal Psalms added to Gunkel’s original ten Royal Psalms.

⁶ J. H. Eaton. *Kingship and the Psalms* (2d ed.; SBT 32; London: SCM, 1986) 1–26.

This raised a further question: What about the placement of these Royal Psalms in the Psalter? Did the context and their placement amongst the neighboring Psalms affect the interpretation of these kingship psalms?

III. THE CANONICAL PLACEMENT OF PSALM 72

The name of Brevard S. Childs has become permanently attached to discussions of the "canonical shape" found both within and between the books of the Bible.⁷ Others have followed Childs and have gone on to investigate why certain psalms are placed precisely at the "seams" or divisions of the five books in the Psalter, and what is the pattern of organization, if one is to be identified at all.⁸

But more to the point of our study, Walter Brueggemann and Patrick Miller noted that the placement of Psalm 73 at the beginning of the Psalter's Book III (Psalms 73–89) stands in juxtaposition with Psalm 72, a psalm "for/by Solomon" that ends Book II of the Psalms.⁹ This raises the question, if this were done intentionally, why are the two psalms placed back to back? If Psalm 73 is of a sapiential or wisdom psalm, as most contend, while Psalm 72 is of a royal type, does the placement of these two psalms have more meaning and significance than immediately meets the eye at first glance?¹⁰

In fact, that is precisely the argument of G. H. Wilson.¹¹ Wilson contended that by means of charting the progression in the royal psalms placed at the "seams" of Books I–III, it is possible to witness the story of the rise and fall of the Davidic monarchy. For Wilson, Psalm 2 marked the inauguration of the Davidic Covenant while Psalm 72 marked its transition to the future Israelite kings, leaving Psalm 89 (at the end of Book III) to lament over what appeared to be Yahweh's ultimate (if in our view only a temporary) rejection of the Davidic kingship. This, according to some, would explain why the Royal Psalms later on played a smaller role (compared to Books I–III) in Books IV–V in the Psalter.

Christopher Seitz has taken the argument a step further.¹² He proposed the view that the Davidic house and the kingship of God are portrayed in

⁷ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 511–25.

⁸ Mentions should be made of J. C. McCann, ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield, JSOT, 1993); G. H. Wilson, "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," *JSOT* 35 (1986) 85–94; idem, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985); and idem, "The Shape of the Book of Psalms," *Int* 46 (1992) 129–42.

⁹ Walter Brueggemann and Patrick D. Miller, "Psalm 73 as Canonical Marker," *JSOT* 72 (1996) 45–56.

¹⁰ See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Prosperity of the Wicked and the Perspective of the Believer: Preaching and Teaching Psalm 73," in *Preaching and Teaching the Psalms. Festschrift for John Davis* (forthcoming).

¹¹ G. H. Wilson, "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," *JSOT* 35 (1986) 85–94.

¹² Christopher Seitz, "Royal Promises in the Canonical Books of Isaiah and the Psalms," in *Isaiah in Scripture and the Church* (unpublished manuscript, 1994) referred to in Brueggemann and Miller, "Psalm 73" 51, n. 17.

the Psalms (and the book of Isaiah) as being parallel to each other. Consequently, as the Davidic throne *recedes* into the background and then finally *disappears*, as it would appear, at the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, then it is that the kingship of God *rises* in prominence. According to this line of thinking, Psalm 72 can be viewed as the fading marker of the Davidic line and his dynasty at the completion of Books I and II of the Psalms. But in Book III, Psalms 73–89, a new regrouping appears as Psalm 74 and 79 lament over Jerusalem and Psalm 89:46–51 ends with a note on the failure of kingship in Israel. On this view, Psalm 73:3–16 contrasts an improper way of relating to God, as illustrated by the “wicked” who are at ease, well-off, rich, and arrogant in their idolatry of self, over against Psalm 73:18–28, where the “heart” is focused on God and nearness to God is a daily experience. Therefore, just as the governance of God emerges in the latter part of Psalm 73, so God’s rule and reign emerges in the Enthronement Psalms of Book IV (Psalms 90–106) and take center stage from that point forward in time. Given the fact that the vocabulary of Ps 73:18–28 is so strikingly similar to that of Psalms 15–24, where these Royal Psalms are centered contextually around Psalm 19 with its obedience to the law, as Patrick Miller has noted, it is clear that kingship and Torah must also go together.¹³ In fact, the kingship law of Deut 17:14–20 had been specifically instructed that the king was to make a personal copy of the law of God from which he would be enabled to rule and reign justly and wisely.

J. A. Grant raised another resulting theological problem, one that seems to come from the fact that the rest of the OT appears to be much more critical of the Davidic office of kingship than the Royal Psalms present that kingly office.¹⁴ However, he saw the resolution to the problem in the fact that the kings of Israel rarely exercised their office in accordance with the Torah of God as provided for in the kingship law in Deut 17:14–20 in particular. Moreover, when the Royal Psalms are read in their contextual settings in the Psalter, the Psalter tended to direct our attention beyond the contemporary expression of kingship in Israel to a future king who would exceed the best examples, even of those in the Davidic line. Grant, however, goes on to ask: Why were these Davidic poems retained so long after the celebrations of their enthronements and royal weddings had ended? His answer is that there were a “democratization” and a “reinterpretation” of these kingship psalms that gave an “ahistoricity” to them, thereby allowing them to be appropriated by later communities of believers as it would be most relevant to their special needs and settings.

It is directly in answer to this unnecessary hermeneutical move that the return to the Antiochene hermeneutic of *theoria* can prove most useful.

¹³ Patrick D. Miller, “Kingship, Torah Obedience, and Prayer: the Theology of Psalms 15–24,” in K. Seybold and E. Zenger, eds., *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung* (Herders Biblische Studien 1; Freiburg: Herder, 1994) 127–42.

¹⁴ J. A. Grant, “Kingship Psalms,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008) 375–78; and idem, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy’s Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (SBLAB 17; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).

Instead of “democratizing” or “reinterpreting” what the psalter had said, the Antiochene *theoria* and Beecher’s “Generic Prediction” both insisted on retaining the historical setting and meaning which encompassed within that same whole idea the hyperbolic progression (i.e. a conscious enlargement, extension, or exaggeration) of the same single idea into the future, final realization of the ultimate king, the Messiah. This can be seen in the exegesis that follows and the discussion of the criteria for such that comes at the end of this exegesis.

IV. AN EXEGESIS OF PSALM 72

According to some church traditions, Psalm 72 is the chief psalm of the festival of Epiphany, which has given it the name of *festum trium regnum*. Therefore, in this long standing tradition of the church, this is at once a psalm from or about Solomon and his reign (the historic event) as it is a psalm that is nonetheless messianic and one rightly applied to the Festival of Epiphany (the final fulfillment as a result of the hyperbolic expressions and analogy of antecedent Scripture in the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants).¹⁵

The ancient tradition found in the title to this Psalm was that Solomon was either its author or dedicatee.¹⁶ The Hebrew *lishlomoh*,¹⁷ according to its usual acceptation regards Solomon as the author, but very little in our argument that follows depends on that position since it works just as well if the psalm is dedicated to him, is about him, or if it was written by him (even though verse 20 should not be used to detract from the possibility that Solomon was the author of this psalm). One of the Psalms of Ascent, Psalm 127, also has the same attribution of the psalm to Solomon, but these are the only two Psalms which have Solomon’s name attached to them.¹⁸

Most seem to want to view Psalm 72 as composed of four strophes based on the perceived four themes of the king’s and Messiah’s reign as being: (1) righteous (72:1–7); (2) universal (vv. 8–11); (3) beneficent (vv. 12–14); and (4) perpetual (vv. 15–17).¹⁹ But Charles A. Briggs’s²⁰ case for three strophes, each beginning with a prayer in verses 1, 8, and 15 seemed to be more faithful to the format of the psalm. In Briggs’s view, the three prayers corresponded to Solomon’s prayer for wisdom at Gibeon and his prayer at

¹⁵ See our case for *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

¹⁶ D. A. Brueggeman, “Psalms 4: Titles,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* 613–21. Because so many of the titles remain untranslatable, even in the third-century BC Septuagintal rendering, many feel these titles in Psalms (as opposed to titles in the other books of the Bible) are original parts of the Hebrew text. Cf. B. S. Childs, “Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis,” *JSS* 16(1971) 137–50.

¹⁷ Verse 20 in no way negates a Solomonic authorship, for verse 20 is a colophon for the entire Book II of the Psalter and thus was not a part of the original psalm.

¹⁸ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “When You Face Domestic Pressures: Families During the Journey: Psalm 127,” in *The Journey Isn’t Over: The Pilgrim Psalms for Life’s Challenges and Joys* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 81–92.

¹⁹ For example, James Smith, *What the Bible Teaches About the Promised Messiah* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993) 195.

²⁰ Charles A. Briggs, *Messianic Prophecy* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1889) 137–40.

the dedication of the Temple. He divided the text, then, as follows: I. 72:1–7; II. 72:8–14; III. 72:15–19. Thus, we would arrange this Royal Psalm into three major divisions, which breakdown will also employ what is called in homiletical circles a propositional sermon, which will serve as the structure for our exegesis:

1. Text for exposition: Psalm 72: 1–19
2. Focal point or “Big Idea” of the passage that gives the subject for the teaching or preaching: verse 7, “In his [Solomon’s and Messiah’s] days the righteous will flourish; prosperity (peace) will abound till the moon is no more.”
3. Subject of message or teaching: “Enjoying the Blessings of the Past and the Promised Messianic Rule and Reign”
4. Homiletical keyword for the propositional teaching or preaching: “Characteristics”
5. Interrogative used with the keyword: How should we characterize our enjoyment of the blessings of the Promised Davidic messianic rule and reign?
6. Outline for teaching or preaching expositionally:
 - I. By Observing How Righteous and Fair the Just King is to All (72:1–7)
 - II. By Noting How Extensive and Beneficent the Just King is to the Whole World (72:8–14)
 - III. By Sensing How Prosperous and Blessed the Just King is to All (72:15–19)

The imagery of this psalm is prompted by the peaceful and prosperous reign of the grandest monarch Judah ever had, King Solomon—this is the historic reality that served as the basis for anticipating a surpassing hyperbolic expression of the rule seen only in modest glimpses of its ultimate perfection in the rule and reign of Solomon. It is not as if Solomon cherishes the wish that he in his person would epitomize or perhaps be that coming messianic person himself; rather Solomon speaks here as the prophet who anticipated one would come after him who would be greater than he ever was or could ever hope to be (Matt 12:42).

1. *By observing how righteous and fair the just king is to all (vv. 1–7).* The psalm begins with a prayer to God that is signaled by a vocative form, “O Elohim!” (Elohim was the divine name that embraced all nations and all of creation and its creatures in its address, rather than “Yahweh” that usually assumed a personal relationship as with the people of Israel or with believers.) Even though this psalm may originally have been created for a coronation ceremony, such as Solomon’s, nonetheless much of the content of the verses that follow extend beyond that setting in such a manner that they can hardly be understood of any earthly monarch except by way of pure “hyperbole.”²¹

²¹ Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II: 51–100* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968) 179.

This is one of the reasons why Christians have treated this psalm as messianic as well as Solomonic.

With this prayer, Solomon, or the one who talked about him, continued with a demand (“give,” i.e. “endow” in the imperative) that God would “endow the king with justice.” Some argue that rather than regarding this request as a blessing-request, where the verbs that follow would be placed in the Hebrew jussive form (RSV “may,” “let”), the verbs are best understood as future tenses with the assurance that God would indeed grant just such a request made on behalf of “a king” (Heb *lemelek*), not “the king,” which is paralleled to “a son of the king” (Heb *leben melek*), thus enlarging its scope of reference. But it is, nevertheless, the whole royal house of David that is the concern of the psalmist.

However, Perowne reasoned that it would be incorrect to render these verbs as future tenses since verses 8, 15, 16, and 17 clearly use the apocopated, or jussive forms, which would indicate optatives, rather than future forms, were meant to be understood for all the verbs in the Psalm that do not possess (and usually are unable to carry) an apocopated/shortened form.²² Thus, in place of the future tense of some English translations, the modal form “may he” is the best rendering throughout the Psalm for the most part.²³

The psalm writer asked “Elohim,” the only use of a divine name in the whole psalm, to “endow” this king with two divinely originated virtues: God’s (note “your” justice) “justices” (Hebrew *mishpateka*, “your justices” in a plural²⁴ form in Hebrew, which could mean either “justice” in its fullest form: God’s “judgments,” or God’s gift to him in rendering “decisions”) along with the second virtue: God’s “righteousness.”

Even though the word “justice” might be rendered in no fewer than thirteen different ways in the OT,²⁵ it certainly involved the interplay between governing, rights, and judging. Especially the “poor,” “afflicted,” “oppressed,” and the “needy,” who normally did not get justice from the courts, are here to be treated equitably under this request to the divine throne.

Such a fair and righteous governing, of those normally overlooked or poorly served would result in a fruitful harvest on the mountains and the hills of the Davidic kingdom. The “peace/prosperity” and “righteousness” of verse 3 point to what is right, harmonious, and normal in all relations between God and mortals, as well as between all men and women. Any judgment, especially on behalf of those who have been disenfranchised, will vindicate their rights. “Righteousness” is mentioned for the third time in the first three verses as the quality that marks the king and his reign over his people as the attribute that is above all other qualities. Such righteousness includes the concept of God’s law and the state of being in conformity with all that is

²² J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966; repr. of 1878 ed. by George Bell and Sons) 1:567.

²³ Willem A. VanGemeren, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) 550.

²⁴ The Greek LXX used a singular form for “justice.”

²⁵ Robert D. Culver, *TWOT*, 2:948–49.

good, excellent, and maintaining all that is “in-the-right” with the will and word of God.

The hope is that this endowed king will continue to dispense these endowments for a long time to come. At this point the hyperboles begin to manifest themselves as extending over a duration of such a time of peace, prosperity, and divine vindication that they extend “as long as the sun and as long as the moon” last (v. 5). However, it must be remembered that this same concept of perpetuity is what had also been specifically promised in the Davidic covenant of 2 Sam 7:13, 16.²⁶ The prayer request of the psalmist, therefore, is that God would make happen all he had promised to David in the Davidic covenant.

In addition to all of this, the peace and prosperity of the kingly reign is likened to “rain falling on a mown field” (v. 6). This, too, is not an unexpected metaphor in a Davidic or messianic context, for it has already been used of the refreshing effects of the reign of a Davidic king in 2 Sam 23:3b–4 (“When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like . . . the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth”; cf. Hos 6:3 and Mic 5:7). So expect a rule and a reign that will not only extend “through all generations” (v. 5), but one that guarantees that “peace and prosperity” will flourish and be found in abundance (v. 7). It is worthy of more than a passing note to realize that fertility in any country is connected with the righteousness rule and reign of a just and fair king. It is important to note how frequently the concepts of “rain,” “growth,” and “fertility” are linked with concepts of “right,” “righteousness,” and “justice” in the Scriptures.²⁷ These sets of attributes cannot be separated if peace, justice, and righteousness are to prevail.

2. *By noting how extensive and beneficial the just king is to the whole world (vv. 8–14).* The extent of the just king’s kingdom stretches from “sea to sea” and from “the River to the ends of the earth” (v. 8), that is, from the Mediterranean Sea on Israel’s western boundary to the uttermost sea on earth, and from the Euphrates unto the ends of the earth (another set of hyperboles!). There is, in part, an obvious allusion to the boundaries of the promised land in Exod 23:31 (“I will establish your borders from the Red Sea [Yam Suph] to the Sea of the Philistines [Mediterranean] and from the desert to the River [Euphrates]”), but the kingdom of Messiah far exceeds anything ever seen in the Judean line of the Davidic kings. It would reach to the fringes of the civilized world, embracing the “desert tribes and even the subjugation of all “enemies” who would “lick the dust” (v. 9) as had been predicted against Satan himself in the promise-plan of God, known here as the Protoevangelium of Gen 3:14–15 and repeated for all of the Davidic king’s enemies in Isa 49:23 and Mic 7:17a (“Nations . . . will lick dust like a snake, like creatures that crawl on the ground”).

²⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Blessing of *David*: The Charter for Humanity,” in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies in Honor of O. T. Allis* (ed. John H. Skilton; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974) 298–318.

²⁷ Helmer Ringgren, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Alec R. Allenson, 1956) 17.

But there was more: the reign of this righteous king would extend as we have seen thus far: (1) *geographically* from sea to sea, which is to say around the world; and (2) *militarily* over all enemies opposing his reign; but add to this also that this reign would extend (3) *economically*, as tribute and gifts were brought from all over the world (v. 10); and (4) *politically*, as all potentates will come under this righteous king's rule and serve him (v. 11).²⁸ Nations near and far will come bringing him gifts much as the Magi (Matt 2:11) did when Messiah first appeared in his first advent. Another example of the nations abroad is "Tarshish" (v. 10), long identified with Tartessos in southern Spain, is singled out as one such nation, which identification has more recently been situated as Tarshish in Sardinia by some.²⁹ "Sheba" and "Seba" (v. 10) are located respectively in modern Yemen in South Arabia and in an African Nation (cf. Gen 10:7; Isa 43:3; 45:14).

The blessed king in the era of righteousness is not one to selfishly invest himself in his own interests, but who invests himself on behalf of the "needy," the "afflicted," the "weak," the "oppressed," and those victims of "violence," in other words, all those who are destitute and cast aside by society at large (vv. 12–14). Their lives ("blood" in v. 14) are precious in that king's sight. While a king like Solomon, who during his prosperous rule of peace and prosperity, may have carried out some of this, it is clear that, at least by the end of his reign, the ten northern tribes felt that Solomon had badly failed them, for they had been overtaxed and treated unfairly in comparison with how Judah had been favored. It is no surprise, then, that the revolt of Jeroboam against the Davidic successor Rehoboam was successfully carried out because of grievances such as these against the reign of Solomon despite all the glories of that rule. Moreover, Solomon's reign never took in *all* the world's needy, poor, and oppressed; someone greater than Solomon was needed to finish that role.

3. *By sensing how prosperous and blessed the just king is to all (vv. 15–19).* Once more, for the third time, the psalmist's prayer was enjoined for: (1) the unending perpetuation of the Davidic dynasty; (2) the security and economic thriving of this kingship; and (3) the extension of the king's great wealth into all areas of life. Once the conditions mentioned in verses 12–14 had been met, then the longevity of the just and righteous king could be described. This can be illustrated in gifts that come from the subject nations, such as "gold from Sheba" (v. 15; cf. 1 Kgs 10:14–15, 22). Sheba, of course, is the land from which the queen came to visit and test Solomon's wisdom (1 Kgs 10:1–13). It is located at the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula in modern Yemen.

Even though God had given great fruitfulness to the land of Israel during Solomon's day, still the prayer for the days of the coming Messiah were ones

²⁸ Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) 383.

²⁹ Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II* 183 and I:292–93.

in which they would be accompanied with an abundance of grain throughout the land in such proliferation that the stalks of grain would be so fruitful and so beautiful that they would wave like the trees of Lebanon, even from the most unexpected, but usually desolate places with the poorest growing conditions, as the tops of the mountains (v. 16). A. A. Anderson cogently noted:

This verse [v. 16] and the Psalm as a whole, shows that what we call the “moral realm” and the “realm of nature” form one indivisible whole to the Israelites. A community which lives according to righteousness enjoys not only the internal harmony but also prosperity in field and flock.³⁰

Some read instead of “his name” in verse 17, “his progeny.” But this is not well supported in this text. The truth of an extensive “seed” is taught elsewhere: Israel in Solomon’s day did become as numerous “as the sand of the sea” (1 Kgs 4:20), nevertheless, such an expectation is also included elsewhere in God’s promise-plan where a joyful increase in population along with the increased fertility of the soil and its harvests (Isa 9:2; 49:20; Zech 2:8[4]), were seen as parallel promises to the ones contained in Psalm 72.

The use of the Hebrew Hithpael of *barak*, “to bless,” usually is read reflexively as all the nations “will bless *themselves*” (v. 17b). But it can be read just as well as a passive meaning: “will be *blessed*,” as can be seen in two of the five instances of the Abrahamic Covenant where the same promise is contained (to Abraham: Gen 12: 2–3; 18:18; 22:17–18; to Isaac: Gen 26:3–4; and to Jacob: Gen 28:13–14). To this day, most commentators remain skeptical about the passive rendering of the Hebrew Niphal in the Genesis record of the Abrahamic promise, much less the Hithpael in certain situations where this form is used in the Abrahamic covenant. However, O. T. Allis’s 1927 article offers some very strong evidence to the contrary.³¹ VanGemeren opted for the passive rendering here in Psalm 72 in light of the use of this same passive concept in Gal 3:8–9 [as it is consistently rendered throughout the entire intertestamental era and the whole NT).

The Psalm and Book II close with a doxology in verses 18–20. It attributes to the Lord all the blessings that have, and will, come from the reign of the king. The Lord is the worker of “marvelous deeds” or “wonders” (Hebrew *nipla’ot*, a word that was used of God’s work in the plagues of Egypt against Pharaoh).

The psalm ends with the words “Amen and Amen” (v. 19c). Such terms repeatedly point to the great confidence and assurance that God will accomplish exactly what the psalmist has here requested. Is it any wonder that this Psalm is also celebrated by two hymn writers: Isaac Watts (1674–1748) and James Montgomery (1771–1854). Watts wrote “Jesus Shall Reign Where’er the Sun”:

³⁰ A. A. Anderson. *The Book of Psalms* (2 vols.; New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 525.

³¹ O. T. Allis, “The Blessing of Abraham,” *Princeton Theological Review* 25 (1927) 263–98. See also Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), especially pp. 17–67.

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
 Does his successive journeys run;
 His kingdom spread from shore to shore,
 Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

People and realms of ev'ry tongue
 Dwell on his love with sweetest song;
 And infant voices shall proclaim
 Their early blessings on his name.

Montgomery wrote "Hail to the Lord's Anointed":

Hail to the Lord's Anointed,
 Great David's greater Son!
 Hail in the time appointed,
 His reign on earth begun!
 He comes to break oppression,
 To set the captive free,
 To take away transgression,
 And rule in equity.

He shall come down like showers
 Upon the fruitful earth,
 And love, joy, hope, like flowers,
 Spring in his path to birth;
 Before him on the mountains
 Shall peace, the herald, go,
 And righteousness, in fountains,
 From hill to valley flow.

V. THE CRITERIA FOR MOVING FROM THE HISTORIC EVENT TO THE MESSIANIC FULFILLMENT

Even though *theoria* has not been widely used or even been carefully understood during the history of the church, nonetheless it has had a continuous link by important exegetes down through the ages as newer methodological rivals appeared to solve some of the same problems *theoria* had already worked out. Bradley Nassif pointed to the Roman Catholic doctoral work in Systematic Theology at the Gregorianum in Rome, who was Bertrand de Margerie, S.J.; it was his three-volume *Introduction to the History of Exegesis* that appeared in 1980.³² In volume one, he devoted a separate chapter to *theoria* entitled "History, 'theoria,' and Tradition in the Antiochene School." De Margerie described the Antiochenes' view of the prophets as "contemplative historians," who saw these prophets as historians of their own times as well as prophets who were conscious of the glorious messianic sense of their

³² Bertrand de Margerie, *Introduction. L'histoire de l'exegese* (Paris: Cerf, 1980). Brad Nassif, *Theoria* 98, n. 133, noted that an English translation was forthcoming at that time and a republication of such was made available to Nassif.

prophecies in addition to their historic settings. For example, he appealed to Diodore of Tarsus's comments on Psalm 65, where Diodore concluded:

The words of the psalms are at the same time both history and prophecy. Words are uttered, from the historical point of view, with "hyperbole" (that is to say that they go beyond the historical situation that occasions them), but the same words, from the prophetic point of view, are realized in truth.³³

More importantly, de Margerie finally concluded that

The Antiochene *theoria* must be distinguished from what we call the *sensus plenior* to the extent that the writers of this School thought that the prophet sees, in a single vision, both the events of a proximate future, interior to the OT, and, in these events, the more remote Messianic future. The prophet is, moreover, in their view, fully aware of the relationship of prefiguration existing between the OT events and those of the Messianic age. . . . The *sensus plenior*, in contrast. . . . Is close to that of the type or of the figures of the OT, with respect to which the sacred writer was not necessarily aware that God had ordained that individuals and institutions about which he is writing should in fact represent NT realities.³⁴

The Antiochene Fathers in contrast to the Alexandrian Fathers did not aim at the allegorical meaning of the Scriptures, but the Antiochenes did aim at the spiritual and messianic meaning of the text when there was a textual reason for doing so. Thus, the criteria for their sorting out the direct future prophecies from *theoria* included:

1. Distinguishing history from "hyperbole," especially when the historic events described included language that surpassed the capacity of the nation Israel to completely fulfill what was taught.
2. Preference given to "intertextual Interpretation," or what I have described as "the analogy of antecedent Scripture," where later Scriptures make obvious direct reference or allusion to earlier texts, especially in the promise-plan of God in the Abrahamic-Davidic-new covenant line of the gospel story.³⁵
3. The example of "apostolic exegesis," where explicit theoretic interpretations were lifted by the NT writers from the OT.
4. A criterion I have added from my interaction with W. J. Beecher, which is the presence of grammatical and theological patterns as signaled by a simultaneous connotation of collective singular nouns with a singular and plural reference (called "corporate solidarity") and the frequent shifts between singular and plural pronouns or pronominal suffixes to indicate an enlargement of the field of reference.³⁶

This is precisely what the exegete witnesses as Psalm 72 is examined. The historical event is clearly what is most obviously at hand, for Solomon's

³³ De Margerie, *Introduction* 190–91, as cited by Nassif, *Theoria* 100.

³⁴ De Margerie, *Introduction* 210, as cited by Nassif, *Theoria* 105.

³⁵ See Kaiser, *Promise-Plan of God*.

³⁶ Nassif, *Theoria* 159–60.

reign in some important ways is an adumbration of the glorious rule and reign of the Messiah who is to come. But the historical base and the final fulfillment are linked together not as two separate realities, but as one whole event.³⁷ The rule and reign of Messiah will indeed be coextensive with the extent of the shining of the sun and the moon. His kingdom will spread from shore to shore as people and realms of every tongue focus on his love and majesty forever.

³⁷ See Willis J. Beecher. *The Prophets and the Promise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975; repr. of 1905) 245–46, 253–56, 292–94.