

WNBS: Foundations & Formation

Royal Psalms Study Guide

Central truth: The Royal Psalms present kingship as a responsibility under God’s authority. They celebrate God’s promises, call rulers to righteousness, and, in Christian interpretation, point toward their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

I. What Is a Royal Psalm

- A Royal Psalm is a psalm centered on Israel’s king, particularly the king from David’s family line. These psalms address the king’s authority, responsibilities, victories, struggles, and relationship with God.
- The word royal identifies their subject: the king and his kingdom. A Royal Psalm may take the form of a prayer, thanksgiving, celebration, or lament.
- They remind us that the king’s power depends on God and should serve God’s purposes. Royal occasions, such as a king’s installation or wedding, also provide settings for some of these psalms.
- “When we read the Royal Psalms, we are looking at what it means for someone entrusted with authority to live and lead under God’s authority.”

Central truth: The king is accountable to God. God entrusts authority, and it should be exercised with righteousness, justice, and dependence on Him.

Opening reflection: What qualities do you expect from a leader who serves under God’s authority?

II. Which Psalms Are Royal Psalms

Lists vary slightly among biblical scholars. For this study, we will examine Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, and 144. Psalm 89 is especially important for its treatment of God’s covenant with David, and Psalm 144’s royal emphasis is particularly evident in verses 1–11.

Psalm	Main Focus	Key Verses
2	God establishes His anointed king despite opposition.	6–12
18	The king thanks God for rescue and victory.	1–3, 46–50
20	The people pray for the king’s help and success.	1–9
21	The king rejoices in God’s strength and blessings.	1–7
45	A royal wedding celebrates the king and righteous rule.	1–7

Psalm	Main Focus	Key Verses
72	Prayer for a king who brings justice and protects the vulnerable.	1–4, 12–14
89	God’s promise to David is remembered amid royal defeat.	3–4, 28–39, 49
101	The ruler commits to integrity and rejects corruption.	1–8
110	God grants royal authority and an enduring priesthood.	1–4
132	God’s promises concerning David’s descendants and Zion.	11–18
144	The king seeks deliverance and the people’s well-being.	1–11, 12–15

These themes can be traced directly through the psalms themselves.

Read Psalm 20:6–9 and Psalm 21:1–7. How do prayer and thanksgiving connect these two psalms?

Which psalm would you like to explore further, and why?

III. Who Wrote the Royal Psalms

No single person wrote all the Royal Psalms. The headings above each psalm, often called superscriptions, associate them with several individuals or groups.

Author or association	Psalms	What to remember
David	18, 20, 21, 101, 110, 144	The headings traditionally attribute these psalms to David.
Sons of Korah	45	The heading associates this psalm with the Korahite worship musicians.
Solomon	72	The heading can be understood as “of Solomon” or “for Solomon”; authorship is therefore interpreted differently.
Ethan the Ezrahite	89	Ethan is named in the heading.

Author or association	Psalms	What to remember
Unnamed in the Psalm's heading	2, 132	Neither heading identifies an author. Acts 4:25–26 attributes the words of Psalm 2 to David.

These are the traditional biblical attributions; a heading's association with a person does not settle every historical question about composition.

A psalm can be royal because it concerns a king, even when the king did not write it.

IV. Why Were the Royal Psalms Written

Their purposes emerge from their content, although the exact original occasion is not always known.

1. To affirm God's appointment of the king — Psalms 2 and 110.

The king's royal authority is dependent on God's decision and power.

2. To pray for protection and deliverance — Psalms 20 and 144.

The king and the community bring their needs before God for help and deliverance.

3. To thank God for victory — Psalms 18 and 21.

Success becomes an occasion to acknowledge God's help and strength.

4. To celebrate royal life — Psalm 45.

The royal wedding provides a setting for celebrating the king while emphasizing truth and righteousness rule.

5. To define righteous leadership — Psalms 72 and 101.

Leadership involves justice, personal integrity, and care for people who are vulnerable.

6. To remember God's covenant — Psalms 89 and 132.

These psalms recall God's promises to David's family. Psalm 89 also voices the painful question of how those promises relate to apparent defeat.

Reflection: What did you learn about the writers or purposes of the Royal Psalms?

V. Key Themes of the Royal Psalms

A. Authority carries accountability (*Integrity in leadership*)

Read Psalm 101:2–4

The king's private conduct matters alongside his public responsibilities.

Application: Serving God requires integrity in the places others see and the places they do not.

Why does personal character matter in someone entrusted with leadership?

B. Righteous rule protects people (*Justice and care for others*)

Read Psalm 72:1–4, 12–14

The ideal king defends the poor, helps the needy, and confronts oppression.

Application: Godly leadership considers how decisions affect people with the least power.

What does this psalm teach us about the connection between righteousness and justice?

C. Strength comes from God (*Dependence on God*)

Read Psalm 20:6–9

The community places its deepest confidence in God rather than military resources.

Application: Preparation matters, but our trust must remain in God.

What resources can become substitutes for trusting Him?

D. Faith can bring difficult questions to God (*Faith during uncertainty*)

Read Psalm 89:38–49

The psalm remembers God’s covenant while honestly describing circumstances that seem to contradict it.

Application: We can bring disappointment to God while continuing to appeal to His faithfulness.

How can remembering God’s promises shape our prayers during uncertainty?

VI. How Do the Royal Psalms Point to Jesus

Christians read these psalms in their original setting of Israel’s kingship and in light of the New Testament’s application of royal passages to Jesus.

Royal Psalm	New Testament Connection
Psalms 2:7	Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5 apply this passage to Jesus.
Psalms 45:6–7	Hebrews 1:8–9 applies these verses to the Son.
Psalms 110:1, 4	Acts 2:34–36 and Hebrews 7:17 explain Christ’s exalted authority and enduring priesthood.

These connections help us see why the church reads the Royal Psalms with hope in Christ, the righteous King.

VII. Reflection

Bring the lesson into your week

In my own words, a Royal Psalm is...

One way I will reflect God’s character in how I lead, serve, or care for someone this week is...

One question or prayer I am taking from this study is...

Study references: The biblical passages and psalm headings listed throughout this guide; Yale Bible Study, “Royal Psalms – Study Guide,” yalebiblestudy.org/courses/psalms/lessons/the-royal-psalms-study-guide/.