

The Return of the King

Psalm 144:1 *Of David.*

Blessed be the LORD, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle;

² he is my steadfast love and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield and he in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me.

³ O LORD, what is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you think of him?

⁴ Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.

⁵ Bow your heavens, O LORD, and come down! Touch the mountains so that they smoke!

⁶ Flash forth the lightning and scatter them; send out your arrows and rout them!

⁷ Stretch out your hand from on high; rescue me and deliver me from the many waters, from the hand of foreigners,

⁸ whose mouths speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.

⁹ I will sing a new song to you, O God; upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you,

¹⁰ who gives victory to kings, who rescues David his servant from the cruel sword.

¹¹ Rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners, whose mouths speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.

¹² May our sons in their youth be like plants full grown, our daughters like corner pillars cut for the structure of a palace;

¹³ may our granaries be full, providing all kinds of produce; may our sheep bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields;

¹⁴ may our cattle be heavy with young, suffering no mishap or failure in bearing; may there be no cry of distress in our streets!

¹⁵ Blessed are the people to whom such blessings fall! Blessed are the people whose God is the LORD!"

Psalms 144

The Return of the King

J. R. R. TOLKIEN PROVIDED FASCINATING back-story to his fictional masterpiece *The LORD of the Rings* in what he called “The Appendices” that were put at the end of the third book. In fact, these appendices are so detailed that they actually delayed publication, but they provide so much detail that they only add to the eerie sense that Tolkien’s world was somehow true history. Among the many things in these appendices is a genealogy of the kings of Gondor.

“**Gondor! Gondor,**” Aragorn once reminisced, “**between the Mountains and the Sea! West Wind blew there; light upon the Silver Tree.**” Gondor was the fabled white city of the south kingdom of the Númenóreans. Ruled first by Elendil for 120 years at the end of the second age, the 2,000 year unbroken line of **kings** which had sat upon the

throne in the great Tower of Ecthelion came to an end when Eärnur left his crown on the lap of his father in the Houses of the Dead and rode out to challenge the Witch-king. Escorted by a few knights, he rode past the gates of Minas Morgul, never to be seen again. For a millennium there sat only **the stewards**—the non-royal one-time counselors to the monarchs—until finally, the name of the third book of the Trilogy: *The Return of the King*. The once believed dead line reasserted itself in Strider, Ranger of the North, Aragorn II also called Elessar, named after a green elf-stone from Valinor that became a symbol of his reign.

The point of all this rather nerdy history of a Fantasy series is to implant in your mind's eye why it was that the entire trilogy was focused on Aragorn, and why it was that the climactic note of the book was **his coronation and wedding** which came after the long struggle and war with the forces of evil in Mordor. Finally, the expectations and promises so long unfulfilled were being realized again, and a new age of peace was dawning upon men. The kings of old once again begin to rule the world in wisdom and justice.

While not as long a time-span, but certainly infinitely more important because of its actual history, the **people of Israel had a first king**. Who do you suppose he was? He reigned on his golden throne in the midst of a nomadic people in a wilderness, fought for them through the conquest of a land filled with enemies, and moved about from place to place until finally, the people wanted a king like everyone else had.

In rejecting Yahweh as their King, God gave the sons of Abraham a king named Saul. **Saul** reigned for 40 years, after which the crown was given to one after God's own heart: **David** sons of Jesse. He too reigned for 40 years after which his son **Solomon** completed the 40-year trilogy until the people divided after 120 years of their rule. But the throne of David was not vacated. For nearly 350 years the monarchy sat perched atop the Holy City of Jerusalem until it all came crashing down with the invasion of Babylonian Empire and the destruction of the holy temple.

“You have said, ‘I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: *I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations,*’” we heard in **Psalm 89:3**. But the people were sent into **exile**

for 70 years. But when they returned, even after they had rebuilt the temple, there was no king to sit upon the throne. What was happening to the **promises** to David? What was happening to the **expectations** of the people? Who would rule again in wisdom and justice upon the throne of David?

We've seen in our study of Book V that the compiler of the songs is most likely a scribe or priest, probably living near the time of Ezra and Nehemiah after the people were brought back to the Promised Land, when they could have had a king reign again from the temple, but didn't. These songs were organized so that they form an almost unbroken pattern of evening and morning songs and were done in such a way that three sets of them could serve the **liturgical function** of the renewed feasts commanded by Yahweh.

We also saw some strange **symmetry** in the patterns that the book repeats in this organization with introductory historical songs, followed by a song of returning from exile, followed by a series of songs of David, followed by an alphabet song(s), followed by Hallelujah songs:

Parallelism of Psalms in Book V

105-106	Historical Psalms	135-36
107	Psalm for the Exiles Returning from Babylon	137
108-110	Psalms of/for David	138-145
111, 112	Alphabetic Psalms	145
113-118	Hallelujah Psalms	146-150

This pattern speaks of **intended meaning of the songs** when read together: God has worked in our past. God has brought us out of captivity. God has given us a king. **The totality of his work is reflected upon (A-Z as we might say).** Therefore, we praise the LORD.

But again, there is no king at present. Therefore, the Davidic collections seem to have as much meaning for **the future** as they did when David wrote them, since they aren't in the most literal-physical sense true at the present. This is especially true of the last two songs of David in Book V and in the book as a whole. These are **Psalms 144-145**. A collection that began in Psalm 138, we have seen how David taught the people regarding worshiping in a pagan world in **138**, how he focused his attention on the all-knowing God of **139**, and how after this he moved from a state of attack (**140**) to watching his friends be killed (**141**)

to his own imprisonment (142) to his faithful response in the midst of panic (143).

Now, in 144, the subject changes. **No longer is the king feeling totally overwhelmed.** The tables are turning; he is preparing himself for war. We saw the great enemies in the previous songs, **human enemies** and the other enemies that enslave us—**sin, death, and the devil.** In the next and final Davidic song, the king ushers in his **kingdom.** So the earlier songs anticipate this war while the last song **naturally follows a great victory.** The song forms yet another chiasm:

- A. Blessed be the LORD my Rock (1a)
- B. The battle (1b-6)
- C. Rescue me from foreigners and their lying words (7-8)
- D. A New Song: The One Who Gives Salvation (9-10)**
- C¹. Rescue me from foreigners who speak lying words (11)
- B¹. Peace after Victory (12-14)
- A¹. Blessed are those whose God is the LORD (15)

Again, it is important just here to state the obvious. David is the King. As such, we have to remember that **his words are first and foremost *the king's words***. Not the words of an ordinary Jewish person, but the words of the representative, the leader of the people. But again, there is no king at the time of the compilation of the Psalter. And, in fact, some scholars point out that it is quite possible that someone is appropriating this song to his own situation after the exile, but of course this person would not be a king.

The song itself never identifies the speaker as a king, though it does identify him as “David” (144:1) and a “servant” (10). That’s why it was good to remember that David was the king. Here it is important to know something about **the two-halves** of Psalm 144 as I see them. These halves are not evenly cut. The first half is **vv. 1-11**. The second is **vv. 12-15**. What causes me to make such a division? Nearly every single line of the first 11 verses is taken from **earlier psalms**, the majority of which are from **Psalm 18**, and the vast majority of which are lines from David’s psalms. But the last four verses have virtually no parallels at all:

Psalm 144	Parallels in Earlier Psalms
<p><i>"Of David.</i> Blessed be the LORD, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle;</p>	<p>Blessed be my rock (Ps 18:46) He trains my hands for war (Ps 18:34)</p>
<p>² he is my steadfast love and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield and he in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me.</p>	<p>The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge (Ps 18:2) and subdued peoples under me (Ps 18:47)</p>
<p>³ O LORD, what is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you think of him?</p>	<p>What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? (Ps 8:4)</p>
<p>⁴ Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.</p>	<p>Let me know how fleeting I am! (Ps 39:4) My days are like an evening shadow, (Ps 102:11)</p>
<p>⁵ Bow your heavens, O LORD, and come down! Touch the mountains so that they smoke!</p>	<p>He bowed the heavens and came down (Ps 18:9) who touches the mountains and they smoke! (Ps 104:32)</p>
<p>⁶ Flash forth the lightning and scatter them; send out your arrows and rout them!</p>	<p>And he sent out his arrows and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings and routed them. (Ps 18:14)</p>
<p>⁷ Stretch out your hand from on high; rescue me and deliver me from the many waters, from the hand of foreigners,</p>	<p>He sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many wa- ters (Ps 18:16) He rescued me from my strong enemy (Ps 18:17) foreigners came cringing to me. (Ps 18:44)</p>
<p>⁸ whose mouths speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.</p>	<p>Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak. (Ps 12:2)</p>
<p>⁹ I will sing a new song to you, O God; upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you,</p>	<p>"Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully on the strings, with a shout of joy." (Ps 33:3)</p>
<p>¹⁰ who gives victory to kings, who res- cues David his servant from the cruel sword.</p>	<p>"Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring for- ever." (Ps 18:50)</p>

<p>¹¹ Rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners, whose mouths speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.</p>	<p>He rescued me from my strong enemy (Ps 18:17) foreigners came cringing to me. (Ps 18:44) Everyone utters lies to his neighbor (Ps 12:2)</p>
<p>¹² May our sons in their youth be like plants full grown, our daughters like corner pillars cut for the structure of a palace;</p>	
<p>¹³ may our granaries be full, providing all kinds of produce; may our sheep bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields;</p>	
<p>¹⁴ may our cattle be heavy with young, suffering no mishap or failure in bearing; may there be no cry of distress in our streets!</p>	
<p>¹⁵ Blessed are the people to whom such blessings fall! Blessed are the people whose God is the LORD!"</p>	

This makes the date and the compiler of the song uncertain. Obviously, **David was the original writer of most of it**, since nearly all of the words were taken from his songs. So, it is good and right to call it a song of David. If I took a hodge-podge of lines from Robert Burns and created a poem from them, adding only a couple of new lines, it would not be right say that I wrote the poem. Because basically, I stole it. But the idea of a “servant” (which David is also called; e.g. **1Kg 3:6**) is a title that a non-king can also

take upon himself (**Neh 1:6, 11**), and thus it would have meaning in a context like Nehemiah's of someone else like him.

Now, the point of this is that two titles of this individual become important: **King and Servant**. In the original context, it is clearly the king speaking. In the new context, it is clearly a servant speaking. And in the overall context of the placement of this song just here at the end of the book, both have great significance.

Understanding the Holy Spirit's intended purpose for this song here, we are aided by a brief reminder of Psalm 18 of which at least 10 different verses are represented in Psalm 144 (vv. **2, 9, 14, 16, 17, 34, 44, 46, 47, 50**). Set in the context of the last of the wars against the Philistines (and several remaining giants in the land; **2Sa 21:15-22**), it is David's reflections on God's tending to his life which culminated in his becoming king. In fact, in the superscription, he is called "servant" rather than king. It is cited in the NT numerous times as being a word about the coming Messiah:

- 18:2 and Luke 1:69. A horn of salvation.
- 18:4 and Acts 2:24. Loosing the pains of his death.

- 18:49 and Rom 15:9. Gentiles coming to God through Christ.

Psalm 18s chief antagonists are **death** which encompasses him and the **devil** (see last week's sermon as well) where he is called "**Belial**" (**Ps 18:4**) and through a series of victories, the psalmist overcomes them both. This means that the song points forward to Christ, since David did not defeat either of these foes (see **Eusebius**, *Commentary on Ps 18:1*). Thus, when David sings of his own victories, he does so, as a type of Christ; he sings prophetically about the Lord Jesus.

With so many quotations from one song, **comparing the songs** can be informative. One of the things we can notice is what is *not quoted*. Goulder explain that even though there are many quotes from here, strong military tones of **18:33-49** seem almost suppressed.¹ All manner of weapons from the earlier song (**bow** in **34**, spear or **sword** in **38**, etc.) are absent in the latter. And while his hands and fingers are still being made ready for battle (see **144:1**), this absence of weaponry makes it feel as if the psalmist's war this time is

¹ Goulder, 274.

not to be done with arms at all. Might the “servant” theme have anything to do with this Psalm 144?²

One of the more interesting changes is the way the Psalmist **takes the indicatives** of Psalm 18, which from David’s perspective were past actions God had already done for him, and **turns them into imperatives**, which become commands to act again. So, for example, “**He bowed the heavens and came down**” (18:9) becomes “**Bow your heavens, O LORD, and come down!**” (144:5). “**He sent out his arrows and scattered them**” (18:14) becomes “**Flash forth the lightning and scatter them**” (144:6). “**He rescued me**” (18:17) becomes “**Rescue me**” (144:7). To put it another way, what was in the past is now something that looks forward to the future!

What does this future predict? In a word, **the return of the king**. But not king David. Rather, David’s son and David’s Lord. For these words are the words of both the King and Isaiah’s Suffering Servant. As the echo in **Revelation 5:9** of **Psalm 144:9** (“I will sing a new song to you, O God”) itself teaches us, “They sang a new song saying, ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were

² “Servant” is actually found in both songs.

slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (see also **Rev 14:3**). It is through suffering that Christ defeated death and the devil as the sacrificial lamb of God.

With these things in mind, as you read this song, I want I’m going to be doing this reading with the Lord Jesus as its main singer. While it is also appropriate to read it with David or you or me in mind (and we will), we do well when we start with what Jesus himself taught us, “**These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in ... the Psalms must be fulfilled**” (**Luke 24:44**). As **Jerome** said long ago, “**These words may be uttered in the name of Christ with reference, of course, to His Incarnation.**”³⁴ This is all the more urgent to do given the position of this song in at the end of the Psalter (**Next week focus on Psalms 144-145 as recapitulating Psalm 1-2**). We don’t have a lot of time left to see the glories of Christ in this book.

³ **Jerome**, Homily 54, in *The Homilies of Saint Jerome (1–59 on the Psalms)*, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Marie Liguori Ewald, vol. 1, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 380. These words are specifically about vs. 2, “... who subdues peoples under me.” And while his sermon is not exactly an exposition of Christ in every verse, the comment made here does serve his purposes of inserting thoughts about Christ at many points along the way.

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Psalm 144

Blessed be the Rock

The song in Hebrew is simply a song “of David” (Ps 144:1). The LXX adds the curious “... concerning Goliath”—Goliath!” That fits, given that Psalm 18 had giants in mind as well. The first words take us immediately to Psalm 18 (vs. 46), and in turn, to Moses (see Dt 32:4, 15, 18, 31). “Blessed be the LORD, my rock” (Ps 144:1). “Blessed” (*barak*) is a word that finds itself in the last verse in the ESV, and we will get to that in due time.

Preparing for Battle

Why is he blessed? Because God is viewed as the perfect Warrior and more, the one who trains his servant for battle. “... who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle.” Now, we have said many times that the Lord Jesus is the Captain of the Armies of the LORD in the OT. But if

we are thinking about his coming in the NT, then we understand that he gave up this role as the Mighty **Lord Sabbath**, at least for a time, and he came to “**learn**” (**Heb 5:8**) obedience, and presumably, other things. Thinking this way, we can understand his verse as **Christ blessing his Father** as he is preparing him for a coming war and battle, one that he will wage in human flesh, but as we said earlier, one that would not be with weapons of steel and wood.

The training for battle continues in the next several verses. “**He is my steadfast love and my fortress, and my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield and he in whom I take refuge**” (**Ps 144:2**). Fortresses are strongholds, and they keep a person safe during attack. The Father is truly the most impregnable stronghold anyone can flee to, for it is not possible for any to topple him, and he holds whoever comes to him safe and secure forever.

The last part of the verse has imagery that changes the scene. From the refuge to the warrior, he subdues peoples under me. While the psalmist retreats, God goes forth in battle. It reminds me of Martin Luther who famously said,

Take myself as an example. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept [cf. **Mark 4:26–29**], or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.⁵

Again, while it is certainly possible to think here of the Word of God (Christ) doing battle (God is One), and it will not do to make too sharp a distinction such that you can't have the Three Persons doing the exact same things, clearly Christ is placing perfect trust in his Father when he sojourns with us, entrusting his very life into those Heavenly hands. And so Christ went out teaching and preaching (and healing and helping) and eating and drinking, and while he did it, men were subdued, not with earthly weapons, but with heavenly ones—the word: the law, and the gospel.

⁵ **Martin Luther**, *Luther's Works, Vol. 51: Sermons I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 51 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 77–78.

“O LORD, what is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you think of him?” (Ps 144:3). This fascinating text is not from Psalm 18, but Psalm 8. It is quoted in **Hebrews 2:6** as first and foremost being a text that teaches us about the **incarnation of Jesus**. And therefore, we know we are on solid ground in our interpretation. Suddenly, these words take on wondrous significance. For this is not David speaking, but the Son of God prior to the incarnation and doing it. The Son of God became a man and understood personally what it now meant to be a child of the dirt. What an incomprehensible thing it is to consider the very God of the universe saying this verse as one of us. For he became a man and as he did, he was being given dominion of a place that belonged rightly only to Adam, and people were subdued under his feet.

But “**Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow**” (Ps 144:4). Two more non-Psalm 18 passages are now used. In **Psalm 39**, David considers the frailty and transitory nature of his existence. In **Psalm 102**, the psalmist does more of the same. But now, we are thinking of Jesus who has the same thought. For as a man, he took on our

human nature and becoming subject to that nature, through his obedience, he even died (Php 2:8).

In vs. 5-6, we might just want to take a step back in time. “Bow your heavens, O LORD, and come down! Touch the mountains so that they smoke! Flash forth the lightning and scatter them; send out your arrows and rout them!” The verses complete the preparation for battle, but I imagine them prophetically this time, from the standpoint of the Psalmist who has turned the indicative into an imperative, the past into the future. In the OT, when these images appear, it is God coming near in a theophany. Mt. Sinai is the paradigm example and it was not an example of warfare, but of lawgiving.

The NT is being written during all kinds of messianic speculations where the coming king would route the enemies of Israel and take his seat on the throne in Jerusalem. It was into this that God came down alright. But he came down in a way that few were expecting.⁶ While the imagery certainly makes you think of terror and end-of-the-world judgment, it is possible to think of this simply as the

⁶ Eusebius sees here (that is in Psalm 18’s counterpart) “a prophecy of his ascension from earth to heaven” (Proof of the Gospel 6.9). In other words, he reads it Christologically. I rather see it as does Leo the Great, as the reverse: “... that he might take on the flesh of human weakness for our salvation” (*Testimonia* 19).

shaking of an age. The mountains where the gods dwell become unstable. The enemies of God are routed. But they are routed in a way that many, yea most, do not expect. And this is exactly why Jesus says that his ministry usher in the “age to come” where powers are shaken (**Eph 1:21**) and people are granted eternal life (**Luke 18:30**).

Rescue Him

Suddenly, this mish-mash of verses takes a turn towards an unforeseen theme: *suffering*. “Stretch out your hand from on high; rescue me and deliver me from the many waters” (**Ps 144:7**). “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory,” the disciples once asked Jesus. He responded back to them in a surprising way. “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” (**Mark 10:37-38**). *Baptism?* I thought he was already baptized?

In the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, the entry on “baptism” tells us that the idea of “*immersion*” which is what baptism means came to be used for sinking

of ships, suffering shipwrecks, drowning, perishing, bringing a city to destruction, going under, sinking into, being overwhelmed, with “the idea of going under or perishing [being nearer] the general usage.”⁷

In **Isaiah 21:4**, the LXX uses baptizō metaphorically: “My heart wanders, and transgression overwhelms (baptizō) me; my soul is occupied with fear.” It is this sense of ordeal that the Psalmist is now using and that Jesus has in mind with this baptism. And what is he talking about? What baptism is this? He called it the sign of Jonah. “You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me ... the waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me ... I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever” (**Jonah 2:3-5**). In other words, this battle he is preparing for is going to result in his own death at the hands of the Roman soldiers—foreigners.

Yet, it isn't only them. “...whose mouths speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood” (**Ps 114:8**). One thinks of **the monkey trial** of false witnesses and the lies that were told about Christ as he stood there bleeding

⁷ TDNT 1:520.

from whips and a thorn of crowns they put on his head. One also thinks of the betrayal from his own friend whom (Ps 55:13) Satan entered in order to betray the Lord (Luke 22:3). The reason that is interesting? There is someone who “speaks lies” and whose “right hand is a right hand of falsehood” (Ps 144:8) here. Jerome said, “Their right hand is the hand of iniquity and not of equity. Of their left hand, Scripture says: ‘Let the devil stand at his right hand’ (Ps 109:6; 108:6 LXX). The man who has that kind of right hand—the right hand of iniquity—has the devil standing at his right hand.”⁸ God would need to deliver him. But how would that deliverance come? Through his baptism into death and that which happened afterward.

A New Song: The Song of the Lamb

In Psalm 144:9 we hear “a new song.”⁹ We saw this also in Revelation 5:9 where it became a song of the Lamb of God. “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its

⁸ Jerome, *ibid.*, 384.

⁹ “Upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you” seems to recall Psalm 33:3, an interesting if not probably arbitrary number, given that Jesus was 33 when he died. Augustine spiritualizes it as referring to the 10 Commandments. It seems to me more natural to simply read it as a way of picturing the saints who sing of the majesty of Christ anywhere or anytime, in heaven or on earth, in the heavenly temple or the earthly, in Jerusalem or wherever Christ’s bride is gathered.

seals, for you were slain...” In the verse quoted from Psalm 18 in **Psalm 144:10** (“Who gives victory to kings, who rescues David...”) we read, “Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his Anointed (Messiah), to David and his seed forever” (**Ps 18:50**). This remarkable verse teaches about the salvation that God brought *Messiah*, for he is David’s seed. This salvation refers to his resurrection from the dead.

1 Timothy 3:16 refers to it as his “vindication by the Spirit.” Romans 1:4 says the resurrection was a “declaration” that he was the son of God. And great salvation accompanies any who trust in him. As Peter says, “Baptism ... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (**1Pe 3:21**).

Interestingly, the change in Psalm 144 from the original moves from the King to kings. “...who gives victory to kings, who rescues David his servant from the cruel sword” (**Ps 144:10**). Messiah as the New David is rescued by God through death into life. But this change to kings is a great reversal of something we saw at the beginning of the Psalter, and this is not unintentional, for there are several things

that correspond with the last two songs (before the hallelujah conclusion of 146-150) of the Psalter and the first two. This is one of them. “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers [of the heavens?] take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed” (Ps 2:2), that is the Messiah. So the warning is given, “Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (10-12).

And what happens in Psalm 144? **Victory is granted to the kings!** Why? Because they have obviously now heard of the good news and fled to him for refuge. This is really the point of the entire Psalter, that poor and rich, beggars or kings, slave or free, male or female, black or white, old or young might enter into the story of the Messiah and through their own ordeals, flee to the Son of God as the certain and sure Rock that saves you from the battering storms and frees you from the wicked slave masters. David knew it. David spread the gospel. And by God’s grace, kings have been saved. Indeed, there is no reason why this

should ever cease until Christ returns to judge the living and the dead.

The thing stopping it? Our refusal to tell them. But isn't it interesting that in that same NT "new song" concludes of this lamb, "...and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." The psalter and the whole of the Bible is about giving good news to those who need and want salvation, telling them where it is to be found, and giving them the only powerful Word that can save them. This is their very song! As the Targum says, he is "My shield and the one in whose Memra I hope, who beats down the peoples beneath me" (Ps 144:2), in submission yes, but in salvation through a submission that makes them glad and willing servants rather than beaten and broken pots of clay.

Rescue Me

What is your prayer? The song has a refrain of sorts as it makes its way out of the center of new song of salvation towards its ending that is unseen in Psalm 18. "Rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners, whose mouths

“speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood” (Ps 144:11). This virtual repeat of vv. 7-8, but now I must ask, is this your prayer? You’ve seen the enemies. You’ve known of disaster. You’ve felt the overwhelming floods. You face death whenever God calls your name. This prayer to Jesus will save you, if you pray it by faith to the Son of God.

Peace After Victory

With all of this previous material woven together into this newly formed song behind us, we come to a new stanza, unknown to Psalm 18 or any of the other songs quoted. The last three verses are a beautiful description of blessing that reminds me of Sam and Frodo returning home to the Shire after the battle of Mordor, of the people of Gondor cheering their king as they watch him marry Arwen. Peace. Safety. Long life. Prosperity. The very blessings hard won after a seemingly hopeless war.

It shows us the sons: “May our sons in their youth be like plants full grown” (Ps 144:12a). While not quite the same, the imagery takes us in some ways back to Psalm 1:

“He is like a tree planted by streams of water” (Ps 1:3). Language like this helps frame Psalms 1-2 with 144-145 at the first and last of the psalter (before the five song doxology at the end). Maturity, fruitfulness, longevity are all things associated with the picture.

It tells us of the daughters: “Our daughters like corner pillars cut for the structure of a palace” (Ps 144:12b). Now the picture turns to royalty, holiness, security, purity, and foundational building stones, as godly women are to any family, church, and civilization. Of course, the image also reminds us of the bride of Christ who are called living stones in a holy temple united to Christ.

It tells us of our bounty: “May our granaries be full, providing all kinds of produce” (13a). It tells us of our herds. “May our sheep bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields; may our cattle be heavy with young, suffering no mishap or failure in bearing” (13b-14a). No more famines, hungry, want; but a land of plenty, fulness, and feasting.

It tells us of our prosperity and the peace we have in Christ. “May there be no cry of distress in our streets!” (14b). The total picture here is much like that of the end of

Revelation with God's people etched into the pillars of the new Jerusalem, with the tree of life giving fruit in season and out of season, with no more crying or mourning, or pain. With golden streets and green grass and white temples. It is all the heart yearns for, and it is vital to see that in both Revelation and Psalm 144, these are the result of a won war hard, the outcome of victory secured by the Lamb of God.

Blessed be His People

Finally, it returns to the theme of blessing that it began with. But whereas it opened with a blessing upon God for his omnipotent power to subdue his enemies, it ends with a blessing upon his people who have come under his protection. “Bless are the people to whom such blessings fall! Blessed are the people whose God is the LORD!” (15).

This is how a *book* is supposed to end, not just a song. Indeed, that is how the psalter is coming to an end. It has just told us about the **King**, of his battle preparations, of his coming death, of his conquering many to serve him, and of the prosperity he wins for them. The weeping, the fear, the

troubles, the dangers, the enemies that have taken up so much of the psalter are subdued. As not only Tolkien, but a scholar writing a book on Book V says in the title of his book: *The King has Returned*.¹⁰ All that is left is to tell us about **his Kingdom** (Ps 145), and then to spend time praising him for his unsurpassing, unfathomable, unbelievable grace that he has showered on us through Jesus Christ the Lord and God of Ruler of all things (Ps 146-150).

Until then,

May he be praised both now and forevermore.

The lamb who was slain; the lion who has conquered.

Amen.

¹⁰ Michael K. Snearly, *The Return of the King: Messianic Expectation in Book V of the Psalter* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 169.