

Psalm 2

Introduction

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, *someone* put Psalms 1 and 2 at the very beginning of the Psalms. At first, these two chapters might look like they don't have very much in common. Psalm 1 (the wisdom Psalm) is certainly much better known in the church today than Psalm 2 (the royal Psalm). But in the first centuries of the church, there were some who saw these two chapters as really only a *single* Psalm. In some Greek manuscripts of Acts 13:33, the words of Psalm *two* are actually said to come from the *first* Psalm. And in some Hebrew manuscripts of the Psalms, the first two chapters are combined as only one Psalm. Out of the first 89 Psalms (books I-III), Psalms 1 and 2 are essentially, and very conspicuously, the *only* two Psalms without a title. So that's another sign that we're *meant* to read these Psalms *together* as in introduction to the entire book. It's as though the editors of the Psalter have titled these two chapters: "Introducing the Psalms."

But how do Psalms 1 and 2 *go together*? How do they, *together*, give us the "key" for unlocking the Psalms? We've been exploring the answer to that question over the last two weeks. Now this morning we'll come to the end of that exploration and try to put it all together. Part II of the introduction to the Psalms begins like this:

I. "Why do the nations rage and the peoples murmur in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together, against YAHWEH and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.'"

Psalm 1 began with this beatitude [refer to diagram at the end of this document]: "Blessed is the man who does *not* walk in the counsel of the *wicked*, and in the way of *sinnners* does *not* stand, and in the seat of *scoffers* does *not* sit; but his delight is in the *instruction* of the Lord; he *murmurs* his *instruction* day and night." But now the beginning of Psalm 2 is the polar opposite of Psalm 1. Psalm 2 begins with a description of how the wicked, and sinners, and scoffers, instead of "murmuring" obedience, are actually "murmuring" rebellion. Instead of delighting in and murmuring Yahweh's instruction (His *torah*), they murmur plots to throw off His yoke and assert their own independence.

"The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together, against YAHWEH *and against his Anointed*." So the way they rebel against YAHWEH is by rebelling against His Anointed. But who is YAHWEH's Anointed? Picture a royal coronation ceremony in Israel where a new king is being crowned. One commentator says:

"At [this] coronation ceremony the new king first pledged [obedience and faithfulness] to [the Lord's] covenant and was then crowned... as the [rightful] ruler. Only then was he *anointed* with holy oil (2 Kings 11:12), becoming the 'anointed of the Lord' (cf. 1 Sam 16:13; 1 Kings 1:39). [So] the 'Anointed One'... refers to [every] anointed king who was [ever] seated on the throne of David." (VanGemeren)

- ✓ 2 Kings 11:12 — Then [the priest] brought out the king’s son and put the ***crown*** on him and gave him the ***testimony*** [the covenant]. And they proclaimed him ***king*** and ***anointed*** him, and they clapped their hands and said, “Long live the king!”

So the way the kings and rulers of the earth rebel against YAHWEH is by rebelling against His anointed king who is seated on David’s throne in Jerusalem.

Now if we look at Israel’s history, it sure seems like the kings and rulers of the earth were more often than not successful in their murmuring and plotting of rebellion. When David was king, and then his son, Solomon, the rule of the Lord’s anointed went out to many of the surrounding nations. But after Solomon died, the kings who sat on David’s throne never again wielded the same kind of authority and power. It was mostly just a continual, gradual decline until eventually the Lord’s anointed was taken captive and exiled and there was no longer any king in Jerusalem. So *then* what was the meaning of Psalm 2? It might have made sense in the days of David and Solomon, when the rule of Yahweh’s king was constantly expanding and the future looked bright. But what about when the kings were suffering defeat, and oppression, and even exile? Imagine, then, going up to the temple and worshipping with the words of Psalm 2: “***Why*** do the nations rage and the peoples murmur ***in vain?***”

I imagine the Psalmist being first completely ***astonished***, and then after that genuinely ***amused***, and then after that ***sad***, and then finally ***indignant*** and ***angry***. All of these feelings (astonishment, amusement, sadness, indignant anger) can be summed up in the Psalmist’s question: “***Why*** do the nations rage and the peoples murmur ***in vain?***” Why do they even attempt something so completely ludicrous and impossible and stupid? It’s as though the nations and peoples of the earth have all gone insane. It’s as though they’re completely out of their minds. The Psalmist obviously isn’t worried – not in the slightest, tiniest, teeniest little bit. But then is he somehow in denial? Is he blind to reality? How can he justify this “over the top” confidence when to *all* appearances it’s the kings and rulers of the earth that actually have the upper hand? Suddenly, now, the scene shifts from earth to heaven:

II. “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, ‘As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.’”

In verses 1-3 we saw the “kings ***of the earth***” all gathered together. Now in verses 4-6 we see the one who “sits ***in the heavens***.” This one who sits in the heavens isn’t sitting there idly. The point of His sitting is that He sits enthroned in the heavens. This time, instead of referring to YAHWEH, the Psalmist refers to ADONAI, the Master and Sovereign over all the universe. As ADONAI sits there enthroned in the heavens, He doesn’t sit there uncaring and detached. The point is that from His throne in the heavens, He looks down and sees all the kings of the earth gathered together. He looks down and He hears all their murmuring.

- ✓ Psalm 11:4 — The LORD’s throne is in heaven; his eyes see...
- ✓ Psalm 33:13 (cf. 14:2) — The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man.

And from His throne in the heavens, ADONAI laughs; He holds the nations and kings of the earth in derision. (cf. Psalm 37:13; 59:8) At first you might think this sounds “mean,” but it’s the only way to really put everything in true perspective. The Lord laughs because it is utterly laughable. The Lord holds them in derision because no plotting has ever been more ludicrously empty and futile and vain, and doomed to failure from the start. “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.” Why? Because not to do so would be to not understand the situation.

“Then he will speak to them in his *wrath*, and *terrify* them in his *fury*, saying...” Saying what? Saying, “I will rain fire and brimstone upon you from heaven”? Saying, “I will open up the earth so that it swallows you whole”? Saying, “I will send a host of angels to annihilate your armies?”

“Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying...” Saying what? “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” *God’s answer* to the nations is the coronation ceremony—the enthronement ceremony—of the king in Jerusalem. One commentator translates like this: “*I*, yes *I*, have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” In other words, the kings and nations of the earth can murmur and plot rebellion all they want, but the sovereign master of the universe has made His decision. He has set *His* king on Zion, *His* holy hill. This is the decision of the one who sits in the heavens.

But what’s really so “*terrifying*” about this? Why should this be such a terrifying expression of God’s “wrath” and “fury”? After describing the scene on earth, and then the scene in heaven, all of a sudden, it’s the “Lord’s anointed” himself who speaks. We just heard the “testimony” of YAHWEH (“As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill”), and now we hear the testimony of YAHWEH’s anointed king:

III. I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.’”

Now when the Lord’s anointed says, “I will tell of the decree,” he’s not being reluctant. There is no dutiful, grudging attitude here! “I will tell of the decree with joy and gladness!” “I will tell of the decree,” we might even imagine, “with singing and dancing!” “The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you.’”

When did the Lord say this? Obviously it was *after* this son of David had already been born and probably already grown. So when exactly did Yahweh beget His son? We have to read now about the covenant that God made with David:

✓ 2 Samuel 7:11–16 — The LORD declares to you [David] that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom... ***I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.*** When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him... Your throne shall be established forever.

So it was on the coronation day of each successive king in David's line that God took that king to be His royal son. On the day the king was crowned and anointed – *on that very day*, he became YAHWEH's *son*. And so it was on *that day* that each new king in David's line could recite these words as his very own: "I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to *me*, 'You are my *Son*; *today* I have *begotten* you.'"

Now what do you think it means when you're the royal son of Yahweh? What do you think it means when you're the royal son of the one who sits enthroned in the heavens? In the words of YAHWEH Himself, it means this: "**Ask** of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." What does it mean when you are the royal son of the one who sits enthroned in the heavens? It means you have only to *ask*, and He will subdue the entire world under your feet – which explains why the Lord setting His King on Zion, His holy hill, should be so utterly terrifying to all the plotting nations, and peoples, and kings, and rulers of the earth. Now we know why YAHWEH's decision to set His king on Zion, His holy hill, is such a deadly expression of His wrath and fury. This king has only to ask, and it will be given to him to "break" all the plotting nations of the earth "with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Make no mistake, these are "Rated R" words. These are graphic, horrifying, terrorizing words. And it was the *will* of YAHWEH that His royal son should make this request – not for his own advancement, but for the sake of bringing the good and righteous rule of YAHWEH to all the earth. The kings and nations of the earth can murmur and plot rebellion all they want, but the one who sits in the heavens has made His decision. "As for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.

Psalm 1 ended with a warning: "The *way* of the wicked will *perish*." And now Psalm 2 ends with these words [see diagram]:

IV. "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."

See how the beginning of Psalm 2 echoes the beginning of Psalm 1? And now also the *end* of Psalm 2 echoes the *end* of Psalm 1.

Psalm 2 began with this astonished, and amused, and indignant question: "**Why** do the nations rage and the peoples murmur *in vain*?" Why are they attempting a rebellion so completely ludicrous and impossible and stupid? It's as though the nations and kings of the earth have all gone insane. It's as though they're completely out of their minds.

Now the Psalmist concludes by exhorting these same kings to "be *wise*" and these same rulers of the earth to "be *warned*." Instead of taking counsel together "against YAHWEH," they should "serve YAHWEH with fear, and rejoice with trembling." Instead of taking counsel together "against the Lord's anointed," they should "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and [they] perish in

* Psalm 97:1, 4 — The LORD reigns, *let the earth rejoice*; let the many coastlands be glad! ... His lightnings light up the world; *the earth sees and trembles*.

the way.” But will the nations, and peoples, and kings, and rulers of the earth be wise? Will they be warned? Or will they march heedlessly and recklessly on to their blatantly obvious doom and destruction?

So what does all of this mean for us? Well, something rather unexpected happens now. It very much feels like we’ve already reached the end of the Psalm. These verses, along with verses 1-3, make the perfect “bookends” for chapter two [see diagram]. Notice how chapter 1 also has its own “bookends,” and how the closing bookend of chapter 1 is almost identical to the closing bookend of chapter 2. But after what seems to be the closing bookend of chapter 2, we find suddenly that there’s more. [see diagram]

V. “BLESSED are all who take refuge in him.”

This *is appropriate* to Psalm 2. But there’s also a sense in which it doesn’t seem to fit. Both in terms of *structure* and *content*, this last phrase just feels like it dangles on the end. So it seems very likely to me that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it was a later editor of the Psalms who added these words not only as an application of Psalm 2, but as the closing “bookend” of the first two chapters. [see diagram] (cf. Jacobson) Psalm 1 begins, “blessed is the man,” and Psalm 2 ends, “blessed are all who take refuge in him.” And so these two chapters that together introduce the entire Psalter are finally tied together by the bookends.

So what does this mean for us? What does this tell us about how we’re meant to understand, and apply, and use the book of Psalms?

Conclusion

For centuries, the kings in Israel had only to ask and YAHWEH would have given them the nations as their heritage, and the ends of the earth as their possession. But they had to ask as the *Lord’s anointed*. They had to ask out of a desire to spread *YAHWEH’s* rule to the ends of the earth. And so there were many kings who didn’t even ask. It was nothing to them that they were royal sons of YAHWEH. There were a few kings who did ask, and they experienced mighty victories over their enemies. But for the most part, the kings failed. They experienced oppression, and defeat, and eventually exile. Now the people were returned to the land, but there was still no king. God’s people were an insignificant “nobody” in danger of being lost within the huge empires of their day.

So how were God’s people to make sense of their past, and now their current place and meaning in the world? That was the burning question. And two weeks ago, we saw that the Psalms were carefully shaped and arranged in just such a way as to answer *this* question. So the *introduction* to the Psalms is just setting the agenda. It’s showing us the *path* that the Psalms will take as they answer this most pressing of questions for the people of God.

In Psalm 1, we saw that for the returned exiles, it was first of all delighting and taking pleasure in YAHWEH’s *instruction* [His *torah*] that would mark them out as a distinct and separate people in the world. We are to *murmur* God’s instruction day and night and so in this way be like the tree whose roots are drawing up life-giving moisture from channels of water. And so the book of

Psalms itself will be a book of murmurings. The psalms were collected in order to give *voice and speech* to God's people, *not so we can selfishly vent our own feelings*, but so that we might have an inspired *language with which to murmur Yahweh's torah day and night – in every circumstance of life*.

But what about all of the powerful nations and kings of the earth who are murmuring rebellion against YAHWEH and against His anointed? What about all of their mockery, and oppression, and persecution of God's people who are murmuring His *torah* day and night? Psalm chapter 2 calls us to add to our murmuring, *laughter*. The point of Psalm 2 is not really to send a message to the plotting kings and rulers of the earth. The point is to send a message to all of God's people at all times in history – *Trust* in the Lord! (cf. VanGemeren; Goldingay) “He who sits in the heavens is laughing; the Lord holds nations and kings, and peoples and rulers in constant derision.” Therefore, “blessed are all who take *refuge* in him”!

And yet we know that YAHWEH's ultimate answer to the plotting of the nations is the setting of His King on Zion, His holy hill. God's ultimate answer to the plotting of the nations is to beget a royal Son and to make Him this awesome promise: “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.” When the Psalter was given its final shape and form, there was no Son of Yahweh sitting on David's throne. So Psalm 2 was a reminder to the people that as they murmured YAHWEH's *torah*, they must trust in YAHWEH's *promise*.[†] As the Psalms *themselves* murmur Yahweh's *torah*, they will also murmur in constant anticipation of Yahweh's royal Son![‡] This will be the grounds for the downcast to lift up their faces, and for the oppressed to have hope. And so the book of Psalms is from beginning to end a *book* of hope, of expectation, of prophecy – a book that's fulfilled in Jesus Christ.[§] (cf. Jacobson; 57) Paul preached in one of his sermons:

- ✓ Acts 13:32–33 — We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.”

The writer of Hebrews explains:

- ✓ Hebrews 1:3–5 (cf. 5:5) — After making purification for sins, [Jesus] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are

[†] “Together these two psalms emphasize the centrality of *torah* in the present life of the faithful (Ps. 1) while stimulating enduring hope in the *future* messianic deliverance and rule of Yahweh (Ps. 2).” (Wilson)

[‡] Note the other “Royal Psalms” (18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144), and especially the “strategic placement” of Psalms 72, 89 and 144 at the end of Books II, III, and V respectively (Psalm 144 is the last chapter before the closing doxology, the Great Hallel). See Wilson, pp. 119-126.

[§] Notice how when the Chronicler recounts the story of God's covenant with David, he leaves out these words that we find in Samuel: “When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men...” (2 Sam. 7:14; cf. 1 Chron. 17:11-14) This is because the Chronicler wrote during the days of the restoration, after the apparent failure of the Davidic line. When the Chronicler wrote, God's covenant with David could only have reference to David's ideal Son, the ultimate Messiah and Savior of God's people.

my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”?

As the royal Son of Yahweh, Jesus *has* asked for the nations as His heritage, and the ends of the earth as His possession. He *is* now ruling on David’s throne. And one day He will come and break the plotting nations with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. Jesus says of the one who faces suffering and martyrdom:

- ✓ Revelation 2:27 — He will rule [the nations] with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.
- ✓ Revelation 19:15 (cf. Rev. 12:5) — From [Jesus’] mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.**

After the disciples had been beaten for proclaiming the Gospel, they reported what had happened to their friends, and then they all prayed together:

- ✓ Acts 4:24–30 — Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed”— for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

Psalm chapter 2 calls us to add to our murmuring, *laughter*. The point of Psalm 2 is to send this message to all of God’s people at all times in history – **Trust** in the Lord! Trust in the Lord! – In *whatever* circumstance! So as we murmur YAHWEH’s *torah*, may we never cease to trust in YAHWEH’s *promise*.

“**Blessed** are all who take refuge in Him.”

** And then there will be a new heavens and a new earth, and even a new Jerusalem. The Apostle John writes of this New Jerusalem: Revelation 21:22–26 — I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

Psalms 1-2
Introducing the Psalter

BLESSED is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, and in the way of sinners does not stand, and in the seat of scoffers does not sit;

but his delight is in the instruction of the Lord; he **MURMURS** his instruction day and night. He is like a tree planted by channels of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Not so the wicked! Rather, they are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the *wicked* will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the **WAY** of the wicked will **PERISH**.

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Why do the nations rage and the peoples **MURMUR** in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.”

He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

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.