

PSALM 2

- BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO PUT ALL THEIR TRUST IN THE LORD
AND HIS ANOINTED MESSIAH-KING! -

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Introduction

A gateway to the Psalms

The first two Psalms function as a fascinating gateway and introduction to the Psalter. A linguistic analysis of and comparison between Psalm 1 and 2 help us to understand their placement in juxtaposition at the beginning of the collection of Psalms. The characters we have met in the first Psalm are further described in Psalm 2. The righteous man of Psalm 1 appears again in Psalm 2. Now he is a priest and king enthroned in heaven. Again, he has opponents just as in Psalm 1. In Psalm 2 they are identified as conspiring rulers and nations who reject his rule and seek to do away with him.

The Lord's anointed messiah is king

We can say that Psalm 2 places the struggle between righteousness and unrighteousness in a world-wide context. Together with the first Psalm, Psalm 2 wants to encourage the believer to see *both* what is happening amongst God's people and what happens on the international social and political front, in the light of the righteous rule of God's messiah. The divine response to the plans and plotting of the wicked assures their ultimate defeat unless they submit to him, the righteous and anointed son of Yahweh. Psalm 2 concludes with a reaffirmation of the same judgment promised at the conclusion of Psalm 1. In this way, this second Psalm is an assurance from God that the Lord's anointed king is his true son to whom will be given the ends of the earth as possession.

While Psalm 1 speaks mainly about opposition towards the Lord and his law (thora) and the end of the wicked, Psalm 2 features the same enemies, but now the focus is on the opposition against the

Lord (Yahweh) and his anointed king and messiah. Now the nations (Hebr: gôyim) are included in the opposition against the messiah-son of the Lord. The wicked are still those who would not willingly and in faith and obedience submit to the Lord and his anointed king. The wicked are not portrayed as those who worship other gods; the wicked are those who say: "Away with the Lord and his messiah!" The wickedness lies in the rejection of God's rule in and through his anointed king at his right hand, because the Lord has given everything over to this king. The son of God must be kissed in subjection.

The Psalm functions as a rebuke and warning against the wicked, while it pronounces those blessed that trust in the Lord and his plans through his king.

Use in New Testament

We should notice that this Psalm is one of the most frequently quoted Psalms. It is always used to support Jesus' claim to be the promised messiah of Israel.

Form and structure

It seems natural to divide Psalm 2 into four parts. In each part, a different voice can be heard:

- ❖ Verses 1-3: the rejection of the Lord and his anointed king.
- ❖ Verses 4-6: the Lord's reaction to the wicked.
- ❖ Verses 7-9: the anointed king himself speaks. He proclaims what the Lord has promised him.
- ❖ Verse 10-12: the mighty rebellious kings and rulers are called to give up their wickedness and subject them to the Lord.

The Psalm ends with a beatitude proclaiming the blessedness of those who put all their trust in the Lord alone.

This Psalm is usually recognized as a so-called Royal Psalm. "*Traditionally royal psalms such as Psalms 2 and 110 have been given an eschatological messianic interpretation. Such an understanding is to be found in the New Testament...*"ⁱ (cf. Matt. 3:17; Matt. 17:5; Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:4; etc).

Exposition

Verses 1-3:

¹ *Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?*

² *The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed, saying,*

³ *“Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.”*

- ❖ [Vs. 1] Here we have a secret conspiracy; plans that will not bear the light of God’s presence and are not openly on the agenda! It is important to notice that the first voice we hear in this Psalm is not that of the wicked. We hear someone warning the wicked. The sensibility of their revolt is questioned. Their conspiracy is noted for what it is; it is senseless and futile. Verses 4-9 explain the reasons for the futility and foolishness of their evil plans; it simply cannot and will not succeed. The rulers of all the nations must acknowledge Israel’s king. The rule of the Lord’s king will be a rule in the context of violence, conspiracy, danger and aggression. This situation prepares us for the beatitude with which the Psalm concludes: *“Blessed is all who seek refuge in him.”* For the believer who does acknowledge the king appointed by the Lord, safety and security will always be in the “shadow of the Almighty”.
- ❖ [Vs. 2] This verse indicates against whom the revolution is planned. It is against the Lord and his anointed. The anointed is identified as the king whom the Lord has appointed. It is the king who will rule in “Zion” (cf. vs. 6).
- ❖ [Vs. 3] The plural indicates a clear revolt not just against a human king. The wickedness is cultivated against *the Lord* in the first place and thus against the king He appointed. Note how the wicked experience the rule of the Lord; they characterize it as “chains” and “shackles/fetters”! For them it is a bondage! For them, Yahweh’s rule is not liberation, but slavery. What could be more insulting to the Lord?! It is perhaps good to note again that this Psalm introduces the theme of Yahweh’s rule. In the rest of the Psalter we will see how the Lord’s rule is depicted as in fact part of his goodness, mercy, love and caring presence towards his people! How can we characterize their attitude? It is one of arrogance, defiance, disrespect and a desire for autonomy towards the Lord and willingness to take appropriate action: *“Let us break...let us throw off!”*

Verses 4-6:

⁴ *The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.*

⁵ *He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,*

⁶ *"I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain."*

- ❖ [Vs. 4] Immediately a distance is created between the Lord and the wicked; Yahweh is *in heaven*, they are *on earth*. Their triviality is immediately emphasized. They cannot "reach" God. He laughs and scoffs at them in their revolt and arrogance, letting them have their way in the meantime/for a while.
- ❖ [Vs. 5] The Lord expresses (scoffing) laughter and anger/wrath. It should be noted that God is not "by nature" full of anger and wrath. Anger is only the Lord's response of being provoked by the rejection of what is "natural" to him, i.e. his goodness, loving care and gracious rule. We may not think about God's love in the same way that we experience his wrath/anger. The Lord is a loving God that can and does get angry (when provoked). But we may never say God is a God of anger and wrath in the same way that He is a God of love and kindness and a fountain of whatever is good!
- ❖ [Vs. 6] The emphasis in this verse is on the Lord's action. He has installed his king. Therefore any revolt against the anointed king in Zion will always be revolt against the Lord himself. The Lord himself guarantees the rule of his messiah-king. The safety and rule of the Lord's anointed king can be guaranteed, because the king is allowed to live and rule in Zion, the holy mountain of the Lord. This mountain is God's own personal dwelling place on earth amongst his people. The Lord's presence therefore secures the rule of his messiah-king. Herein lies the guarantee for the futility of all revolt against the Lord's anointed king.

Verses 7-9:

⁷ *I will proclaim the LORD's decree: He said to me, "You are my son; today I have become your father.*

⁸ *Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.*

⁹ *You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery."*

- ❖ [Vs. 7] A new speaker is introduced; now the *anointed king* himself speaks! He functions here as messenger of the Lord; he has a decree to proclaim and that decree concerns himself, or rather his own rule! He attests to himself, because the Lord gave him a decree to proclaim! The content of this decree/proclamation is that he will now be recognized as son. His anointment as king of Yahweh functions as a “generation”. By this the Lord made him heir of all the divine possessions! This is a divine decree and no enemy can change it; no revolt, enmity or rejection. By this “generation” he becomes the Lord’s official representative.
- ❖ [Vs. 8] Being heir of this divine and heavenly kingdom, he may take all liberty to ask for whatever is to the benefit of the kingdom. He just needs to ask and all nations will be subjected to him; the ends of the earth will become his possession.
- ❖ [Vs. 9] As the divine representative he also has power. This is demonstrated in his power over the enemies of the Lord. He will break them! They will not be able to break the rule of the Lord over them as they planned (cf. vs.3). The anointed king’s rule will be confirmed and established.

Verses 10-12:

¹⁰ *Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth.*

¹¹ *Serve the LORD with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling.*

¹² *Kiss his son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment.*

Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

- ❖ [Vs. 10] The reality described in the first nine verses leads to a call and warning: “*be wise...be warned*”. This is addressed to the kings and mighty that are in revolt. To not subject to the Lord’s messiah-king is foolishness! The call is to wisdom.
- ❖ [Vs. 11] The image portrayed here is exactly the opposite of the disrespect displayed by the rulers and kings in verses 2 and 3. “*Fear*” has here everything to do with “respect” and “honour” and above all “trust” (faith).
- ❖ [Vs. 12] Here the respect and honour asked in verse 11 is portrayed in a kiss. Most probably it refers to the respect demonstrated to a king by kissing his feet. Kissing his feet would

signal total subjection and recognition for who he really is. Eventually, this subjection and respect is best demonstrated by the beatitude with which the Psalm ends:

- ❖ [Vs. 12b] This is what it means to kiss the son – take refuge in him. Seek him as your everything. Surrender yourself to his totally gracious rule! Put all your trust in the Lord and his anointed messiah-king!

Application

- ❖ The truest distinction that can be made on earth is between those who revolt and are in rebellion against God's anointed king Jesus Christ, and those who willingly, in trust and worship, surrender themselves to Jesus as God's anointed at his right hand in heaven. This separation may even make a distinction within a Christian congregation, separating the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked, the proud and the humble.
- ❖ The pastoral leadership in any Christian congregation must always see it as their first duty to lead the congregation to humble surrender in faith to the Lord's anointed messiah, Jesus Christ. Their duty is not to keep everybody happy, entertained or busy with church activities. Nobody will be lonely, feel socially marginalized or neglected when they are lovingly, persistently and with great care lead to kiss the feet of Jesus in faith.
- ❖ We should not be afraid to warn against the negation of God's intentions in and through his appointed Son, Jesus Christ. In him and him alone God's purposes can be found and realized.
- ❖ At the same time, we must never get tired of inviting and encouraging people to put their full trust in God's wisdom displayed in anointing Jesus of Nazareth as his Son with his Holy Spirit. The wisdom and blessedness of taking refuge in Him in a world filled with deceit, bitterness, persecution and revolution, should always be promoted.
- ❖ Let us encourage one another to seek the blessedness to be experienced when we take refuge in Jesus. He was publicly appointed by God as his anointed (Matt. 3:13-17), yes his rule was disputed and through that he was crucified in a mock coronation (Matt. 27:27-31); but through his proclamation of God's decree in and through him as the true Heir of God's kingdom, he has risen and is exalted as God's king in heaven and in his Name people from all nations are called to everything he taught (Matt. 28:19-20).

- ❖ Take the anger and wrath of God very seriously (cf. comments at vs. 5), because it is a reality. However, it is a reality as God's response when his goodness in Christ is seen as a chain to be broken and shackles to be thrown off.

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ⁱ Day, J. *Psalms – Old Testament guides*. Sheffield Academic Press: Sheffield. 1990, p. 90 ff.