

B. The Second Psalm – Tribute to Yahweh’s Son-King

As noted, there are only four psalms in Book One that aren’t ascribed to David. The second psalm is one of those, though the New Testament indicates that Jewish tradition held that David penned it also. Psalm 2 is an enthronement psalm that extols and exalts Yahweh’s son-king in whom He exercises His own reign in the world. In this way, the psalm hearkens back to the creation account and its depiction of man as God’s image-bearer, created to be His royal image-son, manifesting His presence and administering His lordship over His creation. It also echoes the Davidic Covenant, by which Yahweh pledged to David to establish his royal dynasty, throne and kingdom everlastingly in a future son (2 Samuel 7). David, Yahweh’s chosen and devoted son-king, was to find his own regal sonship fully realized in a singular descendent.

Thus Psalm 2 is the appropriate sequel to Psalm 1: The first psalm opens the Psalter by extolling the blessedness that attends those who are devoted to Yahweh and His Torah; the second psalm then connects that blessedness with allegiance to Yahweh’s king – His regal son who embodies His Torah (His disclosed truth) by administering His will and lordship in the world.

1. Psalm 2 is constructed like a scene in a play in which various actors take the stage and interact with one another and the audience. Those actors include a narrator (the psalmist), human insurgents, Yahweh and His son-king.
 - a. The narrator opens the psalm with an astonished question expressing the absurdity of human beings seeking to liberate themselves from God’s lordship (vv. 1-2), after which the rebels themselves speak and express their intent (v. 3).
 - b. After His adversaries assert their confidence of self-rule, Yahweh responds, showing that the narrator’s incredulity was well-founded. Humans may boldly and aggressively assert their autonomy, but He will be Lord over His creation, which He has demonstrated by anointing and installing His chosen man as king.
 - c. Then the king himself speaks, affirming that Yahweh has indeed decreed his kingship and established his reign – not merely as a ruler, but as His *son*, installed as to administer the Creator-Father’s rule over all the nations in His name according to His purpose and will (vv. 7-9).
 - d. The narrator then closes out the scene, drawing out the implications of this coronation. Yahweh has installed his son-king on His throne, and all are obliged to embrace and honor him. Echoing the previous psalm, he asserted that those who do will find blessing, while those who refuse will perish (ref. 1:4-6).
2. Again, Psalm 2 opens with the psalmist (apparently David) decrying the absurdity and vanity of human opposition to Yahweh and His reign. In that way he underscored what the first psalm made clear, which is that many of God’s human image-bearers are not devoted to Him. The world is filled with “wicked” people who “walk in the counsel of the ungodly, stand in the path with sinners, and sit in the seat of scoffers.” Some are conscious of their waywardness and rebellion, while others are not. But all such persons live their lives in effective opposition to the Creator-God and His truth and will.

In this psalm, the psalmist identified these persons by means of a *double parallelism* in which he juxtaposed two parallel constructions. The first correlates *nations* and *peoples*, and the second *kings* and *rulers*, emphasizing that this resistance to God's rule marks all nations and people groups. It may find an obvious example in the hubris of kings and rulers, but the desire for autonomy beats in every human heart.

- a. So the psalmist implicitly included the *nation of Israel* and its rulers in His indictment. This is suggested by his distinction between *the nations* (denoting the Gentiles – Acts 4:25) and *the peoples* (characteristically, the people of Israel), and perhaps also by the corresponding distinction between *the kings of the earth* and *the rulers*. The language hints at Jew-Gentile parallelism, and the early disciples certainly interpreted it this way (ref. Acts 4:23-28).
 - b. The psalmist described this opposition in terms of a unified uprising that finds the world's rulers and people taking a stand against Yahweh and His "anointed one" (Hebrew *meshiach*, a general designation that later was uniquely assigned to Jesus as Messiah). The writer then has them speak, and they state that their intent is to throw off Yahweh's authority and demands on them. They expressed this in the parallel images of *breaking fetters* and *casting away cords* that bind and constrain (v. 3). Their goal was liberation from God and His constraints.
3. After the rebels express their design for self-rule, the writer turned his attention to Yahweh's response. He followed the same pattern he used with the human actors in verses 2-3, namely speaking for them (v. 2), and then allowing them to speak for themselves (v. 3). Here, he noted that Yahweh's response was to laugh at this foolish and impotent hubris, and then address the people directly with His own outrage. This uprising reflected the universal human desire for autonomy; God's indignation expressed His unyielding commitment to remain Lord of the earth. *But He would rule the world through another human being – a man who would reign in His name and authority as a regal son.* Yahweh symbolically reigned from Mount Zion, the site of His sanctuary and seat of His throne, and the place where heaven and earth converged. He would not abdicate that throne to human challengers, yet He was determined to have a *man* on His throne – a chosen and anointed man who, unlike every other human king, would faithfully administer His rule: "*As for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion...*"

If David did indeed pen this psalm, God's theocratic designs were already clear at the time of its writing. Indeed, David himself would soon recognize – if he hadn't already – that *he* was the anointed son-king Yahweh had chosen to sit on His throne in Jerusalem. God had long before revealed that the royal rule in Israel belonged to Judah (Genesis 49:10), and now that scepter was about to pass into David's hand (if it hadn't already). Yahweh would subdue all Israel and the surrounding nations through His anointed king, but only as setting the stage for another to come. God's covenant with David made it clear that the ultimate manifestation of His rule – i.e., His everlasting reign over all the nations of the earth – awaited the birth of a future descendent of David. So the psalmist's depiction of this unique, anointed son-king pointed beyond David to that individual; though David was the greatest and most accomplished of Israel's kings, the glory, extent and power of his rule never came close to what Yahweh pledged to this regal son.

4. After Yahweh rebuked and rebuffed His adversaries with the announcement of His installation of His chosen king, that ruler immediately affirmed his enthronement and the divine decree that stood behind it (v.v. 7-9). Yahweh was installing him as king, not just over Israel, but all the world. The entire earth and all its inhabitants were to be his sole possession – acquired, not through military conquest or coup, but *inheritance* from the Creator-Lord who fashioned them, gave them life, and appointed their habitation (cf. Acts 17:24-26). And the basis of this inheritance is the king's *sonship* – sonship deriving, not from genealogical descent, but *decree*. This underscores what is perhaps the most significant, and often misunderstood, part of Psalm 2, namely the relationship between this ruler's sonship, His installment as king, and Yahweh's decree.
- a. The first thing to note is that this king became Yahweh's son in connection with his enthronement: "*I have installed my king upon Zion... this day I have begotten you.*" As much as theologians grapple with the issue of the eternal sonship of the second person of the Trinity, this passage doesn't speak to that matter. The concern here is sonship as reflecting Yahweh's design to exercise His lordship through His human image-bearer. This is precisely the thrust of the Genesis creation account. God created Adam and Eve in His own image and likeness so that, through them and their offspring, He should manifest His own presence in and rule over His creation. Hence man's created *nature* and *status* as "son of God" (Luke 3:38) reflected his ordained *vocation* as vice-regent on behalf of his Creator-Father; in all things, form follows function.
 - b. So the concept of *begottenness* doesn't pertain to ontological origin (the Son's origination in trinitarian terms), but *ordination* and *vocation* – here as Yahweh's son-king (cf. Luke 3-4, where Jesus' sonship pertains to His vocation as True Man: *man of the Spirit* and *True Israel* as Yahweh's elect son). Importantly, this relationship between sonship and kingship is central to the Davidic Covenant, by which Yahweh pledged that His intent to rule the world through human beings would be realized in and through a son of David. In a manner not clear at that time, this unique son was to be the focal point of a line of regal sons, such that these sons of David would be Yahweh's sons (cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-16; 1 Chronicles 28:1-8; 1 Kings 2:1-4; Jeremiah 33:19-26).
 - c. So also this psalm reveals that this son's kingship was to be unqualified and unassailable. David ruled over Israel and achieved dominion over many of the surrounding nations, thereby fulfilling the Abrahamic promise of a vast kingdom (cf. Genesis 15:18-21; 1 Kings 2:12, 4:21-25). But this kingdom was soon marred by sin, rebellion, and fracture, with desolation and exile not far behind. Solomon reigned at the pinnacle of Yahweh's Israelite kingdom, ruling in a time of unparalleled peace, prosperity, and power, *but he never obtained the nations as his inheritance and the ends of the earth as his regal possession*; that attainment awaited another Davidic son-king, one whose authority, power, and dominion would be exhaustive and beyond successful challenge. This son-king would rule the nations with an iron staff, triumphing over His adversaries as completely as smashing a clay vessel on the ground (v. 9; cf. Daniel 7:1-14; Zechariah 9:9-10).

5. Finally, the psalmist again took center stage, closing out the scene as he opened it, with his own commentary that completed his song like a matching bookend. He began by decrying the hubris and absurdity of attempting insurrection against Yahweh and His anointed, and now closed by calling for submission and devotion to them (vv. 10-12).
- a. He specifically addressed *kings* and *judges*, not because such persons are unique in rebelling against God, but because they represent *human authority*, and all such authority pours fuel on the fire of human hubris with its confidence of sufficiency for autonomous rule. Rulers and judges epitomize this, but *all people* are subject to the delusion of independence, self-sufficiency, and self-rule. The fall has left every human being determined to think, judge and act independently of God, hence the *nations* rise up against Him and the *peoples* plot in vain (v. 1).
 - b. But as kings and judges wield authority and power over other men, so it is expected that they do so with discernment, wisdom, and restraint. Thus the psalmist called on them to exercise these virtues in considering Yahweh's sovereign determination to install His king as supreme ruler over all men. Rulers and judges, who instinctively ascribe to themselves superior insight and understanding, ought to demonstrate that claimed discernment and wisdom by *rejoicing* in Yahweh's triumphal installation of His anointed son-king and *worshipping* Him with all reverence and devotion.
 - c. And worshipping Yahweh in this way entails "*kissing the Son*" – paying due homage to His king. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. For, by Yahweh's design, his authority and kingdom know no bounds, and aren't subject to time, circumstance, or human designs. In this son-king, Yahweh determined to establish His own sovereign reign over all the earth and all of its inhabitants, not just for a season, but forever. Other kings, rulers, and authorities will come and go and see their power rise and fall, but Yahweh's anointed will possess his throne to all eternity. Indeed, his reign will one day see the entire creation fully subjected to him as his Father intended (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:25-28; Ephesians 1:9-10).

Hence, it is futile to oppose this king's authority; resisting Yahweh's king is resisting Yahweh Himself (v. 2). Because He has put everything in subjection to the son-king with the ultimate goal of summing up everything in him, all contradiction and opposition will be completely eradicated. Ruling in Yahweh's name as His image-son, this king is himself "*compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth.*" And yet, like His regal Father, he will by no means excuse those who refuse him; all who will not have him as their king will be destroyed (v. 12; cf. Matthew 21:33-45).

- d. But destruction is not what Yahweh would have for His human image-children. Rather, the Father's intent in enthroning His son is that all creation will find life and peace in him. Hence the writer's concluding exclamation: "*How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!*" This, then, answers the question of how devotion to Yahweh's Torah brings blessedness; it is by embracing and being transformed by the Torah made flesh, the Word of life now enthroned in the heavenly mount.