

## Psalm 2 in the History of Redemption

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### Introduction to Psalm 2

In the summer of 2014, I had the privilege of participating in the Young Scholars Summit, sponsored by Institute for Biblical Religion and held at Tyndale House, Cambridge, England. For a week, a group of young biblical studies scholars, under the guidance of a few senior scholars, discussed the topic of Messianic psalms. In our meetings, we discussed various questions related to the study of Messianic psalms such as: What is a Messianic psalm? How should we understand Messianic psalms in their Old Testament setting? How do Messianic psalms predict and anticipate the person and work of Jesus Christ? How do the New Testament authors apply Messianic psalms to Jesus Christ? At the end of the conference, I was given the assignment to write an essay on Psalm 2. This essay represents the fruit of that conference and assignment.

In a study of Messianic psalms, an analysis of Psalm 2 is not only appropriate but also essential. As a kingship psalm, it represents not only the ideals, hopes, and aspirations of Israel, but also the Lord's purposes and plans for the Kingdom of God. In this sense, Psalm 2 serves as a "snapshot" of God's purposes for his people at the time of David – purposes that were established at creation but will only ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Moreover, since various New Testament authors frequently quote or allude to Psalm 2 to demonstrate its fulfillment in Christ, they believed the psalm predicted, prophesied, or prefigured the person and work of Jesus in some way. The purpose of this essay is to investigate Psalm 2 in its original Old Testament setting and subsequently to consider how the New Testament authors apply Psalm 2 to Jesus. Throughout my investigation, I will connect the major themes in Psalm 2 with other places in Scripture to demonstrate how these themes and trajectories unfold in redemptive history. At the conclusion of the essay, I will offer some thoughts on the Messianic nature of Psalm 2 and discuss how this study can help us understand Old Testament texts and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

### Psalm 2 in Its Old Testament Context

Psalm 2 is a royal psalm, and the theme of kingship permeates the entire psalm. While many psalms emphasize either God's heavenly reign or the reign of the earthly king, Psalm 2 celebrates both realities – God's heavenly kingship and the earthly kingship of the Lord's anointed one appointed by the Lord to accomplish

his purposes on earth. Although there is no title for Psalm 2, Acts 4:25 reveals that David was the author. In light of the psalm's content, it is possible that David wrote the psalm to reflect on his coronation and God's promises to him in 2 Samuel 7. Moreover, the psalm might have been utilized to celebrate the coronation of subsequent kings in Judah.

At its core, Psalm 2 represents the ideals, hopes, expectations, and even the certain future of the Davidic kingdom. In this section, I will investigate the meaning of Psalm 2 in its Old Testament context and seek to answer a number of questions. To whom did the psalm originally refer? Was the psalm prophetic of the Messiah in its original context? How would Psalm 2 have been understood by its original audience? My analysis will follow the basic structure of Psalm 2, which can be divided into four main sections: 1) The Rebellion of the Nations (2:1-3), 2) God's Response (2:4-6), 3) God's Promises to the Son (2:7-9), and 4) Invitation and Threat of Judgment to the Nations (2:10-12).

### **Psalm 2:1-3 – The Rebellion of the Nations**

*Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, 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." (Ps 2:1-3)<sup>1</sup>*

Psalm 2 begins with a problem. The nations rage, the peoples plot, the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against the Lord's anointed (2:1-2). The rebellion is such that these nations seek to "burst their bonds" and "cast away their cords" from the Lord and his anointed (2:3).

The term "anointed," which is the term for "Messiah" in Hebrew or "Christ" in Greek, is one that can refer to any person "anointed" by God for a specific office or task. The term can also refer to the Old Testament king. For example, Samuel anointed (verb form of same cognate word) David as king (1 Sam 16:13), and David is commonly referred to as the Lord's "anointed" (2 Sam 19:21; 2 Sam 22:51). This is the nuance of the term in Ps 2:2 – a reference to the king of Israel. Some translations capitalize the term (NIV "Anointed One") (NAS and NKJ "Anointed") and most likely have in view the New Testament fulfillment of Jesus as the "Messiah" or "Christ." In Ps 2:2, however, the Old Testament king is in view, and in light of the psalm's authorship (Acts 4:25), the immediate reference is to King David.

As previously noted, both heavenly and earthly kingship come into focus in Psalm 2. In fact, the relationship between the two is so close that they are almost inseparable. Rebellion against the Lord's earthly king is rebellion against the Lord. This close relationship between heavenly and earthly kingship is of no

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<sup>1</sup> All Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version.

minor significance. God creates humanity in his image for humanity to rule and have dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26). In Gen 1:28, God gives the command, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." From creation, God's intent is for humanity to rule under and alongside God, and to extend God's reign throughout the entire earth! In the New Testament, Jesus instructs his disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10). Here Jesus clarifies that the goal of redemptive history is for God's reign to be on the earth as it is in heaven. This theme is evident throughout Scripture, and Psalm 2 provides a glimpse of how this reality is expressed during the reign of David. God reigns in heaven and he has appointed his people (Israel), under the kingship of David, to reign alongside and under him.

Although it is impossible to identify the nations, peoples, kings, and rulers in rebellion, a likely occasion for rebellion would be a change in kingship, which could signify instability and a nation weakened in power. In light of the psalm's authorship, David's ascension to the throne after Saul's death could have provided an occasion for neighboring nations to rebel. Although Psalm 2 originally referred to specific rebellious nations, there is a possible wider application as Scripture makes it clear that all nations and peoples rebel against Yahweh and his kingship. This has been the pattern since Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden. Even in his promise of victory after the fall, God declared that humanity would be divided into two groups – the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent – and that there would be enmity between these two groups (Gen 3:15). In this sense, the nations of Psalm 2 are representative of all the nations of the earth who are in rebellion against the Lord and at enmity with his people.

### **Psalm 2:4-6 – God's Response**

*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." (Ps 2:4-6)*

In Ps 2:4-6, God responds to the rebellion of the nations through the installation and enthronement of his king. The Lord, the one who sits in the heavens, laughs and holds these nations and kings in derision (2:4). The notion of "sitting" or being "seated" often carries the connotation of reigning, and the context of Psalm 2 clarifies that this is the sense of the word here. The location of God's dwelling and "sitting," "in the heavens," carries the connotation of authority and rule. In Psalm 2, God is enthroned in the heavens, and his enemies are no threat to his power.

In Ps 2:5-6, God speaks to the rebellious nations and answers with the threat of his judgment (2:5). Redemptive history has demonstrated that God's wrath and

judgment are terrifying. Many nations – Egypt in the Exodus event and the nations in the land of Canaan – have already experienced the judgment of the great God in heaven who works to bring salvation to his people on the earth. God’s word now goes out to the rebellious nations of Psalm 2 when he responds, “I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill” (2:6). It is significant that the Lord who reigns in heaven answers the problem of the rebellious nations through his earthly king. Specifically, God will quell the threat of the rebellious nations through David, his chosen king on the earth. This decree is consistent with God’s purpose that humanity serve as his vice-regents to extend his reign throughout the entire earth.<sup>2</sup>

### **Psalm 2:7-9 – God’s Promises to the Son**

*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." (Ps 2:7-9)*

After the installation of his king (Ps 2:4-6), the Lord makes promises to the king (Ps 2:7-9). In a prophetic decree, the Lord proclaims, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you” (Ps 2:7). Though such language might be confusing to modern readers, it was common to refer to kings as the “sons” of their gods in the ancient world. This same usage of “son” is also found in both the Old and New Testaments. An important parallel is 2 Sam 7:12-14 where the Lord proclaims to David,

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. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

In this passage, the Lord promises that he will establish David’s throne forever, and his descendants will be “sons” of God while God will be “father” to them. Psalm 2:7 is reminiscent of and perhaps alludes to these covenant promises. The intimacy of the term “son” for the king and the term “father” for God reveals the interconnectedness of God’s reign and the reign of his servant king on the earth. The emphasis on “today” and “begotten” most likely recalls David’s ascension to the throne on the day of his coronation. The allusion to 2 Sam 7:14 lends further weight to the notion that Psalm 2 might have been appropriated by subsequent generations of Davidic kings in their coronation.

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<sup>2</sup> The reference to “Zion, my holy hill” is a reference to Jerusalem, the city of David, which became the religious and political center of Israel from the time of David. In the history of redemption, Zion is significant since it represents the place from which God’s reign and salvation would come (e.g., Ps 14:7; 110:2; Isa 59:20).

The Lord offers even greater prominence to the son when he says, “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” (Ps 2:8-9). The difficulty with this promise is that David’s kingdom never reached such heights. In light of this difficulty, some interpreters conclude that the psalm, in its Old Testament context, is predictive of the Messiah; however, as noted, the immediate reference of Psalm 2 is David and his kingdom. Another interpretive option is that the language of Ps 2:7-8 is merely hyperbolic, but in light of Old Testament theology, the language need not be understood as hyperbole. The conquest of the land of Canaan was such a daunting task that God continually reminds Joshua and his people of his power to work on behalf of Israel (Josh 1:1-9). In Josh 1:3-5, God promises, “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses...No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.” God’s promise to Joshua and Israel is quite similar to God’s offer to David in Psalm 2 – that the nations would be his heritage and the ends of the earth his possession. Although David’s kingdom never reached the heights offered in Psalm 2, the psalm nevertheless represents the ideals of the Davidic kingdom which, especially in the light of 2 Samuel 7, would find fulfillment in a later Davidic monarch.

The significance of Ps 2:8-9 in redemptive history cannot be overstated. In Gen 1:26-30, God reveals his purpose for humanity to extend his reign throughout the earth. In Gen 12:1-3, God chooses Abraham and his descendants to accomplish this purpose. God will bless Abraham by making him into a great nation and giving him a land, and Abraham will also be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen 12:1-3). At the time of David’s reign, God has given the land of promise to Israel, but his global purposes have not changed. At this time in redemptive history, there is greater specificity for God’s reign as David and his descendants become the conduit to express God’s reign on the earth. God’s offer to David to break the nations with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces is a picture of the complete dominion that David would have over the nations and his enemies.

### **Psalm 2:10-12 – Invitation and Threat of Judgment to the Nations**

*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.*

Psalm 2:10-12 brings the psalm to its logical and practical conclusion by calling the nations to submit to the Lord. Psalm 2:10 issues a call and warning for the kings of the earth to be wise. To be wise is to submit to the Lord and his anointed one (2:10-11). Rather than experiencing the wrath of the Lord, the nations can

serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling (2:11). With God's offer, two points are significant. First, there is a close connection between wisdom and submission to the Lord, a significant Biblical theme.<sup>3</sup> Second, we see the gracious character and offer of the Lord. Although the nations are in rebellion, the Lord grants an opportunity to escape his judgment through submission to him.

As an act of submission, the nations and kings are commanded to "Kiss the Son"<sup>4</sup> (Ps 2:12). The term for "son" in 2:12 is Aramaic rather than the Hebrew term in 2:7. Although we can only speculate, the use of the Aramaic "son" highlights the international scope of the psalm,<sup>5</sup> and some scholars have suggested that it was utilized because the pagan and rebellious nations would have been familiar with Aramaic. Since the earthly king is an expression of God's heavenly reign, an act of submission to the son is also an act of submission to the Lord. For the first time, we learn the fate of those who will not submit to the Lord and his anointed. The Lord's anger will be kindled and the rulers and kings will perish (2:12). Although the Lord is gracious, he is also just and will punish the nations and kings for their persistent rebellion.

The final appeal to the nations to desist in their rebellion and submit to the Lord is a promise. The Lord has given promises to the son. Now there is a promise for the nations. All who take refuge in the Lord – whether kings, people, or nations – will be blessed. Redemptive-historically, such an offer is consistent with God's purpose to extend his reign throughout the earth (Gen 1:28) and with God's promise that Abraham would be a blessing to all nations (Gen 12:1-3). Although Psalm 2 begins with a problem, the outcome is never in doubt. To rebel against the Lord and his appointed king is futile. The rebellious nations must submit to Yahweh and his appointed king or suffer the wrath of the Lord.

### **Summary of Psalm 2 in Old Testament Context**

While many psalms focus on either the divine heavenly king or the earthly king, Psalm 2 demonstrates the interconnectedness of these two realms. Although there is no title, the New Testament clarifies that King David was the author (Acts 4:25-26) and most likely the original referent. In its Old Testament context, Psalm 2 is not predictive of a future king or messiah; however, because of the allusion to 2 Samuel 7, the psalm anticipates future fulfillment and has an eschatologically-oriented trajectory. Psalm 2 advances redemptive history through the celebration of a king from the family of Abraham to whom God has offered the nations and the ends of the earth. The connection with 2 Samuel 7 implies that Psalm 2 anticipates future and possibly even greater kings who will

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<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Prov 1:7, Prov 9:10, and Ps 111:10.

<sup>4</sup> Although the text and syntax of 2:12 are difficult, the traditional reading "kiss the son" makes sense in light of the context of Ps 2.

<sup>5</sup> See also Peter C. Craigie who notes, "It is possible that the poet deliberately uses a foreign word (loan-word) to dramatize his poetic intent at this point," *Psalms 1-50* (WBC 19; Waco: Word Books, 1983), 64, note 12.a.

continue to extend God's reign. The New Testament reveals that Psalm 2 reaches its final fulfillment in the reign of Jesus Christ, and I now turn my attention to the use of Psalm 2 in the New Testament.

## **The Use of Psalm 2 in the New Testament**

Psalm 2 is one of the most frequently cited psalms in the New Testament. The New Testament references to Psalm 2 can be arranged into four groups: 1) baptism and transfiguration passages, 2) references in Acts, 3) references in Hebrews, and 4) references in Revelation. In this section, I will discuss how the New Testament writers use Psalm 2 and apply it to their present-day and future events.

### **Baptism and Transfiguration**

The baptism and transfiguration passages allude to Ps 2:7 and Isa 42:1 to demonstrate that Jesus is God's chosen king who will extend God's kingdom and put all things in right order. The baptism passages are as follows:

- a) Matt 3:17 – “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”
- b) Mark 1:11 – “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”
- c) Luke 3:22 – “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

The transfiguration passages are as follows:

- a) Matt 17:5 – “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”
- b) Mark 9:7 – “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.”
- c) Luke 9:35 – “This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!”
- d) 2 Pet 1:17 – “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased....”

Although there are slight variations, all of these passages allude to Ps 2:7 and emphasize that Jesus is God's Son. The servant in Isaiah 42 is the one in whom God delights, the one upon whom God has placed his Spirit, the one who will bring justice to the nations, and the one who will be a light for the nations (Isa 42:1-6). In the baptism and transfiguration passages, Jesus is the one with whom God is well pleased. Whereas Adam failed in his task of obedience to the Lord, Jesus fulfills all righteousness. Whereas Israel failed in its commission as God's servant people, Jesus succeeds through complete faithfulness and obedience to God, his heavenly father. In the transfiguration passages, after identifying Jesus

as his son, God calls Jesus' followers to "listen to him," an allusion to Deut 18:15, which identifies Jesus as the great eschatological prophet like Moses that God would raise up. With a voice from heaven, God identifies Jesus as the Messianic king (from Ps 2:7) and God's servant who will usher in the new age of justice, righteousness, freedom, and peace (from Isa 42:1-6).

## **Acts**

The references to Psalm 2 in Acts (4:25-26; 13:32-33) shed light on how the New Testament writers and evangelists apply Psalm 2. Both passages demonstrate the progression of redemptive history through correspondences between David in the Old Testament and final fulfillment in Christ in the New Testament. In Acts 4, Peter and John are arrested and brought before the Jewish leaders because of healing and preaching in the name of Jesus. After some deliberation, the Jewish leaders recognize their impotence to punish Peter and John, and the Jewish leaders command Peter and John not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Emboldened by God's sovereign control and the helplessness of the Jewish leaders, Peter and John proclaim that they must obey God rather than men.

The release of Peter and John leads to worship and prayer from this early Christian community, and the believers praise the Lord for his sovereign power. In the midst of this praise, the community proclaims that God spoke by the Holy Spirit through his servant David (4:25a): "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" (Acts 4:25b-26). In their prayer, the church draws several parallels between the Old Testament context of Psalm 2 and its own present context. Although the word "fulfill" is not used in Acts 4:23-31, Luke communicates that Jesus represents a greater fulfillment than David and his kingdom in the Old Testament. For our purposes, I will investigate two themes in Psalm 2 and Acts 4:23-31 and consider how the New Testament use of Psalm 2 in Acts 4 advances redemptive history: 1) opposition to the Kingdom of God, and 2) expressions of the Kingdom of God.

First, just as there was opposition to David's kingdom in the Old Testament (Ps 2:1-3), so also there is opposition to Jesus' kingdom in the new covenant (Acts 4:23-28). From a redemptive historical standpoint, this should be expected since God promised that there would be enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Gen 3:15). However, the identification of the enemies in Acts 4:23-31 is significant. There is greater specificity as Herod and Pontius Pilate represent the kings and rulers opposed to Jesus. What is even more striking, however, is that the peoples of Israel are in league with the Gentiles (or the nations) in their opposition to the Lord and his Anointed – Jesus Christ. This is a stunning development that almost certainly would not have been anticipated from the Old Testament context of Psalm 2.



In the Old and New Testament, we find the theological groundwork for such developments. Hosea 1:9-10 and 2:23 make it clear that defining and identifying God's people are God's prerogatives. In Matt 3:9, John the Baptist declares that physical descent from Abraham is insignificant for determining God's people and insists that God is able to raise up children from Abraham from stones. The apostle Paul picks up on this idea in Rom 9:24-33 to emphasize that the Gentiles are part of God's people through faith in Christ. Furthermore, in Romans 11, Paul writes about unbelieving Jews who have been cut off while the Gentiles have been grafted in.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the New Testament application of Psalm 2 identifies God's enemies as all who are opposed to Christ – both from the nations of the world and from the people of Israel. As the history of redemption continues (beyond Acts 4), we see that the good news of the Messiah is not only for Israel, but also for people from all nations who submit to God's anointed king, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, since the Christian community recognizes the impotence of the nations and the Jewish leaders to oppose the Lord and his Anointed, they pray for boldness to proclaim the gospel and look to God to continue to work in the name of Jesus. In the Old Testament context, the power of God and the impotence of the nations would have surely meant destruction for the nations and people who rebel against the Lord. However, at this time in redemptive history, between the first and second coming of Christ, all people – whether Jew or Gentile – receive an opportunity to submit to God and his son Jesus Christ. This is precisely the reason the church prays for boldness to proclaim the gospel and asks the Lord to work in the name of Jesus. Such an application fits well with the final promise in Psalm 2 that all who take refuge in the Lord are blessed (Ps 2:12).

In the second Acts passage, the larger context of Acts 13 narrates Paul's proclamation of the gospel in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. Paul begins with a brief overview of Israel's history (13:16-22) which culminates in the kingship of David (13:22). Drawing upon the theology of 2 Samuel 7, Paul declares that God has brought a Savior to Israel from David's descendants (13:23). The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah and, along with Pilate, crucified him (13:27-29). After Paul states that God raised Jesus from the dead, he proclaims,

And 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.' And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, "' I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' Therefore he says also in another psalm, "' You will not let your Holy One see corruption.' (Acts 13:32-35).

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<sup>6</sup> See also Rom 4:16 and Gal 3:25-29.

In this proclamation, Paul cites three Old Testament passages to demonstrate fulfillment in Christ.

Paul first quotes Ps 2:7 to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic promises. Just as David was declared to be God's son, so now Christ fulfills this promise in a greater way. Although it is possible that the entire Christ event is in view, the reference to Ps 2:7 is most likely tied to Jesus' resurrection. Jesus' sonship did not begin at the resurrection since, as we have seen, it is confirmed at his baptism and transfiguration. The emphasis on resurrection in relation to Christ's sonship demonstrates that Jesus' resurrection and ascension are God's vindication of his Son and represent a new stage in his sonship. Whereas in his life Jesus reigned in weakness, after his resurrection and ascension, Jesus reigns at the right hand of God in power.

In his argument for the resurrection of Jesus, Paul quotes Isa 55:3 from the Greek Old Testament. In the context of Isaiah 55, the Lord speaks of hope and restoration and offers to make a covenant with the people in which he will give them (plural "you" in Greek) the holy and sure blessings of David. The promises in LXX Isa 55:3 are for God's people (plural "you") and the promises in Acts 13:34 are for Paul's hearers (plural "you") if they believe (cf. Acts 13:39). In the context of Acts 13, one of these promises is resurrection from the dead. Since Jesus has been raised and is the fulfillment of the promises given to David, believers have the hope of resurrection.

Paul's third Old Testament citation in his synagogue sermon is Ps 16:10, which states, "You will not let your holy one see corruption" (Acts 13:35). Although the Old Testament referent of Ps 16:10 was likely King David, Paul makes it clear that David did indeed die and see corruption (Acts 13:36), but Jesus, whom God raised up, did not see corruption (Acts 13:37). With this contrast, Paul emphasizes that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises given to David. Paul's sermon conclusion, which includes a call to faith and a warning against refusing Christ (Acts 13:38-41), is similar to God's gracious invitation and warning to the nations at the conclusion of Psalm 2.

## **Hebrews**

The author of Hebrews cites Ps 2:7 ("You are my Son, today I have begotten you") two times in his argument for the kingship and superiority of Jesus. In Heb 1:5, the author emphasizes Jesus' kingship, Jesus' unique identity as "Son" (see Heb 1:1-4), and Jesus' superiority over the angels. Similarly, the author quotes Ps 2:7 in Heb 5:5 to highlight Jesus' unique role of priest-king. Unlike the passages in Acts, the author does not appeal to the Old Testament context. In fact, the author of Hebrews makes it sound as if Ps 2:7 was originally written specifically about Jesus! With this application, the author of Hebrews emphasizes the finality of fulfillment in Jesus, which is a major theme in Hebrews. Consequently, the author of Hebrews utilizes Ps 2:7 in ways similar to other New

Testament authors. Jesus, as the fulfillment of Psalm 2, is the final, unique, and eschatological “Son” who reigns forever as God’s Anointed.

## Revelation

The three passages in Revelation that allude to Ps 2:8-9 all mention ruling with a rod of iron (from Ps 2:9).<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, these three allusions emphasize different nuances of Psalm 2 than the previous New Testament references. In Rev 2:25, Jesus encourages the church in Thyatira to hold fast until his second coming and promises, “The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father” (Rev 2:26-27). In Psalm 2, David receives the promise that he will rule over the nations, but Rev 2:26-27 emphasizes that believers will have authority over and rule the nations. From the previous New Testament references to Psalm 2, the natural expectation is for the psalm to be applied to Jesus,<sup>8</sup> but in Rev 2:26-27, the reference is to believers. Such a usage is appropriate because Scripture reveals there is a close relationship between the Messiah and his people.

As we have seen, God’s purpose is for humanity to rule under and alongside him (Gen 1:26-30). Psalm 8:5-6 states this purpose when David writes (concerning humanity), “Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.” After the fall, although humanity does not extend God’s reign, God’s purposes are still intact. God’s solution is to send his Son to crush the serpent, to die for sin, and to conquer sin and death through his resurrection from the dead. Consequently, Christ’s victory is also believers’ victory. Jesus has been raised from the dead, and his resurrection is the “firstfruits,” so that all who are united to Christ will also be raised from the dead in God’s timing (1 Cor 15:20-28). Jesus reigns at God’s right hand and is seated in the heavenly places (Eph 1:20), and believers who are in Christ are also seated in the heavenly places and take part in Christ’s reign (Eph 2:6). The same is true in Rev 2:26-27. Because Christ reigns (Rev 11:15; Rev 17:14), Jesus promises that those who persevere will also reign with him (Rev 5:9-10; Rev 22:5). Revelation 3:21 makes this connection explicit when Jesus says, “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” This is the great hope of the Christian faith – that believers will reign with God for eternity.

The final allusions to Psalm 2 in the New Testament are Rev 12:5 and Rev 19:15, both of which speak of Jesus ruling the nations with a rod of iron. In a reference to Ps 2:8-9, Rev 12:5 reads that Jesus is “to rule all the nations with a

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<sup>7</sup> With the word “rule” (Greek *poimaino*), Rev 2:27, 12:5, and 19:15 follow the Greek Old Testament rather than the Hebrew Old Testament which reads “break” (Hebrew *raa*).

<sup>8</sup> Rev 12:5 and Rev 19:5 follow this general pattern and expectation, and demonstrate fulfillment in Christ.

rod of iron.” Similar to Psalm 2, this reference most likely allows for the possibility that the nations can submit to Jesus and find blessing or continue to rebel and suffer judgment. Revelation 19:15 is similar to Rev 12:5 in that Jesus will “strike down the nations and...rule them with a rod of iron,” but the context is one of judgment. In line with Psalm 2, Rev 19:15 gives a final warning to the rebellious nations that there is no escape from God’s wrath if they persist in rebellion.

## **Summary of Psalm 2 in the New Testament**

From the 14 references to Psalm 2 in the New Testament, almost half of the verses from the psalm (2:1; 2:2; 2:7; 2:8; 2:9) are referenced. It is evident that the New Testament writers believed that Psalm 2 foreshadowed or prefigured Jesus and, as a result, utilized the psalm to demonstrate fulfillment in Christ. To be specific, the New Testament writers applied Psalm 2 to Jesus as the Messiah, the final and ultimate king. The fact that 10 of the New Testament references are to Psalm 2:7 (“You are my Son; today I have begotten you.”) reinforces that this was a significant hermeneutic for the New Testament authors.

## **Psalm 2 as a Messianic Psalm**

To understand how Psalm 2 is messianic, it is important to define the term “messianic psalm.” In the narrow sense, a messianic psalm is directly prophetic or predictive of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> I have maintained throughout this essay that Psalm 2, in its Old Testament context, is not predictive of Jesus Christ, but rather refers to David and his kingship.<sup>10</sup> This would of course mean that Psalm 2 is not directly messianic or messianic in a narrow sense. But in a broader sense, we could define a “messianic psalm” as a psalm that anticipates the person and work of Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup> As we have seen, Psalm 2 clearly anticipates the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the many quotes and allusions to the psalm by the New Testament authors demonstrate that they also believed the psalm to anticipate Jesus as the Messiah.

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<sup>9</sup> See the discussions of Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 63-73, and Richard P. Belcher Jr., *The Messiah and the Psalms: Preaching Christ from All the Psalms* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2006), 31-41. Longman distinguishes between narrow and broad messianic psalms, and Belcher distinguishes between direct and indirect messianic psalms.

<sup>10</sup> The only psalm that I consider to be messianic in this narrow or direct sense is Ps 110.

<sup>11</sup> See again the discussions of Longman and Belcher. My definition is more or less the same as Longman’s understanding of more broadly messianic psalms that “look forward to Jesus Christ,” Longman, 68, and Belcher’s understanding of indirect messianic psalms which “relate to the person and/or work of Christ,” Belcher, 40. In my view, according to this definition, all psalms (and even all the Old Testament Scriptures) are messianic. This understanding is supported by Jesus’ post-resurrection teaching where he emphasizes that all the Old Testament Scriptures (including the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms) testify about him (Luke 24:25-27, 44-46). Even though all psalms are messianic in this broad sense, their messianic nature is on a spectrum, and it is reasonable to conclude that some psalms more clearly anticipate the person and work of Christ than others.

Psalm 2 reflects the ideals, expectations, and hopes of the Davidic kingdom and dynasty. Combined with the allusion to 2 Sam 7:11-16 in Ps 2:7, the psalm is filled with eschatological hope and expectation. Since the full realization of Psalm 2 did not come to fruition in David's reign, Israel's and Judah's hopes were extended to future generations and subsequent kings. These eschatological hopes are no doubt the impetus for Jewish intertestamental writings which interpreted Psalm 2 with a messianic flavor.<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, the New Testament writers applied the psalm to Jesus to demonstrate that he is the Messiah and the great, eschatological son of David. In applying Psalm 2 to Jesus, the New Testament community recognized that David and his kingship foreshadowed or prefigured the reign of Jesus Christ. In this sense, David was a "type" or an example of Jesus, the greater king.

Here I will highlight three ways that David's reign in Psalm 2 anticipates the reign of Jesus Christ. First, in Psalm 2, God responds to the rebellious nations by installing his "son" as king (2:4-6). As previously discussed, the New Testament writers frequently draw upon Ps 2:7 in order to demonstrate Jesus' kingship, many times in connection with his resurrection and ascension (e.g. Acts 13:32-37). In his resurrection and ascension, Jesus is installed as king<sup>13</sup> and reigns at God's right hand over all of his enemies as well as the church (Eph 1:20-23).<sup>14</sup> In fulfillment of Psalm 2, God will address the rebellion of the nations through his eternal Son, the final and greatest descendant of David, the Messiah – none other than the Lord Jesus Christ who is installed as eternal king and reigns over all things.

Second, after installing his "son" as king, the Lord elaborates on the comprehensive nature of the son's kingship and offers him the nations and the ends of the earth (Ps 2:7-9). These hopes, dreams, and ideals for the Davidic kingdom were not realized at the time of David, but come to fruition and fulfillment in the reign of Jesus Christ. As Jesus reigns in heaven over all his enemies and the evil spiritual powers (Eph 1:20-23), Satan's power to completely deceive the nations is broken (Eph 3:6-10), and the nations, which were previously in rebellion, are able to become God's people through faith in Christ (Eph 2:11-22; Eph 3:6-10). At this period in redemptive history, the time between Christ's first and second coming, the gospel is proclaimed to the nations (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Matt 24:14). As a result, we see a fulfillment of Ps 2:8-9 when people from the nations submit to Christ, and the nations become his inheritance and the ends of the earth his possession. The proclamation of the gospel is an important way God conquers his enemies and extends his kingdom throughout the earth. As Paul emphasizes in Eph 2:11-22, the result is that former enemies are now God's people through faith in Christ.

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<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Pss. Sol 17:21-25 and the Qumran text 4Q174 3.18-19.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Eph 1:20, Rom 1:1-4, and Acts 2:22-36.

<sup>14</sup> Jesus' session at God's right hand and reigning over his enemies is an allusion to another messianic psalm – Ps 110.

Third, we find the final fulfillment of God's promise to the son in Ps 2:8-9 with the second coming of Jesus. In Rev 11:15, we read, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." Jesus Christ, as the great and final king descended from David, will reign over the world forever. Moreover, in Ps 2:10-12 provides a final invitation and warning to the rebellious nations. They can submit to the Lord and his anointed to receive blessing or continue in their rebellion and suffer judgment. The New Testament paints a similar picture in reference to Jesus Christ. In Phil 2:9-11, Jesus has been given the name above every name and every knee will bow to him and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Those who now confess Christ as Lord take refuge in him and are blessed while those who continue to rebel will suffer judgment on the last day even though they will then recognize that Jesus is Lord. In light of this inevitable outcome, Psalm 2 speaks a timely and significant word: submit to the Lord and his anointed king or suffer God's judgment.

## **Conclusion and Application**

I conclude this essay by offering three brief application thoughts from Psalm 2. First, we should rejoice in God's sovereignty. Even if we feel like kings and rulers conspire against the Lord and against us, God is enthroned in heaven and has installed his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as king. There is nothing that can thwart God's plans and purposes, and we should rejoice that God is in control. Second, in this time between the first and second coming of Christ, we should call others to submit to the Son (to "kiss the Son") so that they might find blessing and refuge in him. Before Jesus returns, God's enemies (and even those we might consider our enemies) can submit to Jesus and find hope, blessing, and refuge in him. Third, we look forward to the second coming of Jesus Christ when Jesus will bring his final judgment and make all things new. Although we will experience persecution, suffering, and trial in this life, our hope is in Jesus' return and the consummation of his complete reign over all things.

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