



Why do the Nations Rage?

Man, and God in Reply!

A Study of Psalm 2

by

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INTRODUCTION

A. THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE.

Being early for a pastoral visit, I parked the car next to the grade school playground. The blur of activity and noise of the children, the competitiveness and intensity of it all, indicated that it was recess time. So it was an opportunity for myself to rest as well and, in observing, inwardly reminisce concerning my own school days. They had been played out only a few miles away. But something soon struck me that caused idealism to yield to reality. The truth was that here was evident a lot of meanness, bullying, and raw selfishness, even in the midst of healthy recreation, both amongst boys and girls. And then it came back to me that fifty years ago, my own participation in a similar situation was not so different. Many a time there would echo the cry in our playground, “A fight! A fight!” As a result the crowd would quickly gather, that is until a teacher came and separated the bedraggled contestants. On one occasion I was in the center of such a ring; I was having some trouble as the two of us threshed about. In my frustration and meanness I called to some older boys who were watching and implored them: “Hold him down for me, and then I can hit him!” Then a teacher came and inflicted swift punishment. So as I now watched a similar scenario, fifty year later, the thought came that the popular concept of youthful innocence was not so true to life.

But further recollection of my early school days led to the remembrance of a particular assembly time in the school quadrangle, during the early 1940’s, that was not unrelated to the common scuffles just described. With the headmaster and teachers all present, a large flatbed truck rolled up being attended by military personnel. On the back was an array of small bombs, mortar shells, guns, etc., that were described to us as being extremely dangerous, and thus to be avoided at all costs. Mind you this was not totally new since my father was an air-raid warden, so that at home we had fire extinguishing equipment and the like. And then there were the black blinds in all rooms, as well as covers for the lights of our car that only allowed light to project from a very thin slit. So that on coming home from the conflict of school life, I was yet merely transferred into a different realm of strife. The scale was much larger, and yet were the roots of these troubles unrelated?

When studying at seminary for the Christian ministry, I recall driving to our apartment in downtown Portland, Oregon, having eaten at a nearby restaurant. Suddenly my wife cried out: “Stop! Go and help that poor woman!” Ahead I could see a young lady pinned to a wall by a man who was pounding her with his fists. I stopped and exited our car rather apprehensively. Running to the lady, I was relieved to see a man much bigger than I intercept the assault; the lady ran away down a side street and I followed for a brief moment calling out: “Stop! I only want to help!” At this she turned and responded. “Its all right. I got what I was asking for!” Stopping in my tracks, I pondered the complexity of human conflict. There was more to what I

had initially encountered than at first appeared. Guilt was broader than I had imagined. If a television news-clip of the beating I had witnessed was broadcast, there would have been outrage for the man and sympathy for the woman. But there was so much left unsaid that a false impression was easily obtained. The conflict was far more comprehensive and profound than a fleeting observation might convey.

And so at the present the world at large, of whatever western hemisphere, continues to witness conflicts at every level, from the school playground, to the streets along which we travel, the communities in which we socialize, the states in which reside, and the countries to which we give allegiance and defend. The playground fence is but a microcosm of the borders of sea and barbed wire. The macrocosm of national boundaries, whether a Great Wall of China, the Berlin Wall, a “no man’s land” corridor, or ocean territorial limits, is but a representation of a universal problem, namely conflict. The trouble is that the strife in the school yard is not contained there; it is transferred to the ever widening spheres of street, city, state, and country, so that we are forced to conclude the problem here is not merely a juvenile one. The only difference is one of size and sophistication. When all is said and done then, the present conflict of the nations is but reflective of a fundamental problem with the human individual that inevitably finds corporate expression.

What then is at the heart of man’s problem here in terms of this innate capacity for hostility? If one simply concludes that it is a matter of social maladjustment, then the implication is that social readjustment will solve the problem. But if that be so, then why have man’s attempted schemes in this realm been such utter failures? For instance, where now is Rousseau’s *Social Contract*, his belief that while human nature should be exonerated it is society that is to be blamed for the emergence of vices. Hence his conviction is that man must “be forced to be free”! Of course the certain legacy of this philosophy was totalitarianism. Consider another witness to the failure of human self-reformation. It is

to be found in the history of Pitcairn Island’s colony of English seamen mutineers of the H.M.S. Bounty. With the forces of the English Navy in hot pursuit, nine English seamen, six native men, and eleven native women fled from Tahiti to Pitcairn Island where they lived peacefully for the first two years. Then, . . . a dispute arose over the possession of one of the females. At the end of ten years on the island, twelve of the fifteen men had been murdered and peace finally reigned when the population was reduced to a lone white man, nine native woman, and twenty-five children.¹

A similar representation is found in William Golding’s parabolic novel *The Lord of the Flies*, in which a marooned group of English schoolboys gradually degenerates in its island existence from civility to barbarity, even murder. One could easily be forgiven for concluding that this author is challenging us to seriously consider the biblical doctrine of original sin. And very substantial evidence from Scripture could be harnessed to support this contention. For instance, it is not so long after the fall that the children of Adam and Eve are found to be in opposition to one another. The result is that Cain slays Abel (Genesis 4:1-15). Then follows the dispersion, the scattering of mankind, “so that they will not understand one another’s speech” (Genesis 11:7), and consequently be restrained in worldly ambitions.

Thus not only is man captive to aggression, and most evidently so at an international level, but his humiliating dilemma is facing this reality and then seeking not only an analysis that is nakedly honest and goes to the heart of the problem, but also presents a genuine remedy that is necessarily radical. This course then inevitably leads us to the Bible as the incomparable source of such an analysis. And probably in all of Scripture, there is no better passage that addresses

¹ Elton B. McNeil, *The Nature of Human Conflict*, p. 17.

this matter than Psalm 2. The opening question: “Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing?” is bursting with relevance with regard to this twenty-first century. Of course many books have been written concerning this most obvious and fundamental human ailment. Broadly there are the social analysts who suggest that outward primeval circumstances, especially within an evolutionary environment, have conditioned man in such a way that latent, primitive instincts continue to erupt. Hence, the suggested remedy is the application of a different social agenda by means of educational, psychological, and legislative means. For example, consider the suggested solution of academic specialist Elton B. McNeil²:

The plea, simply, is for every interested social scientist to begin at once using the ultimate weapon—his brain. To read, study, discuss, write, and think, and act to solve some of the problems of international human relations. To do these things not just from the viewpoint of his own specialized training but from a broader viewpoint—one big enough realistically to encompass man in his total political, economic, historical, social, and personal environment. It is only by seeing man as a total unit that we can avoid solutions that fail or are derided for their narrowness and provinciality. . . . I think our fundamental problem, then, is to cast the emphasis in war and peace in terms distinct from those that have dominated the last fifteen years of negotiations and foreign policy. I think this can best be done by a concerted effort on the part of social scientists to become active in the search for the best ways and means of having an impact on policy at all levels of its determination.³

The fact that these comments were published in 1965 only reinforces the conclusion, set against the past centuries of relentless human failure, that such a proposal is at best superficial. At worst it represents the hopeless prescription of godless humanism, the vain attempt of secular man to save himself according to a mind-set that is doomed to failure.

On the other hand there are those who believe that man’s outward belligerence is really symptomatic of an internal affliction, indeed a cancerous disorder that is rooted in the human soul. In other words, while the secular analysis studiously avoids any consideration of a deeper spiritual problem at the heart of man’s constitution, the alternative perspective delves into the dark and more controlling rivers of personal behavior that are sourced, not in moral neutrality, but a bent toward that which is sinful and selfish. Herein lies the root of the problem, which, if ignored or denied, leads to a distorted world-view. Thus Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments:

I am asserting that you cannot understand *life as it is in this world* at this moment unless you understand this biblical doctrine of sin. I go further, I suggest that you cannot understand the whole of human history apart from this, with all its wars and its quarrels and its conquests, its calamities, and all that it records. I assert that there is no adequate explanation save in the biblical doctrine of sin. The history of the world can only be understood truly in the light of this great biblical doctrine of man, fallen and in sin. Read your books on the philosophy of history and you will find that they fumble. They do not know how to interpret the facts, they cannot give an adequate explanation; all their ideas are utterly falsified by history. That is because they never realize that the starting point is man’s fallen sinful condition.⁴

It should be noted that this comment is based upon the Apostle Paul’s declaration in Ephesians 2:1 in which he addresses man, unreconciled to God, as being “dead in trespasses and sins.”

² Dr. McNeil, with a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Michigan, was a staff member of the Center for Research on Conflict Resolution and directed the Faculty Seminar on Armed Conflict Resolution and the Faculty Seminar on Arms Control and Disarmament. He has been a consultant in arms control and disarmament research and has taught psychology and international relations. He has published a number of articles focused on the problems of psychology and aggression in man. *Ibid.*, pp. xiii-xiv.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 313-4.

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Way of Reconciliation, Studies in Ephesians 2*. p. 15.

Hence, it is vigorously asserted that the revelation of God Himself, He who knows us better than we know ourselves, is uniquely suited to getting to the heart of turbulent man's predicament. Again, we assert that Psalm 2 gives not only one of the best biblical representations of this universal blight that infects mankind, but also the sole remedy that can turn war in the soul into peace with God and man, and thus bring about true social concord.

B. THE BACKGROUND TO PSALM 2.

Psalm 2 is a royal psalm in that it is probably authored by a human king, that is David, and yet looks forward to the reign of a transcendentally greater king, the Messiah. Thus it is also a prophetic hymn in the Psalter which, with its national and universal emphasis, contrasts with the particularity of Psalm 1. It is the most frequently quoted psalm in the New Testament (Acts 4:25-26; 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5), which references focus on vs. 1-2, but especially v. 7 concerning the doctrine of Jesus Christ's begetting by the Father. There are other allusions as well (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Rev. 2:26-27; 11:18; 12:5; 19:15, 19). Not having a superscription, the authorship has nevertheless been traditionally attributed to King David,⁵ not only according to Jewish interpreters, but also with the specific acknowledgment of Acts 4:25.⁶

As a messianic psalm, it speaks not only of King David, but also prophetically of King David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This identification was even acknowledged during the Old Testament era. Hengstenberg comments:

There are the clearest grounds for asserting, that by the King, the Anointed, or Son of God, no other can be understood than the Messias. It is generally admitted, that this exposition was the prevailing one among the older Jews, and that in later times they were led to abandon it only for polemical reasons against Christians.⁷

Certainly there is agreement that a glorious reign, appointed by God, is in view, and parallel references concerning David and Christ are supported by Acts 4:25-26. However the degree of individual prominence is not so easily maintained. Perhaps the best suggestion is that of David being partially prominent in v. 1, yet as the Spirit of prophecy overtakes him personal reference diminishes. On the other hand, while Christ is partially prominent in vs. 1, the Spirit of prophecy causes him to be increasingly dominant, so that the reader becomes almost totally forgetful of David. This dominant reference to Christ becomes especially evident when later verses refer to a king who has no earthly parallel, vs. 7-9, 11-12.

Above all else, this is an evangelistic Psalm, and as such it first declares the bad news before it proclaims the good news. Hence, to begin with, the lid is lifted concerning what is really going on amongst the nations. It looks beneath the unending struggle for power, the agendas for acquisitiveness, the farce of peaceful coexistence and *détente* in the face of ceaseless eruptions of tension and aggression akin to infectious boils. Here is national confirmation of Paul in Ephesians 6:12: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." However, in laying bare the underlying problem in man's heart, this

⁵ J. S. Perowne assigns it to that period described in II Samuel 10 when certain Ammonite and Syrian nations, formerly subdued, rise up in opposition to David. *Commentary on the Psalms*, p. 113. Franz Delitzsch also sees this as a possibility, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, I, p. 90.

⁶ Some claim that the reference to David here is merely a synonym for "hymn." So Delitzsch, *Psalms*, I, pp. 89-90.

⁷ E. W. Hengstenberg, *Works*, 5, p. 19. This messianic understanding by the Jews is confirmed in the Talmud as well as the opinions of Rashi, Maimonides, and Kimchi.

universal spiritual decadence, there is also presented the divine prescription that focuses on, as God describes it, “My King, . . . My Son, . . . My Heir.” Here is the John 3:16 of the Old Testament which invites: “Do homage to the Son, . . . How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!” v. 12.

I. THE NATIONS HAVE THEIR SAY, VS. 1-3

UNDERSTANDING the truth of God is often a matter of perspective. For the Christian it particularly involves the divine perspective which so often contrasts with that former vista as an unbeliever which was materialistic, temporal, and self-centered. However, following conversion, a new and revolutionary vision confronted us. We began to see things through glasses made according to a heavenly prescription. Now a spiritual, eternal, and God-centered vision awakened us to what it really is to be “born again” (John 3:3). Psalm 2 presents these two contrasting world-views in sharp relief. So in vs. 1-3 we are spectators on earth as it were, listening to the chorus of the media as they reflect the cry of the nations, the kings, the rulers, the presidents, the legislative assemblies, the councils and world consultative bodies. Then in vs. 4-9 we are transported heavenward so as to observe the cauldron of earthly rebellion from God’s point of view. How radically different is the assessment from this exalted vantage point.

As a consequence, it will be noted that here God expects the readers of this revelation to have a sense of history, especially in relation to the present. If “the nations [are] in an uproar,” v. 1, if “the rulers take counsel together,” v. 2, if they plan to “tear their fetters apart,” v. 3, then it is incumbent upon us to be astute observers of world affairs. This means that the child of God is to be a student of world history, even as Christ seems to recommend in Mark 13:31-37. The reason is that it is God who studies the movements of the various nations from His throne in heaven, and this being so, then so should His children.

A. THE RAGE OF THE NATIONS, v. 1.

Does it seem a little extreme to suggest that the nations as a general rule, and even all of them on some sort of rotational basis, are incessantly angry to such a degree that they seem to be inflicted with a common malady? Perhaps there might have been grounds for thinking this way in centuries past when, due to communication difficulties, we could optimistically think that surely our war was a local aberration and certainly not representative of a contagion infecting the whole human race. But today we are confronted with the naked truth concerning the raw reality of this infection analogy. The modern availability of news from around the world, even live, on the spot, has shattered any mythical conclusion that man is mostly good, and only very occasionally bad. The Bible declaration here is only all too true, even as in Isaiah 57:20: “But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuge and mud.” The Psalmist would consider it unnecessary to ask, “Are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing?” But to ask “Why” on the other hand assumes the obvious and focuses on the more important matter of basic motivation.

1. The fury of it all.

“Why do the nations [גוֹיִם, goyim; gentiles] make a commotion [רָגָשׁ, rāgāsh; a concert of noise, an agitated commotion]?” “Nations” means the pagan masses as observed by the earthly leader of God’s people. Perhaps some might see this as the question of a man who is perplexed, even King David, since the omniscient Deity need not ask such a matter. However it must be noted that this enquiry is rhetorical in nature and proposes a definitive answer, vs. 2-3. Hence King David can be understood as assertively making such an enquiry since he is confident of the eventual establishment of the kingdom of Christ. In the same manner the Lord Jesus Christ could make a similar comment expressing dismay

concerning the spiritual wilderness of Jerusalem, and then triumphantly declare that, “from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord’ (Matt. 23:37-39; cf. Mark 14:61-62). However, there is a sense in which David is dismayed at the vastness of the surrounding empires that have both unity in their godlessness and diversity in their idolatry. It may well seem so senseless that Israel alone comprehends the light concerning the only true and living God, while the surrounding darkness is so irrational, so depressing. It is for this reason that David here so obviously possessed a missionary spirit. This is plainly evident in v. 10 where “kings” and “judges of the earth” are to be evangelized.

Nevertheless, the cacophony of opinion proclaimed by alien spokesmen is difficult to avoid. Even in David’s day, national rumblings via official ambassadors, as well as the commentary of media pundits, could not be ignored. The king of Israel regularly received official dispatches from outlying representatives. So that putting it altogether, he could only conclude that beyond the perimeters of God’s country there was a turbulent sea of heathen philosophies competing for prominence. Yet from the perspective of the truth that is only revealed in the God of Abraham, such a performance was pointless, an exercise in utter futility.

However, could it be said that this uproar was limited to the pagan masses alone? The truth is that David well knew that within the people of God there were some who, although Hebrews by circumcision and national title, yet at heart were more aligned with foreign culture (31:11-15; 41:5-9). They made the same noises as those wafting across the borders of Israel from foreign lands, even as multitudes within Israel had similarly murmured in the wilderness (Ex. 15:24; 16:2-3; 17:2; Num. 21:4-5). So the early church understood this same broad perspective in that opposition to Jesus as the Messiah was encountered from “the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel” (Acts 4:27) even though this verse is translated in verse 25 as: “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things?” In other words, David’s question here really incorporates the godless wherever they may be found. They are to be expected in the world at large, yet the mystery of iniquity works within the household of God as well.

Of course from a contemporary perspective, the child of God may easily ask why the surrounding nations, in contemplating the sheer magnitude of them, are so vociferous and conflicting. There are “wars and rumors of wars” (Matt. 24:6) at every hand. From an outward perspective, a number of answers may be forthcoming. First there is the struggle for existence in the midst of population explosion. Of course this involves not only necessary space, but also sustenance and protection against harsh living conditions. Second there is competition for natural resources such as oil, minerals, agricultural produce, etc. Third there are differing ideologies or philosophies of life, so that capitalists conflict with communists, Zionists conflict with Arabs, Christians conflict with Moslems. And then we can take any of these particular groups and find differences within each. Yet does not the universality of this problem in so many spheres suggest a more profound and basic cause? Many attempts have been made to establish new communal societies, and yet dissension, conflict, moral failure, and especially fanaticism, have eventually overtaken them all.¹

¹ Refer to Ray Strachey, *Group Movements of the Past and Experiments in Guidance*, 270 pp., which especially focuses on religious excesses.

2. The futility of it all.

“And why do the peoples muse [הָגָה, hāgāh; contemplate with groaning, growling²] on emptiness [רִיק, reek; futile/vain schemes]?” The parallelism here expands upon the concert of noise that is now understood to be a chorus of godless proposals. The great rumblings and noise of line one are now declared to be useless, ineffectual.

- a. *The futility in analysis.* The fundamental principle of this world chorus is that man can save man, and this is generally the focus of attempts to resolve various world wars. These ragings have nothing of the only living God in them, hence they are doomed to failure. In Winston Churchill’s published account of the Second World War, his final volume is titled, *Triumph and Tragedy*, which he subtitles, “How the Great Democracies Triumphed, and so Were able to Resume the Follies Which Had so Nearly Cost Them Their life.”³
- b. *The futility in destiny.* As the nations continue to raise their voices, the question arises as to where this cry of the world powers will lead us. Arnold J. Toynbee, according to his profound study of world history, makes the following suggestion: “In our recent Western history war has been following war in an ascending order of intensity; and today it is already apparent that the War of 1939-45 was not the climax of this crescendo movement. If the series continues, the progression will indubitably be carried to ever higher terms, until this process of intensifying the horrors of war is one day brought to an end by the self-annihilation of the war-making society.”⁴
- c. *The futility in methodology.* Consider the suggested solutions of Ronald J. Glossop for a more permanent resolution of the scourge of war which he subtitles, “An Examination of Humanity’s Most Pressing Problem.” All of the following proposals are wholly humanist in nature. He suggests:
 - (1) *Reforming the attitudes of individuals.* This includes the commendation of unselfishness, globalism, world citizenship.
 - (2) *Reforming the Internal Operation of National Governments.* This considers the Western, Marxist, and Ghandi-King approaches.
 - (3) *Reforming the Policies of National Governments.* This includes peace through strength, arms control, moral restraint, conflict management.
 - (4) *Reforming the Nation System.* This includes limitation of national sovereignty, nation consolidation, and world government.⁵

² The same Hebrew word is used for “meditate” in Psalm 1:2.

³ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Triumph and Tragedy*, p. ix.

⁴ Arnold J. Toynbee, *War and Civilization*, p. 4.

⁵ Ronald, J. Glossop, *Confronting War*, pp. 171-252. This author has had extensive teaching experience at Southern Illinois University concerning problems related to war and peace.

3. The future alternative to this futility.

However under the direction of the Holy Spirit, King David is led to reveal a far more profound analysis of the problem of universal human conflict. In vs. 2-3 we will be led to a far deeper probe concerning man's contentious ways. It is a single principle that yet explains the totality of man's essential hostility. Hence it is only when this surgical revelation is provided are we at that place where the only glorious remedy can be revealed, vs. 4-9.

B. THE COUNSEL OF THE NATIONS, v. 2.

Up to this point the nature of the raging that occupies the nations of the world could easily be misunderstood as a fierce ideological contest, even as has already been suggested. In other words, the nations primarily, unendingly assail and fume against each other because of essential disagreement. Thus many pursue the allusive prospect of attaining ideological agreement through treaties and conferences that, it is vainly hoped, will, for the first time, usher in peace on earth. However, what now surprises us is the discovery here of a chorus of anger, or agreement in this raging that so enflames the countries of they world. To a degree, while they do have innumerable conflicts, yet here such lesser disputes are laid aside with the result that there is concord concerning one fundamental matter. They are like Herod and Pilate who, having been enemies, yet are reconciled through their agreed contemptuous opposition to Jesus Christ (Luke 23:11-12). Likewise the nations are all agreed in their anger directed, not so much toward each other, as toward God! Man fundamentally hates and opposes God, notwithstanding his veneer thin protestations of love and devotion.⁶

1. The forum of man's rebellion, national consensus.

The parallelism here in the first two lines expands upon the "who" and "how" of the international rebellion introduced in v. 1. Then the third line unveils, with shocking effect, the singular target of this unrestrained vitriol. Man the creature, implicitly being absorbed with self-interest, despises his Creator. He is like the thronging multitude at Babel that proudly asserted, "let us make for ourselves a name" (Gen. 11:4).

a. The extent of the rebellion.

The "kings" and "rulers" signify that not only the plebeians and proletarians, as suggested in v. 1, are involved, but also the patricians and bourgeoisie. In other words, potentates and parliamentarians, dictators and delegates, sovereigns and senators, are all contaminated with this plague of defiance. Thus this uprising is orchestrated by the finest talent this world affords, and we ought not to be surprised from which direction it comes. Dr. Lloyd-Jones recounts that his call to the Christian ministry was born of his perception that not only are men in greater need of spiritual rather than physical healing, but indeed all men, whether from the lower class East

⁶ In his *The Long War Against God*, 344 pp, Henry Morris focuses on this fundamental antagonism in the light of antipathy toward God that is stimulated by evolutionary theory, though surprisingly he makes no reference to Psalm 2.

End of London or the more aristocratic and professional West End, are identically ill in the spiritual realm and thus productive of the same sins and indulgences.⁷

By way of parallel it is clear that the Lord Jesus Christ not only suffered from the common throng that cried out, “We do not want this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14), hence, “Crucify, crucify Him” (Luke 23:21), but also the “kings” and “rulers” of his day, as with Herod the Great, Herod Archelaus, Herod Antipas, Herod Philip, Pontius Pilate, along with the Jewish leaders such as Caiaphas the high priest (John 11:49-50; cf. Acts 4:27).).

b. The strategy of the rebellion.

Could it be that in the corridors of international consultation, whereas it would seem futile for merely one country to offer resistance to the Almighty Jehovah, yet upon meeting in conference it is found that, without exception, on this one matter of being subject to the God of Abraham, there is uncommon agreement in being utterly opposed to such holy tyranny. Thus a concerted effort at dethroning this God might seem to have a greater likelihood of success! However, such a universal conspiracy is covert in nature; it is not antireligious in general. Rather the distinctive nature of this uprising is the narrow focus on the God of Israel and His King, and none other.

(1) Let us meet in concert.

With “unitedness,” יחד, *yachad*, cf. 31:13 where “scheming counsel” is in mind, the world leaders have been collaborating. William Plummer adds: “The word rendered assemble [counsel] is probably to be taken in a military sense, rendezvous, post, or muster.”⁸ Here a league or confederation of nations is deliberating over the reign of Jehovah that is implicitly acknowledged and yet explicitly denounced.

(2) Let us agree in concert.

By inference, there is agreement that causes differences to recede in importance. Specifically the personal reign of “Jehovah/Yahweh and His Anointed” is considered the dominant object of their rage. Stone and wood deities do not trouble them so much as this God, jealous of His solitariness (Ex. 34:14; Deut. 4:23-24; 5:8-9; 6:13-15), glorious in holiness and sovereignty. Submission to this God is repugnant to man’s desire for autonomy and moral relativism.

(3) Let us complain in concert.

By unanimous consent a resolution is reached, namely that this Jehovah and His Anointed King are unacceptable sovereigns. Here democracy reveals its fundamental weakness, that is the concept of establishing the “right” by means of a chorus of opinion, which here is upraised, fisted hands. Of course this is the

⁷ Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The First Forty Years*, pp. 61-62.

⁸ William S. Plummer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms*, p. 89.

ultimate expression of humanism that is guided solely by human consensus and not the objective revelation of an essentially holy, unchanging God.

2. The focus of man's rebellion, God and His Messiah.

A modern Jewish political analyst has written: "Some Israelis believe in the existence of a national streak of paranoia and Professor Amnon Rubinstein, a lawyer and politician . . . once wrote a caustic essay on this theme entitled 'All the world is against us'. And indeed such tendencies are understandable in the light of the Holocaust, of which so many Israelis are survivors, and of the continual state of war and tension under which the state has existed since its creation."⁹ This is not an extreme analysis. Dr. Wilbur Smith, formerly of Moody Bible Institute, Fuller Seminary, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, recounts visiting the English Mission Hospital in Jerusalem during 1937. He describes: "the apparent extreme sensitivity of Hebrew people to pain. A doctor can hardly touch them but they begin to groan; a treatment which would make a normal Gentile only wince, brings forth a scream or a cry from most Jews. . . . Dr. McLean, who is a graduate of the University of Edinburgh, told me the astonishing thing that the body of any Jew is distinctly more sensitive to pain than the body of a Gentile, due to extreme nervousness, the result of centuries to persecution, and that a recent medical journal in London had even published an article in which it was set forth as a scientific fact that the reaction of Jewish people to suffering was more marked than with any other race in the world."¹⁰ Granted that the Jewish people are predominantly secular, yet does not common antipathy to things Jewish reflect in a measure the fierce opposition which the world has for Israel's God?

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the confessed international opposition described in vs. 1-2 concerns, "the LORD and His Anointed," namely the God of Israel and His designated King. Lord here, יהוה, Jehovah/Yahweh, is the name revealed by God to Israel through Moses (Ex. 3:13-15; 6:2-8). Leupold describes this animosity as being, "aimed at the one whose very name spells gracious and faithful love, Yahweh. Never as grief and opposition more causeless. Never were men more in the wrong than when they opposed him who was their salvation."¹¹ But further, this God's King is משיח, Mashiah or "His Messiah." Saul was the first king of Israel to be anointed (I Sam. 9:15-16; 24:6; II Sam. 16:14) followed by David (I Sam. 16:12-13; Ps. 18:50; 20:6). The outpoured olive oil signified the distinctive outpouring of grace through the Holy Spirit with regard to consecration to a God-appointed office (Lev. 8:12; Num. 3:3). Thus King David identifies with the opposition that Jehovah experienced. However, the early church clearly indicates that Jesus the Messiah is identified here (Acts 4:26-28), who was likewise anointed (Matt. 3:16-17; Luke 4:1, 14, 16-21; John 3:34; 10:32-33; Heb. 1:9). He indicated that opposition to the Son is likewise opposition to the Father, and vice versa (John 5:22-23; 10:30).

⁹ William Frankel, *Israel Observed, An Anatomy Of The State*, p. 9.

¹⁰ Wilbur M. Smith, *Before I Forget*, pp. 263-4.

¹¹ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, p. 46.

C. THE REBELLION OF THE NATIONS, v. 3.

The essential distinguishing feature of the God of the Bible, both in Old and New Testaments, is that of monotheism. Whereas the nations have worshipped a plurality of gods, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has always been identified as singular, unique, the LORD who alone is God. Israel was to be a holy people, that is set apart in worshipping only this jealous God; all other gods were to be thoroughly spurned in being fraudulent, impotent usurpers. After all, there can only be one God; to postulate two or more gods is to have no god as God due to resultant rivalry. Indeed this competitive spirit marked out the deities of Greece and Rome. Now this exclusive faith, so foreign to the nations that encircle Israel, inevitably led to conflict even as the same situation arises today when the claim is made that the God of Abraham alone is God.

Consider the claim of Israel from the point of view of the surrounding pagan idolaters. In learning of this distinctive nation's exclusive claim, the inference is that their pagan gods are illegitimate and that, of necessity, sole allegiance must be yielded to Jehovah/Yahweh. Also take into account that the era of David and Solomon was missionary minded according to God's original design for the Hebrew people (Ps. 33:6-12; 67:1-7; 72:8-11, 17; 86:8-10; 96:1-13; 100:1-5; 117:1-2). For this reason, as Walter Kaiser substantiates: "Missions cannot be an afterthought for the Old Testament: it is the heart and core of the plan of God."¹² As a result the character of Jehovah/Yahweh has been evangelistically made known to the "peoples/nation," and especially His unique, living, vital essence, His holiness and righteousness, and His awesome power (Ps. 96:3-10). Hence David now reflects on the surrounding chorus of rebellion that is voiced by the Gentile "kings" and "rulers." In simple terms they are declaring that they have no desire to yield to this sole God and His implicit demands. They don't like His administration, but particularly the character of its dominion!

1. The defiance of the nations against the *fetters* of the LORD.

The word "fetters" or "bonds," מוֹסֵר, mōsēr, is the harsh confinement that Israel experienced in Egypt (Jer. 2:20a; cf. Lev. 26:13); it is the means of restraining a wild donkey (Job 39:5). Thus the Gentile leaders sense they are confined by Jehovah/Yahweh. His setting of bounds, especially in the spheres of accountability and morality, conflicts with their lust for autonomy (self-law, Rom. 1:25). Consequently they propose abdication by means of "tearing apart from" or "complete separation," נָתַק, nataq, that is the establishment of a breakaway kingdom.

To this John Newton responds: "Ah! If sinners did but know what the bonds and cords are, which they are so determined to break; if they knew that His service is perfect freedom: if they were aware what more dreadful bonds and chains they are riveting upon themselves, by refusing His easy yoke [Matt. 11:28-30], they would throw down their arms and submit. They think, if they yield to the gospel, they must bid adieu to pleasure. But what will become of their pleasure, when, the day of His forbearance being expired, he will speak to them in His wrath, and fill them with hopeless horror and dismay?"¹³

¹² Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament*, p. 38.

¹³ John Newton, *The Works of John Newton*, p. 757.

2. The defiance of the nations against the *cords* of the LORD.

The word “cords” or “rope,” עֲבֹת, *abōth*, is that which binds Samson (Judg. 15:13-15); it is the means of restraining a wild ox (Job 39:9-10). Hence the synonymous parallelism confirms the resolute opposition of the world at large to the only true and living God. Here the creature rises up in mutiny against its Creator; it provokes a revolution whereby it “flings aside” or “casts away,” שָׁלַךְ, *salak*, what it considers to be tyranny, the reign of God, like the prodigal son who cannot endure the security and constraints of home life.

3. The defiance of the nations against the *dominion* of the LORD.

Hence the world at large, being predominantly religious, agrees that the singular reign of Jehovah/Yahweh, the God of Israel, is an intolerable burden, as with His Son, Jesus Christ. Of mankind in general we are told that: “the Light [Jesus Christ] has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). In other words, presented with a choice between Jesus Christ and this world, the nations have expressed a decided preference, even “love,” ἀγαπάω, *agapaō*, for the pig pens of this world rather than the holy glory of the Father’s house. Ironically, they would also agree with the Jews strident complaint, “We do not want this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). It is for this reason that an unholy alliance was formed being comprised of, “both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,” for the purpose of disenfranchising the Son’s appointment by the Father, as described here in vs. 6-9. So C. H. Spurgeon comments: “The true reason of the opposition of sinners to Christ’s truth [is] their hatred of the restraints of godliness.”¹⁴

Consequently, in modern communication of the Christian gospel, it needs to be appreciated that our main problem is not the means of communication, as valid as is concern for clear proclamation. Rather our essential concern is to be with the natural antipathy of man, of whatever social and educational status, toward the God of Scripture. Surveys concerning the opinions of a population with regard to God, Jesus Christ, heaven, hell, the gospel, etc., are of minor importance compared to our understanding of this latent hostility of man toward the God of the Bible. Since the Fall, when Adam hid from the presence of the LORD God (Gen. 3:9-10), the children of Adam have continued to not only flee from His presence, but also oppose His pursuit of rapprochement (John 1:10).

¹⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, I, p. 23.

II. THE LORD GOD HAS HIS SAY, VS. 4-6

IMAGINE that you are reclining on a lush lawn at the end of a summer's day. Your head gently rests on this carpet of green that you, as a devoted gardener, have cultivated and recently mown. Of course you well understand that at the earth level there are probably ants aplenty crawling amongst the roots of the green leaves. But you are not in the least concerned; that is their realm and such minute insects don't trouble you in the slightest. After all, why should you be concerned when they could be crushed in a moment? Even if they did think to crawl on your hand, you would brush them off in an instant. However on this occasion, your ear being so close to the ground, you are suddenly shocked to hear a chorus from that same earthly level such as you have never heard before. "Ants of the world, unite! Ants of the world, unite! Ants of the world, unite! Down with the tyranny of mankind that tramples where he will." It seems preposterous to contemplate, but yes, the cry does come from beneath the lawn. There is no doubt about it. There is a large army of ants crying out in rebellion, defiant in their assertion of newly declared class warfare. The united complaint is against the tyranny of the human race that so thoughtlessly relegates these little specks of the soil to a level of such meager importance. Yes, clearly there is a revolt at hand, so what would be your response?

To begin with you would probably break out with laughter at such an absurd uprising. The puny arrogance of it all is astonishing. Why this is the most ridiculous act of impudence you have ever encountered. Then you would probably stand on your feet, towering over the minute army massed far below. You would peer down, now being hardly able to hear the cry of resistance. Now your laughter would take on a mocking tone, even disdain for such unbelievable folly. After all you have a whole garden to care for. Hence you would raise your foot and quickly stamp upon the feeble revolution that is instantly silenced and exterminated. Now while the ants have acted according to their own perspective, yet they have lost sight of the perspective of the gardener, and that proves to be their ruination.

So in having considered the rebellion of the human race against Jehovah/Yahweh and His Messiah in vs. 1-3, especially from the earthly realm, we are now transported to the heavenly realm far above, in the region of His holy dominion, where God peers down with divine "astonishment" at such presumption. It is man's refusal to consider this perspective that also results in his ruination.

A. THE CONTEMPT OF THE LORD, V. 4.

If anyone would view this world aright, he must gain the perspective of heaven. The earthly outlook of mankind is limited on account of two factors. First there is the sinful clouding of his whole being, but particularly his perceptive and auditory faculties. On earth the tumult of the nations, its agreed rebellious agenda, is comprehended through the dominance of the similarly clouded media and educational agencies. So "the nations say, 'Where, now, is their God?'" (Ps. 115:2). The whole presentation is polluted; it is like living in a valley where the sun never shines. Second there is the limitation of mankind's finiteness, such as sequential perception that comprehends frame by frame rather than instant totality. However in heaven, the sinful cloud has been left behind so that holy vision alone prevails. There the contrasting cry is, "God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases" (Ps. 115:3). Wedded to this sovereignty is an infinite perception of all things, not merely temporally but in the eternal now. William Shedd illustrates this radical distinction as follows:

A person stands on a street corner, and sees a procession passing, whose component parts he does not know beforehand. He first sees white men, then black men, and lastly red men. When the last

man has passed, he knows that the procession was composed of Europeans, Africans, and Indians. Now suppose that from a church tower he should see at one glance of the eye, the whole procession. Suppose that he saw no one part of it before the other, but that the total view was instantaneous. His knowledge of the procession would be all comprehending, and without succession. He would not come into the knowledge of the components of the procession, as he did in the former case, gradually and part by part. And yet the procession would have its own procession still, and would be made up of parts that follow each other. Though the vision and knowledge of the procession, in this instance, is instantaneous, the procession itself is gradual. In like manner, the vast sequences of human history, and the still vaster sequences of physical history, appear all at once, and without any consciousness of succession, to the Divine observer.¹

So we must now anticipate the same change of viewpoint as we perceive earth from heaven. Certainly the true child of God, in having the cloud lifted from his soul, has been endowed, even if imperfectly at the present (I Cor. 13:12), with this new perspective. There has come to him the capacity to “see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). As a child of this kingdom, it is the interests of this new realm that now dominate; it is a God-centeredness that pervades the whole of his thinking.

1. The posture of the LORD is exalted.

“He who sits [is enthroned] in the heavens,” is He who reigns, who is in total charge of all creation. He is the “Lord,” Adonai, אֲדֹנָי, Master over His subjects/creation,² who “is high above all nations; His glory is above the heavens. Who is like the LORD our God, Who is enthroned on high?” (Ps. 113:4-5; cf. 97:9; 99:1-2). In contrast with earthly turmoil, at the highest level of heaven there is, “serene dignity that characterizes Him who is so infinitely removed from the frailty and littleness of man.”³ From this vantage point, “the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales. Behold He lifts up the islands like fine dust” (Isa. 40:15).

2. The laughter of the LORD is disdainful.

From the throne of heaven there thunders forth the “laughter,” שָׂחָק, sachaq, of God (Ps. 37:12-13; 59:8), that has the tone of ridicule, as it is directed toward “ant-like” mankind. Similarly God “laughs” when His personified wisdom is spurned (Prov. 1:20-26). This “anthropopathism” or divine representation of a human passion need not deny divine emotion or moral expression, as if God was always quiescent and blissful (Mark 14:33-34). Certainly God does not in reality frown or smile, yet He is pleased to represent Himself facially in this manner (Ps. 34:15-16; Jer. 44:11).

3. The scoffing of the LORD is derisive.

From the LORD there resounds “scoffing,” לָעַג, lawag, that is divine mockery that taunts (Ps. 59:8; Prov. 1:20-26; Jer. 20:7), that merges with “anger” and “fury” in v. 5. In other words God exposes man’s extreme stupidity. As David Clarkson has written: “All the resistance that any created power can make to the Lord in his course of governing the

¹ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, I, pp. 344-5.

² The KJV, NASB, and A New Translation – Jewish Publication Society, all follow the Masoretic Text and read “Lord,” while the NKJV, RSV, and NIV read “LORD.”

³ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, p. 48.

world will be but like that which a snail can make to the foot that treads on it, and will crush it.”⁴

4. The sovereignty of the Lord is reassuring.

To the child of God, who is prompted to tremble as he encounters this rebellion at close range, such raging against Jehovah/Yahweh is seen for what it really is, whistling in the dark, like the charge of the Light Brigade by the British against the Russians in 1854, memorialized by Tennyson, or General Custer in 1872 against the Sioux Indians, both incidents representing inevitable wholesale slaughter and defeat. So, notwithstanding our suffering the seeming overwhelming opposition of the world, God’s mockery of his opponents, who are our opponents, guarantees inevitable triumph, “for He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet” (I Cor. 15:25).

William Plummer adds:

But let not the child of God be much moved by all his trials, however contrary to flesh and blood they may be. They can never affect his relations to God. He abideth faithful, vs. 6-7. Nor can anything disturb his eternal tranquility. Luther: ‘He who cares for us *sitteth in the heavens*, dwells quite secure, apart from all fear, and if we are involved in trouble and contention, he fixes his regard upon us; we move and fluctuate here and there, but he stands fast, and will order it so, that the righteous shall not continue forever in trouble (Ps. 55:22). But all this proceeds so secretly that thou canst not well perceive it, thou shouldst then need to be in heaven thyself. Thou must suffer by land and sea, and among all creatures; though must hope for no consolation in thy sufferings and troubles, till thou canst rise through faith and hope above all, and longest for Him who dwelleth in the heavens, then thou also dwellest in the heavens, but only in faith and hope.’⁵

B. THE ANGER OF THE LORD, v. 5.

One crucial matter at this juncture is that of timing. The aversion of the nations of the world to Jehovah/Yahweh and His Messiah in v. 2 suggests they have been confronted with a redemptive ministry. In other words, the nations must have known something of anointed David, but ultimately also Jesus Christ, to be able to repudiate his claims. This being so, the divine response that now comes to the boil, so to speak, must surely be an apocalyptic revelation that is intent on a furious and just vindication irregardless of mankind’s rebellion. Such a revelation of divine outrage in no way precludes the grace of this same God that is inherent in His Messiah. Surely it is the arrogant refusal of this grace that aggravates He who addresses man with grace.

There is a degree of escalation in God’s indignation. Laughter and scoffing ripen into “anger,” חָרוֹן, *charōn*, that is “burning/fierce anger,” or “hot annoyance,” that is frequently directed against God’s rebellious people (Ex. 32:12; Ps. 78:49; Isa. 13:9, 13). This anthropopathism, exclusively used of God in the Old Testament, brings to mind at a human level “red faced displeasure” that suggests impending discipline and judgment according to v. 12.

God’s mode of speaking concerning His Messiah has been through the prophets of the Old Testament, according to promise (Isa. 9:6-7), and the apostles of the New Testament, according to fulfillment (Acts 4:25-28). But now Jehovah’s speaking, which will “terrify them in His

⁴ David Clarkson, *The Practical Works of David Clarkson*, II, p. 462.

⁵ William Plumer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms*, p. 50.

fury,” sounds forth at the end of the age, even at that time of final tribulation. Such a universal cataclysm will be accurately interpreted by mankind as the fearful voice of God, and not random natural causes. For the “wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:16) will overwhelm “the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man” who formerly boasted of overthrowing the LORD of heaven!. Isaac Watts describes this day of the Lord as follows:

Tempests of angry fire shall roll
To blast the rebel worm,
And beat upon his naked soul
In one eternal storm.

Perowne reminds us that, “this Psalm is of the nature of prophecy, and still waits its final accomplishment.”⁶ The substance of this apocalyptic address to the nations, this holy defiance, this sovereign assertiveness, is revealed in v. 6.

In the interim, ongoing divine displeasure at the opposition to God’s Messiah results in ongoing preparatory judgment. William Plumer recounts that:

It is easy for God to destroy his foes. . . . Behold Pharaoh, his wise men, his hosts, and his horses plouting, and plunging, and sinking like lead in the Red Sea. Here is the end of one of the greatest plots ever formed against God’s chosen. Of thirty Roman Emperors, governors of provinces and others high in office, who distinguished themselves by their zeal and bitterness in persecuting the early Christians, one became speedily deranged after some atrocious cruelty, one was slain by his own son, one became blind, the eyes of one started out of his head, one was drowned, one was strangled, one died in a miserable captivity, one fell dead in a manner that will not bear recital, one died of so loathsome a disease that several of his physicians were put to death because they could not abide the stench that filled his room, two committed suicide, a third attempted it, but had to call for help to finish the work, five were assassinated by their own people or servants, five others died the most miserable and excruciating deaths, several of them having an untold complication of diseases, and eight were killed in battle or after being taken prisoners. Among these was Julian the apostate. In the days of his prosperity he is said to have pointed his dagger to heaven defying the Son of God, whom he commonly called the Galilean. But when he was wounded in battle, he saw that all was over with him, and he gathered up his clotted blood, and threw it in the air, exclaiming, “Thou hast conquered, O thou Galilean.”⁷

C. THE APPOINTMENT OF THE LORD, V. 6.

The divine heavenly assessment is suddenly crowned with a towering assertion of uncompromising, untroubled boldness (Ps. 115:2-3). As Spurgeon declares: “While they [the nations] are proposing, he [God] has disposed the matter. Jehovah’s will is done, and man’s will frets and raves in vain. God’s Anointed is appointed, and shall not be disappointed.”⁸

1. The installation of the King and his dominion.

“But [Yet, KJV, NKJV] as for Me, *I* . . .” is emphatic. This is one of God’s interjections when He, in all of His sovereign grandeur, responds to a sordid human situation in such a

⁶ J. J. Stewart Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms*, p. 114.

⁷ Plumer, *Psalms*, p. 49.

⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, I, pp. 12-13.

lordly manner (Isa. 49:15; Ezek. 13:1-5; Rom. 3:21). Here is divine assertion that responds to human impudence. While man would seize heavens right to establish rule over the universe, and thus crown himself as king, God has unilaterally installed His King over these same rebellious nations. As the LORD sent Samuel to Jesse and declared, “I have selected a king for Myself among his sons” (I Sam. 16:1), as distinct from the people’s earlier choice of Saul (I Sam. 10:17-19), so God appoints His Son as “king over all the earth” (Zech. 14:9) even though the will of mankind would appoint another (John 5:43; 18:40). Man may be enamored with democratic, republican, socialist, even totalitarian forms of government, yet in reality the universe is subject to theocratic rule. God not only determines His Monarch according to righteous nepotism, but also sovereignly imposes him upon a rebel planet. However this appointment envisages not so much raw coercion as sovereign redemption motivated by gracious love rather than despotic vengeance.

2. The realm of the King and its dimensions.

The hill or “holy mountain” called “Zion” was originally the location of the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. There the angel of the Lord confronted David concerning his sin in numbering the people of Israel; consequently, “David built there an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings” (II Sam. 24:15-25). This became the site of Solomon’s temple (II Chron. 3:1) being also known as Mount Moriah. Thus Zion identified the sacred site of God’s earthly dwelling place and became synonymous with Jerusalem and the city of David. But further, as Delitzsch points out:

Zion is mentioned as the royal seat of the Anointed One; there He is installed, that He may reign there, and rule from thence (Ps. 110:2). It is the hill of the city of David (II Sam. 5:7, 9; I Kings 8:1) including Moriah that is intended. That hill of holiness, *i. e.* holy hill, which is the resting-place of the divine presence and therefore excels all the heights of the earth, is assigned to Him as the seat of His throne.⁹

There is a twofold appointment here, and thus two aspects in a chronological sense. They relate to the first coming of Jesus Christ, being the initiation of the King, and the second coming concerning Jesus Christ’s consummate reign. This twofold perspective is also evident in Psalm 132:13-18.

For the Lord has chosen Zion;
He has desired it for His habitation,
This is My resting place forever;
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
I will abundantly bless her provision;
I will satisfy her needy with bread.
Her priests also I will clothe with salvation,
And her godly ones will sing aloud for joy.
There I will cause the horn of David to spring forth;
I have prepared a lamp for Mine anointed.
His enemies I will clothe with shame,
But upon himself his crown shall shine.

First Christ is set upon Mt. Zion as redeemer (Isa. 28:16; Matt. 28:18; Rom. 9:33), and the “heir of all things” (Heb. 1:2). During his first coming in humiliation yet he spent the major portion of his Jerusalem ministry in the temple precincts. He claimed to be a king

⁹ Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary On The Psalms*, I, p. 94.

(John 18:37) and was acknowledged as a king (John 19:14, 19-22). The context of v. 7 would suggest this to be the primary meaning here., even as John Newton has written.

Savior, if of Zion's city
 I, through grace, a member am,
 Let the world deride or pity,
 I will glory in Thy name:
 Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
 All his boasted pomp and show;
 Solid joys and lasting treasure
 None but Zion's children know.

Second Christ is set upon Mt. Zion as the unchallenged King reigning over the whole earth. While his first coming to Mt. Zion was with redemptive glory “in Zion [as] a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense” (Rom. 9:33), yet at that time the populace in Jerusalem cried out, “Crucify, crucify, . . . Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!” (John 19:6, 15). While Pilate correctly declared to the Jews: “Behold, your King!” they insultingly responded, “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:14-15). Certainly Hebrews 12:22-23 describes the spiritual classification of “Mount Zion [as] the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, . . . the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven,” especially during this current church age when “Jerusalem [Zion] will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). So Adolph Saphir comments: “The earthly Zion and Jerusalem have also a glorious future; but we believers are *now* [emphasis added] come to the true mount Zion, even to the throne of grace, to the Jerusalem above, the heavenly city, free and holy.”¹⁰ However the *future* millennial glory of Mount Zion appears to be repeatedly stated . (Zech. 8:1-3; Mic. 4:7; Rom. 11:25-27). This is exemplified in Psalm 48:1-3:

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised,
 In the city of our God, His holy mountain.
 Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth,
 Is Mount Zion in the far north,
 The city of the great King.

Concerning Zechariah 14:9-10, especially, “Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site,” David Baron writes:

As ‘the city of the great King’ (Ps. 48:2), whose dominion extends to the earth’s utmost bounds, and as the center whence God’s light and truth shall go forth among all the nations, Jerusalem is also to be physically exalted above the hills by which she has hitherto been surrounded and overshadowed. . . . Isaiah . . . announced that, ‘*it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of Jehovah’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills* [Isa. 2:2].’¹¹

Indeed the whole of Isaiah 2:2-4 and the later expanded parallel in Micah 4:1-8 use language that transcends present fulfillment to date or exotic spiritualization (cf. Zech. 8:1-3; Rom. 11:25-27). So as the Father declares here through David, “I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain,” so “the LORD will be king [enthroned in Jerusalem,

¹⁰ Adolph Saphir, *The Epistle To The Hebrews*, II, p. 848.

¹¹ David Baron, *The Visions & Prophecies Of Zechariah*, pp. 510-513.

vs. 10, 17] over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one” (Zech. 14:9).

III. THE SON OF GOD INTERVENES, VS. 7-9

IN contrast with vs. 1-3, where the displeasure of the nations on earth with Jehovah and His Messiah has been revealed, in vs. 4-6 we have been lifted heavenward to hear this same Jehovah's sovereign response. His mocking, unruffled, disdainful censure concludes with the proclamation, "I have installed My King upon Zion." Consequently, in that same heavenly realm, that same King responds to that same "Lord" who is now designated as "LORD," concerning this appointment. While there has plainly been reference to King David up to this point, and the equally clear recognition, according to Acts 4:25-28, that the person of the Lord Jesus is prophetically incorporated within this record, yet it becomes more obvious from this point on that the Messianic reference is increasingly dominant. Liberal bias in opposition at this point is to be spurned.¹ While C. H. Spurgeon retreats from commenting on the heart of this verse,² cautious investigation is surely a necessity in view of the three New Testament quotations (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5).

A. THE BEGETTAL OF THE SON, V. 7.

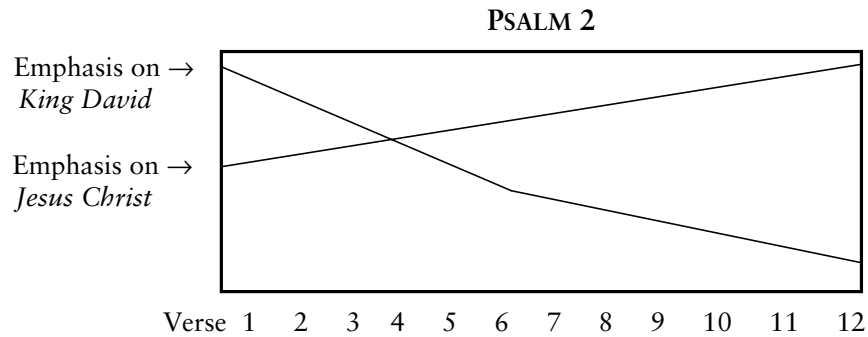
From the perspective of a change in divine discourse, we now consider that conversational relationship which exists between two persons of the Trinity. In other words, here we have revealed that heavenly union of God the Son in the bosom of God the Father (John 1:1-2, 18), but particularly with regard to the Father's appointment of the willing Son for the purpose of saving sinners who the Father delivers to the Son (John 4:34; 17:6, 9, 24; Heb. 10:7-9).

The extent to which this verse, let alone the Psalms as a whole, reflects both the human author and Messiah as identified as Jesus of Nazareth, has been a matter of considerable debate. In this respect Walter Kaiser gives a very judicious foreword and estimate with regard to J. J. Stewart Perowne's approach in his classic commentary. "Perowne successfully maneuvers past the Scylla of modern rationalism's denial of any messianic presence in the Psalms and the Charybdis of the patristic and medieval writers who affirmed that every psalm had some direct prophetic reference to Christ and his Church."³ A diagram of this dual representation that involves a variation of emphasis is as follows.

¹ Robert Bratcher and William Rebyburn, of the United Bible Societies, who author *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Psalms* in which they seek to influence Bible translators, especially at a missionary level, sadly comment concerning v. 7: "Care should be taken not to leave the reader thinking that the Hebrew psalmist was writing about Jesus Christ. In English, by the use of capital letters at the beginning of words and titles, it is possible to imply that Jesus Christ is being referred to. So the New International Version (NIV) in verse 2 has "his Anointed One," in verse 6 "my King," in verse 7 "You are my Son," and in verse 12 . . . "Kiss the Son." This goes beyond the limits of a faithful translation and introduces meanings and concepts that were not in the mind of the original biblical author," p. 28. Presumably these authors only believe in human authorship, in disregard of II Peter 1:20-21.

² "We could give rival interpretations of this verse, but we forbear. The controversy is one of the most unprofitable which ever engaged the pens of theologians." C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, I, p. 19.

³ J. J. Stewart Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms*, I, p. viii. In Greek mythology, considerable skill was required to chart a course between Scylla, a sea-monster, and Charybdis, a whirlpool, in the Straits of Messina. John Owen seems to go to an extreme here when he comments: "There is no cogent reason why we should acknowledge David and his kingdom to be at all intended in this psalm [Psalm 2]." *An Exposition of Hebrews*, II, p. 133.



1. The decree of the Lord, as identified in David.

David is king because of divine anointing (I Sam. 16:12-13; Ps. 18:50; 20:6; 28:8; 132:17), vs. 2, 6, and covenantal promise (II Sam. 7:8-17). So we have here his fervent recollection of this sovereignly established relationship according to divine decree. In the midst of a raging world, such truth was very reassuring. To quote the lines of Edward Mote:

His oath, His covenant, and blood
Support me in the 'whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.

The “decree” צִוִּי , *chōq*, or enactment/ordinance/statute (Ex. 12:24; Ps. 105:8-10) bestowing sonship, was first communicated to David, “He will cry to Me, ‘You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation’ (Ps. 89:3-4, 20, 26-27), and then replicated to Solomon: “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me” (II Sam. 7:12-14). Hence David’s adoption and begettal was that “day” when the LORD directed Samuel, “Arise, anoint him; for this is he [who will replace King Saul].” As a result, “the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward” (I Sam. 16:12-13).

2. The decree of the Lord, as identified in Christ.

The emphasis here on “the decree of the LORD” continues in the New Testament interpretation of this verse since, in Acts 4:25-28, the suffering ministry of Messiah prophesied in Psalm 2:1-2, at the hands of both the Jews and Gentiles, was according to, “whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.” It is well to remind ourselves at this point that Messianic interpretation here has been the prevailing emphasis of ancient Judaism. Owen explains: “Rabbi Solomon Jarchi, in his comment on this psalm, in the Venetian edition of the great Masoretical Bibles, affirms that ‘whatever is sung in this psalm our masters interpreted of Messiah the king; but,’ saith he, ‘according unto the sound of the words, and for the confutation of the heretics’ (that is Christians), ‘it is convenient that we expound it of David.’”⁴

a. The New Testament interpretation.

These are the three New Testament quotations of Psalm 2:7. However, other passages are closely related such as Mark 1:11; 9:7. Taken together they suggest a begettal that

⁴ John Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, II, p. 132.

incorporates Jesus' coming in flesh and complete earthly ministry that were crowned with his resurrection. Collectively, this was his "Today."

- (1) According to Acts 13:32-33.

While many propose that the resurrection is the day of begettal, which is akin to Christ's coronation,⁵ it would be better to suggest that the resurrection of Christ justified, vindicated, indeed fulfilled his sonship, that had previously been established. The declarations of the Father at Christ's baptism and transfiguration (Mark 1:11; 9:7) suggest that Christ's begettal included the earlier part of his incarnate ministry. So here "the promise" is surely more comprehensive than the historic resurrection, even as the following two quotations indicate.

- (2) According to Hebrews 1:5.

Consider Psalm 89:20; 26-27 which describes the encompassing glory for "My [privileged] firstborn," destined to be "the highest of the kings if the earth." So here the parallel idea of higher rank in "Sonship" is emphasized when compared with the angels. Further, the comparison of Christ with the angels surely envisages the broad work of the incarnation by which God, "in these last days has spoken to us in His Son," v. 2. Further, the context of v. 6, "And when He again brings the firstborn into the world," plainly refers to a begettal that is prior to while also being inclusive of the resurrection.

- (3) According to Hebrews 5:5.

Here the priestly role of Christ is inclusive of his earthly life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, 4:14-15; 5:7-8. Moreover the context of vs. 7-8, "In the days of His flesh, he offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears [before his resurrection] . . . Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered," further indicates a begettal prior to his resurrection. The emphasis here on Christ glorifying the Father, not Himself, would require the whole of his incarnate ministry that culminated in his resurrection.

- b. The Old Testament/New Testament synthesis.

In concluding then that this "day,"⁶ this "begettal," foreshadowed in David, encompasses the whole earthly ministry of the Son at the behest of the Father, whereby this willing humiliation culminates in glorious exaltation, it needs to be underscored that this appointment was of He who had, eternally in the past, dwelt in the bosom of the Father (John 17:5) with the highest rank as Son. Jesus Christ's earthly visitation was that of the high ranking Son, who, in the Father's declarations

⁵ So Leupold, and Perowne who comments: "The day of Christ's coronation was the day of his resurrection, Psalms, I, p. 117.

⁶ Plumer quotes Owen as follows: "Today, being spoken of God, of him who is eternal, to whom all time is so present as that nothing is properly yesterday, nor to-day, does not denote necessarily such a proportion of time, as is intimated." *Psalms*, p. 44.

and estimate retained that high office, His taking on the role of a servant (Phil. 2:6-7) notwithstanding.

B. THE INHERITANCE OF THE SON, v. 8.

The “decree of the LORD” continues, that is the response of the Father to the Son in v. 7 concerning the high rank and appointment or begetting of the Son to his earthly incarnate ministry. So here the Father continues his address by giving assurance to the Son of the glorious goal that this incarnate, missionary ministry will accomplish. Certainly the inheritance of David is included here, yet the broad biblical picture envisages the promise made to Israel’s king that, “Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me [the Lord] forever; your throne shall be established forever” (II Sam. 7:16). This then also describes the inheritance that is to come to “great David’s greater Son” (Matt. 1:17; Luke 1:67-9; Acts 13:22-3; Rom. 1:1-4).

How often a father has cradled a newborn son in his arms and dotingly, adoringly promised, with such unconditional, lavish generosity, “All that I have is yours! My name, my estate, my privileges, my promotion.” Thus Jesus Christ declares that “all things have been handed over to Me by My Father” (Matt. 11:27). Furthermore, as the Father has given “the Spirit without measure” to the Son, so “the Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand” (John 3:34-35). Delitzsch comments: “Jahve has appointed the dominion of the world to His Son: on His part therefore it needs only the desire for it, to appropriate to Himself that which is allotted to Him. He needs only to be willing, and that He is willing is shewn by His appealing to the authority delegated to Him by Jahve against the rebels.”⁷

1. The Gentiles.

The term “nations,” גוֹיִם, goyim, is identical to v. 1, so that here the thought of triumphant conquest is envisaged. Thus Jesus Christ shall be “the highest of the kings of the earth” (Ps. 89:26-27). At that time, “Many nations will come and say, ‘Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us about His ways and that we may walk in His paths’” (Mic. 4:1-2; cf. Jer. 3:15-18).

2. The ends of the earth.

This expression means “all the earth,” whereby the theater of rebellion has become the kingdom of the Messiah, that is “Your possession.” As with v. 6, there are clear millennial indications here (Hab. 2:14; Isa. 11:9; Zech. 14:9), as v. 9 would tend to confirm, while vs. 10-12 describe the preceding gospel dispensation. Thus we have the announcement of vindication whereby paradise lost is paradise regained in such a manner that the universal reign of grace is shown to be greater than that of the reign of innocence in Eden.

3. The inheritance.

The Father, in owning all creation, delights to give the Son his “inheritance,” that is his “heritage/appointed personal holding,” נַחֲלָה, nachalah. This word is frequently used to describe the land of Canaan that was given as a personal province to Israel (Deut. 4:21; Ps. 105:11). The parallel word “possession,” אֲחֻזָּה, achuzzah, is similarly used with regard to

⁷ Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, I, p. 96.

the promised land (Gen. 17:8; Deut. 32:49). Hence the Son is designated as having equal title to the universe with the Father (Ps. 72:8; Zech. 9:9-10), even in its present polluted condition; indeed to him is committed its actual saving and holy administration. However the Son is not given a saved universe; rather he is given the universe which he must subdue, renovate and reign over. Thus two aspects of how the Son takes charge of his inheritance are now revealed. First there is described Messiah's response to the unrepentant, rebellious masses of this world, v. 9; second there is described Messiah's response to the repentant, faithful masses who yield to his proclaimed holy dominion, vs. 10-12.

C. THE VENGEANCE OF THE SON, v. 9.

Here is the language of retribution, not redemption, that is apocalyptic, although some, such as Luther, have endeavored to relate this verse to gospel application whereby, "he [Christ] slays our will in order to establish His own will in us. He puts to death the flesh and its lusts in order to make alive in us the Spirit and the things that he desires."⁸ Newton includes this application when he writes: "One branch of his iron rule over them [the rebellious nations], consists in that certain and inseparable connection between sin and misery. . . . He rules them with a rod of iron, by his power over conscience."⁹ However the language is reminiscent of Revelation 2:26-27; 12:5, and particularly 19:15. Further, the gospel age that vs. 10-12 describe yet anticipates the judgment of v. 9, that is a future time when the Son becomes angry, "and you perish in the way, . . . [since] His wrath may soon be kindled." So David Pitcairn rightly concludes:

Here, as in other respects, we must feel that the predictions and promises of this Psalm were but very partially fulfilled in the history of the literal David. Their real accomplishment, their awful completion, abides the day when the spiritual David shall come in glory and in majesty as Zion's King, with a rod of iron to dash in pieces the great antichristian confederacy of kings and peoples, and to take possession of his long-promised and dearly purchased inheritance. And the signs of the times seem to indicate that the coming of the Lord draws nigh.¹⁰

1. The punitive severity of his conquest.

The "rod," שֵׁבֶט, *shēbet*, commonly describes the staff of the shepherd (Lev. 27:32; Ps. 23:4), the parent/teacher (II Sam. 7:14; Prov. 22:15), and the king's scepter (Isa. 14:5; Amos 1:5, 8). The context here suggests that this rod of supreme authority is the scepter which the Father has bestowed upon the Son; it is the token of his absolute reign (Matt. 28:18) whereby he punishes in righteousness in this instance, but also rewards through gospel righteousness, vs. 10-12. Hence following Hebrews 1:5, where Psalm 2:7 is quoted to uphold Christ's superiority over the angelic order, in Hebrews 1:8 this preeminence is further proclaimed: "But of the Son He says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom'" (Ps. 45:6). Hence we have portrayed a seeming paradox concerning the wrath of the Good Shepherd (John 10:11; cf. Rev. 6:16). It is further described in John 3:17-19 where Jesus Christ, in not coming to judge man at his first appearing in a formal sense, yet by the very nature of his work of redemption confronts man with accountability regarding his salvation or condemnation. In other

⁸ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 53.

⁹ John Newton, *Newton's Works*, p. 761.

¹⁰ Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, I, p. 20.

words, for those who spurn the invitation of vs. 10-12, there is here described their judgment. So John Newton describes that terrible day of awakening:

What then will become of those who despise, and those who abuse the gospel of the grace of God? The libertine, the infidel, the apostate, the hypocrite, the profane scoffer, and the false professor, how will they stand, or whither will they flee, when the great Judge shall sit upon his awful throne, and the books shall be opened, and every secret thing shall be disclosed! Alas for them that are full, and that laugh now, for then they shall pine and mourn (Luke 6:25). Then their cavils will be silenced, their guilt, with all its aggravations, be charged home upon them, and no plea, no advocate be found. Can their hearts endure, or their hands be strong, when he shall speak to them in his wrath, and say, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41)?¹¹

2. The permanent severity of his conquest.

Here the parallelism is both cumulative and emblematic. The truth of the first clause is intensified so that “breaking” is more dramatically described as “shattering/smashing” as portrayed through the destruction of a potter’s fragile vessel, a clay pot, that is so complete as to be beyond repair. Here the vaunted nobility of godless man is forever consigned to fragments worthy only of being trodden under foot, like ants that cross our path. Again Newton illustrates:

The texture of the human frame is admirable. The natural capacities of the mind of man, the powers of his understanding, will, and affections, the rapidity of imagination, the comprehension of memory, especially in some instances, are so many proofs, that considered as a creature of God, he is a noble creature; and though he is debased and degraded by sin, there are traces of his original excellence remaining, sufficient to denominate him in the words of the poet, “majestic though in ruins.” But if you suppose him rich, powerful, wise, in the common sense of the words, he is brittle as a potter’s vessel, and while possessed of every possible advantage, he is but like the grass or the flower of the field, which, in its most flourishing state, falls in a moment at the stroke of the scythe, and withers, and dies. A fever, a fall, a tile, a grain of sand, or the air that finds its way through a crevice, may be an overmatch for the strongest man, and bring him down hastily to the grave. By a small change in the brain, or some part of the nervous system, he who now prides himself in his intellectual abilities may soon become a lunatic or an idiot. Disease may quickly render the beauty loathsome, and the robust weak as infancy. There are earthen and china vessels, which might possibly endure for many ages, if carefully preserved from violence. But the seeds of decay and death are sown in our very frame. We are crushed before the moth, and molder away untouched under the weight of time. How surely and inevitably, then, must they whom the Lord strikes with his iron rod, be shattered with the blow!¹²

¹¹ Newton, *Works*, p. 763.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 762.

IV. THE LORD GOD HAS HIS FINAL SAY, VS. 10-12

WHEREAS man was given first say in this revelation of the basic conflict between God and man, and he spoke vociferously with a defiant tone, it is of the essence of this Psalm that God has the final say, and He always will, otherwise He is not God. Job learned the lesson that, in the midst of a world which he could not fully fathom, yet the creature has no recourse but to yield to his Maker and confess: “Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth. Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; even twice, and I will add nothing more. . . . I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ‘Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.’ I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 40:4-5; 42:2-6). Would that the world had come to Job’s conclusion, shut its mouth and realized that the wiser path is to listen to what God has to say.

In the light of the teaching of Psalm 2 thus far, it is astonishing to discover the concluding thrust of the grace of God so generously offered. How this proclamation of mercy radically differs from human nature commonly displayed in this world, that is the desire for immediate vengeance when mankind is offended in a manner that resembles the way in which God was mocked in vs. 1-3.. While the inevitable fury of v. 9 is not diminished, yet its implementation, in human terms, is deferred, after the manner that God dealt with Nineveh through Jonah (Jonah 3:4-10). Although man is so aggressively opposed to God and his affections are so tilted toward unholy human autonomy, this bias does not deter God from issuing a fervent invitation to repentance. Here the injunction of God the Son is well demonstrated: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:44-45).

A. THE EXHORTATION TO THE NATIONS, v. 10.

In spite of the universal animosity that mankind vents toward God, His response is not sudden, as if in a fit of short-tempered rage. Even the promised judgment of v. 9 remains a future prospect. Rather a measured response, employing divine calm, pleads for thoughtful, comprehensive deliberation of the situation, that is contemplation of a vista that is universal and heavenly rather than earthly. The raging nations are as short-sighted as Elisha’s servant who trembled at the Arameans who surrounded the king of Israel at Dothan, that is until the Lord opened his eyes, “and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (II Kings 6:17).

1. The addressor.

David is probably speaking on behalf of God the Father and God the Son. This whole scenario, but especially here God’s forbearance and grace, may well have reminded him of his astonishment when, having been addressed by Nathan with regard to the covenant that God made with him, he responded with amazement: “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me thus far? And yet this was significant in Your eyes, O Lord GOD, for You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future. And this is the custom of man, O Lord GOD[?]. Again what more can David say to You? For You know Your servant, O Lord GOD” (II Sam. 7:18-20). He might also be

likened to Noah who, as a “preacher of righteousness” (II Pet. 2:5), proclaimed the mercy of God for the repentant and the judgment of God for the wicked.

2. The addressees.

The “kings” and “judges” are identical with the “kings” and “rulers” of v. 2. In being appointed by God (Dan. 5:21), it is necessary that they should be addressed by God’s messengers. From the perspective of David’s exhortation to the pagan potentates that surround Israel, it may be that this psalm was intended to be spread abroad; it certainly would have made an excellent tract or representation of what a Hebrew ambassador should declare. From the perspective of the early church and the obvious revelation concerning Messiah, it is similarly an excellent gospel tract, requiring explanation about Jesus as the atoning Christ; as such it is God’s exhortation to a world that is unavoidably confronted with His Son. Of course the assumption here is that the leaders of this world are not so bloated concerning their sense of self-importance as to pay no attention to a man of God who proclaims the Word of God (Eccles. 4:13).

3. The address.

To show “discernment,” סָכַל, *sākal*, means to act circumspectly, prudently, with reflection (Jer. 9:23-24). Here it is with respect to *circumstances* (opposing Almighty God, as a ridiculous exercise), *resources* (puny, infinitesimal), and *consequences* (crushing judgment). To take “warning,” יָסַר, *yāsar*, means to let one be corrected, disciplined (Jer. 6:8). Here is a call for the worldly wise to seriously reflect on their unwinnable rebellion against God and His Son. Like Isaiah, the plea is to, “Come now, and let us reason together” (Isa. 1:18). The truly sensible course is to submit to Christ and partake of his blessed salvation rather than be judged by Christ. Here the world’s attitude is assumed to be irrational, foolish, in the face of such a sovereign God. But faith in this Son brings liberty, joy, peace, rest (John 8:31-36) in the place of inward and outward anxiety, turmoil of soul, and decadence, as v. 12 confirms.

B. THE CALL TO THE NATIONS, v. 11.

Here is David’s invitation/command/exhortation/summons/fervent plea addressed to the kings and judges of the earth, v. 10, who lead their willing subjects in rebellion against “the Lord and His Anointed,” vs. 1-2.¹ They who demand submission are now called upon to themselves offer service to “the King of kings” (I Tim. 6:15). Thus this king of Israel is not insular or extreme in a separatist sense with regard to his attitude toward the heathen; instead he prefers that they might repent and yield in saving faith to the only true and living God; David would rather that a pagan world come to know of the blessedness he has experienced in being a child of this God than perish under His wrath.

1. The priority of true worship. The word עָבַד, *’ābad*, is strictly the offering of service, the performance of acts of worship, such as with Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Ex. 3:12). It is active, demonstrative, unqualified submission, which the LXX translates as the imperative

¹ Andrew Fuller refers to vs. 11-12 here as, “proof that faith in Christ is the duty of all men who hear, or have opportunity to hear, the gospel.” *Works*, II, pp. 343-4.

of δουλεύω, douleuō, meaning to serve as a slave. It is of primary importance that the rulers of the earth acknowledge God's sovereignty and unconditionally bow before it. This is likewise required of all mankind, without exception, as a most fundamental response of the creature to his Creator. So Jonathan Edwards declares:

Let us therefore labor to submit to the sovereignty of God. God insists, that his sovereignty be acknowledged by us, and that even in this great matter, a matter which so nearly and infinitely concerns us, as our own eternal salvation. This is the stumbling-block on which thousands fall and perish; and if we go on contending with God about his sovereignty, it will be our eternal ruin. It is absolutely necessary that we should submit to God, as our absolute sovereign, and the sovereign over our souls; as one who may have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and harden whom he will.²

Thus to worship God aright is to yield in the soul to His absolute dominion without believing that an explanation is always necessary. Hence true worship acknowledges the “worth-ship” of God, that infinite holy value concerning the majesty and fullness of His being. He is so esteemed that there inevitably results a prostration of the soul before Him as well as a variety of responses such as “reverence” in demeanor, “rejoicing” that is vocal, and “trembling” at such an awesome encounter.

2. The responses of true worship.

When men truly meet in the presence of God, there is a response unlike any other encounter. Modern evangelism, in contrast here with David, has lost sight of such a sober confrontation and replaced it with a casual, relaxed, nonchalant, relational substitute.

- a. Reverence, יִרְאַה, yir'âh. The primary meaning is that of “fear/dread,” such as before men (Deut. 2:25), but also God (Gen. 20:11). Of course vs. 5, 9 have supplied good reason for such a recommended response. Here this “fear” displaces humanistic arrogance as a result of suddenly being awakened to one's shabby, decadent status in the sight of God. It is that “fear” which results from the shocking apprehension of personal impotence and imminent jeopardy of soul, like the sudden change of circumstances that Haman experienced; one moment he is confident in his elevated status; the next he is sentenced to hanging on gallows of his own making (Esther 7:1-10). After all, it would be wiser to revere God through willing submission to grace. Otherwise there will be conscripted reverence under judgment. Adoption into the family of God in no way justifies disrespect and presumption, since even the Son addresses the Father as “holy” and “righteous” (John 17:11, 25). Hence we might liken this injunction here to a call to repentance that finds indivisible connection to solicited faith in Christ according to v. 12. But what does faith behold in the face of God?
- b. Rejoicing, גִּיל, gîyl. The invitation here to be “excitedly happy” in this LORD indicates that His countenance is welcoming. Indeed the invitation to prudence in v. 10 would suggest that David said much more to these pagan rulers than is here indicated. In other words he proclaimed the gracious attitude of God toward repentant sinners such as himself. Consequently God will graciously receive humble potentates, so that this prospect is cause for jubilation. Hence David further explains: “O LORD, in Your

² Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, II, p. 854.

strength the king will be glad, and in Your salvation how greatly he will rejoice!” (Ps. 21:1). Further he has great hopes for his evangelism for: “All the kings of the earth will give thanks to You, O LORD, when they have heard the words of Your mouth. And they will sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD” (Ps. 138:4-5).

- c. Trembling, רָעַד, *râ’ad*. The “shaking” here described concerns the addition of sobriety to the preceding expression of joy, though the bodily trembling of unrepentant sinners can also be intended (Is. 33:14). In other words, true worship can have a physical response such as with facial expression and tears (Ps. 42:11; Isa. 38:2-5), yet it is vital that it be reflective of the movement of the soul. Thus both Hebrews 12:28-29 and Philippians 4:4, in this order, result in biblical worship. Fear without joy is depressing while joy without fear is demeaning. But the wedding of fear and joy is suitable worship. As John Monsell has so beautifully written:

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
Bow down before Him, His glory proclaim;
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
Kneel and adore Him, the Lord is His name.
Fear not to enter His courts in the slenderness
Of the poor wealth thou wouldst reckon as thine;
Truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness,
These are the offerings to lay on His shrine.
These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,
He will accept for the Name that is dear;
Mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
Trust for our trembling, and hope for our fear.

C. THE INVITATION TO THE NATIONS, v. 12.

The exhortation of v. 11 becomes more specific, and the obvious connection is that to acceptably “worship the Lord with reverence” is to “do homage to the Son” (Luke 10:16; John 5:23; I John 2:23). Here we almost totally lose sight of David while Jesus Christ is supremely dominant. It may well be that David envisaged and exhorted the repentant Gentiles with regard to their offering obeisance to his God-appointed reign. Nevertheless, subsequent Jewish understanding of this verse was messianic.³

1. Embrace the mercy of the Son to avoid ruin.

To offer “homage” נָשַׁק, *nâshaq*, is literally to kiss, though clarification is needed. “The *kiss* was, from the earliest times, the mark of subjection and respect in the East. Such a kiss was given for the most part not upon the mouth, but upon the kisser’s own garment, or upon

³ Perowne comments in this regard: “It should be observed that two of the names given by the Jews themselves to the Hope of Israel were taken from this Psalm (and Dan. 9:25), the Messiah, ver. 2, and the Son of God, ver. 7. Nathaniel says to Jesus, ‘You are the Son of God,’ *σὺ εἶ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ*, *su ei huios tou theou* [You are the King of Israel]’ (John 1:49), and both names are joined together by the High Priest, [‘tell us] whether You are the Christ, the Son of God, *εἰ σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ*, *ei su ei ho Christos ho huios to theou* (Matt. 26:63). Also refer to Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, pp. 42-50.

the hand of the person kissed.”⁴ Thus the “kiss” here, after the Old Testament manner (I Sam. 10:1; I Kings 19:18; Job 31:27; Hos. 13:2), represents rebellion giving place to submission, except that it is more profoundly qualified by the final declaration: “How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!” Thus “to kiss” is “to yield in subjection” is “to take refuge in Him!” Consequently this is surrender before a warmly receptive and gracious conqueror.

Nevertheless, the righteousness of God, when confronted with the spurning of this grace, is so poised as to render this mutinous human race as, according to Leupold, “blasted from their course.”⁵ As a result they will, in the midst of their campaign, “perish” אָבַד, ‘ābad, die, be lost, go to ruin, according to God’s disposal. It is significant that the LXX translates “perish” with ἀπόλλυμι, apollumi, which is the same Greek word to translate “perish” in John 3:16. Surely both passages are evangelistically comparable though separated by a thousand years!

Thus C. H. Spurgeon preached a sermon on this verse in 1859 titled, “An Earnest Invitation.”

I urge you to ‘kiss the Son,’ and trust Christ, because this is the sure way. None have perished, trusting in Christ. It shall not be said on earth nor even in hell shall the blasphemy be uttered, that ever a soul perished that trusted in Christ. ‘But suppose I am not one of God’s elect,’ says one. But if you trust in Christ you are; and there is no supposing about it. ‘But suppose Christ did not die for me.’ But, if you trust him, he did die for you. That feat is proved, and you are saved. Cast yourself simply on him; dare it, run the risk of it; venture on him, venture on him, (and there is no risk). You shall not find that you have been mistaken. Sometimes I feel anxiety and doubt about my own salvation; and the only way I can get comfort is this: I go back to where I began, and say, — ‘*I the chief of sinners am;*’ I go to my chamber, and once more confess that I am a wretch undone, without his sovereign grace, and I pray him to have mercy on me yet again. Depend on it, it is the only way to heaven, and it is a sure one. If you perish trusting in Christ, you will be the first of the kind. Do you think God would allow any to say, ‘I trusted in Christ and yet he deceived me; I cast my soul on him, and he was not strong enough to bear to me?’ Oh, do not be afraid, I beseech you.

And I conclude now by noticing that this is an open salvation. Every soul in the world that feels its need of a Savior, and that longs to be saved, may come to Christ. If God hath convinced thee of sin, and brought thee to know thy need come, come away; come, come away! come now; trust now in Christ, and thou shalt now find that blessed are all they that trust in him. The door of mercy does not stand on the jar, it is wide open. The gates of heaven are not merely hanging on the latch, but they are wide open both night and day. Come, let us go together to that blessed house of mercy, and drive our wants away. The grace of Christ is like our street drinking fountains, open to every thirsty wanderer There is the cup, the cup of faith. Come and hold it here while the water freely flows and drink. There is no one can come up and say it is not made for you; for you can say, ‘Oh, yes it is, I am a thirsty soul; it is meant for me.’ ‘Nay,’ says the devil, ‘you are too wicked’ No, but this is a free-drinking fountain. It does not say over the top of the fountain, ‘No thieves to drink here.’ All that is wanted at the drinking fountain, is simply that you should be willing to drink, that you should be thirsty and desire. Come, then, . . . He has given you this; come and drink; drink freely. ‘The Spirit and the bride say come; and let him that heareth say come; and whosoever is athirst, let him come, and take the water of life freely.’⁶

⁴ Hengstenburg, *Psalms*, p. 52.

⁵ Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 55.

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *New Park Street Pulpit*, V, pp. 492-3, (Ages CD).

2. Evade the wrath of the Son being kindled.

His “wrath” אָנַף, ’ānap, from which “nostril” is derived, may soon be “kindled/ignited,” בָּעַר, bâ‘ar, and thus, as it were, be breathed forth with burning anger. Note Psalm 79:5-6 where these same two words are used. Here again, as with v. 9, we are reminded of “the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:16), which although occasionally revealed in the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ (Matt. 18:6; 21:12-13; 23:13-33; Mark 3:5; Luke 14:21; John 2:14-17), yet will blaze forth in the final day of judgment (Rev. 19:11-12). So in Psalm 73, although Asaph was depressed at God’s seeming indifference to the ongoing “prosperity of the wicked,” v. 3, yet upon his entry into “the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O LORD, when aroused, You will despise their form,” vs. 17-20.

3. Enjoy the blessing of the Son as a refuge.

To have “blessedness/happiness” אֶשֶׁר, ’eshher (Ps. 32:1-2; 84:5; 106:3; 128:1) is here to prove God as a “refuge” חַסֵּה, châçâh (Ps. 11:1; 25:19-20; 31:19-20) in the hostile environment of this world. In the world of nations that aspire to conquer one another, the expectation is that defeat and subjection results in humiliation, slavery, and misery. So the nations that rage against God would have the same hope in mind, namely the belittlement of the God of Israel; even today this is attempted with the dishonoring of His name, the desecration of His Son, and the dismemberment of His Word. Yet here we are told that the submission Jehovah demands does not result in gloom, but quite the opposite, namely rejoicing with privileges in the Father’s house in contrast with the wretchedness that is inherent in the far country. The Son of God Himself has proclaimed this astonishing prospect for those who yield to his dominion: “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke [unlike worldly tyrants] is easy and Mt burden light” (Matt. 11:29-30).

The strong intimation is that the leaders of the world, along with their hosts, are far from happy. They are as restless as the troubled sea (Isa. 57:20-21). “Why do the heathen rage?” Because they despise the sovereign claims of Jesus Christ. Why is the Christian “blessed/happy”? Because he has yielded to this Son of God and found him to be the only sanctuary for his soul. Jesus Christ is certainly the focal point of human history and personal destiny.

So John Newton makes a passionate plea:

My heart wishes you the possession of those principles which would support you in all the changes of life, and make your dying pillow comfortable. Are you unwilling to be happy? Or can you be happy too soon? Many persons are now looking upon you, who once were as you now are. And I doubt not, they are praying that you may be as they now are. Try to pray for yourself; our God is assuredly in the midst of us. His gracious ear is attentive to every suppliant. Seek him while he is to be found. Jesus died for sinners, and he has said, ‘Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.’ He is likewise the author of that faith, by which alone you can come rightly to him. If you ask of him, he will give it you; if you seek it, in the means of his appointment, you shall assuredly find. If you refuse this there remaineth no other sacrifice for sin. If you are not saved by faith in his blood, you are lost forever. O ‘kiss the Son lest he be angry, and you perish from the way, if his wrath be kindled, yea, but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.’⁷

⁷ Plumer, *Psalms*, p. 52.

So William Goode invites us to sing in conclusion:

O Serve the Lord with fear
And reverence His command;
With sacred joy draw near,
With solemn trembling stand;
Kneel at His throne,
Your homage bear,
His power declare,
And own the Son.