

## Psalm 2

*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ*

### 1. Introduction

“The message of Psalm 2, and the book of Psalms, is that our God is in control, in spite of what circumstantial evidence might indicate. The book of Psalms called ancient Israelites... to live a life of faith in the reign of God – to believe that a truly happy life is possible... for ‘all who take refuge in him’ (Ps. 2:12)... The final note of the psalm is not... ‘he will become angry, and you will be destroyed’ (v. 12a NLT), but ‘what joy for all who take refuge in him’ (v. 12b NLT). According to the eschatology of the book of Psalms, our destiny is a truly happy life, that is, in a word, glory” (Mark Futato).

Psalm 2 is one of the most frequently quoted Psalms in the New Testament (the other contenders for this title being Psalms 110 and 118) – see Acts 4:25-28; 13:33; Rom. 1:4; Heb.1:5; Rev. 12:5; 19:15.

### 2. Structure

The Psalm comprises four stanzas of three verses each. In each stanza we hear a different voice – the raging of the nations, the laughter and derision of heaven, the Messiah reciting the LORD’s accession decree, and the psalmist admonishing kings and judges. The four stanzas may be arranged in a chiasmus with the LORD and his Messiah at the centre, and the kings of the earth, etc. raging and being admonished at the extremities. The centre interprets the extremities.

A<sup>1</sup> (vv. 1-3) *Human arrogance*

B<sup>1</sup> (vv. 4-6) *The LORD’s announcement*

B<sup>2</sup> (vv. 7-9) *Messiah’s accession*

A<sup>2</sup> (v. 10-12) *A gospel admonition*

### 3. Psalm 1 and Psalm 2

Psalms 1 and 2 belong together as a “dual psalm” which introduces the whole Psalter. There are several lines of evidence for this.

- Ps. 1 opens “Oh the happiness of the man...” Ps. 2 closes “Oh the happiness of all...” The rabbis understood this as binding the two psalms together as one. “Every chapter that was particularly dear to David he commenced with ‘Happy’ and terminated with ‘Happy.’ He began with ‘Happy,’ as it is written, ‘*Happy is the man,*’ and he terminated with ‘Happy,’ as it is written, ‘*Happy are all they that take refuge in him*’” (Rabbi Johanan in the Babylonian Talmud).
- Both psalms close with a warning that there is a way in which one might perish.
- Both psalms use the Hebrew verb “to mutter”. In Psalm 1 the happy man “mutter”, i.e. he meditates upon the Law of the LORD – but in Psalm 2 the peoples “mutter”, i.e. they muse over vain plans of rebellion against God.

- Neither Psalm 1 nor Psalm 2 has a title, but from Psalm 3 through to Psalm 41 every psalm (except Pss. 10 and 33) is attributed to David. It would appear that Book 1 of the Psalter starts properly with Psalm 3.

Psalm 1 provides us with insight into the purpose of the book of Psalms (teaching wisdom). Psalm 2 provides us a window on the message of the Psalter as a whole.

### 4. Psalm 2 and Psalms 3-41

The promise with which Psalm 2 closes (“Oh the happiness of all who take refuge in him!”) is worked out in the experience of David in Psalms 3-41. Again and again David finds himself in need of deliverance – and the LORD never fails. David uses a wide and varied set of words for the deliverance, salvation, victory, etc. which the LORD affords to those who take refuge in him as their rock, tower, fortress, etc.

### 5. Psalms 1-2 and Psalm 72

By the end of Book 2 of the Psalter (Pss. 42-72) Solomon has replaced David as the truly happy person portrayed in Psalm 1, and as God’s anointed mediator of true happiness to the nations portrayed in Psalm 2. The programme laid out for the king in Psalms 1 and 2 is working.

Psalm 72 provides a sort of “bookend” to Psalms 1-2. The kingdom has been passed from David to Solomon. Notice how Solomon cares for the poor in the way that David cared for them (Ps 41:1). The flourishing of Solomon’s reign is like the flourishing tree of Ps. 1. The universal reign of Solomon is the reign of Messiah in Ps. 2. The “oh how happy” pronounced by the people on Solomon fulfils Ps. 1.

### 6. Psalm 2 and Psalms 145-150

There is a general movement in the Psalter from psalms of lamentation (which predominate the first three books, Pss. 1-89) and psalms of jubilation (which predominate the last two books, Pss. 90-150). Put another way, there is a movement from suffering to glory. The David who is repeatedly oppressed in the “Psalms of David” (especially Pss. 3-41) is the same David who leads “all flesh” (Ps. 145:21) and “everything that has breath” (Ps. 150:6) in the praise of our “God and King” (Ps. 145:1).

This over-arching structure teaches that, while the truly happy life held out in Psalm 1 and guaranteed by submission to the reign of God in Psalm 2 may not be experienced at every point along the path of life (it certainly isn’t in the experience of the psalmists), the truly happy life is nonetheless the secure destiny of repentant Israel and the nations.

Psalm 149 is a fitting “bookend” to Psalm 2. The honour of binding the kings and rulers who wanted to cast off the cords of the LORD and his Messiah and who refused to “kiss the Son”, and of punishing the peoples and the nations who remained implacably rebellious, is given to God’s *Hasidim* (his covenant loyal ones) who sing the high praises of God as they wield a two-edged sword of vengeance (perhaps the iron rod of Psalm 2:9). When judgement has been passed, the kingdom belongs to God and he is all in all and praised by all (Psalm 150).