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# Psalm 2

## meditation 1— Introductory

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We begin our meditations on Psalm 2 with a reminder that the ancient editors and redactors of the Hebrew Bible seem to have placed Psalm 1 and 2 at the beginning of the Book of Psalms as a sort of dual and linked introduction to the entire Book. Based on Acts 13.<sup>33</sup>, in which some traditions read “first psalm” rather than “second psalm,” some have even suggested that perhaps the two psalms were once a single psalm. Short of this, some have thought that Psalm 1 and 2 have at times been read as one. There are reasons to do so. The two psalms do have many points of contact which we will discuss in the meditations below. In our meditations on Psalm 1, we commented on Israel’s prayer book beginning with a non-prayer. Psalm 2, of course, is also a non-prayer.

Sometimes when I go shopping for music, I am presented with an “explicit” and “clean” version of a song. Like a modern pop song, Psalm 2 has what I call an “explicit” and a “clean” version. The explicit version reflects its apparent original historical context. Its “clean” version reflects its treatment by later interpreters, especially Christian. The “clean” version makes a Christian messianic reading palpable. My translation makes the original “explicit” reading clear. The King James Translation eases one’s way to the “clean” version.

In the original and explicit version as I understand it, Judah’s subjugated neighboring nations are revolting or have revolted against Judah’s dominion over them (vss. 1-3). The nation is represented in the Psalm by its king, anointed one, or Messiah. Because it was God who enthroned Judah’s king, Judah considers any rebellion against it and its king as rebellion against God. Dismissive of and even amused by the rebels’ impotent attempt at freedom from Judah’s subjugation, Judah’s God brutally mocks the rebels for their foolishness (vs. 4). God’s mood changes in the blink of eye from amusement to rage (vs. 5). He informs the rebellious nations of His commitment to Judah’s king and threatens dire consequences if they do not immediately cease and desist from their vain rebellion (vss. 6-9). They do not have to like being subject to Judah and its God, but they must buck up and learn to endure it, however humiliating it may be (vss. 10-12c). The Psalm ends with an expression of confidence in God (vs. 12d).

While the occasion of a historical rebellion against Judah likely represents the original *sitz-im-leben* of the Psalm, it possibly found regular use in the temple during royal coronation and other royal ceremonies.

In this original setting, this “explicit” reading is political and belligerently nationalistic, or so it seems to me. It is entirely consistent with the attitude that Rehoboam and his arrogant bureaucrats possessed toward the northern tribes very legitimate rebellion at the death of Solomon. The reader might remember Rehoboam’s sense of entitlement when he threatened the north that his little finger would be heavier than his father’s thigh, thus signifying that however oppressive his father had been toward the north, the oppression would grow infinitely worse under his reign.<sup>1</sup>

In the clean version, the nations of the earth foolishly rebel against God’s rule as administered by His Messiah. In Jewish interpretation this is an awaited righteous king. In Christian interpretation, this is Jesus of Nazareth. God is unconcerned about the rebellion, knowing it is vain and possess no threat to his dominion. At the same time, he is angered by the rebels’ presumption. He reminds the nations of His inalterable decree that his Messiah (Jewish king/Jesus) will reign and rule the earth. He invites them to repent and yield to the righteous rule of Messiah lest they perish.

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 Kings 12.<sup>1-15</sup>

In this clean version, God is much less confrontational and more compassionate. This portrayal of God is not illegitimate. We will see God portrayed elsewhere in the Psalms as a caring and compassionate world ruler. Nevertheless, in my view it takes some translation acrobatics to arrive at this portrayal in this second psalm.

To my mind, and as we will point out in meditations on specific portions of the text, it requires a softening, a blurring of the text to get to the “clean” version. For example, the “clean” version must blur God’s utter contempt for the rebels and the fact that his initial response is one of mockery and poking fun. It must hide the fact that he is personally entertained by their attempted rebellion.

This is not to say that things cannot be learned from the “clean” version. Both versions, the “explicit” and the “clean” make their own points and share certain others. While they may not exactly agree as to the character of God, they do agree on the character of this world’s nations and their leaders—leaders that should never, according to Psalm 2’s companion Psalm, Psalm 1, have been given access to seats of governance. Rulers, citizenries, and nations all pay a heavy price for turning away from God, his guidance and rule, and replacing his wise guidance and rule with that of individuals of questionable character. Things will end badly for those who refuse to turn from the ungodly governance of rebels, and return to the rule of God.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 10, 2024)*

## meditation 2— Introductory

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In our first introductory meditation on Psalm 2, we suggested that Psalm 2 could be read from an original, what we called “explicit” perspective and from a secondary, what we called “clean” perspective. In this meditation, we will detail the original or explicit version.

We understand the original *sitz-im-leben* of the Psalm to be a rebellion on the part of neighboring nations against their subjugation to the kingdom of Judah. The Psalm is, then, in the first instance as much a political document as a religious one—conceding that in the ancient world politics and religion were intimately and intricately bound together. As a piece of political and nationalistic propaganda, the psalm demonstrates, as nationalistic propaganda often does, a belligerent and threatening tone that likely conceals attitudes that were less self-assured than the rhetoric projects.

As nationalistic propaganda often does, the psalm appeals to a god who is claimed as the nation’s patron deity—this is true even in so-called secular societies where the nation state itself is a sort of god, idolatrous as it is. Thus, the rebelling vassal states are condemned not only for their opposition to Judean subjugation, but to its god as well. The insurgents are warned against angering the god and are threatened with the god’s full arsenal of power.

As is so common in such nationalistic writing, the belligerent condemnation of the insurgents found in Psalm 2 is condescending, intimidating, and disparaging. It begins in the very first verse.

“Why do nations uproariously agitate,  
and countries plot what will come up empty?”

Here, the Psalmist avoids words that the Hebrew Bible normally uses for resistance, enmity, and rebellion. He chooses to depict the rebellion with Hebrew *rgš*—a root that only appears three times in the entire Hebrew Bible—and *hgh*. The first word seems to reflect sound that is noisy, tumultuous, agitated, and chaotic in nature. The second word is a true onomatopoeia—a word that represents a specific sound, such as English “Shh.” The poet eschews the normal words for rebellion to signify that the rebellion is all noise, more “sound and fury” than legitimate threat, thus disparaging the enemy even in his selection of vocabulary.

But this is not enough for the Judah’s state department spokesman. In verse 4, the psalm further expresses the nation’s arrogant contempt for the rebels by ascribing that contempt to the nation’s god in a bit of radical anthropomorphism.

“Enthroned in heaven, He is comically entertained.  
My Lord pokes fun at them.”

Again, the rebellion is not to be taken seriously, or as a serious threat. Such false and dangerous anthropomorphism as is present here is all too common, even today. No way in hell would the true and living God respond in this fashion! An anthropomorphic weeping would be more believable. But no way would it be nearly as satisfying to the carnal mind, filled with hatred toward the despicable enemy.

This bit of anthropomorphism is followed by the report of a divine edict. It is God, himself, who placed Judah’s king on the throne. Having been enthroned, the king is to be thought of and treated as a son of god. Again, the implication is that rebellion against Judah is rebellion against god. But it is important to note the tone in which the edict of Judah’s god is presented.

“Then, in a flash, He addresses them furiously.  
The intensity of His outburst should alarm them” (vs. 5).

Whatever the original setting in which god announced the edict of the king’s divine sonship, it is now announced with a fury that is intended to alarm and intimidate the rebels. Just in case the rebels need an exclamation point put to the danger they face in rebelling against Judah, the Psalmist adds another element of the edict, also spoken, as indicated previously, with ferocity.

“You will break them to pieces with an iron scepter.  
You will pulverize them as if they were merely clay vessels” (vs. 9).

Nations are to yield to Judah’s king and, through him, to god. Those who do not yield, but resist and oppose Judah’s god and king and country will discover just how insignificant and trivial they are. They will be shown to be as powerless as inanimate clay pots. Again, one senses the belittling intimidation that is taking place in this psalm.

Having shared god’s edict with the rebelling vasaal states and their political leaders, the Psalmist now addresses them directly. Again, the language is belligerent and intimidating. The rulers of the rebelling nations need to suck it up and content themselves with groveling at the feet of Judah’s king. They must learn subservience, even to the point of kissing the king’s feet. The kind of subjugation that is demanded of the political leaders of Judah’s neighbors is that which Assyrian’s Shalmaneser III demanded of Israel’s king Jehu, as depicted on the famous “Black Obelisk.”



Here is the Assyrian version of Psalm 2, as sculpted in stone. Here is King Shalmaneser III, son of god. Here is the patron god, Assur, soaring above the fray and distributing the warmth of his protective and triumphal rays. Here is the defeated and humiliated Israelite king, Jehu, kneeling at and kissing the feet of the victorious Assyrian king. Here is a classic example of art as political propaganda.

Well, there you have it, the original and explicit reading of Psalm 2. Those who adopted this psalm as part of Judah’s temple worship and those who turned it into a Messianic foreshadowing of Jesus of Nazareth had to throw some major shade over a good deal of questionable anthropomorphism and ugly political rhetoric and propaganda. We do not mean to suggest that cleaning up an explicit version is illegitimate. There are many examples of forms being adapted and adopted for new and very different audiences, uses, and purposes which change the meaning and function of the form (Christian baptism and aspects of the LDS temple endowment, borrowed from Masonic ritual, would be just two examples).

Then too, we can learn much from the explicit version. We can, especially, it seems to me, learn what not to think, what not to do, how not to engage a hostile individuals and nations. Jesus of Nazareth, a very different kind of Messiah, king, and God showed us a more perfect way.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 10, 2024)*

## meditation 3— Introductory

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We cannot be certain about the use to which the psalms were put within in Judah's temple. But we can say with some certainty that they were used in and for various cultic purposes. The following is presented as one possible cultic drama for Psalm 2. For it, we structure Psalm 2 under seven voices. Each voice is that of a group or individual—including God, Himself—represented by “actors” or temple patrons participating in a temple ceremony, or sacred temple drama within ancient Judah's temple at Jerusalem.

The first voice in verses 1-2 is, perhaps, that of temple patrons. It might also be that of a temple priest or priests representing the patrons who are loyal to Yahweh and the sitting king. They complain about an insurrection on the part of previously subjugated nations, who, themselves, complain against Judah's domination. In the second voice, we hear a group of priests or temple patrons who represent the rebellions nations and give expression to the rebels' goals.

With the third voice, we hear once more from the temple patrons or a temple priest/s representing them. They report Yahweh's belittling dismissal of the rebels and their cause. In the third voice, we hear the words of God, Himself, as spoken by a temple priest representing Yahweh. In them, God reasserts his choice of Judah's king.

The fifth voice is that of the chosen king, or a priest representing him. He prepares his audience to hear the promise God personally made to him. The sixth voice, that of the king, represents a direct quotation of God's promise. Perhaps, for greater dramatic impact, the voice quoting God's promise is that of a priest representing Yahweh.

Finally, the seventh voice—that of temple patrons, a temple priest, or priests—addresses the rebellious kings, warning them to submit to Yahweh's rule as officiated through Judah's king or face divine retribution.

Again, we cannot be sure about this proposed temple scenario. But we offer it as an invitation to consider the uses to which psalms might have been put in Judah's temple. We also offer it as a reminder of the dramatic nature of the Psalms and the emotive impact they may have had on those who heard them sung/performed in Judah's temple.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 10, 2024)*

## meditation 4— psalm 2.<sup>1-3</sup>

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### *first voice*

<sup>1</sup>Why do nations uproariously agitate,  
and countries plot what will come up empty?

<sup>2</sup>The world's kings offer resistance;  
world leaders form a united front  
against YHWH and against His Māšîaḥ.

### *second voice*

<sup>3</sup>“We will break free of his restraints;  
throw off his control” (author's translation).

As already discussed, I am persuaded that Psalm 2 originally represents ancient Judah's political response to the rebellion of one or more of its vassal states, only to be used later in other, likely royal, temple settings. Because Judah, like all nations, considered itself particularly favored by its God, rebellion against its political leaders was the same as rebellion against God. We see this in the surviving propagandistic writings from all over the ancient Near East—and into Medieval times. Indeed, many a modern nation, though secular in nature, possesses and expresses similar notions of national entitlement. The belittling of the rebels and the portraying of their rebellion as little more than empty sound and fury reads like a piece of nationalistic propaganda that might have been produced and shared by nearly any press secretary in any nation at any point in human history.

While I reject and refuse to engage in anything like the arrogant and self-indulgent belligerence found in the propaganda of this psalm, I nevertheless find the psalm useful in reminding us of larger principles.

For example, no matter the location or the time period, no nation, as those in this psalm, likes having their power constricted by another nation. There is, therefore, near universal contention and war between peoples. This constant national contention and war—the “wars and rumors of war” about which Nephi speaks as being a universal part of human occupation<sup>1</sup>—is a sign of human rebellion against God no matter what nations participate in such occupation. In creating humankind, God hoped “that they should love one another... but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood.”<sup>2</sup> Wars and rumors of war are, then, unquestionable acts of rebellion against God. Scripture is consistent about this: the kingdoms of this world are universally, and, at all times, in open rebellion against God as they throw off his restraints and “hate their own blood” in warfare.

The rebellion against God takes place on many fronts. The rebellion is both direct and indirect—direct in each nation's hostility to God Himself and indirect in each nation's hostility to each other and, often, its own citizenry. The indirect rebellion is spiritually deadening. The direct rebellion is pointless and futile, amounting to little more than sound and fury. Yet, hostility toward and rebellion against God is the one common cause upon which all nations seem to be able to agree.

In addressing this global habit of rebellion, Jesus most often spoke simply of “the world.” One of Jesus' final acts before his death was to offer a priestly intercessory prayer on behalf of disciples—those present on that momentous evening and those present in all other periods and places. Over half the prayer focuses on the relationship between disciples and “the world”—the kingdoms and principles by which this world is governed and controlled. He could not pray that we be taken “out of the world.” But he could and did

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 Nephi 12.<sup>2-3, 21</sup>; 14.<sup>15-16</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Moses 7.<sup>33</sup>



pray that God “keep [us] from [its] evil.”<sup>3</sup> Disciples were to be no more part of “the world” than Jesus himself—“Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world.”<sup>4</sup>

In all places and in every period, Jesus’ disciples would be wise to be cautious in their pledging allegiance to any one of the universally rebellious nations. Yet, the disciple boldly goes out into the world, sojourns in a strange land, in order to call out of the world those who have been ensnared in its wanton rebellion. In obedience to the covenants they make with God, those who devote themselves to Him unambiguously “renounce war and proclaim peace.”<sup>5</sup> Their voice is loud and clear, unfailing and uncompromising: “Go ye out from among the nations, even from Babylon.”<sup>6</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 10, 2024)*

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<sup>3</sup> John 17.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>4</sup> John 8.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>5</sup> DC 98.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>6</sup> DC 133.<sup>14</sup>

## meditation 5— psalm 2.<sup>1-3</sup>

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*first voice*

<sup>1</sup>Why do nations uproariously agitate,  
and countries plot what will come up empty?

<sup>2</sup>The world's kings offer resistance;  
world leaders form a united front  
against YHWH and against His Māšîaḥ.

*second voice*

<sup>3</sup>“We will break free of his restraints;  
throw off his control” (author's translation).

Psalm 2 begins with a question. This is not unusual. A number of psalms begin with a question.<sup>1</sup> These questions, often addressed to God, are frequently filled with a sense of pain and anguish and uncertainty.<sup>2</sup> Other questions, absent pain, sincerely seek understanding.<sup>3</sup> But in the opening question posed in Psalm 2, it is difficult to find any pain, uncertainty, or earnest seeking for understanding. The speaker is not confused. Given the language of the question itself (see below), it feels like a sarcastic and loaded question. More statement, really, than question. This feeling is strengthened when we compare the opening of the next psalm with this one, and when we consider the vocabulary used by the Psalmist in this psalm.

Psalms 2 and 3 begin similarly in that both reveal the presence of opposition—in Psalm 2 the opposition is against Judah and God and in Psalm 3, against the Psalmist. Both present the thoughts and perspective of the opposed (2.<sup>3</sup> and 3.<sup>3b</sup>), as well as that of the opposer (2.<sup>1-2</sup> and 3.<sup>2-3a</sup>). Here are the thoughts and perspective of the apposed (Judah) toward the opposition (Judah's enemies) in Psalm 2.

“Why do nations uproariously agitate,  
and countries plot what will come up empty?”

Now, here are the thoughts and perspective of the opposer (the Psalmist) concerning the opposition (the Psalmist's enemies) in Psalm 3.

“O YHWH, how my adversaries have multiplied!  
How numerous are those that rise against me!

How many are talking about me, [saying]...”<sup>4</sup>

I know that these things are quite subjective, but, while the two psalms begin similarly, the tone couldn't be more different. The complaint found in Psalm 3 is filled with anxiety and worry. The complaint found in Psalm 2 knows no anxiety or worry. Rather, the complaint found in Psalm 2 seems full of confidence and even bluster.

We can also sense the confident and blustery “tone” of Psalm 2 in the vocabulary marshaled in its complaint. The Psalmist has at his disposal an array of appropriate and common words that he could use

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<sup>1</sup> See 10, 13, 15, 22, 27, 52, 58, 74. We note that these largely belong to the so-called “1<sup>st</sup> division (1-41).”

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Psalm 10, 13, 22, and 74

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 15, for example.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 3.<sup>2-3</sup>

to reference a opposition and rebellion that is being planned and carried out by foreign powers. For example, he might have used Hebrew *peša'*, the most common word for rebellion (often, “transgress/transgression), as Amos did in describing the opposition and rebellion among Israel’s neighboring nations.<sup>5</sup>

But the Psalmist does not choose this or the array of other words for opposition and rebellion. In the first line, he resorts to Hebrew, *rgš*. While not explicitly onomatopoeic, it does at its most basic denote sound: noisy, tumultuous, agitated, chaotic in nature. In the second line, he resorts to *hgh*. At its most basic, this word is an onomatopoeia. It reflects a “murmur,” “mumble,” “moan,” “groan,” “low growl.” However, such sounds become associated with activities such as “pondering,” “meditating,” “musing,” etc. In Psalm 1, my “and *consult* his Tôrâ at all times,” translates, *hgh* (vs. 2).

The nations are engaged in rebellion against God. They form a united front and single block in resisting God. They are “musing” amongst themselves how best to pull it off. The Psalmist even resorts to quotation, using their own words against them.

“We will break free of his restraints;  
throw off his control.”

The nations’ agitated and agitating consultations are tumultuous. It is as if the whole enterprise is so ridiculous that the Psalmist can’t bring himself to give it the common, if disrespectable, name, *peša'*, “rebellion.” All their rebellious machinations are nothing more than pointless sound and fury. “Half-humorously,” Terrien writes, “the chorus borrows a tone of persiflage.”<sup>6</sup> Clifford feels that the verse “contains a scornful taunt” and speaks of the question posed here as “contemptuous.”<sup>7</sup>

I agree with this assessment and have tried to capture this contempt in my translation. If the Psalmist’s choice of vocabulary left us any doubt as to the import and results of the rebellion, he settles the matter quickly in the second line. All their noisy agitation and plotting will “come up empty.” Here, the Psalmist uses the Hebrew word, *rîq.*, traditionally, “vain.” We could, I suppose, understand this “vainness,” in terms of reason—nations rebel against God with no good reason. This is likely true. But the sense of the word here is “empty.” They will have nothing to show for their rebellion. Their rebellion is doomed to failure.

According to the Judean witness, then, the nations are involved in a good deal of sound and fury with little intelligence and nothing to show for it. We might say that the rebels are full of hot air; that they are all bark and no bite. Their rebellion is like the impotent huffing and puffing of the big bad wolf faced with the firmness of little pig’s brick house.

Such, it seems to me, are the Psalmist’s contemptuous feelings toward Judah’s national enemies. This is as we would expect. In my lifetime, news casts have been inundated with this sort of nationalistic bravado thrown back and forth between enemy combatants. So, while we may not care for the pompous tone, and while we most certainly do not attribute such feelings to God—as the text soon will—we cannot deny the all-too-common reality of such bluster. It is a bluster that the world would be better off without.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(*edition: may 10, 2024*)

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<sup>5</sup> See Amos 1.1.1-2.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> “The Psalms; Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary,” *Eerdmans Critical Commentary*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> “Psalms 1-72,” *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2002.

## meditation 6— psalm 2.<sup>1-3</sup>

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*first voice*

<sup>1</sup>Why do nations uproariously agitate,  
and countries plot what will come up empty?  
<sup>2</sup>The world's kings offer resistance;  
world leaders form a united front  
against YHWH and against His Māšîaḥ.

*second voice*

<sup>3</sup>“We will break free of his restraints;  
throw off his control” (author's translation).

In previous meditations, we have suggested that Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 have several points of contact; insomuch as to justify reading the two Psalms almost as if one. For example, Psalm 2 ends where Psalm 1 began: with a statement of happiness, security, fulfillment, advancement as found in Hebrew, *'ašrê*.

“How truly *fulfilled* is one who...<sup>1</sup>

“*Secure* are all who...”<sup>2</sup>

With these first three verses of Psalm 2, we would like to mention a couple more points of contact between Psalm 1 and 2. We will begin with a vocabulary item: Hebrew, *hgh*. In Psalm 1, they are fulfilled, happy, secure, advancing who reject the direction and principles of the “malevolently immoral,” “wrongdoers,” and “contemptuously antisocial,” but

“choose YHWH's direction  
and *consult* his Tôrâ at all times.”<sup>3</sup>

The word we translate, “consult” is Hebrew, *hgh*. This “consultation of Tôrâ is more than intellectual. It impacts behavior.

There is “consultation” going on in Psalm 2 as well.

“Why do nations uproariously agitate,  
and countries *plot* what will come up empty?”

Here, the consultation is not positive. Whereas in Psalm 1, one “consults” God's directions in hopes of aligning their life with God and His principles, those who consult in Psalm 2 do so in opposition to God and His principles. Indeed, they hope and labor to “break free of His restraints” and throw off his control. Those who engage in the same conduct, *hgh*, “consult/ plot,” do so with very different purposes.

This insight allows us to connect the “malevolently immoral,” “wrongdoers,” and “contemptuously antisocial” who oppose God and his Tôrâ in Psalm 1 with the “nations,” “countries,” “kings,” and “world leaders” that oppose God in Psalm 2. This serves as reminder that while it is individuals who oppose God, those same individuals sometimes become influential, gain positions of governance, and lead entire

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 1.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 2.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 1.<sup>2</sup>

peoples away from God and in direct opposition to him.

This brings us to a point of contact between the two Psalms that is far more consequential than a similar vocabulary item. Psalm 2 begins with a complaint against nations/ countries and the kings and political leaders that guide their attitudes and activities. Those who govern often lead their nations to oppose God, often without the populace's awareness. There are many examples of this found in scripture. The infamous King Noah of Book of Mormon fame is one such. "He did not," the record reports, "keep the commandments of God." As a result, "he did cause his people to commit sin and do that which was abominable in the sight of the Lord."<sup>4</sup> So effective was Noah's "flattery," "propaganda," or "political spin," that, when Abinadi confronted them with the same sort of dire warnings as the Psalmist later in the psalm offered those who opposed God (See vs. 10-12), they were unable to discern that they had gone wrong and acted in opposition to God and His principles.

"And now, O king, behold, we are guiltless, and thou, O king, hast not sinned... And behold, we are strong, we shall not come into bondage, or be taken captive by our enemies; yea, and thou hast prospered in the land, and thou shalt also prosper."<sup>5</sup>

Here, we hear a false claim of *'ašrê*, "happiness," "security," "advancement," etc., to put it in the Psalmist terms.

All of this reminds us of the need for caution when determining whose direction we are going to follow. All of this reminds us of the need for caution when determining to whom we will yield the scepter and gavel of governance. And this brings us back to the end of Psalm 1, the companion piece to Psalm 2. There we were informed,

"Therefore, the malevolently immoral should not participate in a place of decision making, or wrongdoers have place in a just assembly."<sup>6</sup>

In discussing this verse in previous meditations, we tried to ween the reader from a Christian type eschatological reading of a final judgment to which the King James translation can lead.

"Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous."

We argued that the *mišpāt* (a ma- formulated noun from the root *šp̄t*, which has the basic meaning of governance), could indicate a place where decisions are made or where governance takes place. So, as I understand it, we went directly from a warning in Psalm 1 about the sort of people who should be given influence and governance in society to an illustration in Psalm 2 of kings and political leaders ("malevolently immoral" and "wrongdoing" individuals) who directed their nations and population in failed coups against God.

Whereas Psalm 1 had warned that the "actions of the malevolently immoral bring ruin,"<sup>7</sup> Psalm 2 will later proclaim that a ruler who follows God would "break them to pieces with an iron scepter" and "pulverize them as if they were merely clay vessels" (vs. 9). More on that later.

For now, we wish to point out the symbiosis present in Psalms 1 and 2. Both warn in their own differing

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<sup>4</sup> Mosiah 11.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Mosiah 12.<sup>14-15</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 1.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 1.<sup>6</sup>

ways of the dangers in following those whose purpose it is to oppose and resist God. They warn against the dangers of allowing them influence and governance. Such individuals dangerous enough when they are simple individual. When they are one on one against us. But when they are given places of influence, of governance; when they become kings or presidents or prime ministers or senators or congressmen or governors or mayors or school board members, the danger they present multiplies exponentially. Before one knows it, the entire world is in commotion and agitation and open rebellion against God. Such are the warnings of the Psalmist. Such are the days in which we are now living.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 10, 2024)*

## meditation 7— psalm 2.<sup>4-5</sup>

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*third voice*

<sup>4</sup>Enthroned in heaven, He is comically entertained.

My Lord pokes fun at them.

<sup>5</sup>Then, in a flash, He addresses them furiously.

The intensity of His outburst should alarm them (author's translation).

In our meditation on verses 1-3, we have indicated our belief that this psalm was originally a piece of political propaganda offered at a time when a vassal nation or several vassal nations rebelled against Judah's domination of them. While there is a certain belligerence and bellicosity found in it—as there usually is in political propaganda—we nevertheless believe we can learn from the psalm.

No matter their location in time or space, nations do not like being subservient to other nations and having their freedom to self-rule restricted. Conflict and war that stem from one nation dominating another have been and continue to be a universal part of human history. Such war and conflict are acts of open rebellion against God. “The devil... is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.”<sup>1</sup>

It is another near universal human propensity to create a god after our own hearts—one who feels like us, thinks like us, and acts like us.

“Every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol...”<sup>2</sup>

Nearly every nation claims a special place in God's heart. God is associated with one's side and stands in opposition to all others. We see this propaganda in this reading. On one hand, God is portrayed as being comically entertained by Judah's enemies and their puny, fruitless rebellion. He pokes fun at them. This is the sort of braggadocio we often hear and see in nations' response to each other's threats. And it is an example of the all-too-common human anthropomorphism of God. In yet more anthropomorphism, God is portrayed as turning angry on a dime, flying off in a rage against the chosen nation's aggressor.

I don't know about you, but I reject this portrayal of God. He does not have fun at others' expense, even when those others rebel against Him. He does not use ridicule to intimidate individuals or nations into submitting to Him. He is saddened, not entertained, by the rebellion that causes nations to engage in war and rumors of war; saddened, not entertained when nations oppose and resist Him. In addition, while it can happen, it is extraordinarily rare indeed for one nation or group of nations to be engaged in a just cause during war such that God takes their side in the conflict.

Having said all of that, I appreciate this psalm for the window it is into human nature and the warning it represents against adopting such preposterous and ungodly attitudes both toward God Himself, our enemies, and our own righteousness and innocence. I appreciate the window that it presents into the absurdities that arise from our creating gods who look, think, feel, and act just like us; gods who exist to serve us, rather than we serving Him. We would do well to remember Isaiah's witness. Though it is, in Isaiah, offered in relation to God's superior willingness and ability to forgive sin and offense, it can be

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<sup>1</sup> 3 Nephi 11.<sup>29-30</sup>

<sup>2</sup> DC 1.<sup>16</sup>

likened to other aspects of His character.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,  
saith the LORD.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways,  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”<sup>3</sup>

May the nations and kingdoms of this world follow Him in His higher ways and higher thoughts. May they reject the bellicose, belligerent, and jingoistic propaganda that would have God take a kind of perverse pleasure in other peoples’ and nations’ rebellion against Him for the opportunity it provides Him to put them in their place and strut His stuff. Let none of us engage in this sort of foolishness, a foolishness that is, itself, an act of rebellion against the One and True God. Having so said, let us nevertheless never be found opposed to God and His enduring principles, no matter His response.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 10, 2024)*

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 55.<sup>8-9</sup>



*fourth voice*

<sup>6</sup>“I have installed my chosen king  
on Şiyôn, the mount I set apart for myself.”

*fifth voice*

<sup>7</sup>Let me, then, rehearse YHWH’s decree:  
He said to me,

*sixth voice*

“You are my son;  
I have, this very day, begotten you.

<sup>8</sup>Ask me, and I will give whole nations to you as an inheritance.  
Your territory will extend to the ends of the earth.

<sup>9</sup>You will break their power with an iron scepter.

You will shatter them in pieces as if they were merely clay vessels” (author’s translation).

We must, once more, consider this reading from the two perspectives, what I call the “explicit” and the “clean.” The explicit version, the original, is that of ancient Judah in which the nation and its anointed king respond to a rebellion against its rule and thus, according to the nationalism of the day, against God. The clean version is the Christian reading in which Jesus reigns over a planet and its kingdoms which are in open rebellion against him.

One can be forgiven for finding in the original explicit version more than a hint of false doctrine and hypocrisy. The hypocrisy is easy to see. Judah’s kings and citizenry were often no more moral or better followers of Yahweh than the kings and citizens of surrounding nations. Indeed, given that they possessed the greater knowledge about Yahweh and given that they had entered into a covenant relationship with Him—whereas the surrounding nations had not—one could argue that Judah was the more wicked and more accountable nation. Thus, Judah’s complaint about the nations’ rebellion against God is rather like the pot calling the kettle black.

As for the false doctrine, while it is a little more difficult to trace, it is no less condemning of Judah. All, or nearly all, ancient regimes—and even medieval ones—to one extent or another considered the monarch semi-divine to fully divine. This, of course, was false, but it added a layer of intimidation and compulsion that was needed to maintain power. The degree to which Judah adopted this theology has been and still is endlessly debated. However, passages such as this one indicate that it was not entirely absent in Judah. Judah’s kings came to power through rigid succession in which God had no say in who the new king would be—notwithstanding the Davidic propaganda of divinely sanctioned succession. They were most certainly neither simi nor fully divine. Many of them were complete scoundrels—and that’s being kind—and acted contrary to Yahweh’s expectations, demands, and desires for just governance.

Thus, as we have contended before, in its original context this psalm, including this specific reading, is little more than crass political propaganda intended to impress Judah’s citizenry and, hopefully, intimidate Judah’s enemies.

In Christianity’s adoption of this psalm and its application to Jesus, all the hypocrisy and false doctrine was forgotten or ignored. Of course, the assertion of Jesus’ divine sonship was true in a way that Judah’s political propaganda never could be. Indeed, Jesus was not only the Son of God, he was God. Jesus was no hypocrite. In his private life, he was always faithful to his God and Father. In his public life, he treated all with equity—indeed, treating others as he himself would want to be treated—and exercised no

compulsion or intimidation. He remained true to the principles of just governance as God outlined them in the Hebrew Bible.

This leaves us with the necessity of dealing with how Judah and Jesus respond to hostile and rebellious nations. To be sure, ancient Judah, like all the kingdoms of this world, maintained its place in international affairs through intimidation and violence. It regularly engaged in the sort of intimidating rhetoric that is found in this psalm and then, when that did not work, engaged in violent battle and warfare. As all war, it would have been an unholy and bloody mess.

Jesus' response is more difficult to gauge. It would appear over the past two thousand years that he has done little about the continuous and universal national rebellion against him but let nature take its course. Nations have fallen under the weight of their own wickedness and under violence that matched their own. The jury is still out, it seems, on whether he will at some point become more aggressive in dealing with the global rebellion that rages incessantly against him. There are scripture passages—and not a few of them—that many read as indicative of a coming active and personal divine and violent vengeance against a rebellious world. Others, seeing the world's wickedness and violence grow exponentially, assume that any coming catastrophe will be the natural consequence of this escalating human wickedness and violence. Whatever one decides, it seems best to avoid rebelling against God, and to avoid too intimate allegiance to any of the planet's myriad of rebellious kingdoms.

“Put not your trust in princes,  
nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.”<sup>1</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 10, 2024)*

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 146.<sup>3</sup>

## meditation 9— psalm 2.<sup>6-9</sup>

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### *seventh voice*

<sup>10</sup> Now then, O kings, be prudent.

Learn your lesson, O rulers of the earth.

<sup>11</sup> Serve YHWH with deference.

Find contentment in groveling before him.

<sup>12</sup> Kiss the Son's feet

lest he become enraged, and you destroyed;

for his fury can flare up in a flash.

### *benediction/assurance*

Secure are all who seek refuge in him (author's translation).

Many may be touched and inspired by passages that speak of kissing Jesus' feet. We may read about the Nephites' experience of kissing Jesus' feet and long to be there; maybe even look forward to the day when we can do as they did.

“And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying: “Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God!” And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him.”<sup>1</sup>

We might want to imagine the obeisance found in the kiss demanded in this Psalm in such touching and inspiring terms. But it is as near certain as certain can be that such a reading is untrue to the circumstances and context. By our understanding, this world's rulers to whom this Psalm addressed its warning were in open rebellion against Judah's king. If and when these rebellious kings were finally brought to heel and made to reaffirm their obeisance to the Jewish king, they most certainly would not have been happy. There is no chance in hell that any kiss they planted on the Jewish king's feet was worshipful or anything remotely similar to the kisses the Nephites lavished on Jesus' feet. Their kiss would have been accompanied with humiliation and hatred not respect, gratitude, and love.

In our Christian romanticization of this passage, we sometimes look forward to the day when the rulers of this world will yield obeisance to Christ, imagining that their kissing of his feet will be willing, happy, and worshipful. I see no reason whatsoever to believe such romanticization. I see no reason to believe that if Jesus comes tomorrow, the world-wide, corrupt and power-hungry ruling elite of any nation will, today or tomorrow, willingly give up the desire for power, voluntarily give up the reins of power, or willingly concede power to Jesus. More likely, it seems to me, the potentates of this world will have to have the scepter ripped from their hands. I wish it were otherwise, but I have no hope in it. If Jesus is to reign on this planet, it will only come after many a brutal battle.

And, really, the romanticizing Christian need look no further than themselves for evidence. How many of those who look forward to kissing Jesus' feet yield real obeisance to him today? How many of us refuse to yield to his militant demands? How many of us, as but one of countless examples we might offer, understand and act upon the reality that true greatness and real power is evidenced and exercised only through self-sacrifice, however humiliating? How many of us use what abilities and powers we possess to gratify ourselves and our ambitions? To build up our own little kingdom? We need look no further than

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<sup>1</sup> 3 Nephi 11.<sup>16-17</sup>

the behavior of millions of “Christians” during a pandemic. Then, they could not make the teeny, tiniest sacrifices in order to serve and protect others, but asserted their right to power (liberty, they called it)—to do as they pleased. It is difficult to image such a crowd willingly bowing the knee to Jesus, much less kiss the feet of one who demands self-sacrifice.

Sadly, many of us are as unlikely to kiss Jesus’ feet willingly and happily as are the rulers of this world. We are likely to have to engage in brutal internal battles and to pass through fiery trials to get there. And even then, many will refuse and perish. This is not, of course, what we want to hear. So, we make up these other happy stories.

Those who do happily kiss Jesus’ feet in the spirit of love and worship are those who, among other things, recognize, accept, follow, and live the life of attachment, connectedness, unity, and atonement that Jesus revealed when he walked on earth—not as an intimidating force but as a compassionate one. Like Jesus, they yield their will to power. They give up the urge to dominate. They abandon the spirit of competition for the spirit of cooperation. This is the only way to an enduring life. The other way is the way of the ungodly and leads to destruction.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: may 10, 2024)*