

Psalm 2: Introducing Christ, the Son of God

Expository Lessons from the Psalms

I. The Importance of Psalm 2

- a. This psalm is quoted five times in the New Testament.
- b. However, I believe it is alluded to many more times than that. Prophecies contained in this psalm provide the backdrop and framework for so much of what happens in the New Testament.
 - i. By understanding this psalm well, we will get much more out of the gospel accounts, in terms of understanding what the apostles and the other Jews were thinking regarding the One they were waiting for: the Christ.
- c. Understanding this psalm well can better equip us to persuade others to come to the faith, especially those from Jewish and Muslim backgrounds.

II. Here We are First Introduced to 'the Christ' as the One Who is to Come

- a. **Matthew's gospel** in the New Testament begins:
 - i. "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:" (**Matthew 1:1**, NKJV)
 - ii. The genealogy concludes, "And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ." (**Matthew 1:16**, NKJV)
- b. From the beginning of **Mark**:
 - i. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (**Mark 1:1**, NKJV)
- c. From **Luke**, at the birth of Jesus:
 - i. The angels told the shepherds near Bethlehem, "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (**Luke 2:11**, NKJV)
- d. From the gospel of **John**:
 - i. "Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.'" (**John 1:19-20**, NKJV)

- ii. After Jesus is baptized, John the Baptist testifies regarding Him, "...this is the Son of God". One of John's followers (Andrew), who heard what John said, then goes to tell his brother, Simon Peter, about Jesus.
 - 1. "One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus..." (**John 1:40-42**, NKJV)
- iii. When the Samaritan woman at the well speaks with Jesus:
 - 1. "The woman said to Him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When He comes, He will tell us all things.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am He.'" (**John 4:25-26**, NKJV)
- e. Things we learn regarding the 'Christ'.
 - i. The term 'Christ' is the same thing as 'Messiah'. (**John 1:41, John 4:25**)
 - 1. Messiah is the Hebrew word. Our English word 'Christ' is transliterated from the Greek word (Christos, Χριστός). Since the New Testament was written in Greek, the term 'Christ' is used throughout the New Testament.
 - 2. If we want to translate this word into English (instead of just transliterating it), the English language equivalent of 'Christ' or 'Messiah' is '*the Anointed One*'.
 - 3. Tertullian wrote regarding the term 'Christ':
 - a. "...for it (*the term 'Christ'*) signifies 'Anointed.' But Anointed is no more a proper name than Clothed or Shod; it is only an accessory to a name."
 - i. (Source: Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, chapter 28; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 624)
 - b. The point made by Tertullian here is that the term 'Christ' is not a proper name. Rather, it describes a *characteristic* of the person being referred to.
 - ii. At the time of Jesus, many were waiting for the Christ to come.
 - 1. The Jewish rulers wondered if it might be John the Baptist.
 - 2. The Samaritan woman was aware that the Christ was coming.

3. When Andrew heard John the Baptist identifying Jesus as “the Son of God”, he told Peter that they had found the Christ.
4. **Question:** How did everyone know the Christ was coming? Where is the first place in the Scriptures that ‘Messiah / Christ’ would come?
 - a. When the New Testament writers and speakers are quoting from the Old Testament, they are almost always following the Septuagint (LXX), a Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures made about 200 BC, under the authority of the Jewish religious leaders.
 - b. The LXX also was the predominant version of the Old Testament used by the early Christian church (for the first 300+ years).
 - c. In the LXX it speaks of the Christ (Christos).
 - i. Recall that in **Genesis 28:10-22**, Jacob slept on a stone pillow and had a dream where he saw “the gate of heaven”, a stairway or ladder connecting heaven with earth, with angels ascending and descending on it. He then set up that stone as a pillar and poured oil on top of it, and referred to it as “God’s house”. This rock, one of many in the Old Testament that foreshadowed Christ, was ‘anointed’.
 1. Jesus ties Himself to that rock when He speaks with Nathanael in **John 1**.
 2. “And He said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” (**John 1:51**, NKJV)
 - ii. I believe the first reference to a person as being “an anointed one” is Aaron, the High Priest. It describes his being anointed in **Exodus 29:7**. In **Leviticus**, the term ‘*christos*’ is applied to him and to the other priests.
 - iii. However, the first place in the Scriptures where it speaks of the Anointed One who will come, and who will be the Son of God, is in **Psalm 2**.

1. This is the reason that the people are anticipating that the Christ, the Anointed One, is coming.
2. This is the reason they equated the Christ with the Son of God.
3. This is what they were thinking of when they wondered if John the Baptist or Jesus could possibly be the One promised.

III. Against the Lord and Against His Christ

a. Read **Psalm 2:1-2**.

- i. Tertullian (early Christian writer from Carthage, North Africa, writing c. 207 AD) commented about how the manner in which Jesus was tried and crucified fulfilled this prophecy.
 1. “The Lord Himself comes to a trial with ‘the elders and rulers of the people,’ as Isaiah predicted (**Isaiah 3:13-14**, LXX). And then He fulfilled all that had been written of His passion. At that time ‘the heathen (= *non-Jewish nations; Gentiles*) raged, and the people imagined vain things; the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers gathered themselves together against the Lord and against His Christ.’ (**Psalm 2:1-2**) The heathen were Pilate and the Romans; the people were the tribes of Israel; the kings were represented in Herod, and the rulers in the chief priests.”
 2. (Source: Tertullian, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, book 4, chapter 42; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 420)
- ii. The apostles quote this passage from **Psalm 2** when they are threatened and warned to stop teaching in the name of Jesus.
 1. Read **Acts 2:18-31**.
 2. The quote from **Psalm 2** is an exact, word-for-word quote from the LXX.
 3. Note that here it is translated “against the Lord and against His *Christ*”.
 4. The apostles say that **Psalm 2**, which they are quoting from, was “by the mouth of David”.

5. The word “nations” from **Psalm 1:2** and **Acts 4:25** is the same word as “Gentiles” in **Acts 4:27**. This confirms one of the points Tertullian was making.
 6. This exact fulfillment of prophecy strengthened the faith of the disciples in the face of the opposition they were receiving from their rulers.
 7. Also worth noting from this passage is that we should take strength from this prophecy when *we* are facing opposition from the world, and pray for boldness!
- b. Another point made by Tertullian and others was to combat the heresy of modalism (a false teaching that the Father, Son and Spirit are the same person, but in interchangeable forms).
- i. I have encountered the same heresy in Christian churches today.
 - ii. When people try to explain the trinity (Father/Son/Spirit all being one God), they sometimes incorrectly try to illustrate this with the example of water/ice/steam (all being water, but in different forms) Unfortunately, that model implies that the Father somehow could *become* the Son (as water can become ice or steam). This heretical understanding of the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is sometimes referred to as ‘modalism’.
 1. Tertullian, combatting this kind of heresy in his own day, pointed to this passage to explain that the leaders were standing against the Lord and *against His Christ* (referring to *two* persons; not to one that was shifting forms!).
 - a. (See Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 625.)

IV. Let Us Break Their Bonds, Cast Off Their Yokes

- a. **Heads Up:** The early Christians understood **verse 3** differently than anything I ever heard or considered before. While preparing this lesson, I stumbled on something that never occurred to me, based on the translations I had been reading from.
- b. From the NKJV (where, like most other modern translations, the Old Testament is based on the Masoretic Text):
 - i. “The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*, ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.’”
(**Psalm 2:2–3**, NKJV)

- ii. From reading this passage from modern translations like the NKJV and taking it at face value, I had always taken it to mean that the bad guys (kings of the earth, rulers, etc., who are against the Lord and against Christ) are the ones saying, “Let us break their bonds”.
 - 1. Therefore, I had always assumed that the ‘bonds’ referred to good restrictions on us that were imposed by the rule of God and Christ. And I assumed these good bonds were being rejected by bad people who did not want to submit to God’s rule.
 - 2. That understanding hinges on the word “saying”, which connects **verse 2** with **verse 3** as one continuous statement.
 - 3. However, to my surprise, I discovered that the early Christians did not read it that way! The issue comes down to how most modern translators have *added one word* that is not actually in the text of this passage.
- iii. In the NKJV (following the KJV), the word “saying” at the end of **verse 2** *is in italics*. Placing a word in italics indicates (in many translations – check the Bible’s introductory notes) that the italicized word does not appear in the original text, but was supplied by the translators to make the passage flow better in English. Therefore, the word “saying” is not in the (Hebrew) Masoretic Text.
 - 1. The JPS (Jewish Publication Society) translation (1917) does not have the word “saying” in this passage.
 - 2. Also, the Douay-Rheims Bible translation (Roman Catholic) does not have the word “saying” here.
 - a. “The kings of the earth stood up, and the princes met together, against the Lord, and against his Christ. Let us break their bonds asunder: and let us cast away their yoke from us.” (**Psalm 2:2-3**, D-R)
 - b. Notice that it does not appear to be clear in this translation who is saying “Let us break their bonds...”. It could be the ‘good guys’ (the author, the Lord and/or His Christ) or it could be the ‘bad guys’ (the ones opposed to the Lord and to His Christ).
 - i. The translators were willing to leave that point ambiguous.

- iv. The Orthodox Study Bible, which we typically read from in these messages, follows the KJV/NKJV wording here, like almost all other modern Bibles.
- v. A much more literal translation of this passage, from a Bible using the LXX text, is found in the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS). There it says:
 - 1. **(Psalm 2:1-2)** “Why did nations grow insolent, and peoples contemplate vain things? The kings of the earth stood side by side, and the rulers gathered together, against the Lord and against his anointed.”
 - 2. *Interlude on strings*
 - 3. **(verse 3)** “Let us burst their bonds asunder and cast their yoke from us.”
- vi. The early Christians, following the LXX text (which also happens to be consistent with the Masoretic Text here), understood the author of the psalm as the one speaking in **verse 3**, not the bad guys! They understood that *the author* to be the one saying, “let us break their bonds asunder”. Therefore, the bonds and the yoke refer to bad things *that God’s people* are chafing under, things that *we should want to cast off!*
 - 1. From Cyprian, a bishop of the church in Carthage, in North Africa, writing c. 250 AD:
 - a. “In the **second Psalm**: ‘For what purpose have the heathen raged, and the people imagined vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ. Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yoke from us.’ Likewise in the Gospel according to **Matthew**, the Lord says: ‘Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will cause you to rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is excellent, and my burden is light.’ (**Matthew 11:28-30**)
 - b. “In **Jeremiah**: ‘In that day I will shatter the yoke from their neck, and will burst their fetters; and they shall not labor for others, but they shall labor for the Lord God; and I will raise up David a king unto them.’”

(Jeremiah 30:8-9; designated Jeremiah 37:8-9 in the LXX)

- i. (Source: Cyprian, *Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews*, book 1; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 511)
 - ii. Note that Cyprian here says from **Matthew 11** “my yoke is *excellent*”. This is actually a more accurate rendering than “my yoke is easy”, an expression found in many modern Bibles. The English word ‘easy’ in the past meant “not painful / not annoying”. The idea being expressed here is that the yoke of Jesus is a *good and appropriate* yoke, as opposed to a painful and burdensome one!
- c. Cyprian spoke about this subject again, and connected it to what the apostles said in **Acts 15**, regarding the Law of Moses.
- i. “(Section Title:) That the yoke of the law was heavy, which is cast off by us, and that the Lord’s yoke is easy, which is taken up by us.
 - ii. “In the **second Psalm**: ‘Wherefore have the heathen been in tumult, and the peoples meditated vain things? The kings of the earth have stood up, and their princes have been gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ. Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away from us their yoke.’
 - iii. “Also in the Gospel according to **Matthew**: ‘Come unto me, ye who labor and are burdened, and I will make you to rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is good, and my burden is light.’
(Matthew 11:28-29)
 - iv. “Also in the **Acts of the Apostles**: ‘It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to impose upon you no other burden than those things which are of necessity, that you should abstain from idolatries, from shedding of blood, and from fornication. And whatsoever you would not to be

done unto you, do not to others.’ (**Acts 15:28-29**)”

1. (Source: Cyprian, *Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews*, book 3; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, pp. 556–557)
- d. This also reminds me of what Peter said at the same Council in Jerusalem:
 - i. “Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” (**Acts 15:10**, NKJV)
 - vii. Therefore, the early Christians understood the statement in **Psalm 2:3** as referring to something good: *casting off the burdensome yoke and bondage of the Law of Moses*. That burden would be replaced with the much more excellent and appropriate yoke: the teachings of Jesus!

V. This is My Son

- a. Read **Psalm 2:4-7**.
- b. The Christ, the One who will be established as king over God’s kingdom, is also *the Son of God*.
- c. This destroys one of the central claims of Muslims.
 - i. They hold that Jesus is the Christ, performed miracles, and was a true prophet of God.
 - ii. However, they claim he cannot be the Son of God because, they insist, “God *cannot have a Son*”.
 1. They do not understand what Christians mean when we say “Son of God”.
 - a. They claim those parts of Christian faith that contradict the Koran (including Jesus’ crucifixion, His resurrection from the dead, and His being the Son of God), “were added by the Christians later” (presumably sometime in the early centuries of the Christian era).
 - b. Therefore, they claim these things were not part of the original Christian faith, but instead were the result of *a corruption of the original faith*.

2. Unfortunately, most Christians today do a poor job of explaining the historic Christian understanding of the term, 'Son of God'.
 3. He was the Son of God *before all ages*.
 - a. He did not *become* the Son of God at the incarnation, when Jesus was born as a child to Mary.
- iii. However, we can use **Psalm 2** to help Muslims understand that Jesus was, in fact, the Son of God.
1. **Psalm 2** was written about 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus. Since this is in the *Jewish* Scriptures, it is *impossible* that Christians could have altered this.
 2. The Christ *MUST BE* the Son of God, by definition, according to David's prophecy about Him in **Psalm 2**.
 3. Based on what it says in **Psalm 2**, logically there are only two possibilities. EITHER Jesus *was*, in fact the Son of God; OR he *was not* the Son of God and therefore *not* the Christ.
 - a. Either way, no one (including Mohammad) can claim that Jesus *was* the Christ but *was not* the Son of God.
- d. This prophecy of David in **Psalm 2** ties to other, related prophecies about the Christ.
- i. From **Psalm 2** we learn: Christ = Son of God = Ruler / King over God's kingdom. All three descriptions refer to the same person.
 1. He would inherit the ends of the earth.
 2. He would be opposed by rulers and Gentile leaders conspiring together.
 3. He would rule over his enemies.
 - ii. From **2 Samuel 7** (also **1 Chronicles 17**, **Psalm 89** and **Psalm 132**) we learn:
 1. He would be descended from David.
 2. He would be raised up to rule over an eternal kingdom.
 3. He would be known as the Son of God.
 4. He would build the temple that will last forever.

- iii. From **Psalm 110** (designated **Psalm 109** in the LXX) we learn:
 1. He is the Lord of David.
 2. He will sit at the right hand of God, the Father.
 3. He would be both a priest and a king (according to the order of Melchizedek).

- e. The statements made by the Father regarding “This is my Son” are fulfilled by Jesus.
 - i. Several early Christian writers comment regarding statement that the Father makes, “this is my Son” (a) at the baptism of Jesus (**Matthew 3:17**) and (b) at the Mount of Transfiguration (**Matthew 17:5**), as tying back to this promise made in **Psalm 2**.
 1. In essence, the Father is announcing: “Here He is! This is the One I promised would come!”
 - ii. From Tertullian, an early Christian writer from Carthage, in North Africa, writing c. 207 AD:
 1. “On the present (as also on the former) occasion, therefore, the cloud was not silent; but there was the accustomed voice from heaven, and the Father’s testimony to the Son; precisely as in the first [*second*] **Psalm** He had said, ‘You are my Son, today have I begotten you.’ (**Psalm 2:7**) By the mouth of Isaiah also He had asked concerning Him, ‘Who is there among you that feareth God? Let him hear the voice of His Son.’ (Isaiah 50:10, LXX)
 2. “When therefore He here presents Him with the words, ‘This is my (beloved) Son,’ (**Matthew 3:7, 17:15**, etc.) this clause is of course understood, ‘whom I have promised.’ For if He once promised, and then afterwards says, ‘This is He,’ it is suitable conduct for one who accomplishes His purpose that He should utter His voice in proof of the promise which He had formerly made; but unsuitable in one who is amenable to the retort, Can you, indeed, have a right to say, ‘This is my son,’ concerning whom you have given us no previous information, any more than you have favoured us with a revelation about your own prior existence?”
 - a. (Source: Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, book 4, chapter 22; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 384)

VI. He Shall Rule Them

a. Read **Psalm 2:8-12**.

- i. He will inherit all the nations, to the ends of the earth.
- ii. In the LXX, it says, "You shall *shepherd* them..." (or "rule them...").
 1. However, in the Masoretic Text it says, "You shall *break* them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel." (**Psalm 2:9**, NKJV)

2. Read **Revelation 2:24-28**.

- a. "He shall *rule* them with a rod of iron..." (**Revelation 2:27**, NKJV)

- i. The word translated "rule" is the same Greek word as "shepherd".

- b. "...he will *shepherd* them with an iron rod..." (**Revelation 2:27**, Lexham English Bible)

- c. Consider also **Revelation 19:15** where the same phrase from **Psalm 2:9** is repeated, again following the LXX rather than the Masoretic Text.

3. Jesus' quote follows the LXX text (shepherd/rule). The entire point He is making here in **Revelation 2** is based on that phrase!

- a. (Note: This illustrates one of the reasons I am interested in reading from Bibles where the Old Testament is based on the LXX rather than on the Masoretic Text.)

- iii. While the prophecy of Psalm 2:9 says that the Son of God (Jesus, the Christ) will shepherd/rule the nations, note that here in Revelation 2 Jesus applies this to all those who will follow him: the faithful Christians. He seems to be saying here that WE will be ruling the nations, as well.

1. **Questions:** What does that mean? Will we actually rule the nations? But aren't we just going to be transported to heaven after we die, to marvel at the glory of God forever?

- a. Consider something else that Jesus said in **Revelation:**

- i. "To him who overcomes I will grant *to sit with Me on My throne*, as I also overcame and sat

down with My Father on His throne.”
(**Revelation 3:21**, NKJV)

1. Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God, on the throne. Will *we also* sit on that throne?
- b. Also, consider something Paul said, which may be related to this:
 - i. “If we endure, We shall also *reign with Him...*” (**2 Timothy 2:12**, NKJV)
- c. Now let us review some things Jesus said shortly before he was crucified:
 - i. Read **Matthew 24:45-51**.
 1. Speaking about His return, Jesus says:
“Assuredly, I say to you that he [the master, Jesus] will make him [the faithful servant] *ruler over all his goods.*”
(**Matthew 24:47**)
 2. The faithful servant here is the one who His master finds doing what he was told, upon the return of the master. In this case, the Master (Jesus) has told us to feed and take care of the needs of His other servants.
 3. Jesus says that when He returns, He will make His faithful servants “ruler(s) over all His goods”.
 4. This does not sound like we will simply be in a permanent state of bliss, somewhere in heaven, does it?
 - ii. Read **Matthew 25:14-23**, from the Parable of the Talents.
 1. The master (= Jesus) entrusts five talents to one servant, two to another, and one talent to a third servant.
 - a. An ancient ‘talent’ is a large amount of silver, perhaps

equivalent to about 60 pounds or 27 kilograms.

2. Here Jesus expands on the teaching He gave at the end of **Matthew 24**.
3. The master says to his servant who has been faithful: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, *I will make you ruler over many things*. Enter into the joy of your lord." (**Matthew 25:23**, NKJV)

2. Taking all of these Scriptures together, it appears that Jesus is promising that just as He reigns on the throne with His Father, we (if we are found faithful) will rule over many things, as well!

VII. Kiss the Son; or Lay Hold of His Instruction?

- a. From the Masoretic Text, this psalm closes with the following statement:
 - i. "*Kiss the Son*, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him." (**Psalm 2:12**, NKJV)
- b. However, in the LXX the same passage reads:
 - i. "*Lay hold of His instruction*, lest the Lord be angry, and you perish from the righteous way when His fury shall be quickly kindled. Blessed are all who trust in Him." (**Psalm 2:12**, LXX, OSB)
- c. While the closing statement in the MT and LXX both convey a clear warning to treat the Son of God with respect, there is a significant difference between the two statements.
 - i. Over the years I have been more familiar with the MT version ("Kiss the Son").
 - ii. On the other hand, as we have seen here, both Jesus and the apostles come out of the LXX when they are quoting from **Psalm 2**. In the LXX it says "Lay hold of His instruction".
- d. It strikes me that the more challenging statement of the two is to "Lay hold of His instruction". That is much harder to do than simply to give Him a kiss!
 - i. Recall that *even Judas* could give Jesus a kiss.
 - ii. Also, consider what Jesus said in the gospels:

1. “...*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed...*” (**John 8:31**, NKJV)
 2. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ Therefore *whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them*, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock...” (**Matthew 7:21–24**, NKJV)
- iii. Early Christian writers who commented on this statement from the end of **Psalm 2** understood this as a call to *follow what Jesus taught* (based on the LXX version they were reading from).
1. See Clement of Alexandria in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 195.
 2. See also Cyprian in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, pp. 357, 430 and 551.
- e. Let us heed this warning, and follow all the instructions of the Son!