

# Inheritance of Messiah

## *Psalm 2*

- Ps 2:1 "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?  
2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,  
3 "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."  
4 He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.  
5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying,  
6 "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."  
7 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.  
8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.  
9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."  
10 Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers [judges] of the earth.  
11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.  
12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed [Happy] are all who

take refuge in him."

Psalm 2:1-12

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## The Story Behind Psalm 2

PSALM 2 SINGS A STORY. It is a story as ancient as creation, yet for us today—a new song. Its melody plays on virtually every page of the score that is the Bible. Its lyrics were prophesied, fulfilled, and yet are still to come. Its chorus is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news that fills our minds with wonder and our hearts with joy beyond imagination. Today, through this Psalm, I want to tell you this story.

### *Adam to Babel*

Long ago, when the dew of creation was still wet on the ground, the First Man arose from the dust of the earth. He was given life and put on by the holy hill of Paradise--the mountain of God, in a Garden where he was given dominion and told to rule the world from whence he

sprang. The man came to life by the Word of God, who walked with him in the Garden in the cool of the day not as a disembodied voice from heaven, but in a tangible form, perhaps the Angel of the LORD Himself,<sup>1</sup> the first man's High King, his Maker and Creator.

One day, the Word-Angel left the man alone with his wife to tend to their royal duties, when they were assaulted by a different heavenly being, a ruler in his own right, but not of this earth. The *Nachash*—the Shining Serpent and guardian cherubim of Eden was furious with the Word for not installing him on the holy hill as ruler of this world. *This man was a piece of mud, not a brilliant star of heaven. Lucifer was the greatest of all creation, and the right should have been his.* And so he assaulted the very throne of heaven by conspiring against this anointed human ruler of the earth.

His plan was devious. He questioned the woman, “**Has God really said?**” He caused her to waver, “**Do you not know that you will be like one of us, judging right from wrong, good from evil? Do you not know that this is what**

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<sup>1</sup> For a good, short discussion of this idea in ancient literature and in the Bible see **Eric J. Gilcrest**, “Revelation 21-22 in *Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Utopianism* (Brill, 2013), 196-97.

rulers do?” He inquired, “What is this law that stands in your way. This tree or knowledge, this piece of fruit. Burst the bonds apart and cast away the cords, and take your rightful place as ruler of the council.” The divine council on earth, this was where they were after all, the mountain where heaven and earth meet, the seat of the gods as Ezekiel said, where heavenly deliberations are made over the affairs of mankind. That’s why the LORD was here. That’s why Satan was here. That’s why Adam was here. The Serpent was already freeing himself from the shackles of God’s law, and now he hoped this despicable creature of dust would follow his beguiling plan.

The woman ate, and gave some to her husband who stood nearby watching, not ruling, but allowing evil to emerge from his own heart, rather than casting it out of the holy Garden-temple. Their judicial activism now viewed God’s law as a “Living Document,” and in their pronouncement from the bench they usurped the King’s authority over them. Ironically, their own autonomy had brought their own death sentence. For their efforts, the man and the woman were cast out away from the holy hill by the LORD God and would now perish in their way.

But not before a promise had transpired. A promise of victory. A promise of kingship. A promise of rule and authority. “You, woman, shall have a Seed, and the serpent shall have a seed, but your Seed will crush his seed’s head, though his shall bruise your heel” (Gen 3:15). Shiloh, The Ruler, to whom tribute shall be brought when he comes finally comes. The LORD was very serious as he said it, but inside he was laughing at the Serpent, knowing that there was nothing that could happen that could alter the course of his prophecy, for he alone is the one enthroned in the heavens and no one can thwart his will.

Many long centuries later, all flesh on earth had so corrupted itself that the LORD would start over. The Word came again to a man, talking to him as two men talk to one another. He gave him plans to build a boat that would make it through a great deluge. Only eight people would survive, and two of each kind of animal. When the waters finally came, the screams and pleas were drowned out by the crashing waves of death. All flesh was destroyed, save that in the boat. For a year it floated, until finally it came to rest on a new mountain where a new man offered a

sacrifice to the Holy God. The world began anew. But mankind was the same.

For a while, God was worshiped as he was supposed to be. But it did not last long. In older days, before the Flood, Satan did not retreat into the shadows. Rather, he and the host of heaven were unhindered from breaking the chains that they believed bound them, and part of the judgment of those days was the imprisonment of certain angels in the gloomy depths and great chains ... of Tartarus, Peter and Jude would later tell us. For these fallen angels, these rulers of heaven, had transgressed their proper domain and in a host of deeply perverted ways taken the eyes of men off the Creator and onto themselves. Men, it seems, now wanted to re-turn to the gods. So they built a tower to reach the heavens. Babel becomes the origin of the nations.

*What Really Happened At Babel: A Look At Deuteronomy 32:7-8*

This is where we need to stop in our story, for **Psalm 2:1** begins, “**Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?**” **Nations and peoples.** With this language in mind,

someone has called this Psalm, “An entry point into [the] reading of the nations ... Psalm 2 vigorously asserts Yahweh’s governance and rejects the attempt of the nations to cast off Yahweh’s rule (as in **Gen 11:1–9**).”<sup>2</sup> He is right about Yahweh ruling everything, but not as some might think. But certainly as he cites, Psalm has its most explicit historical roots at Babel. Therefore, we have to understand exactly what was going on back there.

Though I’ve dropped verbal hints, we need to study the inspired commentary on Babel in **Deuteronomy 32:7-8**. The swan-song of Moses (literally, his last song), we read, “Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you. When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God.” Moses speaks about a time long before himself. When was this?

He says, it is the time of giving the nations their inheritance. “Inheritance” is the direct link to Psalm 2 (vs.

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<sup>2</sup> **Walter Brueggemann**, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 496.

8), which is why we must understand it. What is this inheritance? The Apostle Paul comments further, “**And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place**” (**Acts 17:26**). Their inheritance is therefore their **land** which was “allotted” to the nations.

But there is more going on here than nations going out to various parts of the world as we read in **Genesis 11:8**. Moses sings here of the “**sons of God**.”<sup>3</sup> Who are the “sons of God?” They appear about 10 times in the OT, and each time they refer to fallen ruling “*elohim*,” often translated as “gods,” or as the LXX has it, “angels.” The Serpent in the Garden is one of these, as were those locked up in the days of the Flood (**Gen 6:1-4**; cf. **Jude 6**; **2Pe 2:4**). Now there are more of them at Babel.

Babel was all about trying to reestablish contact with these heavenly creatures as had occurred prior to the Flood and created disaster. This is what it means to build a tower to the heavens. It was an ancient **ziggurat**, and they were

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<sup>3</sup> This is the original reading of the Hebrew, given in the ESV. See **Michael S. Heiser**, “Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (2001): 52-74.

viewed as stairways to heaven, man-made “mountains” to God. They weren’t trying to see how high they could go physically, but how high they could rise spiritually, the original dark ascended spirit masters of the one world anti-religion. Nimrod and his brood of vipers. This is Babylon. This as Babel.<sup>4</sup>

Notice that **Deuteronomy 32:8** says that **the nations were allotted** to the sons of God. Heavenly beings were given the nations. These become the gods of the nations throughout the OT and all the ancient world. Plato said something almost identical to Moses, “**In the days of old the gods had the whole earth distributed among them by allotment ... all of them by just apportionment obtained what they wanted and ... as shepherds tend their flocks ... different gods had their allotments in different places which they set in order**” (**Plato, Critias**).<sup>5</sup>

But why would Moses even be talking about this? He is recalling earlier parts of Deuteronomy such as, “**And**

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<sup>4</sup> See my sermon on the Tower of Babel: Genesis 11:1-11.

<sup>5</sup> **Homer** said, “**Heaven and earth were divided into three parts, and each of us was to have an equal share. When we cast lots, it fell to me to have my dwelling in the sea for evermore; Hades took the darkness of the realms under the earth, while air and sky and clouds were the portion that fell to Zeus; but earth and great Olympus are the common property of all.**” (Homer, Iliad 15.190).

beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven” (Deut 4:19). This is the opposite of Deuteronomy 32:8. Now, the “host of heaven” are allotted to the peoples. In other words, they are given to each other. We’ll see why in a moment.

Now, this is not talking about just balls of gas (how we think of stars), but created heavenly beings. “When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:7). Thus another verse in Deuteronomy says that Israel, “Has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden” (Deut 17:3). “Praise God above ye heavenly host,” we sing. Again Moses, he “went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them” (Deut 29:26). Later in Moses’ song, almost the same language occurs again, but this time they are called the *shedim*: guardian “demons” of the nations. “They sacrificed

to demons (*shedim*),<sup>6</sup> not God, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded” (Dt 32:17).

“Allotment” is the tie that binds these together. This allotment as an **inheritance**, a portion. Moses is teaching us that it is not only land that was given to the nations. They also inherited their own heavenly beings to rule over them. One of the earliest commentaries on Deuteronomy 32:8-9 is the book of Jubilees. “There are many nations and many people, and they all belong to him, but over all of them he caused spirits to rule [them]...” (Jub 15:31).<sup>7</sup>

These “spirits” later became known as *archons* or “rulers.”<sup>8</sup> This word appears in Psalm 2:2 LXX. Another

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<sup>6</sup> These are not the demons of the NT, but are rather the guardian deities of nations: The Watchers.

<sup>7</sup> The verse concludes, “...so that they might lead them astray from following him.” But why would God want these “spirits” to lead men astray? Well, Jubilees is not inspired. It is kind of right, but kind of wrong. Immediately after Paul comments on **Deuteronomy 32:7** he says that God did this **in hopes that men might grope for him in the darkness and find him, though he was not far from anyone (Acts 17:27)**. God’s purpose was different from their purpose. His were good. We will see in a later **Psalm (82)** that the original idea was that the sons of God would now rule instead of men, and God commanded them to do so in His stead by ruling in justice and with his law, thereby leading the nations to Him. That was the plan as far as they were told, the “revealed law” to them if you will. But God knew this wouldn’t happen. It was all part of the plan.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, the next verse in Jubilees reads (in concert with Deut 32:9 and Sirach 17:17), “**But over Israel he did not cause any angel or spirit to rule because he alone is their ruler and he will protect them and he will seek for them at the hand of his angels and at the hand of his**

commentary on Dt:32:8 written prior to the NT says, “For in the division of the nations of the whole earth he set a ruler (*archon*) over every people; but Israel is the Lord’s portion” (Sir 17:17). The NT talks about the “rulers of this age” (1Co 2:6, 8). Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the *archons* ... in heavenly places (Eph 6:12). It calls Satan himself the *archon* (prince/ruler) of the world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). This is why Satan tempts Jesus with all of the kingdoms of the world. Jesus does not respond to him with laughter saying, “What are you talking about, give me the kingdoms? They aren’t yours to give.” But they were—for the time being. Daniel speaks of these guys calling one the “*archon* (prince) of Persia,” another “prince of Greece” (Dan 10:13, 20), and even of the prince of Israel (12:1; see Josh 5:14 as well). In all of this, you can hear the teaching of Moses known throughout the ancient world.

So what was Babel? Babel was, as the Psalm says, “the nations raging and the peoples plotting in vain.” In those days, there were mighty kings of the earth. Nimrod, founder of Babel and of most of the Middle East, and chief

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spirits and at the hand of all of his authorities so that he might guard them and bless them and they might be his and he might be theirs henceforth and forever.”

instigator of the Babel event, set himself up. And from heaven, the *archons* took counsel together, against the LORD.<sup>9</sup> And when the LORD came down and saw it, there was punishment. R. Kent Hughes makes the connection, “Their tower was so microscopic that the all-seeing omnipotent God had to come down to see. It was as if God stooped down like a man on his hands and knees and lowered his face to the earth to see the great tower. The psalmist says, “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision” (Psalm 2:4). Great peals of laughter echoed in the heavens. So much for the aspirations of men’s Babylonian hearts.”<sup>10</sup>

And so Moses presents this whole Deuteronomy 32:7-8 thing as a punitive action on God’s part. “If you want to meet with them, and talk to them, and get information from

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<sup>9</sup> Archons became major players in the early Gnostic heresies. In fact, Yahweh was considered an evil Archon in this complicated, yet blasphemous religion. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 1.24.1-4) preserves how they perverted this Deuteronomy worldview. But one scholar notices the connection made in Psalm 2:2, “Like Saturninus, Basilides explains salvation out of biblical passages though he calls ‘the god of the Jews’ the chief of the hostile angels. The most important passage is Psalm 2:2: ‘The kings of the earth rose up and the archons gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ.’ When the god of the Jews wanted to subject the other nations to his own people, the other archons rose up against him and fought him, and the other peoples rose against his people.” Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 15.

<sup>10</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 172.

them, and worship them so badly, here you go. You can have them. And they will rule over you.” They were therefore allotted to the nations at Babel and all of the nations at Babel were given one. This is the punishment of Babel, not just dispersion, not just tongues, but utter spiritual darkness, “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). “Following the *archon* of the power of the air, that spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2).

I want to move to Dt 32:9 before getting into the Psalm itself, but we need to ask one more question first. How do we know that they were *all* given one? This comes out in the language “the number of the sons of God.” Ancient tradition has this number at 70, and this corresponds to the 70 nations in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10. The point is, all of the nations were given over. Not one nation on earth was left with the pure worship of God mediated only by his Word. This is the theology, the story of the Tower of Babel that they don’t teach in most Sunday Schools. But it is what happened and if you don’t understand it, you can’t understand the depths of the teaching of Psalm 2.

## *Babel to David*

Now, the story I told earlier and paused at Babel continues **after Babel**. In fact, immediately after Moses tells us to remember those days, he says something else. It is the reason why Moses is even bringing all this up in the first place. He wants Israel to know for all time through perhaps the greatest song ever penned, who its God is. This is the next verse. “**The LORD’s portion is his people, Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance**” (**Deut 32:9** NAS). This verse is so amazing, so wonderful, and so misunderstood.

This is a strange thing to say, “**The LORD’s portion?**” The LORD’s allotted inheritance? I thought the LORD was the King of heaven itself. Well, he is. And yet, he isn’t. Or, rather, he wasn’t. Or rather, he both is and isn’t and wasn’t. Confused? Psalm 2 presupposes that you aren’t. So Moses again helps us. Who is this “LORD?” Later in the song, he becomes The Rock of his salvation (**32:15**), the Rock that bore you and the God who gave you birth (**18**). Who do you suppose that is? You must not think like a Unitarian! It is a deathblow to biblical Christianity.

What we are going to see from the Psalm is that the correct way to understand “The LORD” here is in the

context of the **sons of God** and the Rock, for we know that the Rock is Christ (**1Co 10:4**). And we know that he is the **Son of God**. Do you see the connection? The sons of God vs. the Son of God. This is intentional. The “LORD” here refers not to the Father, but to the Son, to the Angel of the LORD, the Angel of the Covenant, the Angel who forgives their sins, the Angel who is the LORD of Hosts and Armies, the Angel who bears the name of God, Christ preincarnate. He is the one who takes Israel as his inheritance. At least at first.

After Babel, when all the world was in darkness, Stephen tells us, “**The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia.**” Babylon. Babel. God is doing something unheard of here. Abraham’s father worshipped the gods (**Josh 24:2**). Abram was not “seeking” Yahweh. The LORD sought him. It is highly probable to me that Abram was actually worshipping and serving, perhaps as a priest, someone like Daniel’s prince of Persia. This is a woeful defection. God is taking Abram to be his own, and no one can stop him.

This appearance Stephen speaks of, what was it? Who was it? The Word of the LORD appeared to Abraham

many times, in visions—he saw the LORD ([Gen 15:1](#)). In his camp—he ate with the LORD ([Gen 18:2ff](#)). This great God who appeared like this covenanted with Abraham saying, “I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you ... to be God to you and to your seed after you” ([Gen 17:6-7](#)). The promise of kings. The promise of a King. The ruling of the sons of God will not last forever. Their human counterparts, the kings when rightful rule will return to man as it was in the beginning.

Later, he promised Isaac and then again Jacob the same. Jacob said to his son Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession ... The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys” ([Gen 48:3-4; 15-16](#)).

My point in pulling these strands of the OT out here is to help you see that a particular heavenly being called both an angel and God and the Angel of the LORD and simply “LORD,” is the one who takes Israel to be his “treasured possession” in Dt 32:9. Here are more. Stephen, again in his great sermon on Christ says, “the angel appeared to him in the bush” (Acts 7:35; cf. Ex 3:3). This Angel calls himself “I AM WHO I AM” (3:14). Stephen calls him “the God of your fathers” (Acts 7:32).

Listen to what it says just before Sinai, “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all people’s, for the earth is mine” (Ex 19:5). Who spoke those words? The Angel. But Angels are messengers who speak on behalf of someone else. Thus, they seem to have their origin in the Father (with the Son speaking for him). But how will he take them for his treasured possession? Amazingly, through the Angel who is also the One True God. A little later, just after Sinai, the Father says again, “Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not

pardon your transgression, for my name is in him” (Ex 23:20-21).

They did not listen to his voice though. “Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, ‘I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you’ ... but you have not obeyed my voice” (Jdg 2:1-2). How had they not obeyed his voice? By not listening to his servant Moses.

Stephen again says (now reflecting the universal understanding of the origin of ruling authority among men after the Flood), “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush” (Acts 7:35). The biblical God is one God, but he is also Triune. This God made Moses “ruler,” to act on his behalf among men, as he ruled in spiritual places over the nation. This both is and isn’t a fulfillment of the promise of the king to Abraham. God is king; Moses is not quite a king.

Now, this ruler Moses would later be replaced by “Judges.” These judges were then replaced by kings, as the

people both disobeyed God who said that he was their king, and yet fell perfectly in line with God's sovereign plan which no one can thwart. The Word of the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1Sa 8:7). And so God gave them Saul. But then Saul rejected "the Word of the LORD" (1Sa 15:23) and thus "he" has also rejected you from being king.

Into this we can now turn fully to Psalm 2.

## Psalm 2

### *The Rebellious Kings (2:1-3)*

The Psalm begins with a three verse, third-person description of the nations. They are raging and they are plotting. We have seen a bit of why. Curiously, "plot" is the same word used in **Psalm 1:2** for "meditate." The Happy Man meditates on God's law. The nations meditate on something very different. The nations are the "goyim" (the peoples are the "le'ummim"). We have seen the origins

of this hatred at Babel, but the continue down through the corridors of time right up to the present moment. Why are the nations in a uproar? Why are the peoples devising vain things?

The next verse explains more. “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together” (2:2). Here we have two groups of people, the kings of the earth and the rulers in counsel. In Hebrew parallelism, it is possible that the kings and the rulers are the same group of people. It is also possible that they are different groups of people, one earthly and the other heavenly, for these “rulers” are the *archons* we spoke of earlier.<sup>11</sup> I opt for the latter.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Archon is the LXX’s translation of the unusual word *razan* (see note below). This would be parallelism of contrast where two words are juxtaposed to show a contrast like “heaven and earth.”

<sup>12</sup> For several reasons. First, we have seen that this Psalm is a doorway to Babel, and we’ve seen how the archons are so closely related. Second, these rulers (*archons* in Greek) are in “counsel.” This word “counsel” can also be translated as “council,” as thus could mean that the kings on the earth and the rulers in the divine council of heaven are both conspiring together. Third, this idea is ancient; the Targum says that they rebel “in the LORD’s presence.” Fourth, the Psalm comes to a climax with someone inheriting the nations (vs. 8), and that this psalm has deep connections to Psalm 82 which is all about that these wicked heavenly rulers. Fifth, the Hebrew word is unusual, and is always found in conjunction with “kings” (Ps 2:2; Pr 8:15; 31:14; Hab 1:10; Jdg 5:3; Isa 40:23). These six references are translated by four different Greek words: *archons*, *dunastes*, *turannos*, and *satrapes*. So the word itself is not of much help in determining who is in view. But we do see both groups being punished in other places such as Isa 24:21. Sixth, see the “bonds” below. Seven, Hebrews quotes this in relation to angels (see note below). \*\*\* The Hebrew word is *yswd* can mean wither “counsel” or “council.” This word

What are they conspiring against? First it is a who, and then it is a what. Let's look at the *what* first, as we have already talked about it. “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us” (2:3). What are these bonds? Reading this psalm together with Psalm 1, they are God's law. The *kings* are rebelling against God's law. In Job, men are “bound” in fetters, and caught in “cords” of affliction because of their “transgressions” and evil “work” (Job 36:8-9). We saw this in the Eden story earlier. Also in Job, the constellations—that is the stars which stand for heavenly beings are “bound” with “cords” (Job 38:31). This refers to what we would call natural laws, but it explains that heavenly objects/creatures have to live according to law just like we do. Hence Satan's rebellion. Thus, fallen beings and fallen kings and all the nations and all the peoples see God's laws as chains that imprison them. And so they spend their

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has been proposed as the rood of the line here: *ysh (ydu)-yahad 'al-Yahweh* (“conspire together against Yahweh). S. B. Parker, “Council,” ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 204.

Some have also taken “kings” in this more supernatural light. “([Dan] 10:13c): ... The plural kings does not represent human powers only, e.g., Cyrus and his successors, but the active powers, spiritual and earthly, that had control over the kings of Persia. For this enlarged use of the word kings compare Isaiah 8:21; Ps 2:2.” James E. Smith, Ph.D., *Daniel: A Christian Interpretation* (Lulu: 2015), 320.

whole lives trying to figure out how they can be free of them. This explains why the nations rage, why the people's plot, they the kings set themselves against, and the rulers take counsel against the LORD and his Anointed. They hate him and they hate his laws. It is the opposite of Psalm 1 and the happy man.

Now the *who* (not the band). “Against the LORD and against his Anointed” (Ps 2:2). The word “anointed” is the word *mashiach*/messiah or *christos*/Christ. Here is where things start to get interesting. Acts calls this a psalm of David (Acts 4:25). David is the king who replaced Saul, a man “after God’s own heart.” David is called the Lord’s Anointed. But listen how. “Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his seed forever” (2Sa 22:51). David was the first fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham, not of one king, but of “kings.” David is the first christ. But he is not the last Christ. Solomon was the second christ. His son the next, and so on. But there came a time when there was no christ sitting on the throne of David. This Psalm says that the kings and rulers set themselves up against the Lord and against his Christ.

So this Psalm is about David. And yet, it isn't. The NT applies this to Jesus. Peter quotes this psalm and then says “truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27-28). And yet Paul also says that the “archons of this age” were part of it, and if they would have known what they were doing, they never would have crucified the Lord of glory (1Co 2:8).

But if this Psalm is applied to Jesus, my belief is that it must have always been about Jesus, not just David. Psalm 2 is a song to Jesus 1,000 years before he came to us in human flesh. But since this is found in the OT, someone has to have known about him to conspire against him. Hence, the rulers as heavenly beings who knew him. It is one reason why they are so vital to our story.

### *The Heavenly King (2:4-9)*

The LORD has a response to all this. “He who sits in the heavens laughs” (Ps 2:4). The image is particularly

bewildering if God's essence is without passions.<sup>13</sup> What would it even mean? But if it refers—as I believe—not to an essence, but to a person(s), then it most striking, as “he” who is enthroned above all things and who holds their very breath in his hands, who could snuff it out in the twinkling of an eye, yet is plotted against -- like the Utter Sovereign that he is, he just laughs at them.

This is made all the more remarkable because **in our own day**, there have been kings and presidents and senators and congressmen and tyrants and dictators who have all done this and are doing this to God—right now. The way that you and I handle this is not to laugh, but to cry and fear. If you don't believe me, just look at your friends and perhaps your own response to the current presidential cycle and tell me that we are laughing like God is at these people who scoff and blaspheme him and plot against him and seek to throw off their chains. **Spurgeon** is worth hearing, “**He has not taken the trouble to rise up and do battle with**

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<sup>13</sup> Our Confession teaches that the Lord, while one true God, has subsistence in and of himself (this is the language of the “persons”). But his “being” and “essence” which are “incomprehensible” (stated twice), is “a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions.” (**LBC 2.1**). Certainly, this is correct. God's essence is without passions. I don't know a single essence that has them.

them—he despises them, he knows how absurd, how irrational, how futile are their attempts against him—he therefore *laughs at them*.”<sup>14</sup> All their plotting and scheming is just a joke to him, because they can’t actually do anything to him.

Next it says that he “*holds them in derision*.” This is good parallelism, but the amazing thing here is the *change of words for God*. In *vs. 2* Yahweh (Jehovah) has a Messiah. It would seem that *Yahweh* is the one laughing from heaven. But the second part does not say Jehovah. It says “*Adonai*,” Lord rather than LORD. He holds them in derision. One is laughing. One is sneering. Friends, this is exactly what we see in *Psalm 110:1* where Jesus himself said that there are two Lords of David in the verse: Yahweh and Adonai. Psalm 2 is not just a prophecy about Jesus. It is about Jesus back when David wrote it. Jesus is sneering at the plans of the kings and rulers.

It is at this point that the Psalm takes its most dramatic turn and starts to weave together our story into a beautiful book. Let me preface it this way. In those days, as already

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<sup>14</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 1-26*, vol. 1 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 11.

hinted at, the kingship was handed down from the god to the king. Peter said it. We read about it with Moses. Every culture believed this: Pharaohs, Caesars, Sumerians—it doesn't matter. It is how they claimed the authority that they did. It was given to them from on high, “**when the kingship descended from heaven**” as the ANE texts so often put it.<sup>15</sup> This is exactly what God did with David (through Samuel who anointed him), even as he gave the precursor of this to Moses and Abraham and even Adam. And this is what the Psalm begins to tell us.

**Vs. 5** sees a movement from the third person to the first. It begins, “**Then He will speak to them in His wrath, And terrify them in His fury, saying...**” The Lord's laughter turns to wrath, and his derision turns to fury. He isn't just going to sit by and let them do this to him. They have been rebelling against him, these men and angels, since the very beginning. Israel was all about bringing a light into the darkness, a kingdom of heaven into the kingdom of evil.

The Father speaks, “**As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill**” (**Ps 2:6**). The hill is Mt. Zion in

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<sup>15</sup> Such as the first line of the Sumerian King's list or the Etana.

Jerusalem where the Temple will be built. This was the meeting place between men and God, as all the holy mountains were believed to be. But this one is connected to the God of all Creation. He is speaking to David, who took Jerusalem as his city. He is speaking to someone else. Someone enthroned above the Cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant. Someone who Samuel said the people no longer wanted as King.

“I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you’” (2:7). Who is the speaker? David? Kind of. But the NT again applies this to Jesus. Acts and Hebrews (both written by Luke?) all quote this verse (Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5). The first reference in Hebrews is in the context of comparing the Son to angels. He has not said this to the angels. Why would he say this, unless the angels were in view in the Psalm?

The creed and many English NT translations refer to Jesus as the “**only-begotten**” of the Father. The theology of this is correct. The NT word *monogenes* may have a kind of dual meaning, where this is a possible rendering, as the Early Fathers seemed to understand. But *monogenes* also means “**unique**” (perhaps only means “unique”), for Isaac is the

*monogenes* son of Abraham (**Heb 11:17**). Clearly, he is not the only son of Abraham.

The roots of this very important theology are found here in Psalm 2. For here we have the Son being “begotten” by the Father. What does this word begotten mean? It doesn’t mean “created,” for there are other created “sons of God” in heaven and on earth. But Hebrews says this term “Son” has never been applied to any of them individually, not like this. **This begetting is a begetting of like to like.** When we beget children, we beget them in our likeness, but we also beget humans. Humans to humans. Now, God “made” humans in his likeness, but he did not “beget” us in his likeness. He made the heavenly sons of god, but he did not “beget” the sons of God.

He begat this Son; like to like. Father to Son, but very God to very God. This is an eternal begetting in one sense, for the Son is the Word and the Word was God. The Word is the Son. The Word, the Son, did not come into being, but was eternally begotten of the Father. The Son has always been. The mind reels, but anything less would mean you he was not God—for who can comprehend this but himself?

But there was a mystery here as well. It tells of a decree

between Father and Son. This speaks of something they agreed upon in eternity past. This agreement, this **covenant**, comes into view in the next verse. “**Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession**” (**Ps 2:8**). Do you remember our long discussion of Babel, Deuteronomy, **inheritance**, possession, the heavenly beings, the nations, and so on? This is the reverse. This is God’s revenge, his anger pouring forth from all of our sin. For that is what the text says.

But it is not what you would expect. Nor is what they expected. The inheritance theme is the key. God gave the gods their inheritance—the nations. God left the nations in utter darkness. The God took one man and made him into a holy nation, and made him his treasured possession. He promised him a king. The LORD’s portion is Israel, Jacob his allotted inheritance! The LORD becomes Israel’s heavenly king. But now the decree goes forth: If the Son asks the LORD, he will give him all the nations as his inheritance and possession.

**How could he do this**, if he had willingly and legally given the nations to the sons of God? He won’t steal from them. God is holy. He will tell of a decree that will be

shrouded in mystery for a thousand years.<sup>16</sup> It starts with David. God took David and made him king of Israel. He then promises to David, “You made me the head of the nations; people whom I had not known served me” (Ps 18:43). This came true when David conquered them and took control of the full extent of the Promised Land. “I have made you leader and commander for the peoples” (Isa 55:4). But it was only typological. David never ruled Babylon or Egypt. Something more is needed.

This “something” is the coming of another Messiah in human flesh in future days as the Second Adam who does not fail where Adam and David fell short. This is terribly, critically important, not just for our salvation—for if man

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<sup>16</sup> **Going Deeper: Jesus and the Temptation by Satan.** *Originally part of the sermon, but taken out for time:* Satan must have read Psalm 2 very often, but the song was like a death march to him. He knew that some how the Son would inherit the nations. He didn’t know how, so he tried to beat the Father to the punch. “Bow down to me, and I will give you all the kingdoms of the earth” (Matt 4:8-9). This is the last and greatest temptation. Have you ever wondered why?

It is a very similar trick that he pulled in the Garden. Look, I know he gave you the kingship. So now exercise your God-given authority and make your first judicial decision. Become like one of us. Take your seat at the council. The trap was to take away what he already had, by making him think that he was exercising dominion, when in effect he was rebelling against the High King. With the devil, the trap was to take what was going to be given to him, but to do it this way, for who knows, maybe that’s how the decree was meant to be carried out, Jesus? But to fall here would have been to break the First Commandment, “You shall have no other God’s before me.” “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve’” (Matt 4:10).

is to be saved, man has to appease God and obey his law perfectly. But it is so that this decree could be carried out. For it was to Adam—The Man that dominion and rule and kingship was given on this earth. It was taken away as a curse, and given to others, who in turn returned it to some for their fealty and worship. This couldn't happen to the Son of God prior to becoming a human.

But in becoming man, in becoming the second Adam, the Son could receive legally what was his by virtue of his Deity, but which had been given to the created rulers by virtue of a curse. For the angels do not hold rights to this earth, not originally speaking. And if there is a Man who will stand where others have fallen, who will obey where others have sinned, who will do all that God requires, this Man will take Adam's place, and the Father will give him the whole earth.

So our Lord came, and at the start of his ministry he was baptized. This was his “anointing” as the Psalm says. This was the special work of the Holy Spirit. He took his official office as True Messiah, the Last Christ. At this baptism, the Father spoke from heaven as the Spirit descended and said, **“This is my beloved Son” (Matt 3:17)**. There is a semantic

overlap here with **Psalm 2:7** as well.

When Hebrews called Isaac the *monogenes* (“only-begotten”) son of Abraham, it had in mind **Genesis 22:2** which calls Isaac the “only” son of Abraham. The word is *yachiyd*. But the LXX does not use Hebrew’s word. Rather, it translates this with the word *agapantos*—“beloved.” Isaac is the “only-beloved” son in the LXX and the “only-begotten” son in Hebrews. Jesus is called at the baptism: the *agapantos*, the Beloved Son. And in Psalm 2 he is the “begotten” son. The ideas must not be separated. Especially when we consider the next words, “...in whom I am well pleased.” Why? Because Jesus is the perfect law-keeper of Psalm 1:1. He is The Man. He is The Son.<sup>17</sup>

It is as the Son of Man that the Son of God is allowed to take back the nations that were given to Adam at the beginning. This is how God disinherits the sons of God. This is how the Son of God, the Angel of the LORD inherits, not only Israel, but all the nations. This is in

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<sup>17</sup> **Augustine**’s comment on Psalm 1:1 and The Man are appropriate here, since the two Psalms are to be read together. “[The Man] should be understood as referring to our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, the Lord-man ... ‘who has not gone astray’ ... as did the earthly man who conspired with his wife, already beguiled by the serpent, to disregard God’s commandments.... Christ most certainly came in the way of sinners by being born as sinners are, but he did not stand in it, for worldly allurements did not hold him” (*EXPOSITIONS OF THE PSALMS* 1:1.).

fulfillment of the covenant to Abraham, to make him the father of many nations. This is how the Seed of the woman crushes the seed of the serpent. In becoming man, obeying Torah, and dying as a sacrifice, he undoes the curse of death, he defeats sin and Satan. He begins to make the nations his inheritance.

The book of Acts is one large commentary on this. Beginning in Jerusalem, then Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the world, when the nations are brought to Jerusalem at Pentecost, and tongues of fire make not many languages out of one, but one heard by many, it is the reversal of Babel. The Apostles begin the conquest against the gates of hell by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus, as we have heard even snippets from Stephen and Peter and Paul today. They go out from Jerusalem and proclaim the gospel to the 70 nations of the world, and the book of Acts finishes with the Apostles to the Gentiles—to the nations, sitting in Rome having finished his mission.

This is how the promise to “**break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel**” begins to be carried out. For first, the dashing is against the heavenly rulers, for this is where our struggle lies today, not against

flesh and blood. Three times the Revelation quotes this verse. Once for Christ's birth (**Rev 12:5**), in the context of a great and terrible battle against the supernatural dragon. Once in context of his victory at the end of the age (**Rev 19:15**) where he punishes his foes in the winepress of his fury.

The third time it is quoted to the church at Thyatira. "Hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star" (**Rev 2:26-28**).

Israel was taken by the LORD as his treasured possession and was given the title "firstborn son" (**Ex 4:22**). When Christ takes the nations, Paul calls Christians "sons of God" (**Rom 8:14-23**, etc.). This is not coincidental. Sons is the what Adam was called. Sons is what those particular angelic rulers are called. Jesus has defeated them and has given rule back to man, but not to all men. To those who keep his word, obey his law, and confess the Son.

This has all now happened. The nations are still being gathered. The sons of righteousness are still being called out of darkness, away from the spirit of disobedience and darkness. The captives are being set free. Jesus is ruling in heaven. Jesus will soon rule on earth.

Therefore, the final words of Psalm 2, which are about our beloved Lord Jesus Christ are more important than ever before. “Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O judges<sup>18</sup> of the earth” (Ps 2:10). Now, in our day, in our pride and arrogance, we have cast off the gods and most certainly God (so we think). We rule on our own authority apart from any divine help whatsoever (so we think). We are free. We are democracies. We know what’s best for ourselves. We have no one over us. We create our own laws. Psalm 2:1-3 still rings loudly.

Those who would seek to set themselves up today against the LORD and against his Messiah must be warned of these things. Who will tell them if we don’t? But how can we tell them if we are afraid of their tyrannical rule, rule

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<sup>18</sup> The message here is for men and not for the *archons*, hence a different Hebrew and Greek word for what the ESV has as ‘rulers’. The archons cannot be saved by Christ’s blood, for he is a man and not an angel.

that God just laughs at ... and mockery of his law, mockery that the Anointed scoffs at?

Jesus has won, and the kings of the earth must not “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” He is a God whose laughing turned to wrath and fury as he disinherited those beings that that tempted us and tyrannically ruled the kingdoms of the old world. But when God’s people are in such a stupor as this that we can’t think biblically any longer, that only a human-fallen next political Messiah can save us, woe to the Church.

We must recapture this story in our day even as individuals who are not rulers. “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.” He has a ring on his finger, and that ring says “King of kings and Lord of lords.” Kneel now and confess the son, lest you perish in the way. One never knows when he will decide that enough is enough with any one nation or with all of the nations or with any of us as individuals. He is gathering his elect from the four corners of the earth, but when that number is completed, he will return in judgment. Who are we to say how far or close that number is to completion? But that is the good news. His wrath is

held at bay in the death of Jesus Christ. And happy are all who take refuge in him.

Cited in an earlier footnote. Thoughts about Who was with Adam in the Garden. Eric J. Gilchrest, “Revelation 21-22 in Light of Jewish and Greco-Roman Utopianism (Brill, 2013), 196-97

people, ushering them safely into the land insofar as the people listen and obey, something they are prone not to do. Nevertheless, God’s presence and the presence of an angel assist the people into the locative-temporal utopia of the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

God’s presence is next promised to the people of Israel if they obey the laws set forth by God. In Lev 26:12 God says to the people that if they obey, “I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people.”

The presence of God in a cloud returns at the dedication of Solomon’s temple. At this time, the priests enter into the most holy place in order to put the ark of the covenant there, and upon exiting the holy of holies, “a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD” (1 Kgs 8:10b–11). Solomon recognizes that the Lord is now present in the temple and proclaims that he has built a house for the Lord that the Lord may dwell there forever (1 Kgs 8:13; cf. 6:13). God’s presence becomes a vitally important part of the story of the Hebrew Scripture with God repeatedly threatening to withdraw his presence from his people.<sup>326</sup>

In the Eden narrative as found in Genesis 2–3, there are a number of signals that God dwells in the midst of Adam and Eve and has a relationship with them that is of a very personal nature. First, in 2:16–17 God speaks directly to the couple in an unmediated fashion suggesting an intimate relationship. Second, in 2:19, it is God who creates and then brings each and every animal before Adam to be named. These animals are meant to act as a partner for Adam who is said to be alone. The scene recounts an exchange between two friends, God and Adam, the former of which is helping the other find companionship. That God assesses the situation and recognizes Adam’s aloneness suggests that the relationship between Adam and God was one that still required companionship of a different sort than God’s and Adam’s, but Adam nevertheless had a relationship of sorts with God. Third, after Adam and Eve eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Gen 3:8–9 says, “They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’” In this passage God takes on anthropomorphic characteristics by walking in the garden. Adam and Eve are even able

<sup>326</sup> Josephus also records the dedication of the temple and remarks concerning God’s presence (*Ant.* 8.1–129; esp. 102, 106–110, 114).

to hide from him. Clearly from the Genesis account, God dwells in the garden in a very real, perhaps tangible, way.

The presence of God in Eden is also noted in *2 En.* 8:3: “And in the midst [of a group of trees was] the tree of life, at that place where the Lord takes a rest when he goes into paradise.” In *2 Enoch*, paradise or Eden is located not on earth but in the third heaven perhaps making it that much more appropriate as a resting place for God given that God dwells in the heavens. But not only does God go to rest in paradise, so also do 300 angels who take care of it (8.8).<sup>327</sup>

God’s direct, unmediated presence, however, is not found in every Edenic description. For example, Ezekiel compares the city of Tyre to Eden. In this comparison the king of Tyre is placed in Eden “with an anointed cherub as guardian” (Ezek 28:14). The king does not, however, have unmediated access to God himself. Similarly, *Jubilees* retells the Eden narrative from Gen 2–3 with a significant difference. The only unmediated access to God found in this passage is when God curses Adam, Eve and the serpent for disobeying his earlier command, a command only related indirectly in the *Jubilees* account (3.23–25). One does not find an account of God bringing animals before Adam to be named. Nor is there any mention of God walking in the garden in the evening breeze. If the relationship between Adam and God is distanced, in its place *Jubilees* hints that Adam and Eve had a relationship with the angels of the garden, something not found in Genesis. The narrator of *Jubilees*, who is described as the “angel of the presence” (2.1), twice suggests he has a companionship with Adam and Eve, a companionship that is not explicitly found between the couple and God. In *Jub.* 2.9 the angel states that it was the angels who initially escorted Adam into the garden. And then later in *Jub.* 2.15, the angel states that “we gave him work and we were teaching him to do everything which was appropriate for tilling.” The act of teaching particularly suggests that the contact between Adam and the angels was more substantial than that of God and Adam since nowhere does *Jubilees* hint that Adam had such contact with God—a point that is clearly at odds with the Genesis account.<sup>328</sup>

<sup>327</sup> See also *2 En.* 31.1; 42.4; *3 En.* 5.1–5. Philo turns the tradition of God’s presence in Eden on its head by stating that God cannot be bound by his own creation, and thus one should read the Eden narrative allegorically (*Plant.* 32–35; cf. *Leg.* 1.43–44).

<sup>328</sup> There is, however, the statement in 8.19 that the garden of Eden is the “dwelling of the Lord,” but at no point does *Jubilees* connect this to dwelling with Adam (or Enoch who, according to *Jub.* 4.23–26, presently lives in Eden).