

STUDIES IN PSALMS

6. What is involved in the act of meditating?
7. In what way is the godly man like a tree?
8. No fruit—or little fruit and withered leaves is an indication of a lack—what is it?
9. Many ungodly men prosper—how shall we account for this?
10. Since we are all sinners what comfort is there in God's knowledge of our ways?

PSALM 2

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Messiah's Reign in Zion Assured.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, A Conspiracy against Jehovah and His Anointed Foretold. Stanza II., vers. 4-6, Jehovah's Counter Proclamation. Stanza III., vers. 7-9, The Messiah's Claim to the Throne. Stanza IV., vers. 10-12, Counsels of Peace.

(Nm.)

- 1 Wherefore have nations consented together?¹
or should peoples keep muttering an empty thing?
- 2 The kings of earth take their stand,
and grave men have sat in conclave together,²
against Jehovah and against his Anointed One:—
- 3 "Let us tear apart their bands,
and cast away from us their cords!"³
- 4 One enthroned in the heavens will laugh,
my Sovereign Lord will mock at them;
- 5 Then will he speak to them in his anger,
in in his wrath will dismay them:—

1. "So most probably from meaning of Heb. stem and context; 'rage'—A.V., R.V., J.P.S.V.,—'rage furiously'—P.B.V., 'tumultuously assemble'—R.V., Kirk., and so variously, most moderns, are not sustained by text or context"—Br.

2. "It is general rebellion against Jahve and His Anointed"—Del.

3. "They are, therefore, at the time of their rebellion subjects of Jahve and His Anointed"—Del.

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- 6 "Yet I have installed my king
on Zion¹ my holy mountain,²
let him tell my decree!"³
- 7 "Jehovah said to me:—
'My Son art thou,
I today have begotten thee:
8 Ask of me and let me give—
nations as thine inheritance,
and as thy possession the ends of the earth:
9 Thou shalt shepherd⁴ them with a sceptre of iron,⁵
as a potter's-vessel shalt thou dash them in pieces,'"
- 10 Now therefore ye kings show your prudence,
be admonished ye judges of earth:
11 Serve ye Jehovah with reverence,
and exult with trembling:
12 Kiss the Son,⁶ lest he be angry,
and ye perish on the way;
for soon might be kindled his anger.
How happy are all who take refuge in Him!

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

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What fools⁷ the nations are to rage against the Lord! How strange that men should try to outwit God!⁸

1. "Zion is mentioned as the royal seat of the Anointed One; there has he been installed, in order that he may reign there, and rule thence (110:2)"—Del.

2. "What is meant is the rising ground of the City of David (2 S. 5:7, 9, 1 K. 8:1), including Mount Moriah."—Del.

3. Thus, by two minute chances; by virtue of wh. this line is moved up from Stanza III. to Stanza II., giving it the position assigned to it in Sep.; "decree of Jehovah" is resolved into "my decree," the yod (), "my" having, it is assumed, been mistakenly regarded as the well-known abbreviation for "Jehovah"; thus clearing the sense, equalising the stanzas, and effectively introducing Messiah's declaration.

4. So it shd. be (w. Sept., Syr., Vul.)—Gn. "Rule as shepherd king over them, is more suited to the context of the sceptre, even if it be of iron; so 78:71, 72, cp. 28:9, 49:14, 80:1, 2 S. 5:2, 7:7, Jer. 3:15, Mi. 5:4, Eze. 37:24, Na. 3:18"—Br.

5. Cp. Rev. 12:5, 19:15.

6. So Del. w. strong defence. Others: "worship sincerely" (ml. "kiss purely"): but distinctly less satisfying to the context.

7. Implied; literally, "Why do the heathen rage?"

8. Literally, "meditate a vain thing."

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2 For a summit conference of the nations has been called to plot against the Lord and His Messiah, Christ the King.¹

3 "Come, let us break His chains," they say, "and free ourselves from all this slavery to God."

4 But God in heaven merely laughs! He is amused by all their puny plans.

5 And then in fierce fury He rebukes them and fills them with fear.

6 For the Lord declares,² "This is the King of My choice, and I have enthroned Him in Jerusalem, My holy city."³

7 His chosen One replies,² "I will reveal the everlasting purposes of God, for the Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son. This is Your Coronation Day.'⁴ Today I am giving You Your glory.'"

8 "Only ask, and I will give You all the nations of the world.

9 Rule them with an iron rod: smash them like clay pots!"

10 O kings and rulers of the earth, listen while there is time.

11 Serve the Lord with reverent fear; rejoice with trembling.

12 Fall down before His Son and kiss His feet² before His anger is roused and you perish. I am warning you—His wrath will soon begin. But, oh, the joys of those who put their trust in Him!

EXPOSITION

This psalm is obviously and confessedly Messianic. The word *messiah* of course means "anointed"—whether applied to David, Hezekiah, or Jesus of Nazareth. On what level this psalm is Messianic, whether on the lower or the higher level, remains to be seen; but Messianic it is, on its surface and down into its deepest depths. To ascertain its scope it must be carefully and correctly interpreted; and this at once raises the whole question of the Interpretation of Prophecy in general, and the exegesis of Messianic Prophecy in particular.

It is here assumed that much Scripture prophecy is *typical*, and therefore *indirect*; that is to say, that it first points to a type as foreshadowing some person or thing greater than itself. But it is *not* here assumed that there is no such thing as *direct*

1. Literally, "His anointed."

2. Implied.

3. Literally, "Upon Zion, My holy mountain."

4. Literally, "This day have I begotten You."

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prediction, going straight to its mark without the intervention of a type: we do not know that, and must not take it for granted.

To apply these principles to this first Messianic psalm: let us by all means give preference to the supposition that this psalm is *typically* prophetic; and see whether that hypothesis will carry us satisfactorily through the whole psalm, doing justice to all its leading statements: statements in any case poetical, but not necessarily extravagant,—save, it may be, apparently so, when intended to go beyond the type to the antitype.

Now the most striking thing in this psalm is the concerted opposition of certain enemies to *Jehovah and his Anointed One*; and, next to that, the unique way in which that opposition is overthrown—by counter Divine Proclamation. Who is Jehovah's Anointed One? It is David, or Hezekiah, or Jesus of Nazareth? Whoever he is, Divine Sonship as well as Messiahship is attributed to him. Whoever he is, his destiny includes the dominion of the world.

Doubtless, David in his time and degree was Jehovah's Anointed One; but will the language of the psalm, as a whole, apply to him and find reasonable satisfaction in him? Or, if not in *him*, then in Hezekiah, or in both combined? But if the two combined—with any other scion of the royal house added to them—still fail to satisfy the outlook of the psalm,—then on what principle are we to be restrained from applying to Jesus of Nazareth the whole psalm, provided we can fairly show that it has been, or is now being, or will certainly yet be exhaustively fulfilled in him?

In point of fact, these two famous Hebrew monarchs do fit the terms of the psalm remarkably well—up to a point; and then completely fail to satisfy them. Both David and Hezekiah were triumphantly enthroned in Zion; both had enemies who were set aside or overthrown; and both had extensive dominion. Moreover, in a very singular way, both these kings answer to the statement, *Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee*. For the "day" referred to can scarcely be an ordinary birthday; seeing that, save in high ceremonial, it is not customary solemnly to accost children on the day of their birth. Hence the probability is, that the "day" alluded to here is the day on which something took place comparable to a birth, so as to make such a speech appropriate. Now, certainly it might look rather magiloquent to say of David, that on the day when Nathan the prophet (2 S. 7) revealed to him the royal destiny of his de-

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scendants, to whom He—Jehovah—would become a “Father,”—that, on that very day, Jehovah virtually said, “Thou art my son! this day, by my supreme decree, have I begotten thee to this sonly, regal office.” It may; and yet there is something remarkable in it. Still more remarkable, when the representation is transferred to Hezekiah, who was raised up from the very gates of death to be more firmly than ever seated as king on Jehovah’s holy mountain. This, in all candour, must be confessed, even though we hesitate to say with Thirtle, O.T.P. 142: “The new life that was given to Hezekiah, simultaneously with the discomfiture of the Assyrian host, justifies these remarkable words—words of resurrection.” They are indeed words *typical* of resurrection!

But, with all this frankly admitted, it must be maintained that these and other incidents in the Davidic House are simply beggared by the language of the psalm. It is questionable whether the opening scene of the psalm found more than a partial realisation in either of the lives we have so far been considering; but, in any case, neither David nor Hezekiah asked and received *universal dominion*—which, however, is writ large on the psalm, and cannot be erased by any legitimate plea of poetic license. Besides, we shall probably do well to guard against bulking out and hardening the type in order to make it as large as the language, fairly interpreted, appears to indicate: in other words we must beware of assuming that the Spirit of Prophecy could not easily carry away the psalmist’s mind far beyond any type that was within range of his vision. Let us use types as helps and not as hindrances. We need have no craving to *add* to the letters of the typical alphabet; but the free Spirit of God may well be expected sometimes to combine those letters in unprecedented forms, and so spell out revelations which have never before been divulged.

If these things are so, then we must beware of inferring that because a clearly foretold event did not happen in the type, therefore it will not be fulfilled in the antitype; or that, seeing it is attenuated to mere shadow in the type, therefore it has no further significance. For example, the appearance of the semblance of a New Birth which we have detected in the life of David, and the still more striking semblance of a New Birth easily seen in the sickness and recovery of Hezekiah, should not blind us to the comparative feebleness of the fulfillment on either

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of these lines. David himself was not declared Jehovah's Son by Nathan the prophet: neither did David, that we know of, ever say to Jehovah, in the gushing tide of the spirit of adoption, "Abba! Father!" It was, indeed, foretold that he should so address the Most High (89:26); but we have no record that he ever actually did so. In like manner, there are circumstances which obviously enfeeble the fulfillment of the psalm in Hezekiah, who, for example, was Jehovah's king in Zion for years before he passed under the shadow of death and resurrection: and who greatly as he loved Jehovah,—as he had much reason to love him,—yet never ventured to call him his Father, so far as the records show.

To go back from the centre of the psalm to its beginning, and remarking that it opens with the unmasking of a conspiracy between kings and nations against Jehovah and his Anointed,—why should we close our eyes to the plain fact, that the Assyrian invasion was not such a *conspiracy*, but merely one of the ordinary doings of an Oriental despot? Then, turning in the other direction from the centre of the psalm, and glancing forward to the *iron sceptre* that was to dash enemies to pieces *like potters' vessels*,—ought we not to be quite sure of our ground before—even under guise of high-flown poetry—we conclude such absoluteness of rule to have been here encouraged in either David or Hezekiah?

On all hands, then, we see abounding indications that a Greater than either David or Hezekiah is here. And therefore we point with confidence to that Greater One as the Hero of this psalm. The conspiracy of the Nations—though it may have been often attempted—has not yet been brought to a head; and, although the Heir to the Throne has appeared, and been saluted as Divine Son on the day of his literal Resurrection (Acts 13:30-32), yet has he not at present been installed on Jehovah's holy mount of Zion. When he is brought forth from his hiding-place in heaven (Col. 3:3, Acts 3:21) then *the kings and judges of the earth* will need *show* all their *prudence*; for, assuredly, the *iron sceptre* that will appear in his hand will be no meaningless symbol, but will stand for what it naturally means,—absolute, resistless physical force, which is far more fittingly entrusted to immortal hands than to mortal. Yes! this psalm is Messianic; but on the higher level. The astounding pledge already given by the literal resurrection of the Messiah from the dead, assures us that in due time the entire psalm, in all its length and breadth,

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will be amply fulfilled, not as mere grandiloquent speech, but in commensurate and therefore amazing facts.

We are indebted to Delitzsch for calling attention to the obvious but much overlooked circumstance, that those kings and counsellors who are discovered in rebellion when the psalm opens, have already come under obligation to Jehovah and to his Anointed One. They are already under the restraints of duty to Jehovah and to his Christ; since it is under those restraints that they turn restive, against those restraints that they rebel.

There is food for thought here. Indeed, we are so impressed with the possibility of framing out of this element in the psalm an *eirenicon* which may be welcomed by expositors who have differed among themselves as to the character and incidence of the Messiah's predicted kingdom, that we pause here just long enough to remind ourselves that, although Prophecy (if it have any definiteness in its inception) cannot need to await fulfillment before it takes on a reliable meaning, yet may most naturally and legitimately assume a clearer and yet clearer intention as fulfillment advances.

To apply this thought: It follows that, if Jesus of Nazareth is the Anointed One of this psalm; and if the day of his resurrection was the day of his being begotten to their Heirship of the Davidic dynasty; then it may be reasonably anticipated that, whether fulfillment has lingered or has greatly advanced since Jesus rose from the dead,—at least we ought to begin to see our way more and more clearly as to how to interpret the Messianic Prophecies as a class.

It is just at this point that Delitzsch's simple and obvious reminder flashes like a beacon-light across the troubled waters of Messianic Interpretation. The movements of our labouring oar are facilitated by the following encouraging considerations:— Since this psalm was written (*a*) other similar ones have been penned, such as—notably—that strictly cognate psalm, the 110th, which may be expected to throw light on this; (*b*) a part fulfillment of this psalm has confessedly been witnessed in the Messiah's Resurrection, and in the broad facts consequent on that outstanding event, such as his ascension to the right hand of God. (*c*) The notorious negative fact arrests our attention, that no one imagines that the Risen Messiah is now in any special sense reigning in and from Mount Zion in Palestine. Is it too much to hope that, by advancing on these lines, substantial progress in Messianic exegesis may be made?

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(a) The very first helpful suggestion actually comes from Ps. 110. There we discover a link missing from this second psalm—that is, if we have but opened our eyes to miss it here. Clear as a sunbeam, it is written in Ps. 2 that Jehovah's derision of the rebels there revealed simply consists in the announcement of an accomplished fact; which accomplished fact constitutes such a counter-movement to the conspiracy as to reduce it to ridicule—*that*, in a word, is how Jehovah in heaven *laughs* at this conspiracy: he has already taken a step which nullifies all the counsels of the grave men, all the stand of kings, all the gathering of the nations; he has already installed his King on Zion his holy mountain! The implication is: That Zion's King will make decisive work with the conspirators! And the further implication is: That the rebels little dreamed how Heaven was prepared to deride their plot. And yet all the while, beforehand, these selfsame conspirators had been bound by the *bands* and *cords* of obligation to Jehovah and his Anointed One! How can this be explained?

Quite easily—taking Ps. 110 as our guide. It will be seen from our Exposition of that psalm, that we conclude its natural meaning to be, that the elevation of the Messiah to Jehovah's right hand in heaven out of the midst of his enemies, and his session above, run on until he descends to his centre of subduing activity on Mount Zion. That explains everything; inasmuch as the seat of honour at Jehovah's right hand is not a mere seat of honour, but a heavenly enthronement; David's lord is seated at Jehovah's right hand as jointly regnant with him. He is, as he himself expresses it (Rev. 3:21), sitting during all this waiting interval (Heb. 10:13) on his Father's throne. That fact unlocks the difficulty which just now appeared in the 2nd psalm. It is during the joint session of the Son with the Father in heaven that these kings, senators and nations were brought under those obligations to Jehovah and his Anointed One from which they ultimately desire to break loose.

All of which presents the current proclamation of the Gospel in a light which, if not new, is more widely illuminative than it has been deemed heretofore. It thus appears that the appointed current proclamation of "the Gospel of the Kingdom" of which we read in Mt. 24:14, not only serves as a testimony that earth's rightful King is coming, but by its intrinsic force, as news of salvation to men, binds kings, senators and nations with "bonds"

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and "cords" from which they can by no means escape. Men may hear the Gospel or they may forbear; but they can never be quite the same as if they had not heard it. These kings and nations must have heard the Gospel; they must have heard the story of Crucified Love and of Death-Vanquishing Power; and been admonished to amend their ways, and their laws—to reign in righteousness—to undo heavy burdens—to educate their subjects for the Immortal Life. As the result of Antichrist's seductions, however, they grow tired of these restraints, and they rebel. The conspiracy into which they enter comes to a head *before* the Divine Installation of a King in Zion is known. The announcement of that startling fact—that is how Jehovah will laugh at them. Well may they be admonished to beware, and show their prudence.

The discerning will not fail to perceive how essential a part is played in the above interpretation by the assumption that, in the Psalms, Zion means Zion—the earthly Zion, a part of and frequently synonymous with the historical city Jerusalem. It is on the strength of this assumption that, in the second psalm, it could be supposed that the same rebels as were aware of the Messiah's heavenly reign on the throne of the Father, and so had come under allegiance to Jehovah and his Anointed,—in that sense and to that degree,—were at the same time and up to that moment unaware that Jehovah had now recently installed his Christ on his holy hill of Zion. It is the absolute difference between the two enthronements which renders it possible for men to have been rendering nominal homage to the one, and yet be in absolute ignorance of the other. It is the sudden announcement of the earthly enthronement, which renders their conspiracy an object of Divine derision. Accustomed to do as they pleased in governing or misgoverning their subjects, fearless of eternal issues to be tried before an invisible throne, they are suddenly confronted by a counter Divine movement, evidently and utterly subversive of their rebellious schemes, with the prospect of their being called to account by this newly installed monarch who wields an iron scepture and holds a commission where necessary to dash his enemies in pieces like a potter's vessel. In like manner, the same assumption—that Zion in the Old Testament means the earthly Zion—is vital to our exegesis of Ps. 110. It is that, and that only, which resolves ver. 1 of that psalm into an invitation to the Messiah to come

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out of the midst of his earthly enemies; and ver. 2 into a commission to return into their midst, for the purpose of demanding their submission.

Under these circumstances, it is manifestly desirable that each reader should confront this question for himself, and if possible once for all settle it:—Is the Zion of the Psalms practically identical with the historical city of Jerusalem? The highest court of appeal is the usage of the name in the very book we are seeking to interpret. The name “Zion” occurs in the following places in the Psalter, namely:—2:6, 9:11, 14, 14:7, 20:2, 48:2, 11, 12, 50:2, 51:18, 53:6, 65:1, 69:35, 74:2, 76:2, 78:68, 84:7, 87:2, 5, 97:8, 99:2, 102:13, 16, 21, 110:2, 125:1, 126:1, 128:5, 129:5, 132:13, 133:3, 134:3, 135:21, 137:1, 3, 146:10, 147:12, 149:2. It would be unreasonable to expect that all these examples should be demonstrative as to the point at issue: it will suffice, to render the appeal conclusive, that (a) there should be no instances where plainly “Zion” cannot be identical with the earthly Jerusalem; and (b) that there should be a large number in which an alleged reference to a heavenly Zion would bring the Holy Scriptures into ridicule. This reference to a “heavenly” Jerusalem is suggested by a few allusions in the New Testament which name a Jerusalem which is so distinguished: as to which it is obvious to remark that the very term “heavenly” presupposes an earthly Jerusalem to which a contrastive allusion is made; and further that such qualifying term is never found in the Old Testament. The Psalms, in particular, know nothing of a Zion or a Jerusalem in heaven. It would seem like an insult to readers of ordinary intelligence to remind them of such decisive phrases as “Go about Zion,” “wherein thou didst make thy habitation,” “and his lair in Zion hath been placed,” “Zion heard and was glad,” “Thou wilt arise and have compassion upon Zion,” “Jehovah hath built up Zion,” “turned the fortunes of Zion.” Plainly it is the earthly Zion that is intended; and it is fearlessly submitted that there is nothing demonstrative on the other side.

It will conduce to perfect fairness of exegesis, and at the same time lead on to a becoming conclusion to our present study, to call attention to an attractive hortatory element in this psalm which it would be a misfortune to overlook. There is a gracious, subduing light which falls back on the earlier portions of the psalm from the closing stanza, in which the poet is led to fill the part of a kindly monitor. In the opening verses the mutter-

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ings of enemies are heard; then comes Jehovah's counter-proclamation in tones of thunder, alarming in the last degree; the terror naturally caused by such a warning of wrath is seen to be abundantly justified when the Son rehearses his commission, which includes stern rule, in some cases at least issuing in utter destruction. Now, although it would be a very hasty exegesis to infer that none of the Son's enemies will relent, or relenting and suing for mercy will notwithstanding be destroyed; yet it is most acceptable to perceive in the poet's mind a yearning for the salvation of those who have been seen in imminent danger of rushing on to ruin. For *that* is clearly the spirit at work in the entire conclusion of the psalm; and when the peculiar perils of kings and senators are remembered—with few or none above them to represent and enforce Divine claims—it is especially grateful to us to recognise the wooing note which is directly addressed to them, entreating them to show prudence and accept of admonition. It reminds us of our own Scripture which assures us that God willeth all men to be saved—even though they are such as are “in eminent station,” wielding authority over us. But the Divine Father is, as our own Scriptures assure us, jealous of any withholding of worshipful honour from the Son of his Love; and we are therefore predisposed to value at its highest rendering the pointed appeal of Jehovah that such honour be accorded; and, moreover, to interpret the wrath looming against such as withhold it as the Father's wrath; and the refuge into which they are pronounced happy who flee as the refuge which, according to the whole tenor of the Psalms, Jehovah is ready to become to all who seek refuge in Him.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Please read Acts 4:23-28 for an inspired interpretation and application of this psalm.
2. Just when and where have or will verses 3 through 5 be fulfilled?
3. Would it be possible to consider the church as “the kingdom” and therefore find all aspects of this psalm fulfilled in the present reign of the King of Kings?
4. Please offer an interpretation of verse 9 that is satisfactory to you.
5. There is a warning in verses 10 through 12; explain this warning in the context of the whole psalm.

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6. Consider this brief interpretation of this psalm by Harrison Matthews:

WHY DO THE HEATHEN RAGE? Psalm 2

SETTING

David had lived among the heathen for ten long years (at Ziklag among the Philistines). Now Saul was dead and David had returned home. The heathen had dreamed of the utter destruction of Israel and now a new king had arisen, one who had lived among them. We can well imagine their confusion and consternation and even rage. How could they understand the tie that bound together the people of God?

This Psalm is David's cry of victory. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh." How sweet was the victory. Blessed are all they that put their trust in the Lord.

THE RULERS TAKE COUNSEL TOGETHER vrs. 1-3

How often have the rulers of the earth taken counsel together to defeat the purposes of God? The kingdom of Israel was a constant source of irritation to the heathen nations round about. Its God was too strict. Its laws were too narrow. Its faith gave its men a zeal in battle that was almost fanatical. How could they counsel together to destroy this nation?

HE THAT SITTETH IN THE HEAVENS SHALL LAUGH vrs. 4-6

Try to see this through the eyes of David. How often had his faith cried out in previous years, but now he is seeing the workings of God's plan. He wasn't rejected of God at all. God sits in his heavens and has in derision those who would attempt to defeat his purposes. David had been promised the kingdom and now God had set him upon the holy hill of Zion.

THOU ART MY SON vrs. 7-9

This is the great declaration. The Lord hath said, "Thou art my son; ask and thou shalt receive." How the heart of David must have cried out in joy and happiness. He who had been so despised was now declared the son of God. You will see the promise of the Messiah in this passage.

BE INSTRUCTED vrs. 10-12

Be wise now; be instructed; serve the Lord with fear; rejoice with trembling. Can you think of any greater admonition than this? Has not our Lord said, "They shall all be taught of God"? Faith demands that David express his trust in the Lord. Blessed are all who put their trust in the Lord.