

Psalm 2 "When the Lord Laughs" [**\[1\]](#)

Main Idea: The four scenes in Psalm 2 tell us plainly what to do when the nations rage.

- I. Scene #1: We see man's rebellion (1-3).
 - A. Here are the guilty parties (1-2a).
 1. It involves the nations.
 2. It involves their leaders.
 - B. Here is their devious plot (2b-3).
 1. They resist the Lord.
 2. They resist the Lord's anointed.
- II. Scene #2: We see God's rule (4-6).
 - A. He's ruling in heaven (4a).
 - B. He's not pleased with what He sees on earth (4b-5).
 - C. He's installed His own King (6).
- III. Scene #3: We see the Son's reign (7-9).
 - A. Here's a description of the King (7).
 1. He is God's Son.
 2. He is begotten of God.
 - B. Here's a declaration concerning the King (8-9).
 1. He will inherit the nations (8).
 2. He will rule the nations (9).
- IV. Scene #4: We see the right response (10-12).
 - A. Here's what leaders should do (10-12a).
 1. Stop the nonsense (10).
 2. Serve the Lord (11).
 3. Submit to the Son (12).
 - B. Here's what everyone should do (12b).
 1. Don't resist the King any longer.

2. Rather, put your trust in Him.

The Bottom Line: The choice is yours...

1. You can bow before the King now.
2. You will certainly bow before the King later.

"You know, to bomb a church is easy."

Now there's a sentence that grabs your attention. It sure did mine a couple of weeks ago as I read the opening words of a recorded interview with a converted Muslim in *Voice of the Martyrs*.^[2] The article didn't give the man's real name, for security purposes, but called him "Abdulmasi."

According to his own admission, Abdulmasi was raised in Nigeria on a steady diet of Islam and hatred for Christianity. "I was called Mr. Insecticide," says Abdulmasi. "I was the only one who could organize the killing of insects, the killing of Christians. When you are looking for someone to get rid of insects, then you call me, then I arrange and plan an attack against Christians. That was my life."

In the 1970s, Abdulmasi specialized in bombing churches and killing Christians. He was an expert in car bombs, riot planning, and infiltrating Christian organizations. He was (as the article puts it) "the James Bond of Islamic terrorism."

I'll tell you what happened to Abdulmasi later in this message, but now I want to show you something that brings the word jihad a little closer to home. Since tomorrow is Flag Day in our country and you're going to see a lot of flags in our community, I thought I'd show you a special flag. It was one year ago on June 26, 2009 that the flag I am holding flew over Afghanistan in my honor onboard a B-1B by the 9th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron. My brother, Matt, sent it to me last year while he was serving in Iraq as a part of Operation Enduring Freedom. The flag stays in my study as a reminder of my brother and other men and women of our country's armed forces who are placing their lives in harm's way.

And why are they doing it? Because of the Abdulmasi's of the world. I'm grateful for those who are defending our nation from terrorists like Abdulmasi. I'm even more grateful that Christ has the power to transform terrorists as He did with Abdulmasi, as I'll share later.

This morning I want us to meditate on the message of Psalm 2. I'm convinced we need Psalm 2. Psalm 2 begins by asking a pertinent question, "Why do the nations conspire (KJV 'rage') and the peoples plot in vain?"

The nations are raging these days. Why do the nations rage? And what does God think about the raging? Yes, He is in control. This is His world, and He rules it with His sovereign hand. But why doesn't He do something about the raging?

Actually, there's a deeper problem. It's not simply that nations fight each other. Ultimately, the nations are at odds with the Sovereign Lord Himself. Which nation on this planet is truly seeking to please its Maker? Is there one? No, there is not.

How does it affect God when He sees the nations in turmoil? How does He respond when He observes His creatures conspiring against Him?

The answer may surprise you. The fact is, *He laughs*. That's what Psalm 2:4 says that He does. In Psalm 2 we see the nations raging and God laughing. But why does He laugh? And why does He want us to know that He laughs? Furthermore, how should we respond when we see the nations raging against God and His Son and against us as His people?

I think it's significant that when the first Christians faced their first taste of persecution, they turned to Psalm 2 for help (see Acts 4:25-26). It was Psalm 2 that Peter and John leaned on to shape their congregational prayer when the authorities tried to silence their witness for Christ.

There are four scenes in this important, perspective-shaping psalm.

I. Scene #1: We see man's rebellion (1-3).

"Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. 'Let us break their chains,' they say, 'and throw off their fetters.'"

You'll notice no introductory title for Psalm 2.^[3] We're not told the human author's name, although Peter and James attributed it to David in Acts 4:25. The psalm begins with a question of amazement: *Why do the nations conspire*["rage" in the KJV] *and the peoples plot in vain?*

It's unthinkable. Why would people want to live in God's world and yet refuse to submit to Him? Of all the nerve!

It would be like me coming to your house, uninvited, and helping myself to the food in your refrigerator, plopping down on your sofa, then taking the remote from your hands and watching your television, all the while acting as though you weren't even there!

Sounds crazy, but it happens every day on this planet. People conspire against God in God's own world. You say, "Who does that?" The psalmist tells us in verses 1-2.

A. Here are the guilty parties (1-2a). There are two guilty parties involved in the rebellion.

1. *It involves the nations.* "Why do the *nations* conspire?" Who are the nations? The Hebrew term is *goyim*. It refers to the Gentiles, the pagan nations that surrounded the country of Israel. But the rebellion involves a second guilty party, not just the nations, but also...

2. *It involves their leaders.* Verse 2 says, "The *kings* of the earth take their stand and the *rulers* gather together."

Psalm 2 is a *royal* Psalm (as are Psalms 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, 144).^[4] The royal Psalms were used by the people of Israel when they crowned a new king. In fact, Psalm 2 may have been used on David's Coronation day, the day God gave him the throne in Jerusalem.

But not everybody rejoiced when Israel got a new king. The surrounding nations that had been subject to Israel saw the leadership change as an opportunity to make a break. Then as now, political transitions are times of potential shakeup.

And so the nations conspired and plotted. What did they come up with?

B. Here is their devious plot (2b-3). In a word, it's called *rebellion*. And don't miss the emphasis in verse 2 on "together." The rulers gather *together*. This is an organized, intentional plot. The nations and the leaders decided to rebel.

Against whom? Against two authorities...

1. *They resist the Lord.* And secondly...

2. *They resist the Lord's anointed.* You can't see the Lord, but you can see His "Anointed one," the one to whom He delegated His authority to rule on earth.

Just who is the Lord's "Anointed One?" The Old Testament refers to Israel's kings as "anointed one" (small "a")^[5], but they were merely shadows of *the* Anointed One (capital "A") who was to come.

The Hebrew is *Meshiach* from which we get the English term "Messiah." The Greek equivalent in the New Testament is *Christos* or "Christ."

It's not coincidental that the New Testament quotes Psalm 2 frequently. The regional rebellion that occurred when Israel crowned a new king merely foreshadowed the world-wide rebellion that occurred when God sent King Jesus into the world.

What is the attitude of the people of this world towards the Creator God and His Messiah? They reject them both, says verse 3! "Let us break their chains,' they say, 'and throw off their fetters.'"

To summarize, here's scene one. The pagan kings and rulers hold a secret conference. They scheme. They devise a rebellious plan. The majority rules. And what unites the majority? Their common rejection of the rule of God.

"We don't want the God of Israel, and His Anointed, ruling over us!" they say. That's the way it was in the psalmist's day. It's no different in ours, is it?

Right here is the attitude of the world towards God, God's Son, and God's Word. The world says, "We want to run our own lives. We don't need God. His Word is not our authority. And we certainly don't want His Son to rule over us. We want to call our own shots."

Just think about it. For the most part, people don't care if you talk about "God" in general terms. Why not? It's because people tend to define "God" in their own terms anyway. An abstract "God" doesn't threaten anyone. He can get even you a few votes, as politicians have learned. How many political speeches have you heard that referred to "God" in the abstract?

But what happens when you bring up "Jesus" in a conversation, and tell people they need to know Him? "Don't preach at me!" they say. "You're narrow minded!" they accuse.

What's the difference? You can't easily "redefine" Jesus. His claims are in black and white in the Word of God. He said He was the Messiah, the *only* Messiah. And His claims force us to make a decision. You're either going to agree with Jesus or disagree with Him. You're going to receive Him or reject Him. There's no middle ground.

In his book, *More Than a Carpenter*, Josh McDowell asks the question, "How is Jesus different from other religious leaders? Why don't the names of Buddha, Mohammed, and Confucius offend people? The reason is that these others didn't claim to be God, but Jesus did. That is what makes Him so different from other religious leaders."^[6]

Some would say, "Well I believe Jesus was a great moral man, a model example to emulate. But I can't buy the fact that He is God, and that I need to trust Him with my life."

But that's the point, isn't it? Jesus didn't claim to be a great man. He claimed to be the Son of God, the one and only Messiah. And that's an offensive claim to rebel sinners. That's why they nailed Him to the Tree.

I'm reminded of an episode at Jesus' trial described in John 19. Pilate said to the Jews (14), "Here is your king!" But the crowd shouted (15), "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify Him!" Pilate returned (15b), "Shall I crucify your king?" To which the chief priests scoffed (15c), "We have no king but Caesar." And so they rejected the Lord and the Lord's anointed.

That's scene #1, man's rebellion. Now scene #2.

II. Scene #2: We see God's rule (4-6).

The psalmist tells us three things about God in verses 4-6...

A. He's ruling in heaven (4a). Verse 4 begins, "The One enthroned in heaven." What a description of God! He's the One on the throne, not on earth but in heaven. He is *the Ruler* of this universe.

What's He doing? Sitting on His throne. That's right. He is *seated* on a throne, indicating total control. He's not threatened, or worried, or caught off guard by men's rebellion against Him.

Is that how you view God? It's good to remember this when everybody else is wringing their hands. God is on the throne. He's *seated* on His throne, ruling in heaven!

B. He's not pleased with what He sees on earth (4b-5). How do we know? The psalmist tells us how the Lord responds when He sees the nations rage. The text states: "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath."

We're told that God does four things in response to man's rebellion. First, He *laughs*. Does God have a sense of humor? You have to admit when you look at this world from God's perspective, the actions of mankind look pretty ridiculous!

God created us. Yet what have we done? We have devised an elaborate system known as evolution to explain our existence apart from God.

God gave us His Word, and told us it is the blueprint for abundant life. But what do we often do with God's Word? We think we know more than God, and rely on our own ingenuity.

God offers us the free gift of salvation, and invites us to trust in His Son. But what do we often do? We reject God's offer. We'd rather trust in ourselves rather than admit our need for Him.

No wonder the Lord laughs! Not because He thinks it's funny but because it's so foolish.

Just think what these words must sound like to the One who gave us life: "I'll get serious about my need for God later. I've got more important things I want to do first." It really is comical to see how hard finite beings try to prove they can live without the Infinite One! Psalm 37:13 says, "But the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming."

But laughing isn't God's only response. The text mentions some other activities. When rebels resist the Lord, He "scoffs at them [KJV, "shall have them in derision"]." In addition, He "rebukes them in his anger." And thirdly, He "terrifies them in his wrath [or "vex them in His great displeasure," as the KJV puts it]."

The next thing God does is significant. What would you expect God to do to people that shook their fists in His face and said, "We don't want You to rule over us!?" You would expect God to take action, wouldn't you? And that's what He did. He took action. What kind of action?

C. He's installed His own King (6). Here are the Lord's own words, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill."

The "I" is emphatic. Who put the King in place? God says, "I did," and calls Him "*My King*." So if you reject the King God put in place who ultimately are you rejecting? God Himself.

Let that sink in. Who said that Jesus is King? God did. And where did God say He installed His King? On Zion, my holy hill.

Please don't miss that. In this day of rising anti-Semitism, notice carefully what God announced. Where did God choose to establish the reign of His chosen King? The place He calls "my holy hill," a

synonym for the Temple Mount, in Zion, a reference to Jerusalem.

2000 years ago, God revealed His anointed King. But the world didn't recognize Him. When Jesus Christ entered the gates of Jerusalem, and walked into the Temple court, the Jewish nation didn't recognize Him. John 1:11 records, "He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him."

The first scene was man's rebellion, the second God's rule. In scene #3...

III. Scene #3: We see the Son's reign (7-9).

In verse 7 the chosen King speaks, "I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He [that's God] said to me [that's a reference to the King], 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'"

That's intriguing. Psalm 2 is about a King. But Psalm 2 is also about a Son, God's Son. Just who is this Son who is King?

To answer that, we need some background. The position of "king" in Israel was much different from our American concept of president. There was a strong association between the Israelites and the king. The king was the people's representative before God.

In 2 Samuel 7 God established a covenant with David. In verse 8 God explains, "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel.'"

God chose a shepherd boy, David, to be the *ruler* of His chosen people. But that's not all. He also gave David an amazing promise concerning his descendants.

Listen to verses 11-14, "The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. *I will be his father and he will be my son.*"

Don't miss those final words. Every anointed king of Israel, from David onward, was considered to be an adopted son of God. God called the king His "son." The word "son" did not indicate deity for them, but royalty.

And so David's son, Solomon, was God's *son* (small "s"). As was his son, Rehoboam, and his son, Abijah, and his son, Asa, and so on. They were all viewed as God's "sons" (small "s").

But they weren't God's *Son* (capital "S"). No, the "sons" were merely links in the messianic chain between David and *The Son*, the Son who would be King forever."^[7]

Which Son is the ultimate fulfillment of Psalm 2? Who is *The Son* and *The King*? The answer is *Jesus*, right? But how do we know?

For starters, we know because the New Testament writers say so. I mentioned earlier that Psalm 2 is one of the most cited Old Testament texts in the New Testament. The writer of Hebrews quoted Psalm 2:7 twice (in Heb 1:5 & 5:5). Paul referred to the same text in his speech recorded in Acts 13:32-33.

But the language in Psalm 2 itself indicates that this psalm is looking ahead to a unique king, indeed, the King of kings. Concerning this King we're given two things in verses 7-9.

A. Here's a description of the King (7). "I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'"

What's true of this King? First of all...

1. *He is God's Son.* Remember these words? "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased (Matthew 3:17)." The Father spoke those words concerning Jesus at His baptism.^[8] The King of kings is God's Son. Furthermore...

2. *He is begotten of God.* "Today I have become your Father ["have I begotten thee," as the KJV renders the phrase]."

Yes, God called the kings of Israel His "sons" (small "s"). He adopted them. But when the nation went into captivity in Babylon in 586 B.C., and when they no longer had a king on the throne, they began looking for *The Son*, the Messiah (see Dan 9:29). For five centuries they waited. Until finally *The Son* entered history.

For God so loved the world that He gave His *only begotten Son* (John 3:16). Who is the King of kings? It is God's Son, the only begotten Son of God. That's the description God Himself gives of His chosen King in verse 7.

What did God say His King would do? He tells us in verses 8-9.

B. Here's a declaration concerning the King (8-9). "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery."

What did God say His King would do? Two things...

1. *He will inherit the nations (8).* Inherit what? The *nations*. That's right. The same nations that conspired and plotted in verse 1. And the same ones that took their stand against Him in verse 2. What will He do with them?

2. *He will rule the nations (9).* With what? An iron scepter.^[9]

Beloved, when the nations rage, remember this. Jesus *is* King. And when the nations band together in their anti-God campaign, don't forget this. Jesus will rule the nations.

That truth will change your perspective on politics if you grasp it. It did Peter and John in Acts 4, as I mentioned at the outset. Peter and John were arrested for preaching in the name of Jesus (3). The authorities said, "Don't speak in the name of Jesus any longer (17-18)!"

But the apostles refused to keep silent (20). In fact, when Peter and John returned to the church, they called for a special "prayer service". In their prayer they cited an Old Testament passage. Guess which one it was? Psalm 2! In fact, I encourage you to read their prayer in Acts 4:24-30.

Who did the apostles say rejected Jesus? The Jewish rulers did (26). Herod did when he tried to kill the baby Jesus (27). Pontius Pilate did (27). And the people of Israel did (27).

Listen. When Jesus came to the earth 2000 years ago, what response did He find? The very response predicted in Psalm 2. He met a world that said in clear terms, "We don't want You to be our King! We don't want You to rule over us!"

Was God surprised? No. In his prayer to God Peter and John said, "They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen."

It changes your perspective when you know who's in control. To borrow from the hymnwriter: "Rejoice the Lord is King, your Lord and King adore! Rejoice, give thanks, and sing, and triumph evermore. Lift up your heart, lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!" And that brings us to scene #4.

IV. Scene #4: We see the right response (10-12).

How should we respond to the King of kings? The psalmist tells us. First...

A. Here's what leaders should do (10-12a). They need to make three decisions...

1. *Stop the nonsense (10).* "Therefore, you kings [the same ones that stood against Him in verse 2], be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth."

In other words, enough of the foolishness! Stop this nonsense of resisting God and His chosen King!

2. *Serve the Lord (11).* "Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling." Don't resist Him. Serve Him. That's what the King deserves from us.^[10]

3. *Submit to the Son (12).* "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment."

I don't believe that "kiss" here is a sign of affection. Here it means to "pay homage." It's an expression of submission to a sovereign.^[11] *Kiss the Son.*

The word translated "Son" in verse 12 is Aramaic (*bar*) rather than Hebrew. Why would that be? Think about it. To whom is the psalmist talking in verses 10-12? The kings and rulers of the nations around Israel, the ones that plotted to rebel in verse 1. David addresses them in the language they'd understand, Aramaic.

The command is clear. "You'd better give God's Son the place He deserves in your life!" Stop the nonsense, serve the Lord, and submit to the Son.

What happens if you don't? Verse 12, "LEST He be angry, and you be destroyed." What you do with *The King* is serious business. And this isn't just for leaders.

B. Here's what everyone should do (12b). "Blessed are all who take refuge in him." My friend, this is for you whether you are a world leader or not.

1. *Don't resist the King any longer.*

2. *Rather, put your trust in Him.* Make Him the refuge of your life.

Earlier I told you about Abdulmasi, the James Bond of Islamic terrorism. Now the rest of the story. After bombing a church, Abdulmasi liked to go back and inspect his handiwork. On one such visit, he found the church members worshiping in the ashes of the building he had destroyed. "This made my mind bitter!" he says. "I would go back to the mosque and say these people are terrible, you think they are regretting but they are not. They are rejoicing! They are happier."

That frustrated Abdulmasi, so he tried a different course of attack, a more devious one. He infiltrated the church by faking a conversion to Christ. He went to a service, told the pastor he loved his preaching, and said, "I'm a Muslim but I want to become a Christian."

"They loved me," says Abdulmasi. "Everybody gave me gifts. Some called me for lunch. They really embraced me so much. The love I was shown surprised me."

And so for the next six years he lived a double life, pretending to be a Christian while all the while pursuing jihad. Until one day when the Lord used a pastor's sermon from 1 Kings 18 to reach Abdulmasi's heart. "How long are you going to waver between two opinions?" the pastor thundered. "If God is God, worship him. If Baal is god, worship him."

On that day, by the grace of God, the Christian killer became a Christ follower, a *real* born again

Christian. "He knew the person I was and yet he wanted me," says Abdulmasi. "Now, I know God is a merciful and loving God. I really had found a loving father."

But that's not the end. The very day Abdulmasi submitted to Jesus Christ, the persecution began, his own persecution. He started telling Muslims about Christ and his former friends tried to kill him. One night in 2004 two thousand Muslims surrounded his home, began throwing stones at his house, and screamed, "Kill him! Even flies in this house should not go alive." His neighbor tried to calm down the mob, so the mob killed the neighbor with a machete. They also killed the neighbor's wife, doused them with fuel, and burned them.

Miraculously, Abdulmasi and his wife and children escaped that day. But three years later his oldest son did not escape. While attending his classes at the university, three Muslim men approached him with machetes and cut his throat.

Abdulmasi visited the man who planned his son's murder and offered him forgiveness. The man rejected him. But that man's son heard about it and later showed up at Abdulmasi's home seeking to accept Christ.

"I discovered that love is the ultimate," says Abdulmasi. "If you want to win Muslims to be on your side, you have to love them, not with the human type of love, but the love you yourself have experienced through Christ. Instead of treating them as enemies, pity them, because it's not them, it's something that is motivating them. Because when I was there I did not know what I was doing. I was once a persecutor; now through his grace he has forgiven me. This is God's love. And though we have been persecuted, we are not crushed...We die so that others will live."^[12]

The message of Psalm 2 boils down to this. Do you want to be blessed in life? Then you must respond rightly to God's Anointed, as Abdumasi did. Don't resist King Jesus any longer. Put your trust in the One who died for sinners like you and me, who conquered the grave, and who will return soon to this earth with salvation.

Beloved, Jesus Christ is King. The question is, "Is He *your* King?"

The Bottom Line: The choice is yours...

1. *You can bow before the King now.* On the other hand...
2. *You will certainly bow before the King later.* Philippians 2:10-11 couldn't be clearer, "Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

^[1] This message has been revised from a previous sermon delivered at WBC on 11/26/2000.

^[2] *The Voice of the Martyrs*, June 2010, pp. 3-7.

^[3] Psalms 1 & 2 introduce the Psalms. In Psalm 1 we see the blessed man (singular). In Psalm 2 we see the blessed nation (see the plural in verse 12).

^[4] God gave the Psalms to Israel for their use in public and private worship.

^[5] In Psalm 18:50 David is referred to as God's "anointed."

^[6] Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter*, p. 10.

^[7] Isaiah prophesied about Him in Isaiah 9:6-7, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on forever."

^[8] What did God the Father say about Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration? Matthew 17:5 records, "When he yet spoke, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved SON, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye Him."

^[9] Jesus actually cites this reference in His letter to the church at Thyatira, recorded in Revelation 2:26-27, "To him who overcomes and does my

will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—‘He will rule them with an iron sceptor; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father.”

[\[10\]](#) Philippians 2:12 says we are to work out our salvation “with fear and trembling.”

[\[11\]](#) It’s what Samuel did with Saul on the day he anointed him as Israel’s first king (1 Sam. 10:1). It’s what the Lord told Elijah His seven thousand loyal subjects did *not* do in 1 Kings 19:18, “whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.”

[\[12\]](#) *The Voice of the Martyrs*, June 2010, pp. 3-7.