

The Messianic Prophecy in Psalms 2 and its Fulfillment in the Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ

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Abstract

This article explores the profound connection between Psalm 2 in the Hebrew Bible and the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Psalm 2 is widely recognised as a messianic prophecy, portraying the coronation of a king who will rule with divine authority. It elucidates the messianic themes embedded in Psalm 2 and its prophetic significance by examining the text and historical context. The article then investigates the New Testament, particularly the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles, to demonstrate how Jesus Christ embodies the characteristics and fulfils the prophecies outlined in Psalm 2. It analyses vital events, teachings, and attributes of Jesus, illustrating how they align with the messianic expectations outlined in the Psalm. Furthermore, the article explores the implications of this fulfilment for Christian theology and understanding of Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. Tracing the connections between Psalm 2 and Jesus Christ offers a comprehensive exploration of biblical prophecy and its realisation in the person of Jesus, affirming his divine identity and salvific mission.

Keywords: Messianic Prophecy, Psalm 2, Jesus Christ, Fulfillment, Biblical Interpretation, New Testament, Prophetic Expectations, and Divine Identity.

Introduction

The Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament have attracted scholars, theologians, and believers for centuries.¹ These prophecies, written long before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, contain prophetic glimpses into the life and ministry of the Messiah, the promised deliverer and saviour of humanity. Among these prophecies, one of the most significant is found in Psalm 2, which presents a compelling portrait of the future Messiah and has been regarded as a remarkable foretelling of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. It stands as an unusual prophetic literary unit, which anticipates the coming of a messianic figure, and the fulfilment of this prophecy in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ is a topic of immense theological and historical significance.

The intersection of messianic prophecy and its realisation in the life and ministry of Jesus is a profound exploration that gets into the richness of Psalm 2. This paper unravels the intricate connections between the Messianic promises embedded in the Hebrew Bible and the fulfilment witnessed in the historical narrative of Jesus Christ. The study examined Psalm 2 by providing a detailed understanding of its notions of divine kingship, nations' opposition and the installation of the Messiah as the Son of God.

Overview of Messianic Prophecies in the Old Testament

This concept of the Messiah in the Old Testament and its theological message has attracted much scholarly discussion, especially from the 20th century.² Michael A. Rydelnik asserts that the term "Messiah" is described in various ways, including

¹ S. Gillingham, *A Journey of Two Psalms: The Reception of Psalms 1 and 2 in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 94.

² W. C. Kaiser, Jr. *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).; also, J. H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 153–54; W. Horbury, *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1998), 1–35.

as a consecrated person (Ps. 2:2), a King from the Line of David (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Isa. 9:6-7), a Servant of the Lord (Isa. 42:1-13; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12), and an Eschatological Deliverer (Jer. 16:14; 30:3; 31:31; Isa. 59:20).³ The Hebrew root of the word “Messiah” is the verb “*Mashiach*,” meaning “to rub or smear.” W. C. Kaiser, Jr. points out six other passages OT uses of the technical sense of Messiah (1Sam. 2:10,35; Ps. 20:6; 28:8; 84:9; Hab. 3:13).⁴ It describes people, such as anointing a priest, a king, or calling a prophet. The technical use of the term “Messiah” to refer to an eschatological Deliverer is rare in the Old Testament. However, it is often used to refer to an individual uniquely consecrated to the service of God.

God promised to raise a Prophet like Moses for Israel, who would speak directly with Him (Deut. 18:15-19). At the time of the close of the canon of Scripture, the key message was to keep looking for the Messiah, the Prophet, like Moses.⁵ Isaiah 7:14 predicts the virgin birth of the Messiah, who is given the title “Immanuel,” suggesting that God would be with the nation of Judah in a unique way through the birth of this boy. The child Immanuel is identified as a deity because Israel’s land is seen as belonging to Him. In Isa 9:6, the King Messiah is given four glorious dual throne titles, each reflecting His deity. The first title, “Wonder,” refers to the acts of God on behalf of His people and the judgment of their enemies (Exod. 3:20; 15:11; 34:10; Jos 3:5; Neh. 9:17; 1Chro. 16:12; Ps. 40:5; Isa. 25:1; 29:14). The title, “Mighty God,” is used consistently of deity, indicating that the born child and the given Son are no less than God Himself.

³ Michael A. Rydelnik, “The Messiah and His Titles,” in *Handbook of Messianic Prophecy: Studies and Expositions of the Messiah in the Old Testament*, M.A. Rydelnik and Edwin Blum, eds. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 30.

⁴ Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*.

⁵ Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 2010), 60-65.

The title “Father of Eternity” (Isa. 9:6) indicates the divine eternity of the Messiah, stating that He is the Creator of time or Author of eternity. The title “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6) means “ruler” or “leader” (Isa. 3:14) and indicates one who will establish peace between humanity and God. The title “The Branch of the Lord” (Isa. 4:2; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12) is used repeatedly in the Old Testament to describe the Messiah as the Son of Yahweh.⁶

The Messiah is depicted as God’s unique Servant, who will bring justice to the nations and restore Israel to the Lord. The Servant will serve God by obeying Him despite violent attacks and shaming, and their ultimate work would be to provide a substitutionary sacrifice to pay for the sins of Israel. Isaiah’s description of the Servant is connected to the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant, where God promises an everlasting covenant with the Servant, fulfilling the promises made to David (Isa. 55:3). The Servant is also a covenant mediator for Israel. J. A. Motyer identifies links between the royal figure of a Redeemer in Isaiah’s book of Immanuel and the Servant of the Lord in the Servant Songs (Isa. 7-12). The Servant and the King are endowed with the Spirit, bring justice, and establish righteousness (Isa. 9:7; 11:5; 53:11); therefore, the Redeemer is not just a Servant.⁷

Jeremiah prophesied that the Lord would raise a King, a Righteous Branch of David, to be the great Deliverer of His people (Jer. 23:5; 33:15). The Messiah would be a Redeemer from sin, providing redemption and establishing a kingdom of peace, justice, and righteousness. The Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13–53:12) describes the Servant as a substitutionary sacrifice for sin, who would be killed and resurrected, justifying many and carrying their iniquities. The Messiah is a divinely

⁶ W. C. Kaiser, Jr., “Tsemach” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), 769.

⁷ J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 13.

consecrated King who will deliver redemption for Israel, rule the world, and establish a kingdom of peace, justice, and righteousness. The Hebrew Bible foretells this king through prophetic prediction and pattern, highlighting his role in the Old Testament messianic prophecy. The eschatological king is referred to as the Son of God (Ps. 2:7), the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 26:64), the Son of David (Jer. 23:5; 33:15), the Teacher (Joel 2:23; Isa 30:23), and the Servant of the Lord.⁸ Eventually, Jesus' preferred self-identification is the Son of Man, referring to His full humanity.

The Messiah, also known as the "Righteous Branch" (Jer 23:5), is referred to as "Yahweh Our Righteousness" in Jeremiah 23:6, which means "Yahweh is Our Righteousness." This title is not a mere theophoric but a full name of God, "Yahweh." In Psalm 80:1, God is called the Shepherd of Israel, making the title even more significant. God promises to restore the nation at the end of the day, regathering the people from scattered lands and appointing a single shepherd, "My servant David," to care for them. Zechariah uses the term "Shepherd" (Zech. 13:7) to describe a different situation: the Messiah must be struck, and Israel will be scattered. The Servant Songs promise that the Servant's ministry will extend beyond Israel to the world, establishing justice and serving as a light for the nations. The Servant of the Lord is not just the Messiah of Israel but also the Messiah of the whole world.

Thus far, the biblical and theological definition of Messiah and his prophecies have been examined. However, interpretations of these prophecies may differ between Jewish and Christian traditions. Christians believe these prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, while Jewish arrangements may not include Jesus as the Messiah. Despite this, messianic prophecies in the Old Testament have profoundly impacted both religious traditions and continue to be a subject of theological discussion

⁸ Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume I* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2011), 208.

and study. For Jews, these prophecies remain essential, while for Christians, they are seen as fulfilled in Jesus Christ and underpin the Christian belief in Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of humanity.

Literary Context of Psalm 2

The entire Psalter is made up of 150 Psalms that are grouped into five books modelled after the five books of Moses.⁹ While it is hard to date the individual Psalms, references to the exile in Babylon, as seen in Psalm 137, suggest that the Psalter was finally edited after 587 BC and before the Septuagint was translated in the second century BCE.¹⁰ Superscriptions indicating authorship or affiliation, musical notation, and occasion were appended by an editor to 116 psalms. Superscriptions ascribed to David are found in most of the Psalms in Book 1, which includes Psalm 2. It is believed that the first two psalms served as an introduction to the Psalter as a whole, whereas the last two are connected to the psalms that came before them. Therefore, Psalms 1 and 2 could have been initially one Psalm, as shown by the inclusion of a “blessed” phrase at 1:1 אֲשֶׁר־י and 2:11. The definition of מַחְשָׁבָה is “plot” in 2:1 and “meditate” in 1:2.¹¹

King David composed numerous Psalms during his reign, reflecting Israel’s religious and political atmosphere. Psalm 2, often dated to the time of David, focuses on the anointed King of Israel, who is seen as God’s representative. It was written around the 10th century BCE, reflecting the political climate of ancient Israel. It addresses the tensions and conflicts between earthly rulers and God’s divine authority. Wendy A. Johnsen

⁹ Wendy A. Johnsen, “Exegesis of Psalm 2,” (April 2014), 1-3.

¹⁰ Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990), 245-6.

¹¹ *Anchor Yale Dictionary* (Accordance), “Psalms, Book of”; Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 1-50. Vol 19 (Second Edition)* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 64.; Mark J. Whiting, “Psalms 1 and 2 as a Hermeneutical Lens for Reading the Psalter” *Evangelical Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 247-50.

suggests it may have been composed to celebrate a historical event or reflect on the relationship between earthly kings and God's sovereignty.¹² Also, it was written in the context of Ancient Near Eastern culture to reinforce the message of Yahweh, Israel's God, and his designated king over the nations. After the exile, it took on a messianic significance in Israel's minds, seeking an "anointed one" of David's lineage to save them from oppressors.

The Psalms comprise a variety of genres, some of which indicate use for cultic worship or ceremonies: individual and community laments, royal psalms, songs of praise, songs of thanksgiving, liturgy, psalms of trust, and wisdom/torah psalms. Book 1 has a predominance of laments, while the trend of the whole Psalter is from requiem to praise. Helmer Ringgren designates Psalm 2 as a Royal Psalm, postulated to have been written as a coronation psalm for the accession of a king of the Davidic line.¹³ However, it is difficult to determine whether it was for a specific occasion or repeated use. After the exile, their message became one of hope for a future Davidic king, a "messiah."¹⁴

The poetic structure of Psalm 2 comprises four stanzas, which form a chiasm A-B-B'-A', which are sense units as indicated by the changes in speakers. It unfolds into four divisions, which shows good movement from beginning to end: (1) the rebellious nations on earth (vv.1- 3); (2) God in heaven (vv.4-6); (3) the decree of the Lord (vv.7-9); and (4) the anointed king on earth (vv.10-12). The structure is as follows:

¹² Wendy A. Johnsen, "Exegesis of Psalm 2," (April 2014), 1-3.

¹³ Helmer Ringgren, *The Messiah In The Old Testament* (Bloomsbury Street, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1967), 11.

¹⁴ Peter C. Craigie, 64; S. E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 220-1.

The Rebellious Nations (vv.1-3)

B God's Rule in Heaven (vv.4-6)

B' God's Decree (vv.7-9)

A' The Rule of the Messiah on Earth (vv.10-12)¹⁵

The tension and drama in the Psalm are highlighted by parallelism, repetition, and chiasm.¹⁶ The scornful attitude of the surrounding nations, as evident in Psalm 2, is graphically illustrated when looking at the geography of the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) culture. The primary protagonists in this Psalm are the gentile nations in opposition to God and the Davidic King of Israel.¹⁷ Ancient people believed in the activity of the gods in human affairs, and the legitimation of the king as the one who mediated between the human and the divine was also very important as it showed that the gods favoured him and his people.¹⁸

In the first stanza of Psalm 2, the nations' rulers act like the gods they believed they embodied, taking counsel together against Yahweh and questioning his power. In contrast, Israel's God claimed sole power and authority, as the Creator and sustainer of the cosmos, but apart from it, In the covenant made with David, Yahweh promises to establish the kingship and dominion of David's successor, with their relationship indicated by the father-son metaphor. Psalm 2 uses similar language to describe the king in his relationship to Yahweh,

¹⁵ Willem A. VanGemeren, Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds. *Psalms The Expositor's Bible Commentary Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008).; Pierre Auffret, *The Literary Structure of Psalm 2* (JSOTSup 3; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1977).

¹⁶ J. P. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible at the Interface of Prosody and Structural Analysis. Vol. II: 85 Psalms and Job 4-14* (The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 2000), 55.

¹⁷ John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament)* (Accordance electronic edition, version 1.4. Grand Rapids: Zondervan), Vol 3: 3.

¹⁸ John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 220-221.

such as ‘his (God’s) anointed’ (v. 2), ‘my king’ (v. 6), and ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you’ (v. 7). The ‘decree of Yahweh’ (v. 7) refers to the Davidic covenant, and ‘today’ is the day of the king’s coronation. This idea of the divine relationship with the human king occurs in the ANE context, which had similar perceptions of the relationships of their kings with their gods. In Mesopotamia, rulers were sometimes also priests and had a special relationship with the gods. In Egypt, kingship was not only sacral but also believed to be manifestations of the gods themselves. Israelite kings were not regarded as divine, but their kingship was ‘sacral’, acting on behalf of the God they represented.¹⁹

Yahweh designates where he has installed his King, Zion, as “Zion, my holy hill.” Zion is often referred to in the Psalms as the place from which God and the kings ruled and where God was worshipped. In contrast to Mesopotamia, Israel had only one city, Jerusalem/Zion, designated as the place of worship of her God.²⁰ Yahweh is so mighty that he can bestow on his king ‘the ends of the earth’ as his inheritance. The contrasting imagery of solid iron and fragile pottery vividly portrays the significant difference in power between Yahweh and the gentile nations. The violent language and judgmental theme of Psalm 2 would give weight to the Masoretic text as correct. Psalm 2 was initially written as a Royal Psalm for the enthronement of a Davidic king in the ANE cultural context. It uses familiar language and imagery to show Yahweh’s supreme power and authority and his authorised king. After Israel’s exile, they hoped for an idealised king of the Davidic line who would free them from oppression.²¹ The Royal Psalms were given a new

¹⁹ C. J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), 228.

²⁰ Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 275-286.

²¹ William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr., *The Content of Scripture* (Accordance electronic edition, version 3.1. Leiden: Brill, 2003): Vol II, 428 fn 56

focus, and Psalm 2 eventually found its messianic fulfilment in Jesus, the Son of David and God.

Allusions to Psalm 2 are found at Jesus' baptism and his transfiguration. Early Christians attribute the authorship of the Psalm to David. At the same time, the author of Hebrews uses the father-son relationship of Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 to illustrate his point about the supremacy of Jesus over all things and to endorse the high priesthood of Jesus. Jesus also quotes Psalm 2 in Rev 2:27, where he promises that the faithful in Thyatira will have the authority over the nations granted to the messianic king of the Psalm. The promise that the world will be subjugated and at peace under his rule is yet to be fulfilled. It was written to affirm the supremacy of Yahweh, their God, over the cosmos and Yahweh's endorsement of the Davidic King enthroned in Zion. Its prophetic fulfilment in Jesus as King of the Kingdom of God and its eschatological fulfilment at his return are essential aspects of the Christian faith.

An Exposition of Psalm 2

The literary structure of Psalm 2 is divided into four sections: 1-3: the rebellion of the nations against God's anointed king; 4-6: God's response from heaven, asserting His sovereignty and support for the King; 7-9: the declaration of the king's divine Sonship and authority; and 10-12: a call to the nations to submit to God's anointed king and a warning of the consequences of rebellion.

1. The Rebellion of the Nations (vv. 1-3)

[1] לְמַה רָגַשׁוּ גוֹיִם אֲלֵאֱמֹיִם יְהוָה-רֵיק:

[2] יִתְנַצְּבוּ | מַלְכֵי-אֲרָץ וְרוֹזְנִים נוֹסְדֵי-גֵחַד עַל-יְהוָה וְעַל-מְשִׁיחוֹ:

[3] גִּנְתָּקָה אֶת-מוֹסְרוֹתֵימוֹ וְנִשְׁלִיכָה מִמֶּנּוּ עֲבַתֵּימוֹ:

¹Why are nations in tumult, and countries plotting in vain?

² *The kings of the earth* establish themselves, and the rulers conspire together against Yahweh and his anointed:

³ “Let us tear off their bonds, and cast their cords from us!”

According to Declaissé-Walford et al., the first part of this Psalms (vv. 1-3) portrays nations and peoples, kings and officials rebelling against the universal reign of the Lord.²² The psalmist greets this rebellion with astonishment: “Why are they attempting this ‘vain’ struggle?” In this context, the interrogative why לָמָּה indicates puzzlement. This is not a literal question but an exclamation of surprise.²³ The long indicative description (vv. 2-9) that follows it will eventually allow the reader to learn why this rebellion is a vain effort. Nevertheless, the initial survey of the revolution suggests that nations hold the advantage because they benefit from more significant numbers. The poetry of v. 2 elegantly sets two antagonists against each other: מְלֻכֵי-אֶרֶץ וְרוֹנְנִים נֹסְדוֹ-יָגֵד עַל-יְהוָה וְעַל-מְשִׁיחֹוֹ: *The kings of the earth and the officials stand against the LORD and his anointed.* If this struggle were determined strictly by numbers, the kings and officials would have the upper hand.

The Psalm’s dominant motifs of kingship and speech are apparent in the first stanza.²⁴ Three nouns indicate the theme of kingship: kings מְלֻכֵי officials רוֹנְנִים, and his anointed מְשִׁיחֹוֹ. Likewise, the theme of the speech is introduced by two verbs that connote speaking — rage רָגַשׁ, murmur הִגִּיד — and the quotation that closes the first stanza: שִׁבְרֵתָם אֶת-מִקְוֵוֹתֵיהֶם: *Let us shatter their bonds...* The entire rebellion of the nations is

²² Nancy L. Declaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

²³ Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 18.

²⁴ Declaissé-Walford et al., *The Book of Psalms*.

depicted as nothing but speech. They do not raise swords or weapons against God, but only their voices.

2. God’s Response to the Rebellion (vv. 4-6)

יֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁחַק אֲדֹנָי יִלְעַגְלָמוּ: [4]

אֵץ יְדַבֵּר אֱלִימוּ בְּאַפּוֹ וּבְחִרוֹנוֹ יִבְהַלְמוּ: [5]

וְאֲנִי נִסְכַּתִּי מֶלְכִי עַל־צִיּוֹן הַר־קֹדֶשׁ: [6]

⁴ *He who sits enthroned* in the heavens laughs. The Lord derides them.

⁵ Then he speaks to them in his wrath, and in his fury, he terrifies them:

⁶ “But as for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy mountain.”

The second part (vv. 4-6) shifts to heaven, where the Lord is enthroned. The dual motifs of kingship and speech are continued in this stanza. In this context, the verb יֹשֵׁב, “sits enthroned,” is a technical term denoting God’s kingship.²⁵ The Lord is far from alarmed by the revolt of the nations, which merely provokes divine scorn. The heavenly king answers the rebellious speech of the earthly kings with more speech. יִשְׁחַק יִלְעַגְלָמוּ: The Lord laughs, mocks, and speaks.

Moreover, paralleling the structure of the first part, this part also closes with a quotation: *I, yes I, have established my king upon Zion, my holy mountain.* The agency of God is underscored in several ways in v. 6. The redundant occurrence of the Hebrew pronoun אֲנִי emphasises that the Davidic kings exist solely as a result of God’s sovereign actions.²⁶ The pronouns in מֶלְכִי “my king” and הַרִי “my mountain” further underscore God’s agency. These dual pronouns reflect the Old Testament tradition of God’s “double election” of David and Jerusalem; in this tradition, God chose David and his

²⁵ Declaissé-Walford et al., *The Book of Psalms*.

²⁶ Declaissé-Walford et al., *The Book of Psalms*.

descendants to be kings and Mount Zion in Jerusalem as the divine dwelling place (cf. Ps. 46:4). In terms of poetic balance, it is again worth repeating that the enthronement of the Davidic king is part of the Lord's answer to the rebellion of the kings of the earth.²⁷

3. The Anointed King's Declaration (vv. 7-9)

אֲסַפְּרָה אֶל חֵק יְהוָה אֲמַר אֵלַי בְּנֵי אֲתָהּ אֲנִי הַיּוֹם יִלְדָּתִיד: [7]

שְׁאַל מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶתְנַהֵג גּוֹיִם נִחְלָתָהּ וְאַחֲזַתָּהּ אֶפְסֵי-אָרֶץ: [8]

תִּרְעַם בְּשִׁבְט בְּרִזָּל כְּכֵלֵי יוֹצֵר תִּנְפְּצָם: [9]

⁷ I will tell the decree; Yahweh said to me: “You are my son; today I have begotten you.

⁸ Ask from me, and I will make *the* nations your heritage and your possession *the* ends of *the* earth.

⁹ You will break them with an iron rod. Like a potter's vessel, you will shatter them.”

The setting shifts back to earth in the third part (vv. 7-9), but the location differs from that in part 1. Part 2 closed by mentioning the Davidic king on Mount Zion, which is the focus now. The change to first-person verbs אֵלַי אֲמַר אֵלַי “I will tell of the decree of the LORD” — implies that it is now the voice of the Davidic king that is heard.²⁸ The dual themes of kingship and speech continue to be rung at the start of this stanza, as the verb אֲמַר *tells*, the noun חֵק *decree*, and the first-person speaking voice of the king implies. Indeed, as many have pointed out,²⁹ the term חֵק *decree* is most likely to be understood as a technical term from royal law. “It denotes the

²⁷ Declaissé-Walford et al., *The Book of Psalms*.

²⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, “Ask of Me, My Son: Exposition of Psalm 2” *Crux* 43, no. 4 (2007): 10-11.

²⁹ Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 55.

document of legitimacy, the royal protocol written down at the enthronement and after that identified the legitimate ruler.”³⁰

The Old Testament king’s relationship with God is emphasised through the announcement that he has been begotten. The king is considered God’s Son, and many interpreters interpret this :הַיּוֹם יָלַדְתִּיךָ הַיּוֹם “today I have begotten you” as a reference to God adopting the king as a son. However, the verb “begotten” יָלַד in the texts also means to “reproduce.”³¹ Peter Craigie notes that “ ‘I have begotten you’ is metaphorical language; it means more than simply adoption, which has legal overtones, and implies that a ‘new birth’ of a divine nature took place during the coronation.”³² The language emphasises the king’s special relationship with God, as it becomes a “father-son” relationship. The king can now ask what he will of God, and God promises that he may request and grant it. The promise has a poetic tie back to stanza 1, where nations and kings of earth rebel against God. In stanza 8, the king reports that God has willed the nations and ends of the earth as the king’s inheritance. This internal link underscores one part of the poem’s argument: God’s response to the rebellion of earthly powers is to install the Davidic monarch in Zion.

4. A Call to the Rulers and a Warning (vv. 10-12)

וְעַתָּה מְלָכִים הַשְׁכִּילוּ הַיּוֹסְרוּ שְׁפָטֵי אֲרָץ:

עֲבַדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה בְּיִרְאָה וְגִילוּ בְרַעְדָּה:

וְנִשְׁקוּ־בֶרֶךְ פְּנֵי־יְהוָה | וְתִאֲדָדוּ וְזָרְדוּ כִי־יִבְעַר כַּמְעֵט אֶפְסוֹ אֲשֶׁר־י כָּל־חַוְסֵי בּוֹ:

¹⁰ So then, O kings, be wise. Be warned, O rulers of the earth.

¹¹ Serve Yahweh with fear and rejoice with trembling.

¹² Kiss the Son lest he be angry and you perish on

³⁰ Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 129-30

³¹ Declaissé-Walford et al., *The Book of Psalms*.

³²Craigie, Peter C and Marvin E. Tate. *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 1-50. Vol 19 (Second Edition)*. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004: 62-69.

the way, for his anger burns quickly. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

The final part (vv. 10-12) maintains its established themes of kingship and speech, warning the earth's rulers to serve the Lord. However, this fourth part (vv. 10-12) presents a shift in the speaking voice, setting, and more explicit references to speech.³³ The setting seems to return to the dispersed מְלָכִים אֲרֶץ: "kings of the earth," but the speaker remains the same. Declaissé-Walford et al. argue that this part should be understood as being spoken by a priest, but there is no sound ground for thinking of a speaker other than the king who said part 3.³⁴

The Psalm's poetic structure involves verb changes, from indicative description (vv. 2-9) to imperative warning, הַשְׁכִּיל "be wise," הִנְדָּרוּ "be warned," עֲבֹדוּ "serve," נִשְׁקוּ "kiss." emphasising the importance of wisdom, warning, and silent submission. The disjunctive Hebrew particle עֵתָּה is used at the point where the argument of the psalm hinges, and the stanza lacks a closing quotation and verbs of speaking. The kings and rulers are depicted as rebelling against God in their speech and are warned to keep silent. The verb kiss נִשְׁקוּ fits well in this context, symbolising humility and political obedience in ancient times. The poem ends by warning the kings of the earth not to utter vain words of rebellion against the universal king of heaven and God's chosen king on Zion but to employ their mouths more appropriately in the act of silent submission. The closing colon — Happy are all who take refuge in him — was likely added to form an *inclusion* to Ps. 1:1, allowing the reader to read the two psalms (1 & 2) together as a unity.³⁵

³³ Declaissé-Walford et al., *The Book of Psalms*.

³⁴ Declaissé-Walford et al., *The Book of Psalms*.

³⁵ Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 33.

Messianic Interpretation of Psalm 2

Psalm 2 is frequently quoted and applied to Jesus Christ in the New Testament, solidifying its Messianic significance. It is often interpreted as a prophecy or foreshadowing of the Messiah, the anointed one sent by God to fulfil specific roles and bring salvation to humanity.³⁶ In this context, the Anointed King is seen as a prophetic figure, ultimately identified with Jesus Christ in Christian tradition. The Son of God is emphasised in Psalm 2:7, often interpreted as a divine declaration of the relationship between God the Father and the Messiah.³⁷ Psalm 2:8-9 speaks of the Messianic figure's rule over the nations, with his authority to rule with a "rod of iron," predicting the Messiah's universal kingship and ultimate triumph over all opposition. It calls rulers and peoples to submit to the Lord and His Anointed One, warning of the consequences of rebellion and urging them to seek refuge in the Messiah.

In Jewish tradition, this Psalm is also seen as a Messianic text, with some interpreting it as a future Davidic Messiah or Israel itself, chosen and anointed by God to fulfil a particular role among the nations³⁸ until the days of Rashi.³⁹ Several critical aspects of Psalm 2 that find fulfilment in Jesus Christ include: First, the Sonship of Jesus is recorded in several NT passages, emphasising his Sonship as the divine Messiah, fulfilling the prophetic language of Psalm 2:7 (Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11). I. Howard Marshall sees a messianic prophecy pointing to Jesus

³⁶ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction And Commentary On Books I And II Of The Psalms* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 49-53.; Willem A. VanGemeren, Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds. *Psalms The Expositor's Bible Commentary Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008).

³⁷ R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1971), 85-86

³⁸ M. A. Signer, "King/Messiah: Rashi's Exegesis of Psalm 2" in *Prooftexts*, 3/3 (Haifa, Israel: 1983), 274

³⁹ George Gunn, "Psalm 2 And the Reign Of The Messiah," (April 17, 2011), 7. https://www.shasta.edu/uploads/1/6/7/0/16705804/psalm_2_reign_of_messiah.pdf

Christ as the Son of God and the promised Messiah.⁴⁰ The text describes the opposition of the nations and rulers of the earth against the Lord and His anointed one (the Messiah), which is seen as a foreshadowing of the rejection and hostility Jesus faced during His ministry and crucifixion.⁴¹

God's response to the rebellion is depicted in Psalm 2:4-6, where He sets His King on Zion, understood to be Jesus Christ, who reigns as the anointed one of God.⁴² Psalm 2:7 declares the divine Sonship of the Messiah, and early Christians believed that Jesus was uniquely the Son of God in a spiritual and religious sense. It promises the inheritance of the nations to the Messiah, with the promise of Him ruling them with a rod of iron. This imagery is associated with the future reign of Christ when He returns as the triumphant and authoritative ruler over all nations. Psalm 2:10-12 calls earthly kings and judges to fearfully serve the Lord and kiss the Son, lest they perish in His wrath. This interpretation has played a significant role in shaping Christian theology regarding the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah.⁴³

The second interpretation is the Universal Reign of Jesus, which speaks of the Messiah's rule over the nations. In the New Testament, Jesus is depicted as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16), whose authority extends globally. Mark D. Futato believes that Jesus fulfils this prophecy, chosen

⁴⁰ I. Howard Marshall, 'Acts,' in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 552.

⁴¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts, BECNT* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 206

⁴² Brandon D. Crowe, *The Hope of Israel: The Resurrection of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 47–57.

⁴³ C. K. Barrett, *Acts 1–14, ICC* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 245; Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 202; I. Howard Marshall, 'Acts,' in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 552; David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles, PNTC* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 200.

by God as the Savior and King.⁴⁴ The Psalm begins with the question, “Why do the nations conspire and the people plot in vain?” In this interpretation, the “Anointed One” or “Messiah” is the central figure God will anoint to rule over the nations.

The rebellion of the nations and their leaders against the Lord and His Anointed is described as a rejection of God’s authority and sovereignty. This rebellion is often associated with humanity’s rejection of Jesus as the Messiah during his earthly ministry, leading to his crucifixion. God’s response to the rebellion is depicted in the Psalm. He laughs at their futile attempts to oppose Him and declares His King in Zion, interpreted as God’s appointment of Jesus as the king and ruler over all creation. Psalm 2:7-9 proclaims the Messiah’s universal reign, emphasising his divine Sonship and authority to rule over all nations. The imagery of breaking the country with a rod of iron signifies his absolute power and dominion.⁴⁵

The third interpretation is the Rejection and Persecution of Jesus through the conspiracies against the Lord’s Anointed in Psalm 2, which find parallels in the rejection, betrayal, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It is interpreted in various ways throughout history, particularly in the context of the Christian tradition. In this context, it is often seen as a prophecy or foreshadowing of Jesus’ rejection and persecution during His earthly ministry.⁴⁶ The text begins with the question, “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?” often referring to Jesus Christ. The Psalm also mentions the “kings of the earth” and “rulers” who conspire against the Lord’s Anointed, which is seen as a prophecy of the opposition and conspiracy against Jesus by religious leaders and political authorities. According to VanGemeran, the first-century church pointed

⁴⁴ Mark D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2007), 125.

⁴⁵ John Goldingay, *Psalms 1-4*, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

⁴⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017).

out-Herod, Pilate, the Romans, and even the Jews as rebels against the Anointed when they conspired together to take Jesus' life (Ac 4:25-28).⁴⁷ God's response to the rebellion is described as God declaring that He has set his King on Zion, referencing God's ultimate victory through Jesus' resurrection and exaltation. The rejection and suffering of Jesus are also paralleled with laughter, seen as God's response to the futility of human efforts to oppose His Messiah. The verses call for repentance, inviting rulers to recognise Jesus as the Son of God and submit to Him as Lord and Savior. Some Christians also interpret Psalm 2 in an eschatological context, suggesting that it points to a time when Jesus will return as the victorious king to establish His rule over all nations.⁴⁸

The fourth interpretation is the Call to Worship, which the passage concludes with an exhortation for rulers and nations to "kiss the Son" and take refuge in Him. This call to worship and allegiance to the Messiah is fulfilled in the spread of Christianity worldwide. One of the most influential interpretations is the Messianic interpretation, which sees the Psalm as a prophetic description of the Messiah, the anointed one of God.

The central theme in this interpretation is the Messiah, the chosen and anointed King of God. The passage mentions God setting His King on Zion, referring to the Messiah's reign in Jerusalem, establishing God's kingdom on earth.⁴⁹ It declares the Messiah's divine Sonship, highlighting the unique relationship between God and the Messiah and describes the Messiah's universal rule over the nations, symbolising the "rod of iron." The call to worship is emphasised in verses 10-12, urging rulers and governments to serve the Lord with fear, rejoice with trembling, and "kiss the Son" to avoid His wrath

⁴⁷ VanGemeren, et al. *Psalms The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 97.

⁴⁸ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 2nd edition (WBC 19; Dallas: Word Books, 2004), 64.

⁴⁹ Marc Zvi Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor*, JSOTSup 76 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 136-137.

and find refuge in Him. This interpretation has been influential in Jewish and Christian traditions, with Christians applying it to Jesus as the Messiah.⁵⁰

The Use of Psalms 2 in the Context of Jesus Christ's Life and Ministry

The use of Psalm 2 in the context of Jesus Christ's life and ministry is significant, as it is one of the Messianic psalms that the NT often associate with Jesus as the promised Messiah. It is a royal psalm that initially concerned Jerusalem's kings, who were believed to be God's anointed Son.⁵¹ However, the New Testament associated the ideal Davidic king and the Son and called Psalm 2 with Jesus, which was believed at his baptism and transfiguration and declared him God's Son. Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ and the book of Acts associates Pilate and Herod with the kings and rulers who oppose God's will in Psalm 2.

The New Testament affirms Jesus' Messianic identity, as seen in early Christians' prayers after Peter and John's release. It describes Jesus as the anointed king, the Son of God, and how nations and rulers conspire against Him.⁵² It is seen as a prophecy about the Messiah, the anointed one of God, and the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies found in Christ Jesus. It emphasises Jesus' unique relationship with God the Father, a key element of his identity as the Messiah. Psalm 2:1-3 is interpreted to describe the opposition and rebellion against Jesus, leading to His crucifixion and his victorious reign,

⁵⁰ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 31, eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 309.

⁵¹ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 23.

⁵² Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings*, CBOT 8 (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1976), 259.

referring to his inheritance of the nations and his rule with an iron rod.⁵³

Furthermore, the title Son of God depicts Psalm 2:7, which states, “I will proclaim the Lord’s decree: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have become your father.’” This verse is often associated with Jesus’ baptism and his divine Sonship. At his baptism, the voice from heaven declared, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him, I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17), echoing the language of Psalm 2:7, which the NT relates to Jesus Christ’s life and ministry, particularly concerning His identity as the Son of God which speaks of the anointed king and is often seen as a Messianic prophecy that points to the coming of the Messiah.⁵⁴

Rolf A. Jacobson interprets verse 7 as the divine Sonship of Jesus Christ,⁵⁵ as cited in Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5. Psalm 2 highlights the religious authority and rule of the Messiah over the nations, contrasting with the rebellion of earthly rulers and governments against the Lord and His anointed one which the crucifixion of Jesus served as the fulfilment of the act of rebellion, while verses 10-12 call for earthly kings to serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling, pointing to the universal reign of the Messiah and Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples of all nations.⁵⁶

Helmer Ringgren argues that the Messianic prophecy the NT believes found fulfilment in the life of Jesus Christ is the

⁵³ F. F. Bruce, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts*, in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies: Essays in Honor of William Sanford Lasor*, ed. Gary A Tuttle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 8-9.

⁵⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 889.

⁵⁵ Nancy L. DeClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

⁵⁶ Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and Its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology*, JSNTSup 110.

Kingship and Dominion of the Messiah, aligning with Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God and his role as the king and his dominion over the nations, stating that he will make them their inheritance and possession.⁵⁷ Despite this opposition, Jesus installed his Kingship in Zion, his holy mountain, marking his victory over sin, death, and evil forces.⁵⁸ The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) instructs Jesus' disciples to make disciples of all nations, claiming authority over heaven and earth. This commission aligns with the universal dominion described in Psalm 2, as Jesus sends his followers to spread the message of his kingship to the ends of the earth.

Rejection and opposition are depicted in the NT, especially in Psalm 2:2, which mentions the rulers and kings of the earth conspiring against the Lord's anointed, leading to his crucifixion. The passage begins with the question, "Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain?" describing the earthly rulers conspiring against the Lord's anointed one, which is believed to be applied to Jesus, emphasising His role as the promised Messiah and King.⁵⁹ One of the earliest instances of opposition to Jesus can be seen in King Herod's reaction to the arrival of the Magi (wise men) who came to worship the newborn king of the Jews. Herod sought to kill Jesus, representing the rejection and opposition of earthly rulers against God's anointed. Jesus faced opposition from the religious authorities throughout His ministry, particularly the Pharisees and scribes. They rejected His claims, questioned His authority, and plotted to have Him arrested and crucified. The ultimate rejection and opposition Jesus faced was His crucifixion, which was called for by the religious leaders and the crowd.⁶⁰ This

⁵⁷ Helmer Ringgren, *The Messiah In The Old Testament* (Bloomsbury Street, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1967), 11-24.

⁵⁸ Ringgren, *The Messiah In The Old Testament*

⁵⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

⁶⁰ Michael Rydelnik et al. eds. *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy* (Chicago, IL: Moody Pub., 2018), 73-89.

fulfilment of the nations' raging and plotting against the Lord anointed in Psalm 2 can be seen as a fulfilment of the nations' raging and conspiring against the Lord's anointed, which the NT often referenced to emphasise Jesus' messianic role and the opposition He faced (Acts 4:25-26), acknowledging that Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the Gentiles had conspired against Jesus.

The prophecy of this Psalm speaks of resurrection and exaltation. It says of the Lord's anointed being set as King in Zion (Psalm 2:6), which the NT sees as a foreshadowing of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of God after his death and crucifixion.⁶¹ It is believed that Jesus, after His resurrection, was exalted as the Son of God uniquely and powerfully, as stated in verse 8, which says, "Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession." The NT believes that after His resurrection, Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God and now reigns as Lord and King over the entire world.

The NT contains several references in connection with Jesus, which the early Apostle used to explain the opposition faced by Jesus and His followers. In Hebrews 1:5, Psalm 2:7 is explicitly referenced in connection with Jesus' exaltation, underscoring the unique status of Jesus as the Son of God.⁶²

Psalm 2 concludes with a Call to Repentance as the kings of the earth to "kiss the Son" and take refuge in Him, lest they perish (Psalm 2:12).⁶³ This call to submission and acknowledgement of the Messiah's authority is reflected in the NT message of repentance and faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. It begins with the question, "Why do the nations rage and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his Anointed."

⁶¹ Ringgren, *The Messiah In The Old Testament*, 22.

⁶² Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 99-100

⁶³ Browne. 'Kiss the Son'--Ps 2:12."

Jesus is often called the Son of God and the Anointed One (Messiah), whose ministry was seen as fulfilling this Psalm, with religious and political authorities conspiring against Him. It speaks about the universal reign of the Messiah, urging nations and rulers to submit to the Lord and His Anointed One.⁶⁴ Fulfillment in Christ is believed to be found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His crucifixion and subsequent exaltation as King of kings and Lord of lords demonstrate His authority and the fulfillment of the Psalm's Messianic prophecy. Through His sacrifice, Jesus made it possible for people to repent and find forgiveness of sins.

Conclusion

This study examines the Messianic prophecy in Psalms 2 and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ's life and ministry. Written centuries before Christ's birth, Psalm 2 promises a Messiah who would be both the Son of God and King of Kings. The prophecy's ultimate fulfillment is found in Jesus, whose life was marked by miraculous events, profound teachings, and a mission to reconcile humanity with God. The alignment between the prophecy and Jesus' life is undeniable, as he embodied the attributes of the promised Messiah, proclaimed the kingdom of God, healed the sick, raised the dead, and offered himself as the atoning sacrifice for humanity's sins. Furthermore, Jesus' teachings and actions mirrored the divine authority described in Psalms 2, as he challenged earthly rulers and religious authorities while establishing a spiritual kingdom that transcends temporal boundaries. His sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection demonstrated his ultimate victory over sin and death, affirming his status as the anointed king of all creation. The Messianic prophecy in Psalms 2 and its fulfillment in the life of Jesus Christ serve as a powerful testament to the sovereignty and faithfulness of God. It underscores God's

⁶⁴ Nancy deClaisse-Walford et al., *The Book of Psalms, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 69.

redemptive plan's profound unity and continuity throughout history. As believers reflect on this connection, they find assurance in the promises of Scripture and inspiration to follow the teachings and example of Jesus, who remains the ultimate fulfilment of God's plan for the salvation of humanity. In examining this prophecy and its realisation in Jesus Christ, we are reminded of the profound depths of God's love and grace, offering hope and salvation to all who believe in Him.

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