

Psalm 2

Paul WYNS

According to Gunkel's classification into genres,¹ Psalm 2 belongs to the "Royal Psalms".¹ Most are thought to be postexilic and symbolic; they are

¹ Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998), *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

not regarded as historical poems based on a king's enthronement, but rather cultic texts which belonged to a ceremony celebrating the Davidic covenant and the messianic promises within the general setting of the covenant festival. However, recently more attention is being paid to editorial work in the Psalter ² on the grounds that the governing principles of the final collection are not liturgical but rather literary. Accordingly, the Psalter has not developed in a haphazard and arbitrary way, but has been carefully woven together in such a manner that previously independent compositions or smaller collections of such compositions now comment upon or respond to one another. Brennan concludes that approaching the Psalter as literature (rather than generic cultic liturgy) opens the way to an eschatological and messianic interpretation of many texts which had originally only a limited national and historic setting.

In his Introduction, B. S. Childs focused on the final form of the Psalter and saw eschatological reinterpretation as its governing motif. We would argue for the importance of all the various elements, the original historical setting (recognizing that this is often difficult to establish), the liturgical and cultic *Sitz im Leben*, and the final edited literary form.

The apostles refer to Psalm 2 as Davidic (Acts 4:25-31), but this does not exclude it being re-used and/or adapted by Hezekiah.³ In Hezekiah's day, the setting for the Psalm would have been an enthronement ceremony enacted by Hezekiah after his recovery from the dual threat of mortal illness and Assyrian invasion. It celebrates the re-establishment of the Davidic covenant

¹ Pss 2, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110.

² David M. Howard Jr., "Editorial Activity in the Psalter: A State-of-the-field Survey", (*Word & World* 9/3 (1989): 274-283 See also D. J. A. Clines, "Psalm Research since 1955: I. The Psalms and the Cult", *Tyndale Bulletin* 18 (1967): 103-26.

³ G. W. Anderson says, "There can be little doubt that some, perhaps many, psalms have been altered and adapted in successive ages; and in such psalms it may well be a doubtful procedure to assume that there is one and only one consistent meaning in the text", *BJRL* 48 (1965) p. 28. Note how Hezekiah adapts the Psalms in Isa.38:9-20 and especially, v.20, "we will sing my Songs (what songs?) all the days of our life in the house of the Lord."

when the nation and the king survived the threat of extinction. The psalmist exhorts the pagan nations to abandon their rebellious plans against Yahweh and His anointed king and submit to the authority of this king whom God has ordained to rule the nations and smash all rebellion. The psalm begins with a rhetorical question, “Why do the nations rage?” The psalmist is expressing amazement and indignation at their foolish act of rebellion. This theme of re-establishment of the monarchy is picked up in two NT passages.

1) The re-establishment of the Davidic monarchy is the underlying typology for the reference to Acts 4 by Peter. The Psalm was applied by the apostles Peter and John in Acts 4:25-31 to the redemptive act wrought by Jesus Christ (the anointed) King who re-established the Davidic covenant, and who, like, Hezekiah was “raised” on the third day (2 Kgs 20:5), and enthroned on high, thus saving the nation from extinction.

2) The establishment of the monarchy as a response to a “last days” crisis, such as that of 701, is also the eschatological element that has been used in Revelation 11. A tabular comparison demonstrates the correspondence between the motifs in the Psalm and Revelation 11:

Revelation 11 (Seventh Trumpet)	Psalm 2
“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ” (v.15).	“Yet have I set my king, upon my holy hill at Zion” (v.6).
“And the nations were angry” (v.18).	“Why do the nations rage?” (v.1).
Thy wrath is come” (v.18).	“Then shall he speak to them in his wrath and vex them in his sore displeasure”(v.5).

“Thou hast taken thy great power, and hast reigned” (v.17).

“Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession” (v.8).

“A man child, who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron” (12:15).

“Thou art my son” (v.7).
“Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron” (v.9).

“Woman travailing in birth” (12:2).

“This day I have begotten thee” (v.7).

“The kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ” (Gr. anointed) (12:10).

“Against the Lord, and against his anointed” (Christ) (v.2).

“That thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name” (v.18).

“Blessed are they that put their trust in him” (v.12).
“Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling” (v.11).

“Destroy them which destroy the earth” (v.18).

“Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (v.9).

We have elsewhere¹ argued that Psalm 79 has a history associated with Gentile persecution of the nation of Israel. Psalm 2 on the other hand (which we believe comes from the same original setting) celebrates a complete reversal of fortune (resurrection). The Psalm represents a triumph and an enthronement. It is the climax of covenant renewal both individual and communal – for the king represents the people. God has not yet finished with the people of Israel – *for the receiving of them shall be life from the dead* (Rom 11:15).

END

¹ “Re-using Psalm 79”, *CEJBI* 1:1 (2007).