

PSALMS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Leader's Guide, Lesson One

PSALM 2

God's Anointed King

Lesson at a glance

Psalm 2 is a coronation song for a son of David, sung while the vassal nations around Israel were testing a new king. It moves through four short speeches: the nations plot, God laughs and installs His King, the King reads out the decree that names him God's son, and the poet turns and tells the kings of the earth to submit while there is time. The apostles reached for this psalm constantly. The Father's voice at the Jordan and on the mountain carries its language. The church in Jerusalem prayed it after the Sanhedrin threatened Peter and John, and read it off the events of the crucifixion, line by line. Paul preached it at Antioch of Pisidia and tied its "today" to the resurrection. Hebrews quotes it twice. Revelation quotes its rod of iron three times. Because this is the opening lesson of a twelve-week series, it does double duty: it teaches Psalm 2, and it teaches the class how the New Testament reads the Old Testament at all. Leave the hour with one conviction planted in the room, that Jesus is not an interruption in the biblical story but its fulfillment, and one fact settled, that He reigns now.

Goals for this session

First, that each person would be able to say what Psalm 2 meant to the Israelites who first sang it, before saying anything about Jesus.

Second, that the class would see how the church in Acts 4 prayed this psalm over real persecution, and would notice what the church asked God for and what it did not ask for.

Third, that the class would understand "today I have begotten you" as coronation and declaration rather than as a statement about the origin of the Son, and would be able to say why that distinction matters.

Fourth, that everyone would leave knowing that the reign of Christ is present, from heaven, right now, and that the invitation of verse 12 to take refuge in Him is open to them today.

Preparing to lead

Read Psalm 2 every day this week, aloud, until you can hear the four speakers without looking. Then read Psalm 1 immediately before it two or three times so you can feel how the two psalms open the Psalter together, with "Blessed is the man" at the head of the first and "Blessed are all who take refuge in him" at the foot of the second.

Read Acts 4:1 to 31 whole, not just the prayer. The threat in verses 17 to 21 is what makes the prayer in verses 24 to 30 remarkable. Then read Acts 13:16 to 41 and Hebrews 1 in one sitting, so the quotations of Psalm 2:7 are not isolated proof texts in your mind but part of two sustained arguments.

Look up 2 Samuel 7:8 to 16, Psalm 89:19 to 45, 1 Samuel 10:1, and 1 Timothy 2:1 to 4 before class. Then pray. Ask God to keep this first hour from becoming a lecture on interpretation, and ask Him to give you the class members who are quietly resisting some claim God has on them right now, because verse 3 is about them and so is verse 12.

Sensitive topics in this lesson

Expectations of a future earthly kingdom. Some in your class have been taught that Jesus will one day return to sit on a literal throne in Jerusalem for a thousand years, and Psalm 2:6 and 2:8 are verses they associate with that hope. Handle it entirely from the text and without naming groups. Acts 2:29 to 36 is your friend: Peter says God kept His oath to seat a descendant on David's throne when He raised Jesus and exalted Him to God's right hand. Colossians 1:13 says we have already been transferred into that kingdom. 1 Corinthians 15:24 to 26 says the reign runs until the last enemy is destroyed and then the kingdom is delivered to the Father. Stay calm, stay in the text, and do not let this consume the hour.

The word "predestined" in Acts 4:28. Someone will hear that word and reach for a system in which God decides in advance who will be saved and who will be lost, and someone else in the room may have been wounded by that teaching. Keep the discussion on what the verse actually says. God's plan was that His Christ would suffer, and it stood no matter what men chose. Peter says in the same breath that the men who did it acted lawlessly (Acts 2:23), and then he tells those very men to repent so their sins may be blotted out (Acts 3:19). God foreordained the event, not the guilt of the individuals.

The word "begotten" and the person of Christ. This verse has been used to argue that the Son had a beginning. Do not get drawn into an argument, but be ready. Coronation language declares a thing publicly; it does not bring it into existence. John 1:1 to 3, Colossians 1:16 to 17, and Hebrews 1:2 settle the question of the Son's eternity, and Romans 1:4 gives the exact sense of what happened at the resurrection: He was declared to be the Son of God in power. Question 11 exists precisely to give you a place to say this in an orderly way.

Politics. Verses 1 to 3 and verse 10 are about rulers, and if you are not careful this hour will turn into a discussion of whichever officials the class dislikes. Set the tone in the warm-up by asking for older examples rather than current ones. The Optional Application callout asks each person to pray daily for a leader whose decisions trouble them, and that is where you want the energy to go.

People in the class who have never obeyed the gospel. Question 15 asks directly. Say it once, warmly, near the end, that anyone who wants to talk about being baptized into Christ can stay afterward or speak to one of the elders this week. Then move on to question 16 without looking at anyone. Do not press an individual in front of the class, and do not repeat the offer three times.

Suggested 60- to 75-minute schedule

Five minutes: welcome. Since this is the first meeting of the series, take a moment to say what the twelve weeks will cover and to encourage the class to do the reading at home.

Five minutes: open in prayer. Read Psalm 2 aloud in full before you pray.

Five minutes: warm-up. Ask each person to describe a time they watched human authority behave as though God were not watching, then read Psalm 2:1 to 4 and stop.

Thirty-five to forty minutes: discussion. Choose six or seven questions in advance.

Five to ten minutes: "Your response" reflection.

Five minutes: closing prayer.

Discussion priorities

Make sure these are among the questions you discuss: 4 (the decree and the day it was spoken), 6 and 7 (the church praying Psalm 2 in Acts 4), 9 (Paul tying "today" to the resurrection), and 13 (the present reign of Christ). If time runs short, keep 6, 7, and 13. Question 13 is the doctrinal anchor for the whole series, and question 7 is the pastoral heart of this particular lesson.

Notes on key questions

Question 4. The decree is quoted in verse 7: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." Push the class to notice the word "today." In its original setting this is the day of the coronation, and the language comes straight out of God's promise to David about his son, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son" (2 Samuel 7:14). Verse 8 gives the inheritance, the nations and the ends of the earth, and verse 9 gives the authority to break rebellion, a rod of iron against a fired clay jar. Point out that a king of Judah never came close to ruling the ends of the earth. The psalm always said more than any son of David could carry, and Israel kept singing it anyway.

Question 6. Line them up on a board if you can. Psalm 2 says nations, peoples, kings, and rulers. Acts 4:27 says Gentiles, the peoples of Israel, Herod, and Pontius Pilate. The church is not stretching the psalm; it is identifying the roles. Then make sure the word "Anointed" gets its due. Hebrew *mashiach*, Greek *christos*, English Christ, all one word, and Acts 4:27 says of Jesus, "whom you anointed." When the class sees that "his Anointed" in Psalm 2:2 is simply "his Christ," most of the lesson has landed.

Question 7. This is the pastoral center of the hour. Having just prayed a psalm about God breaking rebellious rulers with a rod of iron, the church asks for two things: that God would look on the threats, and that His servants would speak the word with boldness. They do not ask for their enemies to be destroyed, and they do not ask to be spared. Verse 30 mentions signs and wonders, which God gave in that generation to confirm the word He was giving through the apostles (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3 to 4). Note that plainly if it comes up, and note that the confirming work was completed with the completion

of revelation (1 Corinthians 13:8 to 10). Then bring the discussion back to the request that we may still pray word for word: give your servants boldness.

Question 9. Paul says in Acts 13:32 to 33 that the promise made to the fathers has been fulfilled "by raising Jesus," and quotes Psalm 2:7. The "today" of the coronation lands on the day of the resurrection. If someone asks whether "raising Jesus" in verse 33 might simply mean raising Him up onto the scene, note that verse 34 goes on to speak of "the fact that he raised him from the dead," and that verse 30 has already said God raised Him from the dead. The resurrection is where Paul's whole sermon is going. Romans 1:4 says the same thing in one sentence.

Question 10. In Hebrews 1 the writer is proving that the Son is greater than the angels, and Psalm 2:7 is his first proof: God never said "you are my Son" to any angel. In Hebrews 5:4 to 6 he is proving something else entirely, that Christ did not take the honor of the high priesthood on Himself but was appointed by the Father, and the same verse now serves as evidence of appointment. Psalm 110:4 is quoted beside it, which is the class's first look at the psalm that will occupy Lesson Eight. This is a good moment to show the group that a single verse can legitimately support more than one argument when the argument is drawn from what the verse actually says.

Question 12. Revelation 12:5 applies the rod of iron to the male child, that is, to Christ. Revelation 19:15 applies it to the rider on the white horse. Revelation 2:26 to 27 promises a share in that authority to "the one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end," which is a conditional promise made to a congregation under pressure. Two things to draw out. First, the condition: this is faithfulness to the end (compare Revelation 2:10), not a guarantee handed out in advance. Second, the wording: John writes "rule" or "shepherd" where our Old Testament reads "break," because the Hebrew consonants can be read either way and the Greek Old Testament chose "shepherd." The same rod defends the sheep and breaks the wolf.

Question 13. Do not rush this one, and do not turn it into a debate about end-times charts. Just read the three passages. Acts 2:29 to 36: God swore to seat a descendant of David on his throne, and He kept that oath by raising Jesus and exalting Him to His own right hand, so that God has made Him both Lord and Christ. Colossians 1:13: we have already been transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son. 1 Corinthians 15:24 to 26: He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet, and the last enemy destroyed is death. The reign began at the resurrection and exaltation, the throne is in heaven, the reign continues now, and it ends when death does. Say it simply and let the passages carry the weight.

Question 15. The psalm ends with an invitation, not a threat, and so should the lesson. Taking refuge in Christ in the New Testament has a shape: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing Him, and being baptized into Him (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3 to 4; Galatians 3:26 to 27). Offer once and gently. Do not single anyone out, and do not let the class debate baptism here; the series will come back to it. If someone does want to talk, arrange the conversation for after class rather than in front of the room.

About the Study Skills in this lesson

Two Study Skills appear in Lesson One, and both are foundational for the eleven weeks that follow. Reading a Psalm in Its Original Setting is the discipline that keeps this study honest. If the class begins every psalm by asking who wrote it, on what occasion, and what the first singers understood, they will never fall into treating the Psalter as a book of riddles that meant nothing until Jesus came. What the New Testament Means by Fulfilled gives them the second tool: the word "fulfill" often means to fill up a pattern rather than to make a prediction come true. Teach both categories as legitimate, and let the class hear you say that Psalm 2 works both ways at once. That single sentence will keep the group out of most of the trouble available in this subject, and Lesson Three will sharpen the distinction further when Peter argues outright that David foresaw the resurrection.

A suggested closing prayer

Pray your own prayer. A sample, if you would like one:

"Father, You made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them. The nations rage and the peoples plot, and You are not troubled. Thank You for setting Your King on Your holy hill, and for keeping Your promise to David in a way no one expected, by raising Jesus from the dead and seating Him at Your right hand. Forgive us for the places where we have quietly wanted to burst Your bonds apart. Teach us to serve You with fear and to rejoice with trembling. Give Your servants boldness to speak Your word, as You gave it to Peter and John. And keep every one of us under the shelter of the Son, where the blessing is. In His name we pray. Amen."

Looking ahead to Lesson Two

Next week is Psalm 8, a creation psalm about the dignity and dominion of man, and the New Testament use of it in Matthew 21:16, 1 Corinthians 15:27, Ephesians 1:22, and above all Hebrews 2:5 to 9. Ask the class to read Psalm 8 several times, outdoors at night if they can manage it, and then to read Hebrews 2:5 to 18 slowly with a pencil. Tell them in advance that "son of man" in Psalm 8:4 simply means a human being, so that they come ready to watch the Hebrew writer take the psalm at face value, admit that we do not yet see everything in subjection to man, and then point at Jesus. If this week was about the King, next week is about the Man.