



PSALM 2

"My king on Zion"

Translation and Performance Notes

LEGEND FOR COLORED WORDS:

Key term

Emotions

Imagery

Other Translation Challenges

Participant tracking notes

Hebrew text	verse	English Close-but-Clear Translation
למה רָגְשׁוּ גוֹיִם וְלֹאֲמַיִם יִהְיוּ רֵיקָה:	1	Why are nations in an uproar, and [why] would peoples plot emptiness?
יִתְנַצְּבוּ מַלְכֵי-אֶרֶץ וְרוֹזְנִים נֹסְדוּ יַחַד עַל-יְהוָה וְעַל-מְשִׁיחוֹ:	2	[Why] do earthly kings take a stand, and [why] have rulers conspired together against YHWH and against his anointed one?
נִגְזְזָה אֶת-מוֹסְרוֹתֵינוּ וְנִשְׁלִיכָהּ מִמֶּנּוּ עֲבֹתֵינוּ:	3	"Let's tear off their bonds, and throw their ropes away from us!"
יּוֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁחַק אֲדֹנָיִי יִלְעַג-לָמוֹ:	4	The one enthroned in the heavens laughs. The Lord mocks them.
אִזּוֹ יִדְבֹר אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּאַפּוֹ וּבְחִירוֹנוֹ יִבְהַלֵּמוֹ:	5	Then he speaks to them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath.
וְאֲנִי נִסְכַּתִּי מֶלֶכִּי עַל-צִיּוֹן הַר-קֹדֶשׁ:	6	"But I have poured out my king on Zion, my holy mountain."
אֶסְפָּרָה אֶל תַּק יְהוָה אָמַר אֵלַי בְּנִי אַתָּה אֲנִי הַיּוֹם יִלְדְּתִיד:	7	I will tell about the decree; YHWH said to me, "You are my son. I hereby father you today.
שְׁאַל מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶתְּנָה גוֹיִם נַחֲלָתָהּ	8	Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance

וְאַחֲזֶנָּה אֶפְסֵי-אֶרֶץ:		and the ends of the earth your property.
תִּרְעֵם בְּשֶׁבֶט בְּרֹזָל כְּכֵלֵי יוֹצֵר תִּנְפֹּצֵם:	9	You will crush them with an iron scepter . You will smash them like clay pottery ."
וְעַתָּה מְלָכִים הִשְׁכִּילוּ הִוְסְרוּ שְׁפָטֵי אֶרֶץ:	10	And now, kings, wise up! Accept discipline, earthly rulers!
עֲבֹדוּ אֶת-יְהוָה בִּירְאָה וְגִילוּ בְּרַעְדָּה:	11	Serve YHWH with fear and rejoice with trembling!
נִשְׁקוּ-בֶרֶךְ פֶּן-יִצְאֵנָה וְתֵאָבְדוּ לְדָרֶךְ כִּי-יִבְעַר כִּמְעַט אַפּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־יִכְלֵ-תוֹסִי בּוֹ:	12	Kiss the son, or else he will become angry and you will perish in your way, for his anger quickly ignites. Happy are all who take refuge in him!

GENERAL TRANSLATION TIPS FOR THIS PSALM:

- To translate poetry accurately and beautifully, a knowledge of both the source language's poetry and the target language's poetry is needed. So, here are the steps we recommend to follow when setting out to translate this or any psalm:
 - GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE'S POETRY/ARTS.** Research and analyze many examples from numerous genres of poetry, storytelling, and music in the target language and culture, and document findings. See our [Local Arts Analysis Guide](#) for help.
 - GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOURCE LANGUAGE'S (HEBREW) MEANING AND POETRY.** The aim of all our materials is to provide exactly this for the translator, poet/musician/artist, and consultant: an understanding of what the psalm *means*, as well as its *poetics*.
 - TRANSLATE THE PSALM IN THE APPROPRIATE LOCAL ART/POETRY GENRE(S).**
 - TEST THE TRANSLATION WITH THE LANGUAGE COMMUNITY, SEEKING FEEDBACK ABOUT BOTH WORD CHOICES AND FORM/GENRE/MEDIA OF TRANSLATION.**

TRANSLATION TIPS: PSALM AS A WHOLE

These are the elements that we believe are most helpful to keep in mind during both drafting and checking translations, to help verify that the translation or performance is accurate beyond just a word- or verse-level; just as important is accuracy on the level of a **whole**.

Additionally, these are elements that will guide decisions about **performance** in oral translations, songs, poems, or other kinds of art based on this psalm.

1. Overview

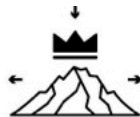
The following gives a basic **Overview** of the Psalm, answering the following questions:

- **Title**-what title best describes this unique psalm?
 - "My king on Zion"
- **Purpose**-why was this psalm written?
 - To call the rebellious kings of the earth to submit to YHWH and his king.
- **Content**-In summary, what is said in this psalm?
 - Serve YHWH and submit to his king!
- **Message**-what is the general theme of this psalm? What seems to be the main point the psalmist wanted his audience to realize by hearing this psalm?
 - YHWH's anointed king will rule the world.

2. Story Behind the Psalm and Background Situation

Every psalm has a coherent story behind it. However, many psalms are not written in typical "story" format, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Here, we attempt to understand the story and background that prompted the psalmist to write.

- **Story Behind**-How do the various parts of the psalm fit together into a single, coherent story? What is the main message/theme conveyed by this "story behind"?
 - Before the psalm begins, YHWH enthrones his king, but nations and their rulers rebel against YHWH and his anointed king.
 - As the psalm continues, YHWH laughs at the nations and their rulers because of their rebellion.
 - Next, YHWH and his anointed king declare their sovereignty, and this is the turning point in the story when the tension begins to resolve.
 - Then, the anointed king summons the rulers to submission.
 - The psalm then ends, but not before he calls the nations and their rulers to submit to YHWH and his anointed king.
- **Background Situation**-what are the series of events leading up to the time in which the psalm was written?



YHWH anoints and enthrones the king on Mt. Zion to represent his rule to the nations

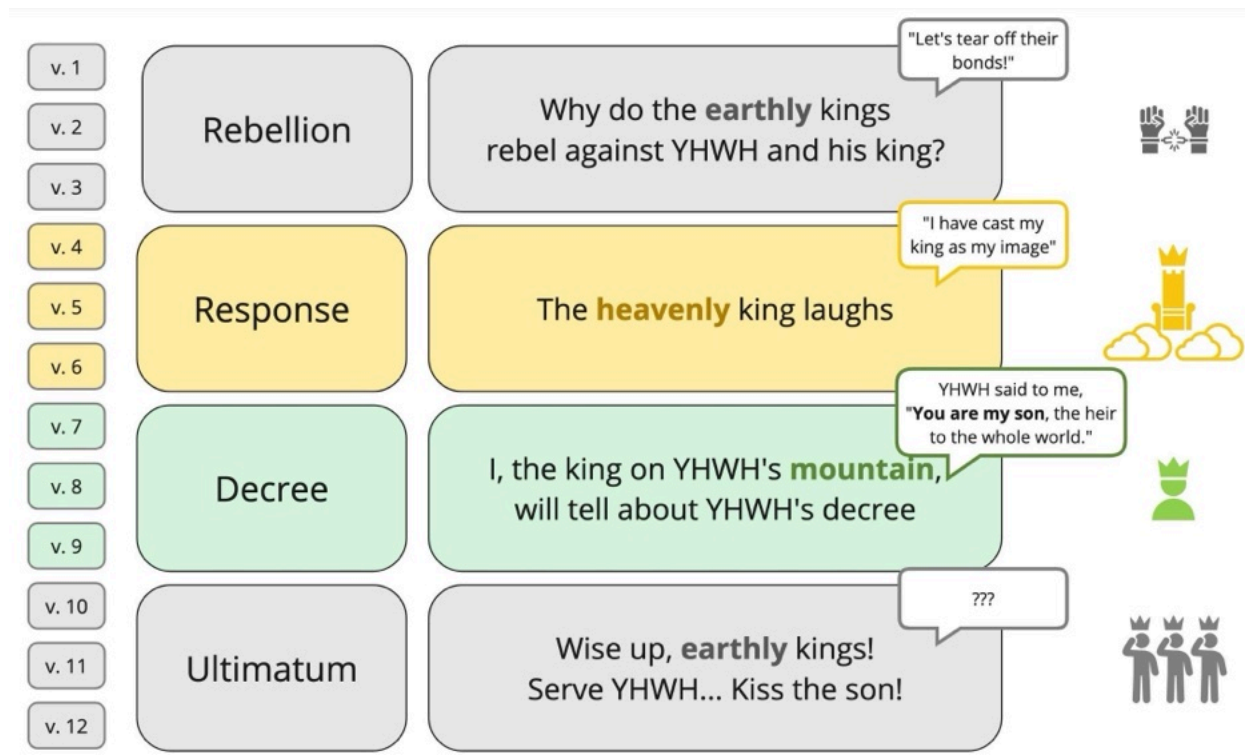


Nations and their rulers rebel against YHWH and his anointed king

3. Layout

Knowing the layout of the sections of the psalm by sections helps us to understand the progression of thought as the poem progresses.

How to read the visual below: The picture below shows the main “chunks” or pieces of the poem. Verse numbers appear on the left. The second column has a title for each section. The large third column contains a brief summary of the section’s content. As you read through the content column, you will see important words and ideas highlighted in similar colors. The icons on the right may be used as memory aids.



Progression—what is the flow of thought as the poem progresses?

- The psalm begins by asking why kings and nations would rebel against YHWH (verses 1-2). The psalmist quotes the kings' plans to set themselves free from YHWH (verse 3).
- Then, the psalmist describes YHWH's mocking and furious response to the kings' plans (verses 4-5). The psalmist quotes YHWH's statement that he has poured out his king on Mount Zion (verse 6).
- The psalmist then recounts the decree that YHWH made to his king. YHWH tells the king that he is YHWH's son (verse 7), that YHWH will give the earthly nations to the king (verse 8), and that the king will destroy his enemies (verse 9).
- Finally, the psalm ends with a final demand (an "ultimatum") to the earthly kings, that they should serve the Lord and his king (verses 10-12).

4. Emotions

Part of poetry is communicating emotion. Each section, and even each verse, can contain a number of different emotions. Here are the main emotional themes of each section:

v. 1	Rebellion	contempt
v. 2		
v. 3		
v. 4	Response	contempt & awe
v. 5		
v. 6		
v. 7	Decree	confidence
v. 8		
v. 9		
v. 10	Ultimatum	contempt
v. 11		
v. 12		

- In the first section (verses 1-3), the psalmist expresses contempt for the rebel kings.
- In the second section, YHWH expresses contempt for the rebel kings (verse 4), and the psalmist expresses awe at YHWH and his king (verses 5-6).
- In the third section (verses 7-9), the psalmist expresses confidence in YHWH's decree.
- In the fourth section (verses 10-12), the psalmist expresses contempt for the rebel kings.

5. Participants and Speech Acts

In poetry, it is important to keep track of who is speaking, who is the audience, and what it is that the speaker is trying to do with his words.

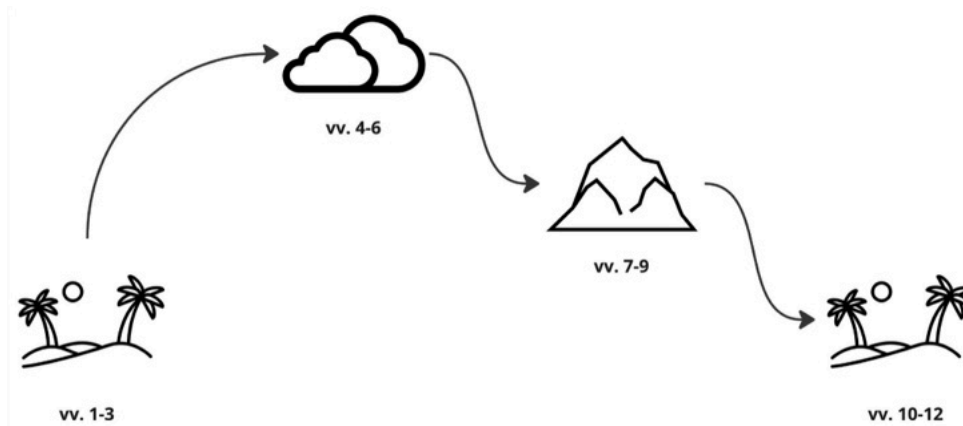
How to read the visual below: In the chart below, the left-hand column identifies the speaker. In verses 1-6, the psalmist is the speaker, and in verses 3 and 6 the psalmist reports the speech of the nations and YHWH. In verses 7-9, the speaker is the king, and in verses 10-12 the speaker is the psalmist. The right-hand column identifies the audience. In verses 1-6, the audience is the listeners, while in verses 3 and 6 the audience of the reported speech is the nations. In verses 7-12, the audience is the nations. The middle column has bolded grey boxes that tell what the speaker is trying to do with his words (his speech acts) in each section. Under each grey box is a summary of what the speaker says.

SPEAKER	SPEECH ACT SECTIONS	ADDRESSEE
Psalmist	DISPARAGEMENT (vv. 1-3) Why would they plot emptiness? Conspiracy (v. 3) "Let's rebel against their rule!"	Listeners
Nations		Nations
	DESCRIPTION (vv. 4-6) YHWH responds to them Affirmation (v. 6) "I have given my king authority over you"	
YHWH		Nations
King	PROCLAMATION (vv. 7-9) I will tell about YHWH's decree Decree (vv. 7bβ-9) "You are my son..."	Nations
Psalmist	ULTIMATUM (vv. 10-12) Wise up and submit to YHWH and his king or be destroyed!	

6. Poetics

In this section, we ask, "what kinds of artistic beauty did the psalmist incorporate into the poem to reinforce its message?" (See Poetic Features [video](#) and [layer](#) for more details.)

Poetic Feature 1: Heaven and Earth and In Between



The movement of the Psalm is from earth up to heaven, and then slowly downward, from heaven, to a mountain, and finally back to earth. The first section of the Psalm (verses 1-3) is about the "kings of earth." The second section (verses 4-6) is about YHWH, who is referred to as the "one who rules in the heavens." The third section (verses 7-9) is spoken by the king who is on YHWH's "holy mountain," the meeting place between heaven and earth. Finally, the last section of the psalm (verses 10-12) comes back down to where the psalm started, addressing the "rulers of earth."

The psalm is like a play about the great forces of power in the world. At the beginning of the psalm, the earthly kings are rebelling against the ruler of heaven, and at the end of the psalm they are summoned to submit to God's king on Mount Zion, and thereby submit to the king of heaven. The center of the drama is Mount Zion, the meeting place between heaven and earth. Mount Zion is the place where the conflict between YHWH and the earthly kings resolves. It is the site where YHWH's heavenly rule begins to take place on earth, because it is where YHWH places his anointed ruler as king.

Poetic Feature 2: Dramatic Conversation

Section 1	<p>למה רגשו גוים ולאפים והגוררים: יתנצבו מלכי־ארץ ורוזנים נוסדו־יחד על־יתיה ועל־משיחיה: גנתקה את־מסדותיה ונשליכה מקנני עבדיה:</p>	1 2 3	<p>Why are nations in an uproar, and [why] would peoples plot emptiness? [Why] would earthly kings take a stand, and [why] have rulers conspired together against YHWH and against his anointed one? "Let's tear off their bonds, and throw their ropes away from us."</p>
Section 2	<p>יושב בשמים ישחק אדני ילעג־למו: אז ידבר אלימו באפו ובחרונו ובהלמו: ואני נסכתי מלכי על־ציון הר־קדשי:</p>	4 5 6	<p>The one enthroned in the heavens laughs. The Lord mocks them. Then he speaks to them in his anger and dismays them in his wrath. "But I have poured out my king on Zion, my holy mountain."</p>
Section 3	<p>אספרה אל חק יהוה אפרי אלי בני אמה אני היום ילד־תורה: שאל מקני ואתנה גוים נחלתה ואחזתה אפס־ארץ: תרעם בשבט ברזל פכלי יוצר תנפצם:</p>	7 8 9	<p>I will tell about the decree; YHWH said to me, "You are my son. I hereby father you today. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your property. You will crush them with an iron scepter. You will smash them like clay pottery."</p>
Section 4	<p>ועתה מלכים השפילו הקסרו שפט־ארץ: עבדו את־יהוה ביראה וגילו ברעדה: נשקו־בר פו־אנף ו וואבדו ד־רה כ־יבער כמעט אפו אשרי קל־חסי בו:</p>	10 11 12	<p>And now, kings, wise up! Accept discipline, earthly rulers! Serve YHWH with fear and rejoice with trembling! Kiss the son, or else he will become angry and you will perish in your way, for his anger quickly ignites. Happy are all who take refuge in him!</p>
	<p>???</p>		<p>???</p>

The speeches are part of what makes Psalm 2 unique compared to other poems in the Psalter. It is as though we are watching a play in which each of the major characters has a speaking part. The psalm begins and ends with an anonymous psalmist speaking (see [Participants and Speech Acts](#)). In verse 3, the nations speak; in verse 6, YHWH speaks; and in verses 7-9, the king speaks and quotes YHWH's decree (verses 7b-9).

Each of the first three sections (verses 1-3; verses 4-6; verses 7-9) ends with a speech. Unexpectedly, though, the fourth section (verses 10-12) does not conclude with a speech but an ultimatum to the early kings. We are left wondering what the nations will say in response. Will they accept the king's rule and join those who "take refuge in him" (verse 12c), or will they continue their rebellion and perish in their way (verse 12b)?

Poetic Feature 3: Think Again

למה רגשו גוים ולאמים יהגוריק: יתנצבו מלכי-ארץ ורוצנים נוסדו-יחד על-יהוה ועל-משיחו: בנתקה את מוסרותימו ובשליכה ממנו עבתימו:	1 2 3	Why are nations in an uproar, and [why] would peoples plot emptiness? [Why] would earthly kings take a stand, and [why] have rulers conspired together against YHWH and against his anointed one? "Let's tear off their bonds , and throw their ropes away from us."	Rebellion of the Kings
יושב בשמים ישחק אדני ילעג-למו: אז ידבר אלימו באפו ובקרונו יבהלמו: ואני נשקתי מלכי על-ציון הר-קדשי:	4 5 6	The one enthroned in the heavens laughs. The Lord mocks them. Then he speaks to them in his anger and dismays them in his wrath. "But I have poured out my king on Zion, my holy mountain."	
אספרה אל חק יהוה אמר אלי בגי אמה אני היום ילדתיך: שאל ממני ואמתה גוים נחלתה ואחזתה אפסי-ארץ: תרעם בשבט ברזל ככלי יוצר הנפצים:	7 8 9	I will tell about the decree; YHWH said to me, "You are my son. I hereby father you today. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your property. You will crush them with an iron scepter. You will smash them like clay pottery."	
ועתה מלכים השקילו הוסרו שקטי ארץ: עבדו את-יהוה ביראה וגילו ברעדה: נשקו-כר פו-אנפה וואבדו לך כי-יבער כמעט אפו אשרי קלי-חסי בו:	10 11 12	And now, kings, wise up! Accept discipline , earthly rulers! Serve YHWH with fear and rejoice with trembling! Kiss the son, or else he will become angry and you will perish in your way, for his anger quickly ignites. Happy are all who take refuge in him!	Ultimatum to the Kings

The first section of the psalm ends in verse 3 with the rebellious kings declaring that they will resist YHWH's rule. But the final section of the psalm contains the psalmist's response in verses 10-12. Here, the psalmist challenges the rebellious kings and calls upon them to reverse their behavior.

Interestingly, in Hebrew, many of the words in YHWH's response sound similar to the words used by the kings in their original challenge (for a picture of this effect, click [here](#)). In fact, every verb and noun from the nation's speech in verse 3 has some sound echo in verses 10-11. The words with similar sounds are matched by colored boxes in the diagram above. Translators may seek to construct similar sound-play in their translations.

7. Prominence

Prominence—what words, phrases, or ideas are most important in this psalm?: It is also important to consider how the author chose to draw attention to certain parts of the psalm. Here are the parts of the psalm that we believe are most prominent, and thus should be most prominent in a performance of the psalm.

למה רגשו גוים ולאמים יהגור־ריק:	1	Why are nations in an uproar, and [why] would peoples plot emptiness?
יתנצבו מלכי־ארץ ורוצנים נוסדו־יחד על־יְהוָה ועל־משיחו:	2	[Why] would earthly kings take a stand, and [why] have rulers conspired together against YHWH and against his anointed one?
גנתקה את־מוסרותימו ונשליכה ממנו עבתימו:	3	"Let's tear off their bonds, and throw their ropes away from us."
יושב בשמים ישחק אדני ילעג־למו:	4	The one enthroned in the heavens laughs. The Lord mocks them.
אז ידבר אלימו באפו ובחרונו יבהלמו:	5	Then he speaks to them in his anger and dismays them in his wrath.
ואני נסכתי מלגי על־ציון הר־קדשי:	6	"But I have poured out my king on Zion, my holy mountain."
אספרה אל חק		
יהוה אמר אלי בני אתה אני היום ילדתיך:	7	I will tell about the decree; YHWH said to me, "You are my son. I hereby father you today.
שאל ממני ואמתנה גוים נחלתך ואחזתך אפסי־ארץ:	8	Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your property.
תרעם בשקט ברזל ככלי יוצר תנפצם:	9	You will crush them with an iron scepter. You will smash them like clay pottery."
ועתה מלכים השכילו הנסו שפטי ארץ:	10	And now, kings, wise up! Accept discipline, earthly rulers!
עבדו את־יְהוָה ביראה ולגילו ברעדה:	11	Serve YHWH with fear and rejoice with trembling!
נשקו־בֶּר פו־אָנָה ולאבדו דָּר כִּי־יִבָּעַר כַּמַּעַט אָפוֹ אֲשֶׁר־י קל־תּוֹסִי בוֹ:	12	Kiss the son, or else he will become angry and you will perish in your way, for his anger quickly ignites. Happy are all who take refuge in him!

The speeches in verses 3, 6, and 7b-9 are prominent within their sections and the psalm as a whole.

The most prominent part of the psalm is **verses 7a-b**. Verse 7a is the middle line of the psalm, with 13 lines coming before and 13 lines coming after. The divine name, YHWH, appears 3 times in this psalm, and the middle of these appearances is in verse 7b. These verses contain a double introduction to the psalmist's speech: both "I will tell about the decree" and "YHWH said to me." In terms of story, the statement that the king is YHWH's son ties the psalm to 2 Sam 7:14 and the history of the line of kings that began with David. Thematically, the statement that the king is YHWH's son forms the basis for the promises in verses 8-9 and the warnings to the rebellious kings in verses 10-12.

TRANSLATION TIPS, VERSE BY VERSE

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in *green*) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 1–3: *Rebellion*

- This section is primarily about the useless rebellion of the earthly nations and their rulers.
- The psalm opens with the assumption that two events have already taken place:
 - YHWH has anointed and enthroned his human king on Mount Zion to represent his rule to the nations, and
 - Nations and their rulers have rebelled against YHWH and his anointed king.
- Each section of this psalm except the last one (verses 1-3, 4-6, and 7-9) ends with quoted speech. This first section ends with a quotation of the nations' speech (verse 3).
- Sections 1 (verses 1-3) and 4 (verses 10-12) are both about the earthly kings, and both sections use the words **kings** and **earth** (verse 2, verse 10).
- The main emotion of this section is *contempt* against the rebels, which is shown in the psalmist's rhetorical questions about the usefulness of the rebels' activities.

VERSE 1

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

YHWH and his anointed king rule over the nations and their rulers. But the nations and their rulers want freedom and independence from the imperial rule of YHWH and his anointed one, and so they are attempting to rebel. But there is no point! They will certainly be defeated. Why do they even bother? **Why are nations in an uproar**, like an agitated crowd or like a turbulent sea, and [why] do peoples make plots that result only in emptiness?

לָמָּה רָגָשׁוּ גוֹיִם וְלָאֲמָלִים יִהְיוּ רִיק:	1	Why are nations in an uproar , and [why] would peoples plot emptiness?
--	---	---

- **Participant tracking note:** In verses 1 and 2, the psalmist is speaking to a general audience. Both the speaker and audience will shift several times in this psalm, and translators should pay attention to this movement in their translations.
- The psalm opens with the question word¹ **why...?** (לָמָּה). The question is rhetorical, meaning that "it is asked for effect, rather from a desire to know the answer."² The psalmist is not seeking information but is expressing his contempt for the nations, they are engaging in something futile, foolish, and destined for failure. So, translators should make sure that their rendering is not understood as a real question.

¹ An interrogative adverb.

² Merriam-Websters.

- In some languages, asking a rhetorical question may not be an available option, or it is unable to express the contempt of the psalmist. Bratcher and Reyburn present a few alternatives:
 - A statement: "It is completely useless for the nations to plan rebellion."
 - A question and a statement: "The nations are in an uproar—but why? The peoples plot, but it is useless!" (French RCL).³
- In Hebrew, the question word **why** is left out of the second line of this verse for poetic effect (it is *elided*), but its meaning there is implied. In many languages, it may be necessary to include it. See, for example, the NLT says: *Why are the nations so angry? Why do they waste their time with futile plans?* (see also NET, GNT). It is probably implied in the clauses of verse 2 as well.⁴
- Most English translations render all four verbs in verses 1 and 2 (**are... in an uproar**, **plot**, **take a stand**, and **have... conspired**) in the present tense indicative. However, these translations obscure what is happening in the Hebrew. In Hebrew, these verbs are in two different verb forms that normally express different tenses. The first and last verbs are in *qatal* form, and should be rendered as describing what *has* happened in the past (*have been...in an uproar*, *have...conspired*). The second and third verbs are in *yiqtol* form, and describe what *continues* to happen in the speaker's present time (*plot*, *take a stand*).⁵
- The first verb of the psalm **are... in an uproar** (רָעָשׁוּ) occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, and so its meaning is unclear. There are two main options:
 - It could mean *assemble* (NJPS) in the sense of *conspire* (NIV, NRSV; see CEV, GNT).⁶ However, the evidence for this meaning is weak (see the [Verse by Verse notes](#) for more detail).
 - It could mean *are... angry*" (NLT) in the sense of *rage* (KJV, ESV, CSB), *are... in turmoil* (REB), or 'are... in an uproar' (NASB).⁷ Not only is the evidence for this meaning stronger, but verbs for *anger* also appear in the last verse of Psalm 2 (**or else he will become angry... his anger**). So, if we take the word here to refer to anger, then this idea appears both at the beginning and the end of the psalm, forming a poetic device called an *inclusio*. This is the preferred reading.
 - This preferred meaning (angry, in an uproar) is *stative* in nature; that is, it describes a *state of being* rather than an action. Stative verbs in this form (*qatal*) should most often be

³ Bratcher and Reyburn, 23.

⁴ So Craigie 1983, 62–3.

⁵ There are two good alternatives: 1) To render the first and last verbs as reporting a situation that is **known** to happen or have happened ('are... in an uproar' and 'have... conspired'; these are rendered as *indicative*). Then, the second and third verbs are rendered as reporting a situation that is **not known** to happen or have happened (*would... plot*, *would take a stand*; these are rendered as *modal*). 2) All four verbs describe past time, but the first and last verbs (the *qatals*) convey single, one time actions, while the second and third verbs (the *yiqtols*) convey "repetition/habit/explication/description" (Niccacci 2006, 259). This results in a rendering like "Why did the nations conspire, while the peoples were plotting in vain? [Why] were the kings of the earth setting themselves, while the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed?" (underlining added to highlight the verb forms).

⁶ So SDBH: "action by which a relatively large number of people form a group in order to pursue a common goal together."

⁷ Many French translations use the verb *s'agitent* (NBS, NFC, NVS, PDV) while others use a noun (BDS: *effervescence*; LSG: *tumulte*).

translated in the present tense, and this explains our present tense rendering 'are... in an uproar.'⁸

- The *raging nations* are often compared to the tumultuous sea in the Psalms (see Psalm 46). Furthermore, the word 'uproar' likely has connotations of commotion and turmoil like a stormy sea.
- The HCSB⁹ translation says *rebel*, which is a nice summary of what the nations are doing in verses 1-2, but it is not an accurate gloss of the Hebrew word here.
- The word **nations** (גוֹיִם) refers to non-Israelite nations. It tends "to describe a people in terms of its political and territorial affiliation."¹⁰ It is roughly a synonym with the word translated **peoples** (לְאֻמִּים), except that word tends to emphasize shared bloodlines, kinship, or origin.¹¹ For languages that lack distinct words for nations and peoples, translators may use a single term.
- The verb **plot** (יָהַג) literally means *mutter*,¹² and here it has the poetic meaning of "'devise, plan, plot' (see Psalm 38:12; Proverbs 24:2)."¹³ So, most English translations use a form of the word *plot*.
 - As in Psalm 1:2, the verb refers to utterances that are spoken aloud,¹⁴ and it implies intense, deep thinking.¹⁵ Languages that have a word that can fit in both places may consider rendering this word the same way here and in Psalm 1:2.
 - In this psalm, the verb contributes further to the picture in the previous line of the nations as a noisy crowd, agitated like a tumultuous sea. The French NBS captures the basic meaning of *mutter* in the context of tumultuous nations with the verb *gronder*, which means "to scold; grumble, to make a low and deep sound (like thunder)."¹⁶
- The noun **emptiness** (רֵיק) "may characterize [the nations'] behavior as 'worthless, morally bankrupt' but more likely refers to the outcome of their plots (that is, failure or futility). As the rest of the psalm emphasizes, their rebellion will fail."¹⁷
 - 'Emptiness' could either be the direct object of the verb 'plot' (resulting in the rendering **plot emptiness**) or a nominal adverb, resulting in the rendering *plot in emptiness* or *plot in vain* (ESV, NIV, NRSV, CSB, LEB). Both interpretations are grammatically possible. Given the fact that the Hebrew verb we have rendered 'plot' (יָהַג) typically takes an object, the direct object interpretation is more likely.
 - However, target languages often have their own conventions for phrases that refer to plotting that fails, and these should be followed by translators. Languages that lack an abstract noun for 'emptiness' could render it as an adjective: *something empty* or *an empty thing*. Other alternatives are *useless plots* (GNB) or *plots that will fail* (NET).

⁸ See HALOT: "to be restless;" also Gesenius 2013, 1220.

⁹ Holman Christian Standard Bible.

¹⁰ TDOT 2:427.

¹¹ TDOT 2:427; but see NIDOTTE 3:340.

¹² SDBH.

¹³ NET.

¹⁴ SDBH.

¹⁵ Bratcher and Reyerburn 1991, 18.

¹⁶ Cambridge French-English Dictionary.

¹⁷ NET.

VERSE 2

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

[Why] would earthly kings *who govern the nations as vassals to YHWH and his king* **take a stand against their suzerains¹⁸, and [why] have rulers conspired together against YHWH and against his king whom he anointed as the one to rule his people?**

<p>יְהִיבּוּ מַלְכֵי־אֶרֶץ וְרוֹזְנִים נֹסְדִי־יַחַד עַל־יְהוָה עַל־מְשִׁיחוֹ:</p>	2	<p>[Why] do earthly kings take a stand, and [why] have rulers conspired together against YHWH and against his anointed one?</p>
--	---	--

- As mentioned in the notes on verse 1, the psalm's initial question word **why...?** applies to the first and second lines of verse 2 also. Translators can supply the word here, as we have done.
- The verb **take a stand** (יְהִיבּוּ) literally means to "take one's stand (firmly)," but in the context of battle or conflict, it functions as a figure of speech that means "to resist."¹⁹
 - Even in English, the phrases *take a stand* or *set themselves* do not really convey the action by the nations of preparing for rebellion. Several translations make the sense of 'resist' more clear: *prepare for battle* (NLT, Hausa CLT²⁰, French NFC, PDV²¹), *revolt* (GNB), *form a united front* (NET), or *post/station themselves* (French NBS²²). While all of these are possible for translators, the French NBS is closest to the literal Hebrew term while still conveying the contextual meaning of preparing for battle.
- The phrase we have rendered as **earthly kings** is literally *kings of [the] earth* (מַלְכֵי־אֶרֶץ) in Hebrew.²³ It is a disparaging reference to the kings as kings who reign on earth, "in contrast to the heavenly king (verse 4)."²⁴
- **Rulers** (רוֹזְנִים) is a poetic term for "ruler[s] of a nation or people."²⁵
 - It can be rendered with a verbal phrase if necessary: *those who rule*. The word is used synonymously with the word **kings** from the previous line, though it is more generic than 'kings.' Languages that lack two different terms for 'king' and 'ruler' can use the same one for both.

¹⁸ A *suzerain* was a superior ruler who had authority over other, less powerful rulers. These less powerful leaders were called *vassals*, and they were required to remain faithful to the superior ruler.

¹⁹ DCH, HALOT; see, for example, Deut 7:2, 9:2, 11:25; Josh 1:5; 1 Sam 17:16; 2 Sam 23:12; Jer 46:4, 14; Ps 94:16; Job 41:2; 1 Chron 20:6.

²⁰ *sun yi shirin yaki*.

²¹ *se préparent au combat*.

²² *se postent*.

²³ It is common for words that are not marked as definite in Hebrew to have a definite sense when translating into other languages.

²⁴ Baethgen 1904, 5; see Ibn Ezra; see the same phrase in Pss 76:13; 89:28; 138:4; 148:11.

²⁵ SDBH.

- The word 'rulers' is in an unusual order in Hebrew. It appears at the front of its clause (line 2b) to create a symmetrical pattern²⁶ with the previous clause (line 2a). The result in Hebrew looks like this:
 - [why] do take a stand earthly kings,
 - and [why] rulers have conspired together?
- The above pattern occurs many other times in this psalm (verses 5, 8, 9, and 10). If the target language is capable of recreating this pattern in a way that makes sense, and it has a poetic effect in the target language, then it should be retained.
- The phrase **conspire together against** (הִתְקַדֵּם יַחַד עָלַי) also occurs in Ps 31:14: "For I hear many whispering, 'Terror on every side!' They conspire against me (בְּהִתְקַדֵּם יַחַד עָלַי) and plot to take my life" (NIV). In this passage, as in Ps 2, the verb probably means *get together* in the sense of *conspire*,²⁷ that is, "to join in a secret agreement to do an unlawful or wrongful act."²⁸
- The preposition **against** (עָלַי), which appears twice in the last line of this verse, is used here to express opposition.²⁹ The repetition of this word draws attention to the conflict.
- **YHWH** is God's proper name (as opposed to a title such as *lord*), which he commanded his people to call him in Exodus 3:15. For more guidance about how to translate this name, see the "Names/Titles of God" document. This name also appears in verses 7 and 11.
- The word **his** in line 2 refers to YHWH.
- The key term **anointed one** refers to someone upon whose head fine oil was poured in a ceremonial way. It often refers to a person who was given special favor and protection from God (1 Sam. 2:10; Ps. 28:8; Hab. 3:13). Because kings were typically anointed with oil for the task of ruling over Israel (Ps. 45:7), the designation 'anointed one' is often used to refer to the king, as it is here.
 - In Hebrew, this is the word *Messiah* (מָשִׁיחַ). Translators should ensure that they are consistent about how they translate this word throughout the Bible when it refers to a king.
 - At the same time, translators should be careful not to import language that is specific to the New Testament into the Old Testament. So, here they should be careful to avoid words like "Christ" (which is a transliteration of the Greek word Χριστός that means 'anointed one', but is not found in the Hebrew Old Testament) or "Jesus."
 - Many cultures may not have the idea of anointing, especially as it relates to being chosen as king. In this case, translators may:
 - Still use the symbol, but explain it in a paraphrase, such as *his anointed king* (NET, REB) or *his anointed one he chose as king*. This is the preferred method. For languages in which the passive voice will not work, a possibility is *the one YHWH anointed*.

²⁶ The pattern is called a *chiasm*.

²⁷ HALOT; so REB and NASB ("conspire"); LXX: "gather" (συνήχθησαν). According to HALOT, this verb probably derives from the root יָדָה II (a by-form of יָדָה; cf. the noun יָדָה which can refer both to a "group, gathering" of people and, by metaphorical extension, to a "plot" or "scheme" known only by that group. See SDBH; so also Gesenius 2013, 471.

²⁸ Merriam-Websters.

²⁹ Mena 2012, §5.4.6; cf. 2 Chr 26:18—"and they stood against [עָלַי] Uzziah."

- Drop the symbol and substitute a paraphrase, such as *the king he chose* (GNB). However, such a translation causes the passage to lose connection with the major biblical theme of the anointed king, and is not preferred.
- Choose another symbol from the culture that communicates the meaning of being chosen as king. However, doing so may be risky for two reasons. First, the local ceremony may contain many un-Biblical ideas. Second, it may be difficult to consistently use this local symbol in other parts of the Bible that refer to anointing and the anointed one.
- Transliterate the phrase as *Messiah*. This option may be best when this transliteration is already in use in local churches.
- As Bratcher and Reyburn point out, "rebellion against the chosen king of Israel was rebellion against God."³⁰
- The complete phrase **against YHWH and against his anointed one** probably relates to both of the first two lines, so that the verse means: *Why would earthly kings take a stand against YHWH and against his anointed one, and why have rulers conspired together against YHWH and against his anointed one?* The final line of verse 2 most likely relates to both lines of verse 1 as well, so that the message is *Why are nations in an uproar against YHWH and against his anointed one, and [why] would peoples plot emptiness against YHWH and against his anointed one?*
- Psalm 2:1-2 is quoted in Acts 4:25-26.

VERSE 3

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

*The rebels say, "Let's stop serving them! **Let's tear off their bonds and throw their ropes away from us!** Let's achieve independence!"*

<p>וְנִתְקַהּ אֶת־מִוֶּסְרוֹתֵינוּ וְנִשְׁלֹכָהּ מִמֶּנּוּ עֲבֹתֵינוּ:</p>	3	<p>"Let's tear off their bonds, and throw their ropes away from us!"</p>
--	---	---

- **Participant tracking note:** In verse 3, the nations and peoples, who are represented by their earthly kings and rulers, begin to talk amongst themselves. The entirety of this verse is the speech of these people to one another, as it is reported by the psalmist to his audience. The lines of the verse have the same basic meaning, namely that the rulers want to set themselves free from the authority of YHWH and his Messiah.
- Though many English translations simply add quotation marks to this verse to show that it is reported speech, in some languages it may be necessary to also add a reference to who is speaking, especially for oral translators. One possibility is to add the phrase *they say* outside of the quotation marks (GNB, NET, French PDV,³¹ Hausa CLT;³² see also NLT, REB, French

³⁰ Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 25.

³¹ *Ils disent.*

³² *Suna cewa.*

BDS³³: they cry). For additional clarity, translators may say *they say amongst themselves* or *they say to one another*.

- The verbs **Let's tear off** and **throw** are first-person plural verbs that have some important features for translators:
 - These two verbs are in a form (called the *cohortative*) that indicates the speakers are seeking "to instigate [that is, to urge] or encourage each other to some action."³⁴ That is why we have added the word **let's**, which in our translation applies to both verbs. Translators can think of it as saying *let's tear off...and let's throw...*
 - Context suggests that the nations, peoples, kings and rulers are talking to one another, and not to YHWH, YHWH's anointed, or YHWH's people. In this case, the speakers want *their* entire audience to be involved in the actions of these verbs. So, languages that distinguish between the inclusive and exclusive 1st person plural should use the inclusive form (this also applies to the pronoun **us** at the end of the verse). At the same time, this speech is being reported by the Psalmist to his own audience, and the psalmist does not expect that *his* audience should be included in the actions of these verbs. Some languages may be able to mark this distinction.
- The pronoun **their** occurs in each line of this verse. Both times the word refers to YHWH and his anointed one.
 - For some audiences, following the participants here may be difficult, and translators may find it helpful to make the referents of these pronouns clear. One strategy is that of the Hausa CLT, which adds the referents in the middle of the verse: *Let's free ourselves from their rule, from the rule of YHWH and his king that he set apart, and let's escape from their slavery.*³⁵
- The words **bonds** (מוֹסְרוֹת) and **ropes** (עֲבָתִים) are images meant to communicate the idea of being restrained, and therefore under the authority and control of another person.
 - So, for languages in which the meaning is not clear, translators may:
 - Add an explanation of the function of the bonds and ropes, such as: *bonds that restrain us* and *ropes that tie us*. This is the preferred method.
 - The GNB drops the images of the bonds and ropes, and substitutes them with *their control* and *their rule*. Both of these meanings can be helpful for translators to add while retaining the images of the bonds and ropes: *bonds of their control* and *ropes of their rule/slavery*.³⁶ However, we do not recommend removing the images, if possible.
 - The NLT removes the image only from the second phrase, and in its place substitutes *slavery to God*. From the perspective of God's people, the instruction of God is life-giving (see Ps 1), but from the perspective of those opposed to God, his instruction is like oppressive slavery. This is a compromise method, if necessary.

³³ *Ils s'écrient.*

³⁴ IBHS §34.5.1.

³⁵ *Mu 'yantar da kanmu daga mulkinsu, daga mulkin Yahweh da sarkin da ya keɓe, mu kuɓuce daga bautarsu.*

³⁶ See Hausa CLT.

- 'Bonds' were made of metal and were used to hold prisoners and slaves (see Jer 30:8) as well as animals (Job 39:5); the word may be translated as *chains* or *shackles*. 'Ropes' were woven material and were also used to bind prisoners (see Judg 15:13; 16:12) and "to refer to decorative plaited work" (see Exod 28:14).³⁷ The two images of 'bonds' and 'ropes' are basically synonymous in function here in Psalm 2, and so languages that lack separate words may use the same term to translate them.
- Like the first person plural verbs in this verse, the pronoun **us** refers to the nations and peoples (verse 1) and the kings and rulers (verse 2).

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in *green*) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 4–6: *Response*

- This section is primarily about the response of YHWH, the Lord enthroned in heaven, to the futile rebellion of the earthly nations and rulers.
- The first two verses of this section return to the psalmist as speaker.
- The section ends with a quotation of YHWH's speech to the nations (verse 6).
- Both this section and the third section (verses 7-9) present YHWH speaking in order to justify his human king's right to rule.
- In the first section (verses 1-3) the scene was the **earth**, but in this second section, the scene shifts to **heaven** (verse 4).
 - The geographic movement in this psalm is significant. For more detail, see [Poetic Feature 1: Heaven and Earth and In Between](#).
- There is a new main character, who is **the one enthroned in the heavens** (verse 4a).
- The main emotions of this section are:
 - Contempt expressed by God at the rebellious nations and kings (verses 4 and 5).
 - Awe as God pours out his king on Zion (verse 6).

VERSE 4

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

The one enthroned in the heavens, far above the earthly kings, is not threatened by their rebellion. Instead, he **laughs** at them, an expression of mockery and disdain. **The** all-powerful **Lord** whom they ought to be serving **mocks them**.

יוֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁחַק
אֲדֹנָי יִלְעָג-לָמוֹ:

4

The one enthroned in the heavens laughs.
The Lord **mocks them**.

³⁷ NIDOTTE 3:318.

- **Participant tracking note:** The subject of verse 4a is **the one enthroned in the heavens** (יֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם), who is YHWH.
 - Even though YHWH was already mentioned in verse 2, he is introduced here for the first time as the agent (that is, the one performing the action) of a clause.
 - It may be difficult for some audiences to tell who 'the one enthroned' refers to in the first line, since the clear referent ('the Lord') does not appear until the second line. One strategy for making the identity of 'the one enthroned' clear is to rephrase the verse to make 'the Lord' the clear subject of the verb 'laughs' in the first line:
 - *In heaven the Lord laughs as he sits on his throne, making fun of the nations* (CEV).
 - *From his throne in heaven the Lord laughs and mocks their feeble plans* (GNB).
 - *But the Lord laughs, and he who sits in the heavens mocks them* (French BFC).³⁸
 - The phrase is in an unusual position within the Hebrew clause. It is placed at the front of the clause to help readers and hearers of this psalm understand that YHWH, in his role as an agent, is a new topic within the psalm.
- The verb translated **enthroned** (יֹשֵׁב) literally means sit, and this is how some translations render it (sits: ESV, NASB, NRSV). But here and elsewhere it refers figuratively to sitting on a throne, that is, "reigning"³⁹ as a king. The verb probably has this meaning in this context, where YHWH as 'the one enthroned in heaven' is contrasted with the *kings of earth* (verse 2).⁴⁰ So, NIV, CSB and NET render it 'enthroned,' and NLT has *rules*. One possible rendering of the phrase is *from the seat of his rule in heaven*.⁴¹
- The verbs **laughs**, **mocks**, 'speaks,' and 'terrified' in verses 4-5 narrate a sequence of events: first YHWH 'laughs' and 'mocks' (verse 4) and **then** (אָז) he 'speaks' to them (verse 5a) so that they are 'terrified' (verse 5b).
 - These verbs are in a form (*yiqtol*) that has the effect of making the sequence of events more like a performance; it makes it feel as though the events are happening right before the speaker's eyes.⁴²
 - The verb 'laughs' (יִשְׁחַק) refers to an "action by which humans or deities express their lack of respect for (other) humans, often accompanied by laughter."⁴³
 - The verb 'mocks' (יִלְעָג) is a poetic synonym of 'laughs' (יִשְׁחַק). It occurs mostly in poetry and refers to an "action by which humans or deities express their disdain of others with words, sounds and/or gestures."⁴⁴

³⁸ *Mais le Seigneur se met à rire, celui qui siège dans les cieux se moque d'eux.*

³⁹ It appears a number of times in the phrase *he sits upon a throne* (יֹשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּא: Exod 11:5; 12:29; Deut 17:18; 1 Sam 1:9; 4:13; 1 Kgs 1:13, 17, 20) and can have a similar meaning even when the prepositional phrase *upon a throne* (עַל כִּסֵּא) is omitted (for example, Isa 40:22; Zech 9:6).

⁴⁰ So SDBH: "action by which humans or deities assume a position of leadership, as if sitting on an actual throne." See NIV: "The One enthroned in heaven" (also NLT, CSB, CEV, GNT).

⁴¹ Hausa CLT.

⁴² See Robar 2022, 4-5, 12-13.

⁴³ SDBH.

⁴⁴ SDBH.

- Thus, both of these verbs express the emotion of *contempt*, not of amusement or humor.
- The synonymous nature of the two lines means that the two verbs happen simultaneously.
- In many languages, it may be necessary to employ a figure of speech in order to avoid using the same word twice. One example is to use expression *makes fun of them*⁴⁵ for 'mocks.'
- The key term we have rendered **the Lord** in the second line is a title for God as ruler. It is not the divine personal name YHWH, which appears three times in this psalm (verses 2, 7, and 11).
- The term rendered **them** (לָמוֹ) refers to the the nations and peoples (verse 1) and the kings and rulers (verse 2).⁴⁶ The term 'them' appears to be the object not just of the verb 'mock' in the second line, but also the verb 'laugh' in the first line as well. So, translators may say, *the one enthroned in heaven laughs at them*.⁴⁷

VERSE 5

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

Then he speaks to them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath.

אֵן יִדְבֵּר אֱלִימוֹ בְּאַפּוֹ וּבְהִרְוֹנוֹ בְּהֶלְמוֹ:	5	Then he speaks to them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath.
--	---	---

- The word **then** (אֵן) could be functioning in a variety of ways, but it most likely connects a sequence of events,⁴⁸ resulting in the meaning: "(first) he laughs and mocks; then he speaks..."⁴⁹ This is the preferred reading. The four verbs in verses 4-5 are in the same form (*yiqtol*) that, when combined with the word 'then,' has the effect of creating a dramatic narrative with suspense. For alternative readings, see the footnote below.⁵⁰
- The third-person singular pronouns **he** and **his** refer to YHWH. The third-person plural pronoun **them** refers to the rebellious nations, peoples, kings and rulers (from verses 1 and 2).
- We have rendered the verbs **he speaks** and **terrifies** in the present tense.
 - These verbs are in the same form (*yiqtol*) as the verbs in verse 4 ('laughs/mocks'). They indicate something like a performance, in which the events are happening right before the speaker's eyes (think of a sports commentator saying, "He shoots, he scores!").⁵¹ Since the

⁴⁵ Hausa CLT: *Ya mai da su abin ba'a*.

⁴⁶ The 3mp מ suffix used throughout verses 4-5 is not the normal Hebrew 3mp suffix; it is rare and "poetic." See JM §61i; see also §94i.

⁴⁷ See Delitzsch 1996, 55; Tsumura 2023, 22-23, 65-66.

⁴⁸ In this reading, the term functions as a *conjunctive adverb*. See BHRG §40.6(2).

⁴⁹ So Baethgen 1904, 5.

⁵⁰ Alternatively, the term 'then' could refer to a specific point in time (as an *adverb of time*; BHRG §40.6(1)). In this reading, it refers to the time of the rebellion described in verses 1-3, so that the verse means: "at that time (when they were rebelling), he speaks to them..." (So Genebrardus and Gejerus, cited in Poole 1678). The word 'then' might also connect somehow to the term 'and now' (וְעַתָּה) in verse 10 (see, for example, Josh 14:11).

⁵¹ See Robar 2022, 4-5, 12-13.

same verb form is used in verse 5 as well, we believe 'he speaks' and 'dismays' should be rendered in the present tense also, so that they too describe events playing out before the psalmist's eyes.

- However, several modern English translations render the verbs here in verse 5 in the future tense: *he will speak...and terrify* (ESV, NASB, NRSV). This is an acceptable rendering of this form, which can have a future tense value in a sequence of events.⁵² But rendering the verbs this way means that the events of verse 5 (and following) are not playing out before the psalmist.
- The preposition **in** (בְּ) found in the phrases **in his anger** and **in his wrath** (בְּאַפּוֹ...וּבְחֵרוֹנוֹ) indicates that YHWH speaks to the nations *in a state of anger/wrath*.⁵³ These phrases indicate the manner in which YHWH speaks and terrifies people, so the NET has *angrily*.
 - The phrase 'in his anger' is literally *with/in his nose*. This is a very common figure of speech in Hebrew, in which the nose is the outlet of anger. Frequently elsewhere in the Old Testament, YHWH's nose is said to be hot or to burn (see verse 12). If the target language has an idiom similar to *with/in his nose* that uses a body part to express anger, it may be appropriate to use here.
 - Both the word **anger** and the word **wrath** refer to the emotion of "extreme displeasure" and are associated with fire.⁵⁴
 - The second term, 'wrath' (חֵרוֹן) might "have a specialized use designating the legitimate rage" of a ruler against a subordinate person who is disobedient.⁵⁵
 - For languages that lack distinct words for *anger* and *wrath*, translators may use the same term to translate both.
 - Neither of these two Hebrew words is the same as the Hebrew word we have translated as 'uproar' (which is commonly translated as *rage*) in verse 1. Even though all of these words connote anger (see notes on verse 1), the anger of the nations is not like the anger of YHWH, at least in terms of the vocabulary used in this psalm. Translators should therefore use a different word for the 'uproar' in verse 1 than what they use for the 'anger' and 'wrath' in verse 5, if possible.
 - The phrase 'in his wrath' is in an unusual position in the Hebrew text. It appears at the front of its clause (line 5b) to create a symmetrical pattern⁵⁶ with the previous clause (line 5a). The result in Hebrew looks like this:
 - he speaks to them **in his anger**,
 - and **in his wrath** he dismays them.

⁵² In this scenario, the distinction between the present tense values of verse 4 and the future tense of verse 5 may be delineated by the presence of the word 'then' that begins verse 5.

⁵³ That is, they indicate the *mode* of his anger. See BHRG §39.6(4); Jenni 1992, #423, #445.

⁵⁴ SDBH.

⁵⁵ "Since the object of this rage is almost always Israel (except Hab 3:8; Ps 18:8), and since the source of provocation often is 'transgression of the covenant' (Josh 7:1; 23:16; Judg 2:20) or 'pursuit of other gods' (Deut 6:14–15; 11:16–17; 31:16–17), חֵרוֹן and אַפּ seem to have a specialized use designating the legitimate rage of a suzerain against a disobedient vassal" (Herion 1992, 990).

⁵⁶ The pattern is called a *chiasm*.

- The Hebrew verb that we have rendered **terrifies** means an "action by which humans, divine beings, or certain events cause (other) humans to experience a state of great fear combined with severe distress, often accompanied by physical symptoms, such as trembling and pain."⁵⁷ Most modern English translations render it as we have done. The French PDV has *makes... tremble*,⁵⁸ which is a good example to follow as long as it communicates extreme fear in the target language.

VERSE 6

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

He says in response to their words (from verse 3): "You can plot all you like. **But** it will not work. **I have poured out my king** as my image, just as a craftsman pours liquid metal into a mold to make an image, and I have placed him **on Zion**, the city of David, **my holy mountain**, the place where heaven and earth meet, to represent my heavenly rule on the earth. Nothing that you do can alter this reality."

וְאֲנִי נִסְכַּחְתִּי מֶלֶכִּי עַל־צִיּוֹן הַר־קֹדֶשׁ׃	6	“ But I have poured out my king on Zion, my holy mountain. ”
---	---	---

- **Participant tracking note:** This verse is a quotation of YHWH's speech to the nations.
 - A few English translations supply a phrase to make it clear that YHWH is speaking, and translators may consider doing the same. Possibilities that appear in modern translations include *For the Lord declares* (NLT), *the Lord says to them* (French PDV⁵⁹), or *he says* (GNB, REB, Hausa CLT). The French BDS adds the phrase *by telling them this:* to the end of the previous verse, where YHWH was the one speaking.⁶⁰
 - Translators should use local conventions for communicating quoted speech here.
- The word **but** (וְ) at the beginning of verse 6 contrasts YHWH's response here with the nations' speech in verse 3. In Hebrew grammar, when the word 'but' begins a quotation, it marks a "dispreferred response."⁶¹ In other words, here the word marks that YHWH's response is a kind of answer that the nations do not want to hear.
- The pronoun **I** (אֲנִי) refers to YHWH. In Hebrew, the word is in an unusual position. It appears before the verb in verse 6a to show that it represents a shift to a new topic in the dialogue between the nations and YHWH. The old topic was the nations' desire to rebel, which they expressed in verse 3. Now, here in verse 6, YHWH (and what he will do) is the new topic of the

⁵⁷ SDBH.
⁵⁸ *les fait trembler*.
⁵⁹ *Le Seigneur leur dit*.
⁶⁰ *en leur tenant ce discours* :
⁶¹ BHRG §40.23.4.3; see, for example, 1 Kgs 2:21-22.

dialogue. The contrast can be understood as, "You nations say that you want to rebel (verse 3)... But as for *me*... (verse 6, see NASB, LEB)."

- The meaning of the verb translated **I have poured out** (יָסַךְ) has long been debated. In brief:
 - Most modern English translations understand it to mean *set/installed*.
 - However, we understand the verb in the sense of "I have poured out my king as my image, just as a craftsman pours liquid metal into a mold to make an image." This is a well-attested meaning of the Hebrew verb (יָסַךְ), and it fits the context well. Thus, Psalm 2:6 depicts the king as God's image (see Gen 1:26), which is a metaphor that goes hand in hand with the metaphor of sonship in the following verse (verse 7: **you are my son**; see Gen 5:3).
 - If available, translators should choose a verb that specifically indicates metalworking, such as *cast (metal into a mold)*, instead of a more general verb of 'pouring out' that could describe water. If no such word is available, or if using such a word would not make sense in the local language, then a term for *set/installed (a king)* may be used.
 - The following chart further explores the *image* metaphor in verse 6. The chart compares characteristics of both an image and a king, such as the process by which each is created, where each one is located, and how each one functions:

"But I have cast my king on Zion, my holy mountain" (v. 6)		
	An Image	The King
Process of creation	metal casting, pouring metal into a mold (Isa 40:19; 44:10; cf. Num 33:52)	enthronement on Mt. Zion (v. 6)
Location	temple (2 Kgs 11:18)	Zion, YHWH's holy mountain (v. 6)
Function	represents the deity's presence on earth	"acts as the conduit through which the authority and power of a divine patron is realized" (Garr 2003, 145)
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The king stands on Mt. Zion, between heaven and earth, representing YHWH's heavenly rule (cf. v. 4) on the earth 	

- See [The Meaning of יָסַךְ in Ps 2:6](#) for in-depth discussion of the issue.
- The phrase **my king** (מֶלֶךְ) refers to "the king who is mine, whom I made to be king." It does not mean "the king who rules over me." The word for king here is the same as the one used in verse 2 for 'kings.' The pronoun **my** refers to YHWH (as it also does in the second line, in the phrase **my holy mountain**).

- The name of the holy mountain is **Zion**, which is "that part of Jerusalem on which the temple was built, also known as a fortress and stronghold, city of David, YHWH's dwelling place."⁶² Other Psalms also make it clear that Zion is the place where YHWH's king is located.⁶³
 - The NLT substitutes the phrase **on Zion** with the phrase *on the throne in Jerusalem*. But the NLT uses the term Zion 70 other times throughout the Bible, and so dropping the term here obscures this verse's connection with the Zion theme elsewhere. If translators want to clarify that Zion is in Jerusalem, we recommend something like *on Zion, my holy mountain, in Jerusalem*.
- The phrase **my holy mountain** (עַל-הַר-קֹדֶשׁ) is, literally, "my mountain of holiness," that is, the mountain that is devoted to me as holy.⁶⁴
 - This phrase serves to further identify 'Zion'.⁶⁵ The connection can be paraphrased as *My holy mountain (which is) called Zion; or, Zion, which is my holy mountain*.
 - The key term **holy** refers to a "state in which... humans or objects have become part of the realm of God and his service, and therefore no longer accessible to humans unless they have gone through special rituals."⁶⁶ It refers to divine beings, people, things, or places that are set apart, exclusive, important, and valuable. So, the opposite of **holy** is not *sinful* but rather *common, mundane, or ordinary*.
 - In some languages, it may be helpful to render this as a verbal idea: *the mountain I have devoted as holy*.
 - This phrase refers to Zion, which is not a very high peak (especially compared to, for example, Everest or Kilimanjaro). It is 2,575 feet (785 meters) above sea level.⁶⁷ So, several English translations opt to translate the word we have rendered as **mountain** (הַר) as *hill* (ESV, NIV84, GNB, NET, NRSV).



"Mt. Zion from the southern slope of Olivet"
Matson Collection, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

- In ancient Hebrew thought, a mountain is a place where heaven and earth meet, and thus a place where people experience God's presence (see for example, Gen 22; Exod 3:1-2; 19; also Matt 17:1-8). In the flow of Ps 2, the mountain (verse 6) is the place from which YHWH, who is

⁶² SDBH.

⁶³ According to Ps 132, "The Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: 'This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it... There I will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed'" (Ps 132:13-14, 17, ESV).

⁶⁴ Joel 4:17; Obad 16; Pss 3:5; 15:1; 43:3; 48:2; 99:9; Dan 9:16.

⁶⁵ It is in *apposition*.

⁶⁶ SDBH.

⁶⁷ Britannica, "Landscape of Jerusalem," (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Jerusalem/Landscape>).

the great heavenly king (see verse 4a), rules over the earthly kings (see verses 2a, 10b). Compare Psalm 110:2, where YHWH is speaking to his messiah: *The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of your enemies!"*

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in green) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 7–9: Decree

- This section is primarily about YHWH's decree. The decree, which was originally spoken by YHWH, is quoted by the king in this section. The content of the decree takes up most of this section of the psalm (midway through verse 7b, all the way to the end of verse 9).
- In this section, the king is the speaker. He tells about YHWH's decree to the nations.
- The decree is based on YHWH's covenant with David.
- The main emotion of this section is *confidence*, since the decree expresses both YHWH's affection towards his son and his determination to give his son success over the rebels.

VERSE 7

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

Listen up, you rebellious nations! **I**, the king whom YHWH anointed and cast as his image, **will tell about the covenant** YHWH made with my father, David, which he has confirmed to me as a **decree**, a decree that you must heed; **YHWH said to me** on the day of my enthronement, "**You are my son**. You resemble me in terms of character, you represent my rule, and you will always receive my paternal care. With this speech, **I hereby father you today**, on the day of your enthronement, causing you to be born into a royal existence, thus fulfilling what I promised your father, David, when I told him, 'I will raise up your offspring after you... and I will establish his kingdom... I will become his father, and he will become my son' (2 Sam 7:12-14).

אֶסְפָּרָה אֶל חָק יְהוָה אֱמַר אֵלַי בְּגִי אֲמָה אֲנִי הַיּוֹם יִלְדָּתִיךָ:	7	I will tell about the decree ; YHWH said to me , " You are my son . I hereby father you today .
--	---	---

- The term **I** in verse 6 referred to YHWH, but in the first line of verse 7 it refers to the king, who is now the speaker.⁶⁸
 - If this transition is difficult for the target audience to follow, translators could retain the word 'I' while explaining who is speaking: *I, the king, will tell...* This is a better alternative than dropping the reference to the first-person altogether (against the NLT, NET).
 - Still, the close-together occurrence of the first-person to refer to both YHWH and the king - without an immediately clear way to tell them apart - is probably a poetic device meant to blur the lines somewhat between YHWH and his king. This ambiguity also exists in other

⁶⁸ In Hebrew, this word is part of the verb form, and not a separate pronoun.

psalms about God's chosen king (the Messiah), such as in Psalm 110. So, translators should consider retaining this ambiguity if doing so can still result in an intelligible translation for the target audience.

- The verb **tell** (סִפֵּר) refers to an "action by which humans communicate verbally to others about an event or situation, with focus on the contents rather than on the speech act."⁶⁹
 - The verb has a suffix (he: אֶסְפֶּרָה) that some translations identify as the marker for the *cohortative*, which is why these translations say "Let me..." (ISV, see ELB, French NFC, BDV) instead of "I will..." (which is the choice of most translations). But it is more likely that this suffix instead expresses that the action is done for the benefit of, or in the interests of, the speaker.⁷⁰
 - Some languages today have a natural way to indicate this "benefitting the speaker" sense, in which case it would be appropriate to render it in translation (perhaps: *I will tell for my benefit...*).⁷¹ But many other languages do not have this sense, and in such cases translators may leave it untranslated.
 - Interestingly, this suffix appears in three places in this psalm, each time in the speech of a different speaker (verses 3, 7, 8).
 - For languages that have more than one way to express the future tense, we recommend a form that will convey that the king begins to tell the decree starting in the very next line of the psalm, such as the immediate future tense. The present tense could also work (see NLT, NET), since the act of "telling" happens immediately after he says "I will tell."
- The word **about** (אֵל) here indicates the topic of the discourse: "tell of the decree" (ESV, NJPS) or "tell about the decree."
- The word **decree** (חֹק) here refers to a "god-given" "prescription" or "rule."⁷² But it is possible that the emphasis here is on YHWH's privilege and power to make the decree happen, rather than on the hearers' obedience to what is said.⁷³ Specifically, in this context, YHWH's decree to the king "appears to be the [covenantal] promise of sonship pronounced at the king's enthronement."⁷⁴ The decree acts as a "personal covenant document, renewing God's covenant commitment to the dynasty of David."⁷⁵
- Depending on how one divides the first two lines of verse 7, **YHWH** might be either:

⁶⁹ SDBH.

⁷⁰ This is called the *reflexive-benefactive* sense. See Cook 2024, 216; see Gentry 1998.

⁷¹ For example, such a reflexive-benefactive may be possible in Chamba-Daka, a language in the Adamawa region of northeastern Nigeria. See Boyd 2010.

⁷² HALOT.

⁷³ Victor 1966, 361. Note, however, that the earthly kings are in fact summoned to observe the decree (verses 10-12).

⁷⁴ TDOT.

⁷⁵ Craigie 1983, 67; see Jones 1965, 336-44. On the close relationship between "covenant" and "decree," see for example Ps 105:9-11.

- the final noun of the first line, and part of a combined phrase⁷⁶ with the word **decree**: ...*decree of YHWH. He said...*⁷⁷ This is the reading of most modern translations.⁷⁸
- the subject of the following clause: ...*decree. YHWH said...*⁷⁹ Only a few modern translations take the lines this way,⁸⁰ but this line division is supported by the MT accents. A decision between the two options is difficult. In the absence of any compelling evidence one way or another, we have defaulted to following the reading tradition of the Masoretes and grouping "YHWH" with the second line.
- The pronoun **me** in line 2 refers to the king, who is speaking. After this, the king begins to report the speech of YHWH. So, **you** refers to the king, and **my** refers to YHWH.
- The declaration by YHWH that **You are my son** (בְּנִי אֱתֶרָה) draws upon an Old Testament theme that goes back at least to Exodus 4:22, where YHWH says, "Israel is my firstborn son." In that verse, the image of a 'son' refers to a whole nation, and so the usage of the word is clearly figurative. It does not refer to the process of physical birth, but rather to the significance of the relationship between YHWH and his people. This theme of God's son undergoes an important development in the covenant YHWH made with David and his descendants: "I will raise up your offspring after you... and I will establish his kingdom... I will be his father, and he will be my son" (2 Sam 7:12-14). The special father-son relationship that YHWH has with the whole nation is now concentrated upon a single representative, the king. This is the background for Psalm 2.
 - The image of the 'son' has high prominence within this psalm, since YHWH's king is described as his son. Sonship is part of the reason why, in the next verse, the king will **inherit** the nations (verse 8).
 - Furthermore, this image is frequently referred to in the New Testament, including in direct quotations of this verse (Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5; see also Matt 3:17; 17:5; etc.).
 - Therefore, translators should render this image faithfully in order to produce an accurate translation here and elsewhere in the Bible. The sonship of YHWH's king is central not only to Christianity, but to Judaism as well. So, we recommend not obscuring the image in translation.
 - The following table explores the significance of the 'son' image within the Old Testament. Specifically, the table compares the relationship between a *father and his son* with the relationship between *God and his king*:

⁷⁶ A construct chain.

⁷⁷ So Targum; see also the layout in the Aleppo Codex.

⁷⁸ NIV, NRSV, NLT, CSB, CEV, GNT, REB, NET, LUT, HFA, NGÜ, ELB, EÜ, GNB, ZÜR.

⁷⁹ So MT accents; Aquila[?]; Peshitta. A third option is if "YHWH" is read twice, as both the final noun of a construct chain and as the subject of the next clause (...*decree of YHWH. YHWH said...*). This is the reading of the LXX and Jerome, but no modern translations take this view.

⁸⁰ ESV, see NJPS.

I will tell about the decree:

*YHWH said to me, "You are **my son**."*

*I have **fathered** you today.*

*Ask me, and I will make nations **your inheritance**... (vv. 7-8a)*

	Father-Son Relationship	God-King Relationship
Participant 1	father	God
Participant 2	son	king
Nature of relationship	familial, blood bond	covenantal bond (cf. 2 Sam 7; Ps 89:4, 27)
Basis of relationship	loyalty, family obligation (not e.g., merit-based)	loyalty and faithfulness
Beginning of relationship	begins on the day the child is born	begins on the day of the king's enthronement ("today," v. 7c), when the covenant is renewed (cf. Craigie 1983, 67)
Source of relationship	"fathers" or "begets" the son (cf. Prov 3:22)	the covenant relationship is initiated by God (cf. 2 Sam 7:8), who "fathers" the king (Ps 2:7c)
Implication of relationship: Resemblance	son resembles father in terms of physical appearance and occupation	king resembles God in terms of character and rule (cf. Gentry 2012, 396-7)
Implication of relationship: Authority	father has authority over his son (cf. Jer 35:6)	God has authority over the king
Implication of relationship: Instruction	father instructs his son (cf. Prov 1:8)	king meditates on God's instruction (cf. Deut 17:18-20; Ps 1:2)
Implication of relationship: Discipline	father disciplines his son for disobedience	God disciplines the king for disobedience (cf. 2 Sam 7:14)
Implication of relationship: Love and care	father loves and cares for his son (cf. Gen 37:3; 2 Sam 14:1; Ps 103:13)	God loves and cares for the king
Implication of relationship: Inheritance	son inherits father's property (cf. Num 27:7-11; 1 Kgs 21:3; Job 42:15)	God gives the king the nations and the ends of the earth (Ps 2:8)
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The king is in a unique covenant relationship with YHWH (cf. 2 Sam 7; Ps 89) • The king who sits enthroned in Zion (v. 6) <i>resembles</i> the Lord who sits enthroned in the heavens (v. 4) • YHWH will instruct the king, and the king will submit to his instruction (cf. Ps 1) • YHWH will protect the king from harm; he will rescue him from the hostile nations (vv. 1-3) 	

- The phrase **I hereby father you** (אָנִי...יִלְדֶּהְךָ) has some important features for translation:
 - **I** refers to YHWH, and **you** refers to the king.
 - The verb we have rendered **father** (יִלְדֶּה) here literally refers to the "process by which males among humans and animals generate offspring."⁸¹ But the "king is not a son of YHWH

⁸¹ SDBH.

physically."⁸² Instead, the verb 'to father' can be used in the Old Testament figuratively, with the basic meaning of *bring forth*: "the wicked bring forth lies (Ps 7:15), mischief and evil (Job 15:35), and that which does not endure ("straw"; Isa 33:11)."⁸³ The verb is used figuratively here in Psalm 2:7 as well. It most likely refers to the special relationship that was begun, not when the king was physically born, but rather when the king was ceremonially crowned. Later Christian tradition applied this verse to Jesus at his resurrection (Acts 13:33).⁸⁴

- Modern English translations render the full phrase as referring to an event which, from the perspective of the speaker (YHWH), is in the past but has continuing relevance in the present: *I have fathered you today*. But the word **today** probably indicates that the event is happening *right now*, as the speaker is talking (that is, it is a *performative speech act*). So, we have rendered it 'I hereby father you'.⁸⁵ The meaning would be similar to what we find in 2 Kings 9:3: "Thus says the LORD, I anoint you (מְשַׁחְתִּיךָ) king over Israel" (ESV, see NIV, NLT).
- The pronoun 'I' and the word 'today' are each in an unusual position in the Hebrew text. Both are at the front of the clause, before the verb. 'I' comes first, then 'today.'
 - The fronting of the word 'I' probably indicates that the topic of the discourse has shifted from "you," which referred to the king and was the topic of the direct quotation in verse 7b, back to YHWH in verse 7c.
 - The fronting of the word 'today' probably indicates intensive focus: *this very day*...

VERSE 8

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

Ask me, my son, for your inheritance, and I will make nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your property. *For the whole world is mine, and you, my only son, will inherit it all.*

שֶׁאֵל מִמֶּנִּי וְאַתְּנָה גוֹיִם נַחֲלָתִי וְאַתְּנָתִי אֶפְסִי-אֶרֶץ:	8	Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your property.
---	---	---

- Verse 8 continues the decree of YHWH that is being reported by the king.
- The verb **ask** is in the form of a command directed by YHWH at the king, and **me** refers to YHWH.
 - The REB says *ask of me what you will*, but the phrase *what you will* is not in the Hebrew text and should not be followed in translation.

⁸² TDOT.

⁸³ TDOT.

⁸⁴ Similarly, the logic of Hebrews 5:1-10 seems to apply this verse to Jesus "after he was perfected" (that is, upon his resurrection, verse 9). God calling Jesus his "son" was also prominent at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:17) and transfiguration (Luke 9:35).

⁸⁵ It is a *performative qatal*. See BHRG §19.2.3; Andrason 2012, §3; Cook 2024, 170.

- The form of the Hebrew verb **and I will make** (וַאֲנִי עֹשֶׂה), which is a *weyiqtol* here indicates result: "Ask me, and (as a result) I will make..."⁸⁶
 - The root we have rendered as **make** can also mean *give*, and that is how several English translations render it. Doing so usually requires some additional wording to make a smooth translation. NASB says, "I will give the nations as your inheritance"; NLT says, "I will give you the nations as your inheritance." In Hausa, the CLT translation requires an additional verb: "I will give you the nations to be your inheritance."⁸⁷
- Both occurrences of the word **your** in this verse refer to YHWH's earthly king.
- The key term **inheritance** (נַחֲלָה) in this verse continues the sonship imagery of the previous verse. Sons inherit their fathers' property (see Num 27:7-11; 1 Kgs 21:3; Job 42:15). Furthermore, the idea of inheritance is a major theme throughout the Old Testament, since YHWH regularly promised his people that they would receive the land as an inheritance.⁸⁸ Psalm 2:7 reflects a development in that theme. Since the whole world is YHWH's property (see Ps 24:1), YHWH's son will inherit the whole world.
 - Though the word 'inheritance' in English normally implies what a child receives after the death of one or more parents, this sense is not present in the usage of the word here. YHWH does not die so that his 'son' can receive the inheritance.
 - The ESV renders the word here as *heritage*, and REB translates it *domain*. These translations have the benefit of avoiding a sense of parental death. The REB's rendering applies the sense that to inherit something means to have exclusive rights and responsibilities over that thing; in this case, inheriting the nations would mean to have control over them. The drawback of these renderings is that these translations do not render the word here the same way they do elsewhere that it appears in the Old Testament, which may obscure an important theme.
 - The GNB drops the word entirely. While this strategy is not our preferred one, it may be the best for languages that do not have a way to render the word 'inheritance.'
- For poetic reasons, the second line of this verse lacks a verb, and the verb from the first line (**and I will make**) applies to the second line as well. For languages in which the second line will not make sense without a verb, translators may repeat the verb in the second line.
- The phrase **the ends of the earth** (אַפְסֵי־אֶרֶץ) often refers to people (for example: Psalms 22:28; 67:8; 98:3). But here, it appears with the word property (אֲחֻזָּה) (specifically, "landed property"),⁸⁹ and so it probably refers to land (see Psalm 72:8). Thus, the king will inherit both people (verse 8a) and land (verse 8b). In order to retain the reference to both of these ideas, we prefer not to render the phrase here as *every nation* (CEV).
 - Some cultures may lack the concept that the earth has 'ends.' The phrase is an expression to mean all the earth; possibilities include *the whole earth* (GNB) or *all the earth* (French PDV⁹⁰).

⁸⁶ See Robar 2015, §2.4.

⁸⁷ *Zan ba ka al'ummai su zama gādonka*.

⁸⁸ For example, Numbers 26:53-56, 62; 33:54; 34:2, 14-15; 36:2-12; Deut 4:21, 38; 15:4; 19:10; 20:16; 21:23; 24:4; 25:19; 26:1; Josh 13:4-33, etc.

⁸⁹ HALOT.

⁹⁰ *toute la terre*.

- The word order in the second line is literally *your property the ends of the earth* (אַחֲרֵי־אֶרֶץ). The reason for this ordering is to create a symmetrical pattern with the previous clause. It looks like this:

- nations your inheritance
- your property the ends of the earth.

VERSE 9

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

If they try to rebel against your rule, I will be with you to strengthen you, and **you will crush them with an iron scepter and smash them like fragile clay pottery** that, once it is smashed, cannot be put back together."

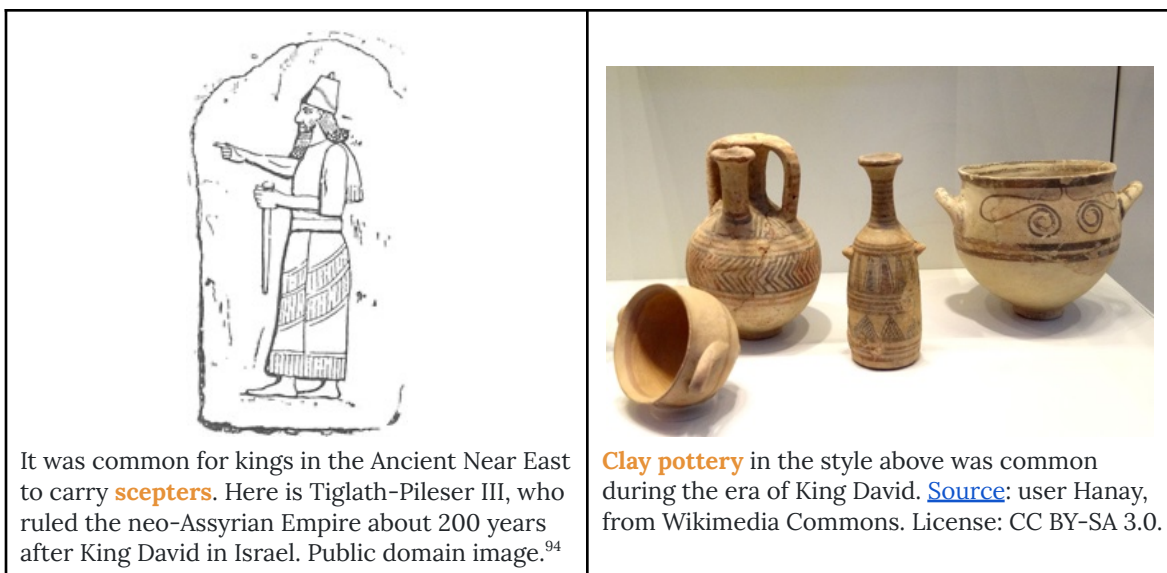
תִּרְעֶם בְּשֵׁבֶט בְּרֹזֶל בְּכִלֵּי יוֹצֵר תִּנְפְּצֵם:	9	You will crush them with an iron scepter . You will smash them like clay pottery ."
--	---	--

- According to the Hebrew Masoretic Text, the first word of verse 9 is **you will crush** (תִּרְעֶם).
 - However, when the NT quotes this verse in Revelation 2:27, 12:5, and 19:15, it renders the verb as *you will shepherd them*. Still, we recommend following the Hebrew text here and not trying to make the OT translation match the NT quotation. See the footnote for more detail.⁹¹
- Both occurrences of the word **you** in this verse refer to YHWH's earthly king.
- A **scepter** is "a staff or baton borne by a sovereign as an emblem of authority."⁹² An **iron scepter** or "scepter of iron" (שֵׁבֶט בְּרֹזֶל) is a scepter *made of* iron, and translators can supply an equivalent of the words 'made of' if necessary. It is a symbol of the king's unbreakable authority, since iron was "associated with strength and permanence."⁹³
 - Cultures that lack a word for **iron** can substitute another similar word, including a general word for metal. Cultures that lack words for metal can focus on the *hard* quality of the iron.
 - Cultures that lack a word for 'scepter' can substitute the local word for *staff* or *stick*.

⁹¹ The reason for the difference is that the New Testament author of Revelation quoted the Greek Septuagint translation (ποιμανεῖς αὐτούς). The Septuagint's translator's Hebrew manuscript had no vowel pointings, and so he read it with different vowels than the Masoretic Text. This allowed him to read the verb as "to shepherd" (רָעָה) rather than "to break/crush" (רָעַע). But the presence of the verb "smash" (תִּנְפֹּץ) in the parallel line strongly favors the Masoretic Text vocalization of "crush," and that is what we recommend following here. It is possible that the Hebrew writer of this psalm knew the word could be read both ways, and deliberately made the choice ambiguous as a kind of word-play. If so, the nations were faced with the possibility of "either firm shepherding or devastating destruction" (Goldingay 2006, 101).

⁹² Merriam-Websters.

⁹³ SDBH.



- In contrast to the king's strong iron scepter, the nations are depicted as "a vessel of a potter" (בְּכֵלִי יוֹצֵר), that is, **clay pottery** (NIV, NLT, GNT), which is very fragile and, once broken, virtually impossible to restore. The following chart explores this image, comparing the pottery's characteristics to those of the nations:

You will crush them with an iron scepter and smash them like clay pottery (v. 9)		
	Clay Pottery	Nations
Strength	fragile, easily broken (cf. Jer 19:11) with something stronger than itself (e.g., iron)	easily defeated by the king (Ps 2:9)
Irreparable	unable to be pieced back together once broken (cf. Jer 19:11)	unable to be reconstituted once decisively defeated
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the king shatters the nations to pieces, they will never be able to be pieced back together (cf. Ps 2:12b). 	

- The phrase 'clay pottery' (בְּכֵלִי יוֹצֵר) is in an unusual position in its line. It is at the front, to create a symmetrical pattern with the previous line. The pattern reinforces the contrast between the strong iron and the fragile clay. It looks like this:
 - (a) you will crush them (b) with an iron scepter
 - (b) like clay pottery (a) you will smash them.

⁹⁴ Myers, 2012.

Gray boxes discuss sections and subsections. The headings (in *green*) are guides, and not part of the Biblical text.

VERSES 10–12: *Ultimatum*

- This section is a final demand and final warning to the rebellious nations. This warning is delivered to the nations by the psalmist.
- We have chosen the word "ultimatum" to summarize this section. This word means "a final offer or demand made by one party to another, especially in negotiations between nations, expressing or implying the threat of serious consequences or the breakoff of relations if the terms are not accepted."
- This section contains a clear thematic reversal of what happened in verses 1-3. Those early verses described the nations' rebellion against YHWH and against his anointed, but verses 10-12 summon the nations to submit to YHWH and his anointed.⁹⁵
- Numerous sound correspondences connect the speech of the nations in verse 3 with the warning to those nations in verse 10. In fact, every verb and noun from the nations' speech in verse 3 has some sound echo from verses 10-11. For more detail, see [Poetic Feature 3: Think Again](#).
- The main emotions of this section are *contempt* towards the rebels (verses 10-12b) and *admiration* for those who have taken refuge in YHWH's king (verse 12b).

VERSE 10

Expanded Paraphrase – the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

And now, you foolish kings, having heard YHWH's decree, wise up! Accept YHWH's discipline and submit to him, earthly rulers!

וַעֲתָה מְלָכִים הַשְׁכִּילוּ אֶת־עֲסֻרֵי שְׁפָטֵי אֶרֶץ:	10	And now, kings, wise up! Accept discipline, earthly rulers!
--	----	--

- **Participant tracking note:** In verses 10-12, the psalmist addresses the rebellions nations/kings. Bratcher and Reyburn suggest that YHWH's earthly king could be the one speaking instead, and that too is a possibility.⁹⁶
- The words **and** (ו) and **now** (עַתָּה) join together to serve a single function, which is to "introduce a new subject or section."⁹⁷ It refers "to the present, often as opposite to the past."⁹⁸ In this case, the new subject is the warning to the rebellious kings. These kings are given a series of five commands (verses 10-12a) to act in a way that is the opposite of their past behavior. All of these commands are in the plural imperative form.

⁹⁵ See Hossfeld and Zenger 1993, 49.

⁹⁶ Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 31.

⁹⁷ HALOT; see Gen 27:3; Isa 5:3, etc.

⁹⁸ DCH definition 11n(1).

- Languages have their own conventions for introducing a warning as a new subject. For example, the Hausa CLT uses the combination of the word for 'now' (*yanzu*) with a strengthening particle (*fa*).
- Many English translations render this combination of words as *now therefore*,⁹⁹ *therefore*,¹⁰⁰ or *so now*.¹⁰¹ In other words, they introduce one or more commands, suggestions or wishes based upon a previously mentioned reason.¹⁰² The reason for the commands is the decree from verses 7-9, which promised that YHWH's kings would conquer and possess the nations.
- The phrase "as used in the Wisdom literature ("now then ...") signals an exhortation to wisdom."¹⁰³ Coupled with the phrase 'wise up!', the first line of this verse is both a warning and a word of wisdom: *wise up, or else...*
- The word **kings** (מְלָכִים) is in the form of direct address (the *vocative*). It identifies the 'kings' as those who are being addressed by the speaker.¹⁰⁴
 - English translations signal the *vocative* form by rendering the word as *O kings* (RSV, NASB) or *you kings* (GNB, PDV).
 - The vocative word 'kings' appears before the verb in this line. In the next line, another vocative word ('earthly rulers') appears after the verb. The result is a symmetrical structure in the two lines. It looks like this:
 - (a) **kings** (b) **wise up**
 - (b) **accept discipline** (a) **earthly rulers**.
 - The word for 'kings' is the same as the one in verse 2; here it refers to those same rebellious kings.
- The word we have rendered as **wise up!** is the first command in the series. It literally means *be wise*, and this is how many English translations render it.¹⁰⁵ However, this rendering does not account for the emotion of contempt that the speaker feels towards the earthly kings. So, while the word *up* is not literally in the Hebrew text, the English idiomatic expression *wise up!* communicates the speaker's contempt while retaining the basic meaning of the verb.
 - It is most important that translators communicate the basic meaning of the word, and then, if possible, they should choose a word or expression that also shows the speaker's contempt for the earthly kings.
- The verb here translated **accept discipline** (הִקְדָּרִי) is the second command. It has been translated variously as *be warned* (NIV, ESV, NLT, NRSV), *be instructed* (KJV), *submit to correction* (NET), *learn this lesson* (GNT), and *accept discipline* (NJPS). The word means "literally: to be disciplined; hence: action by which humans bring themselves to a position of submission before God, as a result of

⁹⁹ ESV, NASB, NRSV

¹⁰⁰ NIV, KJV.

¹⁰¹ CSB, NET; LEB: so then.

¹⁰² DCH definition 8, 11n(10a).

¹⁰³ Futato 2009, 36; also VanGemeren 2008, 97.

¹⁰⁴ Kim 2023, 213-217.

¹⁰⁵ ESV, NIV, CSB, LEB, NRSV; NLT: *act wisely!*; NET: *do what is wise*; NASB: *show discernment*.

his disciplinary actions."¹⁰⁶ So, we recommend a translation that emphasizes discipline, as opposed to simply being warned, instructed, or learning a lesson.

- The phrase **earthly rulers** in Hebrew is literally *judges of the earth*. It is not quite the same Hebrew word as the term we translated as 'rulers' (רוֹזְנִים) in verse 2, but the two can be rendered as though they are synonymous.
 - It refers to the same people as the 'kings.' In ancient Israel, kings served as judges (David: 2 Sam 8:15; Solomon: 1 Kings 3:9), and this was likely the case for the nations around Israel also. For cultures today in which kings and judges are the same people, it may be possible to render this term as *judges* here. However, in cultures where the same person cannot fill the role of both a king and a judge, a rendering closer to 'rulers' is better.
 - The word **earthly** is important because it emphasizes the lowly, mortal nature of these rulers, in contrast to YHWH who reigns over them as 'the one enthroned in the heavens' (verse 4). This is similar to the phrase **earthly kings** in verse 2.

VERSE 11

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

Serve YHWH, the heavenly Lord, **with fear**. *Live according to his requirements, especially his "decree" (verse 7). Celebrate his rule and rejoice at his good kingship, but do so with fear and trembling, for he can destroy you in a moment if you step out of line!*

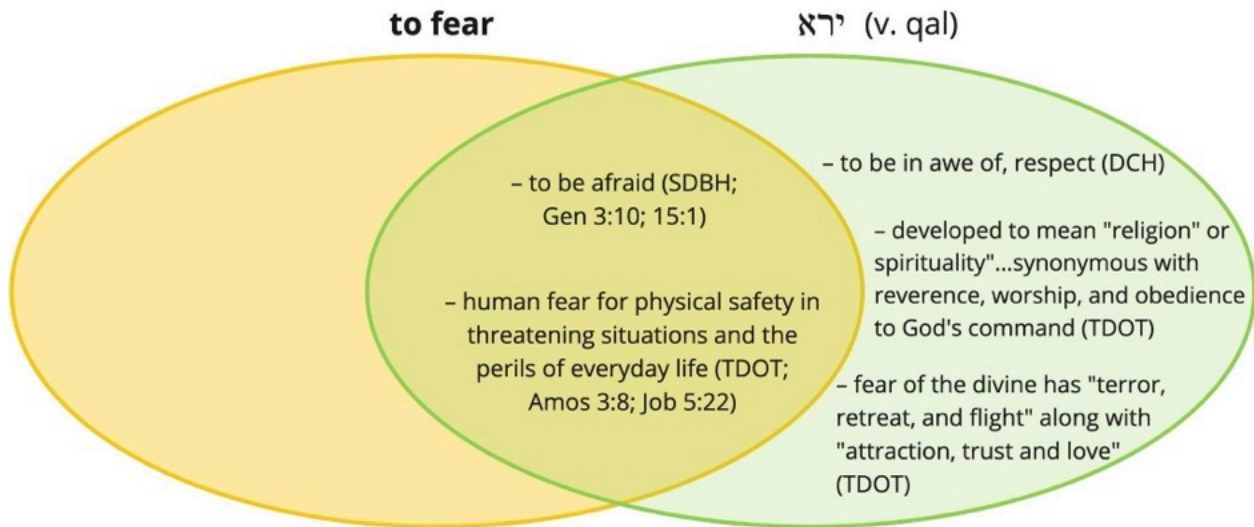
עֲבֹדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה בִּירְאָה וְאִילּוּ בִרְעָדָה:	11	Serve YHWH with fear and rejoice with trembling!
--	----	--

- The third command in the series is **serve**. The word means "action by which humans, either as individuals or as groups, assume a position of subservience towards a deity, perform the required rituals, and live in accordance with the requirements of that deity."¹⁰⁷ To serve (עֲבָדוּ) YHWH in this context is to submit to his authority and his lordship (see the word **Lord** in verse 4), and to observe his 'decree' (verses 7-9).
- This is the third and final time the divine name **YHWH** appears in this psalm.
- The Hebrew word we have rendered **fear** (יִרְאָה) has a broader meaning than the English word *fear*. The English word primarily refers to dread or terror, while when the Hebrew word refers to a person's attitude toward YHWH, it also includes awe and respect (Mal 2:5) and trust (Ps 40:3; 115:11).¹⁰⁸ So, while some English translations render the word as 'fear' (ESV, NIV, NET), it can also mean *reverential awe* (CSB) or *reverence* (NASB).
 - The following diagram shows a detailed look at the Hebrew word *be afraid of* (יִרָא) (green circle on the right), our modern English understanding of *to fear* (yellow circle on the left), and what the two understandings have in common (the middle section where the two circles intersect):

¹⁰⁶ SDBH.

¹⁰⁷ SDBH.

¹⁰⁸ Ryken et. al. 1998, 962.



- The fourth command in the series is to **rejoice**.
- The clause **rejoice with trembling** (גִּילּוֹ בְרָעָה) is difficult to understand, since the emotions associated with "rejoicing" (such as joy) and the emotions associated "trembling" (such as fear) may seem to be incompatible with each other. But they actually fit together well in this context. Both joy and fear are appropriate responses to YHWH's reign (see Pss 97:1; 99:1).
 - For languages in which such a phrase is difficult, one good translation to consider is that of the Hausa CLT (*kuna rawar jiki*), which refers to the shaking of the body with connotations of being eager (or even anxious) to serve the Lord with a full heart.
 - See [The Meaning of גִּילּוֹ בְרָעָה in Ps 2:11](#) for a detailed discussion of the issue.

VERSE 12

Expanded Paraphrase - the words in *italics* provide a fuller sense of the psalm; the text itself is in **bold**.

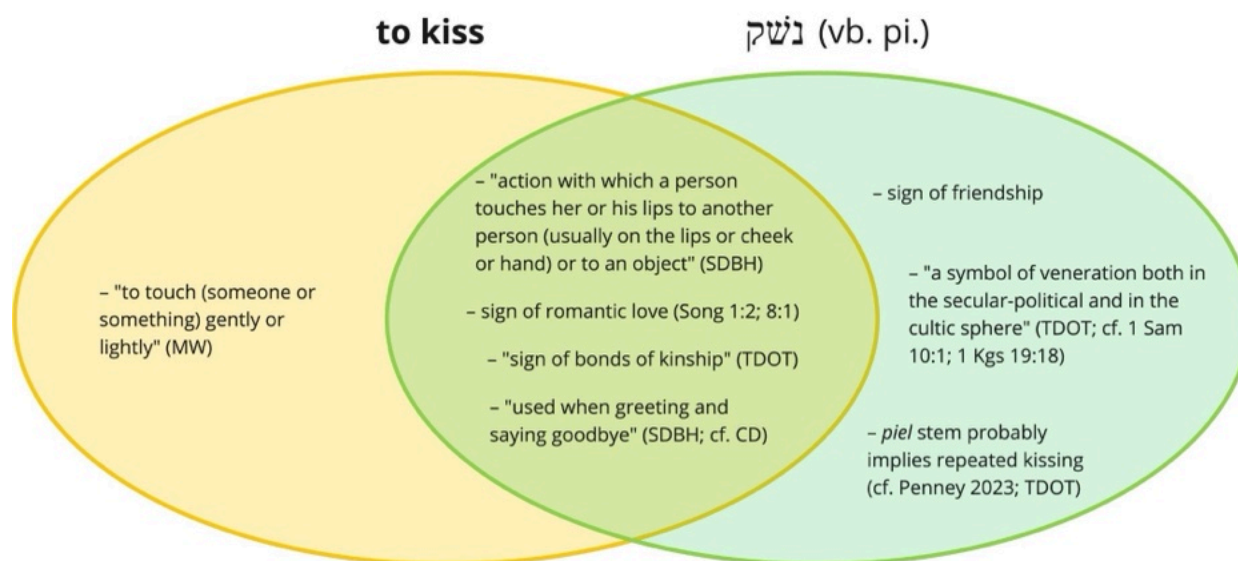
Kiss the son as a sign of honor and submission, or else he will become angry and you will perish in your way of rebellion that you have chosen to walk, **for his anger easily ignites and burns everything in its path.** You will not stand a chance if you oppose him! But if you submit to him, then you and your peoples will flourish under his righteous rule. **Happy are all who take refuge in him,** for he is a good king who takes care of his people!

נִשְׁקוּ-בֶן פֶּן-יִצְאֶנָּה וְתִאָּבְדוּ לְדָרְךְ כִּי-יִבְעַר כַּמְעַט אָפֹן אֲשֶׁר־י פֶּלִי-תוֹסִי בּוֹ:	12	Kiss the son, or else he will become angry and you will perish in your way, for his anger quickly ignites. Happy are all who take refuge in him!
---	----	--

- In ancient Israel, a **kiss** was a symbolic act that expressed honor to an important individual.¹⁰⁹ The Hebrew word here is in the plural since it is addressed to the rebellious kings and earthly rulers.

¹⁰⁹ TDOT; see 1 Sam 10:1; 1 Kgs 19:18.

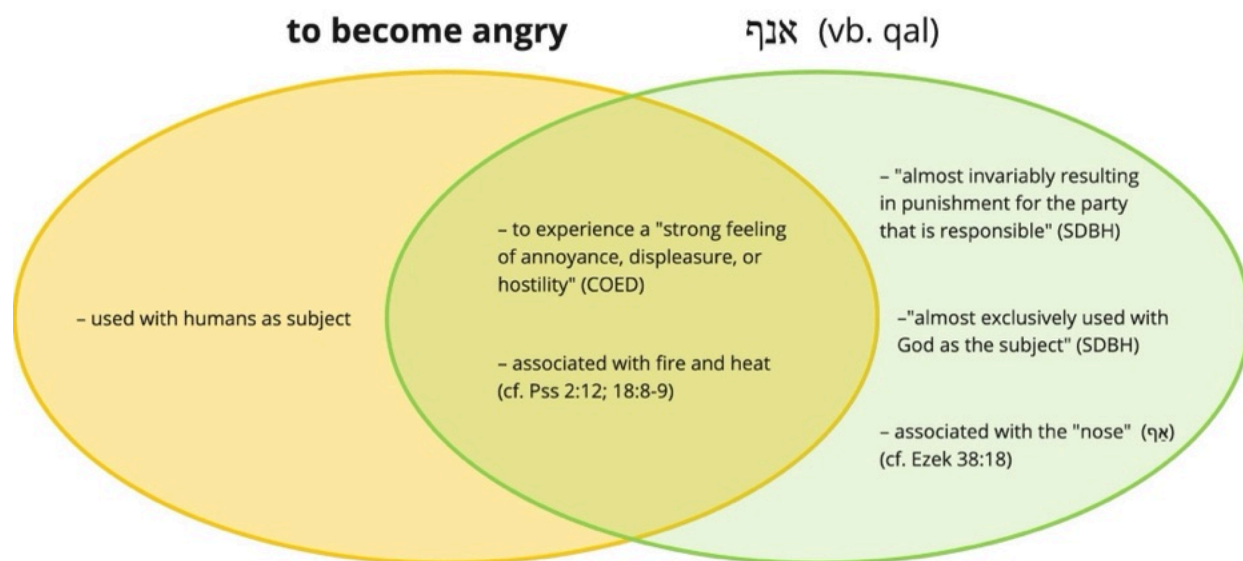
- The following diagram explores the meaning of the Hebrew verb (נִשַּׁק) compared to the English verb *kiss*. The part that is in yellow (on the left) contains definitions that only apply to the English word. The part that is in green (on the right) contains definitions that only apply to the Hebrew word. The overlapping area (in the middle) contains definitions that apply to both:



- In many cultures, the act of kissing does not communicate honoring an important person. In this case, it is important for translators to find a replacement that is culturally appropriate.
 - The Hausa CLT says *bow down before* (GNB is similar). This translation has the benefit of both conveying the meaning and using a culturally appropriate symbolic action.¹¹⁰
 - Several English translations render the meaning, without a clear action: *do/pay homage to* (NASB, CSB), *submit to* (NLT).
- The word translated **son** (בֶּן) is difficult, because it is not the normal Hebrew word for *son* (בֶּן, see verse 7) but the Aramaic word for *son*. This has caused translators to render the word in various ways:
 - A few translations take the word to mean *pure*. So, the NET translates it as *sincere*, and renders the complete phrase as *Give sincere homage!* The REB translates it as *with reverence*, so that the complete phrase is *Worship the LORD with reverence*. These readings have problems grammatically, and they are dispreferred.
 - The NRSV and NJB translate it as *feet*, which results in the phrase *kiss his feet*. This reading is based upon modern scholars proposing faults in the Hebrew text, and it is dispreferred.

¹¹⁰ However, both of these translations do not translate the word *son*, which is a dispreferred translation choice. See the subsequent note.

- We prefer to read the word as 'son' for several reasons. The concept of sonship is prominent in the psalm (verses 7-8), and the nations' rebellion is against YHWH *and* against his anointed (verses 2-3). And, there are two Aramaic words in other parts of the psalm.¹¹¹
 - So, the word refers to YHWH's 'son' (see verse 7). Some translations make it clear whose son it is: *God's royal son* (NLT) or *his son* (NIV, CEV).
- See the webpage [The Text and Meaning of Ps 2:12a](#) for a detailed discussion of the issue.
- The word **he** in the phrase **or else he will become angry** (פָּחַדְיָאֱלֹהִים) most likely refers the 'son,' that is, the human king. The son is the most recently mentioned participant, and the son, as king, has already been mentioned as the one who will crush the nations with an iron scepter (verse 9).
 - However, some scholars have argued that the verb refers to YHWH becoming angry, not the king.¹¹² This is because the verb "become angry" (פָּחַד) elsewhere refers only to divine anger. But the king is described in this psalm as YHWH's son (verse 7), and it makes sense that the king would have some of his father's attributes since sons are the image and likeness of their fathers. Similarly, Psalm 110 is another psalm that blurs the identities of God and the human king.¹¹³ Thus, there is no good reason not to take the son, who was the most recently mentioned participant, as the referent of the word 'he' in verse 12.
- The verb **he will become angry** in verse 12a is almost always used in the Bible with God as the subject. The following diagram explores the meaning of the Hebrew verb (פָּחַד) compared to the English verb *to become angry*. The part that is in yellow (on the left) contains definitions that only apply to the English word. The part that is in green (on the right) contains definitions that only apply to the Hebrew word. The overlapping area (in the middle) contains definitions that apply to both:



¹¹¹ The first is the word 'be in an uproar' (רָגַשׁ) in verse 1. The use of an Aramaic word at the beginning may signal the psalm's international significance. The other word is 'crush' (רָצַעַ) in verse 9.

¹¹² Baethgen 1904, 7. See, for example: 1 Kings 8:46; Isaiah 12:1; Psalms 60:3; 79:5; 85:6; Ezra 9:14; 2 Chronicles 6:36.

¹¹³ See [The Subject\(s\) in Ps. 110:5-7](#); on the poetic device of deliberate ambiguity in the Psalter, see Raabe 1991.

- The phrase we have rendered **in your way** (דרכך) is literally just the word **way** in Hebrew. It probably means *in the way* (ESV), that is, *in the midst of all your activities* (NLT), or, more specifically, *in your rebellion* (CSB).
- The word we have rendered as **for** introduces the reasons why 'he will become angry' and 'you will perish on your way': it is because 'his anger quickly ignites.'
 - The KJV renders this word as *when*, but we do not find this to be the most likely meaning (see below on the word **quickly**).
- The phrase **his anger** is repeated from verse 5a, and so translators should render it the same way here as in that verse. Like in verse 5, in Hebrew it is literally *his nose*. Here, his nose **ignites**/burns.
- The word **quickly** (בְּמֵדָעַת) has a few important qualities for the translator to consider:
 - The word is translated in various ways in modern translations, resulting in phrases with slightly different meanings (we have underlined the key differences):
 - KJV has *when his wrath is kindled just a little*. The phrase seems to mean that his anger is extremely powerful, so that even a little is enough to destroy someone.
 - NASB has *for his wrath may soon be kindled*. The phrase seems to mean that the time of his wrath is very soon, so hurry and submit to him!
 - Other English translations say something like *for his anger may ignite at any moment* (CSB) or *for his wrath can flare up in a moment* (NIV). These phrases mean that it does not take much for him to get angry, so be careful! This is the most likely meaning of the phrase, in which the king's anger happens easily.
 - The word 'quickly' appears in an unusual order in Hebrew. It is moved forward before the subject, 'his anger.' This unusual order is designed to correct a misunderstanding among the audience about YHWH's anger, namely that it comes slowly. The psalmist is emphasizing that instead, his anger burns quickly and easily.
- The word **ignites** (יִבְעֵר) (so CSB, NET) means "specifically *begin to burn, be kindled*."¹¹⁴
- The Hebrew expression we have translated as **happy are...** (אַשְׁרֵי) is also found in Psalm 1:1.¹¹⁵ Thus, Psalm 1 and 2 form an *inclusio*, which is a poetic device in which a textual unit begins and ends in the same way. It is likely, then, that the organizers of the book of Psalms wanted the readers to understand these two psalms together.
 - Several translations render it *blessed are...*, but the expression is not a claim that God will bless or reward someone who behaves well.¹¹⁶ Rather, it is an *exclamation of admiration* for someone who makes good choices.
 - English has no expression that quite matches the phrase *happy are...*, but it is similar to the exclamation *congratulations!*¹¹⁷

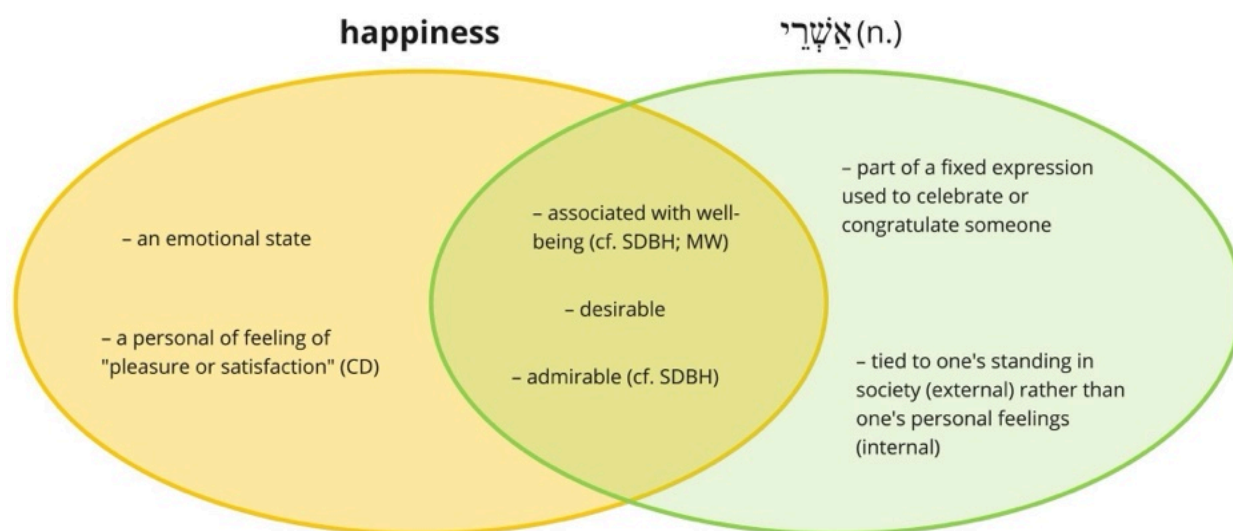
¹¹⁴ See Ps 79:5.

¹¹⁵ Thus, Psalm 1 and 2 form an *inclusio*.

¹¹⁶ Bratcher and Reyburn 2011, 16.

¹¹⁷ See 1 Kings 10:8.

- The translator should search for a similar expression in the local language. Bratcher and Reyburn point out that some languages may require a shift to the second person in order to convey congratulations; for example: *How happy you are* or *What great happiness is yours*. Also, they note that "In some languages the congratulation may be expressed more naturally at the end of the verse rather than at the beginning."¹¹⁸
- The word **happy** (אֲשֶׁרִי) has several features for translators to consider:
 - People would declare someone 'happy' (אֲשֶׁרִי) whose position in life was admirable or desirable. Possible alternatives include *joyous*, *commendable*, *favored*, or *blessed*. The meaning of the word chosen in the receptor language may be less important than the function of the phrase to express admiration and celebration.
 - The word 'happy' is never used to describe God, only people.
 - Translators should try to avoid a word that includes the idea of *lucky*, as if the person's success is just by chance.¹¹⁹ Also, translators should avoid using a word that merely means the emotional state of the person. We have colored the word in green because it conveys the emotion of the speaker—that of admiration—not the emotion of the person being described (such as happiness).
 - The diagram below shows how the Hebrew word compares with our modern English idea of *happy*. The wording in the center shows the similarities between the two.



- The pronoun **him** in the phrase **take refuge in him** most likely refers to the son, who is the king. The phrase 'take refuge in him' probably refers to the complete responsibility that ancient kings had to protect their subjects, whether on the military battlefield or by giving righteous judgments in court.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Bratcher and Reyburn 2011, 16.

¹¹⁹ Bratcher and Reyburn 2011, 16.

¹²⁰ Creach 1996, 52.

REFERENCES

- Baethgen, Friedrich. 1904. *Die Psalmen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.
- BHRG** = Merwe, Christo H.J. van der, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze. 2017. *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*. Second. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Boyd, Raymond. 2010. "A 'Reflexive Benefactive' in Chamba-Daka (Adamawa Branch, Niger-Congo Family)." In *Benefactives and Malefactives: Typological Perspectives and Case Studies*, edited by Fernando Zúñiga and Seppo Kittilä, 92:331-50. Typological Studies in Language. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Bratcher, Robert G., and William D. Reyburn. 1991. *A Handbook on Psalms*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies.
- Cook, John A. 2024. *The Biblical Hebrew Verb: A Linguistic Introduction*. Learning Biblical Hebrew. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Craigie, Peter C. 1983. *Psalms 1-50*. WBC 19. Waco, TX: Word.
- Creach, Jerome F. D. 1996. *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*. A&C Black.
- DCH** = Clines, David J. A., ed. 1993-2011. In *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Vol. I-VIII. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press; Sheffield Phoenix Press.
- Futato, Mark D. 2009. "The Book of Psalms," in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, Vol 7: The Book of Psalms, The Book of Proverbs. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- HALOT** = Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm. 1994-2000. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Hossfeld, Frank-Lothar, and Erich Zenger. 1993. *Die Psalmen I: Psalm 1-50*. Neue Echter Bibel. Würzburg: Echter.
- IBHS** = Waltke, Bruce K., and Michael Patrick O'Connor. 1990. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns.

- Jenni, Ernst. 2000. *Die hebräischen Präpositionen Band 3: Die Präposition Lamed*. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer.
- Jones, G H. 1965. "The Decree of Yahweh (Ps. II 7)." *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (3): 336–44.
- Kim, Young Bok. 2023. *Hebrew Forms of Address: A Sociolinguistic Analysis*. Atlanta: SBL Press.
- Mena, Andrea K. 2012. "The Semantic Potential of לָּ in Genesis, Psalms, and Chronicles." MA Thesis, Stellenbosch University.
- Myers, Richard. 2012. *Images from The Temple Dictionary of the Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.
- NIDOTTE** = VanGemeren, Willem, ed. 1997. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Raabe, Paul. 1991. "Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (2): 213–27.
- Robar, Elizabeth. 2022. "Morphology and Markedness: On Verb Switching in Hebrew Poetry: SBL Annual Meeting 2020 Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew Seminar: Typological and Grammatical Categorization of Biblical Hebrew." *Journal for Semitics* 30 (2).
- Ryken, Leland, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman, Colin Duriez, Douglas Penney, and Daniel G. Reid, eds. 1998. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- SDBH** = de Blois, Reinier. The Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew. <https://semanticdictionary.org/overview.php?book=19&chapter=33>
- TDOT** = Botterweck, G. Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds. 1977–2012. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, translated by John T. Willis, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, David E. Green, and Douglas W. Stott, Revised Edition. Vol. I–XV. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- TWOT** = Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. 1999. In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. Chicago: Moody Press.
- VanGemeren, Willem A. 2008. "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 5. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.