

## **Why Do the Nations Rage?**

(A Meditation on Psalm 2)

By Allan J. McNicol

Some years ago there appeared regularly a paid column in many of the nation's local newspapers. It was headlined "Why Do the Nations Rage?" I don't think the writer was trying to echo Handel's *Messiah*. Actually, the column was placed there by a somewhat conservative person who had a good bit more money than he knew what to do with. The author was bothered by current trends in the popular culture and wished to voice a strong protest and slant his commentary in opposition to what was happening that he didn't like.

"Why Do the Nations Rage," of course, comes from the first line of Psalm 2 and was a good choice for what the columnist was attempting to say. In general, the composer of the psalm was drawing attention to the infinite distance between the universal dominion and power of the Holy One and those who occupy positions of political power in this temporal realm. In Psalm 2:3 we read:

He who sits in the heavens laughs;  
the Lord has them in derision.

Not only is there this chasm that marks an infinite difference between the Divine One and our current rulers, but the psalm informs us that the Father above has not left himself without his special earthly witness. The Psalm tells us in 2:6:

I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.

Of course, the psalmist is referring to the Davidic dynasty; most likely this is a statement of confidence that someone from the family of David was about to be restored to the kingship in Jerusalem. If so, it was a little premature. Given the advantage of the course of history, the people of God had to wait many centuries for something remotely like a restoration of the house of David.

The early Christians seized on this text to anchor their conviction that the king enthroned in Zion was Jesus. The Gospels take up the terminology of the psalms to say he is the Lord's anointed (the Messiah) and a true representative of the Divine One (i.e. God's Son). He is the

One re-commissioned to rebuild God's family or his house starting in Zion. Not only that, but the writer of the letter to the Hebrews even developed this saying to the extent that as Son of God, Jesus pre-existed eternally with the Father. One might go so far as to say that before they were finished, the earliest Christians had construed the foundational claims of the Christian story as resonant in this psalm.

But it is not with the esoteric matters of Christology that I wish to concern myself today. That can wait for another time.

I am still thinking about that column that I noted when I opened up the pages of my newspaper. Why do the nations rage? Why are people so angry when we confront them with the divine message of peace? As prospective proclaimers of the word each Christmas, more than likely, in some place you will be called upon to read the Lukan account of Jesus' birth.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace  
among men with whom he is pleased.

These are the words that the angelic host greeted our savior upon his birth; but, like the later readers of Psalm 2 in the centuries after it was written, we still wait for the world to recognize the sovereignty of the one born in the city of David: our savior, Christ the Lord. When will this peace come?

Of course, we do not know for sure. It would be good to remember that we acknowledge that as far as God is concerned he does things in his own time. The nations still rage. But the Bible teaches us that God does not act anywhere and everywhere. As Gerhard Lohfink points out, if we learn anything from the biblical story, not only does God work in concrete places and times through people he chooses, but he moves history forward far differently than earthly leaders think and plan. Samuel learned this when he went to the house of Jesse to find a king. I imagine that when Jesus was beginning to make some odd points as he carried out his chores in the backward village of Nazareth there were some people who observed that he, like some thought of the young David in Jesse's household, "would never amount to anything."

But we know differently now. I believe it would be good to keep this in mind as we try to understand what God has done and may do in the future. In other words, you may be asking: how

do you fit into the scheme of things?

The last several weeks we have again watched the nations in rage. It has not been a pretty sight as we observe, once again, mobs stirred up to wreck senseless violence across the Middle East, while people in America spew words across the airwaves urging that the military vaporize these infidels. The nations continue to rage.

But God has left us with another word from this psalm. The Bible, through God's prophet John, closes with a word in Revelation 11:15-18 about the rage of the nations. But here it is a very different word. The nations rage but it is to no absolute effect. They have been subdued by the rule of Christ.

The kingdom of this world has become the  
kingdom of our Lord and Christ.

That is our polar star for this morning. We may not know when the one who places his king in Zion will make this fully visible. But we are here to learn to continue to proclaim this word today until the nations are compelled to end their rage.

The good news is that they will be compelled. Our task is to go forth, proclaim this word and live out its truth.

AJM/rk  
11-1-12