

Nations Rage, But God Reigns

Psalm 2:1-3

Why are things in such an uproar? Society seems to be ripping apart at the seams.

Political leaders are assuming that they have more authority than they actually possess. Armed protestors are showing up on capitol steps to demand liberty. Political conspiracies are being unmasked as the “power grabs” that they really are – threatening the destruction of democratic republics. Civil unrest is brewing and the heat of this summer could easily light the fuse on the powder keg of societal problems. Those of you who were alive in the 1960’s can call to mind the riots of simmering revolution. And all of this is happening in the United States, a land blessed by God with rich, natural resources. If God’s blessings alone brought contentment, then we should be among the world’s most contented citizens. But things are in an uproar. Like boiling water to a tea bag, this pandemic has brought out what’s really inside. This economic and social upheaval has left people grasping for answers. Is there ultimate meaning? Or is all of this just a chance collection of colliding facts and frenzies? The second psalm has the answers we are looking for. Nations may rage and protest, but the God of heaven reigns over mankind.

This psalm contains three quick lessons about life on earth.

Humanity 101 (An introduction to mankind), vs. 1-3

Theology 101 (An introduction to the true God), vs. 4-9

Practical Studies 101 (An introduction to wisdom), vs.10-12

In this message, we will study verses 1-3 to understand the history of humanity up to the present. As we watch modern societies rage and protest, we will see how to honor the God of heaven who rules over mankind.

HUMANITY101: An Introduction to Mankind, vs. 1-3

¹Why do the heathen [the nations] rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

■ Human History Is Full of Raging Imaginations against God.

This first phrase is not so much a question of “why” but a statement of astonishment. In essence, the meaning is “What?! The nations rage and the people imagine a vain thing?” The people of this world are greatly blessed with God’s good earth. So why the angry commotion?

A brief study of nations in the Scripture appears at the end of [the online version of this message](#). Nations sprang from families of the sons of Noah after the flood. The vain imaginations of the nations led them to join together at the Tower of Babel, but the God who reigns divided the nations once again.

Romans 1:20 describes what every man on God’s good earth can see:

“For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead [divine nature]; so that they are without excuse:”

Sinful humanity delights in the blessings of God while denying the God of those blessings. They enjoy God's common grace, but denounce God's government over all things. In verse 1, the meaning of the first phrase is brought out by the second phrase. When people think in terms of fantasy rather than reality, angry commotion is the result of these raging imaginations. One author noted, "The verb 'rage' can be used to describe something like the raging of the sea, but here it refers to the tumultuous meeting of rebels to plan an attack."ⁱ Picture the waves of a deep ocean pounding a shoreline, tormented by hurricane winds. According to Jude 13, these wicked people are like "raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame . . ." In the second phrase, "The parallel verb, "plot, devise"ⁱⁱ clarifies this raging. The word is often used in a religious sense of meditating (1:2), but here it means that they were plotting a rebellion"ⁱⁱⁱ In short, people are muttering to themselves – meditating and imagining – what is untrue. Listen for this the next time you hear someone talking about a recent disaster or crisis. More often than not, you will hear them say, "Oh that reminds me of a movie!" Think about what that means. When what is fictional is foundational in your thinking, folly is the natural result.

Nations may rage and protest, but the God of heaven still reigns over mankind.

There are some interesting connections between Psalms 1 and 2. Psalm 1 ends in a threat; Psalm 2 begins with a threat. In Psalm 1, the blessed man will not stand in the way of sinners. But in Psalm 2, the kings of the earth take their stand against the Lord. In Psalm 1:2 the blessed man "meditates" (literally "mutters") in the Law of the Lord. In Psalm 2:1, the nations "imagine" empty things. What are some of the vain imaginations of our modern day? What are people plotting, and why are they in a rage?

A “worldview” is the frame of reference through which you view the world. Central to the Christian view of the world is Romans 11:36: **“For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.”** God is the Creator – all things are “of Him.” God is the Sustainer – all things are “through Him.” God is the Sovereign King – all things are “to Him.” “To Him be glory forever!” These three truths about our glorious God are central to a Christian worldview. Mankind was created in the image of God, is sustained by the mercies of God,^{iv} and is designed [for the glory of God](#)^v. So what happened to warp this worldview and bring about this angry commotion and uproar?

The Rebellion Born in Eden

Mankind was made in the image of God to live for the glory of God. He was crowned with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:5-8). The Lord gave man dominion over every living thing on earth (Genesis 1:28). But in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve embraced Satan’s lie: “you shall be as gods.” They rebelled against the Lord and His command. Instead of worshiping their Sovereign King, mankind decided to be “man-king.” They “imagined a vain thing.” And the rest is history. This rebellion has brought upheaval, commotion, and tumult like the raging waves of the sea throughout human history. Consider the following vain imaginations and plots, but remember nations may rage and protest, but the God of heaven reigns over mankind.

Examples of Raging Imaginations

Evolution: Darwinian Evolution is being taught in most schools and universities as a reasonable theory of origins. This is a substitute for the Bible’s teaching of divine creation. Yet, the brightest minds have admitted that evolutionary theory cannot account for the sudden original

appearance of living organisms.^{vi} The more scientists learn about the astronomical complexity of a living cell, the more they are compelled to admit that it cannot occur by random chance. The real truth is that belief in evolution was always based on religious belief. Anaxagoras, a Greek philosopher and astronomer (500-428 BC) is sometimes called “Mr. Mind.” He held that “the Mind” (Nous) set everything in motion and guided evolution.^{vii} Many believe that Anaxagoras was the original evolutionist. Yet most advocates of evolutionary theory today insist that it is pure science. They may rage, but God still reigns.

Casually Murderous Society: More than 61 million babies have been aborted in the United States since 1973^{viii}. Under the names of “reproductive rights” and “essential healthcare” abortionists have terminated the lives of human beings while society tries to look the other way. They imagine that they will not be held accountable. They imagine so in vain.

Modern Education: John Dewey (1859-1952) is considered to be “The Father of American Education.” He signed the Humanist Manifesto 1933 which was designed to introduce a “new religion and refers to humanism as a religious movement meant to transcend and replace previous, deity-based systems.”^{ix} Indeed, according to one study, “In [the Humanist Manifesto of 1933], a number of American intellectuals, among them philosopher and pedagogue John Dewey and biologist Julian Huxley, presented ‘an effort to replace traditional religious beliefs with a stalwart confidence in our capability to achieve moral perfection and happiness along the lines and within the limits of our earthly nature’.”^x And more recently, humanism which rejects God has been declared to be a religion!^{xi} But this religion is now so deeply rooted in government and education that most people don’t even recognize it as their religious belief.

This movement in education, birthed by John Dewey, is one of the reasons that our church founded a Christian school forty-four years ago.

The Transgender movement: In Britain, Freddy McConnell birthed a child but wants to be legally called the father. (Yes, you heard that right.) According to The Guardian, "McConnell . . . lived as a man for several years before suspending his hormone treatment and becoming pregnant, [this] upholds an earlier high court verdict that motherhood is defined as being pregnant and giving birth regardless of whether the person who does so was considered a man or a woman in law."^{xii} Instead of humbly admitting that gender is God-given, some men and women have begun to reject their birth gender, teaching their children to do the same.

Postmodernism: Postmodernism is the prevailing philosophy of our day. It is characterized by skepticism or rejection of authority, exalting one's individual viewpoint^{xiii}. In short, "challenge everything!" Postmodernism challenges the claim of knowledge (and what is valuable) as merely socially conditioned viewpoints. It especially challenges any overall theories or narratives about human life. This approach leads to skepticism about the Scriptures.

Postmodern thinking has produced what is called critical theory and "deconstructionism." In literature, deconstructionism teaches that it is impossible to know the author's intent as you read a literary work. The irony is that these advocates write books to emphasize the "truth" that you can't understand the author's intent! As English philosopher Roger Scruton wrote, "A writer who says that there are no truths, or that all truth is 'merely relative,' is asking you not to believe him. So don't."^{xiv} "The sociologist Max Horkheimer described [critical] theory as critical insofar as it seeks "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them"^{xv}

“Critical theory maintains that ideology is the principal obstacle to human liberation.”^{xvi} This is yet another example of man’s rejection of God’s authority. These are only a few of the raging imaginations going around right now. Nations may rage and protest, but the God of heaven reigns over mankind.

But the nations have been lead into these imaginations by their leaders.

■ **Human History Is Full of Rulers’ Conspiracies against the God of the Bible.**

**²The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying, ³Let us break their bands asunder,
And cast away their cords from us.**

In this psalm, the kings of the earth are presented in contrast to the One who sits in the heavens (Psalm 2:4). The word “set” means to stand, “However, there is more to the idea than simply standing. It is used of those who set themselves against others. . . Hence, it means “to oppose” or possibly “to oppress” as the parallel phrase [break their bands] might also indicate.”^{xvii} For instance, Goliath set himself against the Israelites in 1 Samuel 17:16. Taking counsel together (instead of seeking the Lord) compounds their error. Psalm 2 was written to ancient Israel. Scholars believe that this was a royal psalm and that it was recited at the coronation of each king in the Davidic line (2 Samuel 7:12-14). So, “against the Lord and against His anointed” meant against the kings in the line of David. But both 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2 refer ultimately to the Messiah. Today, we can apply this rejection specifically to the Messiah, the Son of David, and those who follow Him.

When God-given authority is misused, chaos is the result. Kings and governors have authority that is God-given (Romans 13). When they misuse their authority, it produces an uproar. Proverbs 29:12 tells us that if a ruler listens to lies, all his servants are wicked. The kings and rulers in Psalm 2 listen to lies from each other. The Lord insists upon ethics at the highest levels, otherwise scandal and corruption will spread like wildfire. But citizens should be careful about the way they use their authority. When they harshly criticize rulers, they are teaching others how to respond to them. Think about this the next time you are tempted to unload on a political leader: your employees, your spouse and your children are learning how to respond to your authority too.

Modern Political Powers

Are world leaders trying to cast away the ruling power of the eternal God and His Anointed Son? Here are just a few examples.

According to Open Doors World Watch List, Christians are being severely persecuted all over the world. Whether through the paranoia of dictators, Communist regimes or Islamic oppression, world leaders are rising in opposition to Christ and His flock.^{xviii}

According to Alice Ekman, a Senior Analyst of Asian Issues at the European Union Institute for Security Studies, in Communist China, “Religion is considered incompatible with the Marxist ‘faith.’” In one of his main speech [sic] on religion, Xi Jinping introduced himself and the CCP as “inflexible Marxist atheists.” He regards all religions, but Christianity more than the others, as potential enemies of the CCP, which should be strictly controlled now and eliminated in the

long run. Members of the CCP are expelled from the Party not only if they have any kind of religious belief, but even if they have relatives or close friends who are believers. Solving in his own way an old debate between Western scholars, whether Communism was a purely political ideology or a secularized form of religion, Xi Jinping proclaims that Marxism is a “faith,” as such incompatible with all other forms of faith.”^{xix}

“Announcing that the number of new COVID-19 infections was down, the New York Governor Andrew Cuomo stated, ‘The number is down because we brought the number down ... God did not do that. Faith did not do that. Destiny did not do that ... A lot of pain and suffering did that ... That’s how it works. It’s math. And if you don’t continue to do that, you’re going to see that number go back up. And that will be a tragedy if that number goes back up.’^{xx} But three and a half weeks after the governor made that declaration, he discovered something that shocked him. He stated that “66% of the [infected] people were at home, which is shocking to us.”^{xxi} This reminds us of a phrase in verse 4 of Psalm 2: “He that sits in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.”

Though kings and rulers set themselves against the Lord and His Anointed, God still reigns. But the vain imaginations of men leave mankind in an uproar. Here is the good news: Christ came to confront the chaos caused by man’s rebellion. When He came the first time, he came to comfort us. He will return to second time to confront this world. What comfort did He leave us? Well, it is quite the opposite of “break the bands of the Lord.” Jesus said, “²⁸**Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.** ²⁹**Take my yoke upon you, and**

learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, came to give genuine rest to weary souls. Christ lived a flawless life but then gave Himself over to an awful death for you and me. Buried in a borrowed tomb, He rose again the third day. And now He commands you to call upon Him as Lord, and turn from your vain imaginations.

Pastor Gordon Dickson, Calvary Baptist Church, Findlay, Ohio, May 17, 2020

ⁱ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms 1–89: Commentary*, vol. 1, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2011–2013), 202.

ⁱⁱ Ibid. (< הַגְּמָן, a progressive imperfect),

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Paul’s appeals to believers in Romans 12–16 are based on those mercies – Romans 12:1–2.

^v By glory, we refer to the unique excellence of God. Recent messages on this theme can be found here:

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?sourceOnly=true&currSection=sermons&source&keyword=calvaryfindlay&&subsetcat=series&subsetitem=The+Glory+of+God>

^{vi} Mathematical Challenges to Darwin’s Theory of Evolution, Hoover Institution, video accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noj4phMT9OE&t=62s>

^{vii} See Michael Flannery, “Intelligent Design Is Older Than You Think — A Lot Older Than You Think” Evolution News, January 4, 2016, accessed at https://evolutionnews.org/2016/01/intelligent_des_23/

^{viii} Abortion Statistics, National Right to Life Fact Sheet, accessed at <https://nrlc.org/uploads/factsheets/FS01AbortionintheUS.pdf>

^{ix} Humanist Manifesto I, accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanist_Manifesto_I

^x Tom Kaden, Humanismus und Soziologie, American Humanism and Sociology of Religion, July 2018, Abstract accessed at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326266759_American_Humanism_and_Sociology_of_Religion

^{xi} Federal court decides secular humanism is a religion, Christianity Today November 5, 2014, accessed at <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/federal-court-decides-secular-humanism-is-a-religion/42653.htm>

^{xii} Robert Booth “Transgender man loses appeal court battle to be registered as father” The Guardian, April 29, 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/29/transgender-man-loses-appeal-court-battle-registered-father-freddy-mcconnell>

^{xiii} Times haven’t changed much. This is like the comment in Judges 17:6; 21:25. There really is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Consider for instance, Plato’s criticism of Protagoras, the Sophist teacher cited in Joshua J. Mark, “Man Is The Measure,” Ancient History Encyclopedia, January 18, 2012 accessed at <https://www.ancient.eu/article/61/protagoras-of-abdera-of-all-things-man-is-the-meas/>

^{xiv} Postmodernism, Wikipedia, accessed at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism> citing Scruton, Roger (1996). Modern philosophy : an introduction and survey. New York: Penguin Books. ISBN 0140249079.

^{xv} Critical Theory, Wikipedia accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_theory#cite_note-1 citing Horkheimer, Max. 1982. Critical Theory Selected Essays. New York: Continuum Pub.

^{xvi} Ibid. citing Geuss, R. The Idea of a Critical Theory, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, ch. 4.

^{xvii} Paul R. Gilchrist, [“894 גִּימֶל,”](#) ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 394.

^{xviii} Open Doors World Watch List accessed at <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>

^{xix} Massimo Introvigne, "China is Communist. Marxist, Leninist, Stalinist, and Maoist" Bitter Winter, April 24, 2020 quoting Alice Ekman, "Rouge VIF" Accessed at <https://bitterwinter.org/china-is-communist-marxist-leninist-stalinist-and-maoist/>

^{xxxx} Can't Be Our Maker – Must Be Math. Proclaim and Defend. Accessed at <https://www.proclaimanddefend.org/2020/04/17/cant-be-our-maker-must-be-math/> citing Amanda Prestigiacomo, The DailyWire, April 14, 2020

^{xxi} Jessica Chasmar - The Washington Times - Thursday, May 7, 2020 Accessed at

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/may/7/andrew-cuomo-says-66-of-new-covid-19-patients-were/>