



Psalm 110 - Assurance of Victory for God's Priest-King

Of David. A Psalm.

Introduction

This is a royal psalm, i.e. its theme deals with the role of the house of David in the life of God's people. Like Psalms 2 and 72, this psalm goes well beyond the achievements of any merely human heir of David and thus looks forward to the Messiah; in fact, unlike those two psalms, it is almost entirely future in its orientation. When the people of God would sing this in faith, they would celebrate God's promises to David, yearn for the day in which the Gentiles receive the light, i.e. the coming accomplishment of the Messiah, and seek to be faithful to their calling until that great day.

This psalm is one of the most cited OT texts in the NT, with quotations or allusions appearing in the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline epistles, Hebrews, and the Petrine epistles; there are twenty seven in all. Christians sing this psalm to celebrate that Jesus has taken his Davidic kingship by his resurrection, and that God is busy now subduing the Gentiles into the empire of Jesus.

The other royal psalms are 2, 18, 20-21, 45, 72, 101, 132, 144, and possibly 89.

Strangely, some scholars and commentators deny David's authorship. Yet as Derek Kidner noted: "Our Lord gave full weight to David's authorship and David's words, stressing the former twice by the expression 'David himself', and the latter by the comment that he was speaking 'in the Holy Spirit' (Mark 12:36)."

Psalm 110:1 - The Lord to My Lord.

The psalm opens with an oracle from the Lord God (*Yahweh*) to the Davidic king (my Lord). In Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36 and Luke 20:42, Jesus draws attention to

the fact that David, the psalm's author, calls the king 'my Lord,' which implies that the king, whom all agreed was the Messiah, was greater than David.

The idea that the risen Lord Jesus is the reigning messianic king seated at 'God's right hand' appears in Matthew 26:64, Acts 2:32-35, 1 Corinthians 15:25, Ephesians 1:20, Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 1:3, 1:13, 8:1, 10:12, and 12:2, and 1 Peter 3:22. In 1 Corinthians 15:25 and Ephesians 1:20 Paul combines this with Psalm 8:6; refer to the comment made there.

¹ The Lord says to my lord,
'Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies your footstool.'

Psalm 110:1

The Lord says to my lord. David prophetically revealed the words of Yahweh (the Lord) to the Messiah, David's lord. This is clear not only from the context, but especially in how this verse is quoted in Matthew 22:43-45 and Hebrews 1:13; refer to the comments made below.

Psalm 110:1 is one of the OT verses most quoted in the NT:

- Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1 in Matthew 22:43-45 and Mark 12:36-37, showing how David called the Messiah 'Lord' - recognising that the Messiah was greater than David himself.
- Peter quoted Psalm 110:1 on Pentecost, explaining how David prophesied the deity and ascension of Jesus; refer to Acts 2:24-26.
- Paul referred to Psalm 110:1 in 1 Corinthians 15:25, explaining the rule and dominion of Jesus the Messiah.
- The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 110:1 in Hebrews 1:13, referring to the superiority of Jesus the Messiah over any angel.
- The author of Hebrews referred to Psalm 110:1 in Hebrews 10:13, explaining the rule and dominion of Jesus the Messiah.

Spurgeon commented, "How condescending on Jehovah's part to permit a mortal ear to hear, and a human pen to record his secret converse with his co-equal Son! How greatly should we prize the revelation of his private and solemn discourse with the Son, herein made public for the refreshing of his people!"

The Lord says to my Lord. The fact that *Yahweh* – the Lord, the covenant God of Israel – spoke to one that David himself called Lord ('*Adonay*) demonstrates that both *Yahweh* and '*Adonay* mentioned in this verse are God. Specifically speaking, it would be said that *Yahweh* is the Triune God, with references to the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each being *Yahweh*. Normally, when *Yahweh* is

mentioned without specific connection to the person of the Son or the Holy Spirit, it is assumed that it refers to God the Father. Therefore, here is God the Father speaking to the Messiah, God the Son. 'Adonay refers to an individual greater than the speaker. Here is a case of David's citing God's words in which God tells another person, who is greater than David, to sit at God's right hand until God makes the person's enemies a footstool for the person's feet. This person can only be a divine Messiah, who is Jesus Christ.

Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. Yahweh, specifically, God the Father, spoke to the Messiah, specifically, God the Son, telling him to take his enthroned place until the Father made the victory for the Son: <<*God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places*>> (Ephesians 1:20), and: <<*Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*>> (Hebrews 8:1). Spurgeon observed, "His work is done, and he may sit; it is well done, and he may sit at his right hand; it will have grand results, and he may therefore quietly wait to see the complete victory which is certain to follow."

Psalm 110:2-4 - The King Will Rule over God's People.

The next section looks to the Davidic king's effectual rule over God's people, even under threat from hostile forces, for he will rule in the midst of his enemies! The people of God will offer themselves freely on the day of his power, i.e. on the day God exerts his power to take possession of the Gentiles (vv.5-7).

² The Lord sends out from Zion
your mighty sceptre.
Rule in the midst of your foes.

Psalm 110:2

The Lord sends out from Zion your mighty sceptre. The Messiah's authority would not be limited to Israel. It would extend to the entire world, dominating all the kings and nations of the earth, giving him rule over all enemies: <<*As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed*>> (Daniel 7:13-14). Jacob prophesied over the descendants of his son Judah, which includes David and Jesus: <<*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him;*

and the obedience of the peoples is his>> (Genesis 49:10). It can be applied to the kingship of both.

Adam Clarke is among those who think the mighty sceptre represents the Gospel: “The Gospel, the doctrine of Christ crucified; which is the powerful sceptre of the Lord that bought us; is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword; and is the power of God to salvation to all them that believe.”

Rule in the midst of your foes. The exercise of power is an office that the king receives directly from the Lord, a responsibility which he must exercise in dependence and obedience, thereby becoming a sign, within the people, of God’s powerful and provident presence. Dominion over his foes, glory and victory are all gifts received that make the sovereign a mediator of the Lord’s triumph over evil. He subjugates his enemies, transforming them; he wins them over with his love. The Hebrew version tends towards the people responding to their king when he needs to form an army to fight a common enemy. The Septuagint, however, tends towards those who will follow the Messiah, i.e. the church. Refer also to the comment made on v.3 below.

³ Your people will offer themselves willingly
on the day you lead your forces
on the holy mountains.
From the womb of the morning,
like dew, your youth will come to you.

Psalm 110:3

Your people will offer themselves willingly on the day you lead your forces.

When the people of God see and experience the victory of their Messiah, they gladly give themselves to his work. They are willing in the day of his power. Since the Hebrew word translated power is the word for a host or army, the sense is that the Messiah’s people are gathered together as a willing army.

On the holy mountains is literally in holy garments. Either can be applied as Christ will return to Mount Zion, his holy city: <<*Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God. His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King*>> (Psalm 48:1-2), and his people will be arrayed in festive clothing, in honour of the great moment as they did in the days of Jehoshaphat: <<*And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the Lord and praise him in holy attire, as they went before the army, and say, “Give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever”*>> (2 Chronicles 20:21 ESV).

From the womb of the morning, like dew, your youth will come to you. The meaning of the Hebrew is obscure. The womb of the morning is probably a poetic expression for the east, or for the dawn, which is when the dew appears. The dew of youth may be a poetic term for refreshment, implying that the king has continual sources of fresh energy; or it might suggest willing soldiers as numerous as the dewdrops. The people of God praise the victorious Messiah and are noted for their beautiful holiness, their radiant being and their ageless strength.

- ⁴ The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind,
‘You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek.’

Psalm 110:4

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind. This puts the following statement in the most solemn and strong context possible. Yahweh, specifically God the Father, made an oath that would never be annulled: <<*God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind. Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it?*>> (Numbers 23:19).

You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek. With this oath, God revealed that there is another order of priesthood, apart from the priestly order of Aaron. The priests were all descended from Aaron and served in the tabernacle and temple, offering sacrifices and conducting ceremonies according to God’s law. Yet God established another priestly order, after the pattern of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek was the king of Salem, i.e. of Jerusalem, and a priest of God Most High according to Genesis 14:18-20. He met Abraham after a battle, blessed him, and received a tenth of his Abraham’s spoil - a tithe. The Davidic king is to be after his order, i.e. like him, probably in the sense that he is both a king and a priest note that these were always two distinct offices in Israel, ruling in Jerusalem or Zion. The prophet Zechariah foresaw a merger of these two offices in the person of the Messiah, or ‘the Branch’ in Zechariah 6:9-14. Since the OT records this of no other king of David’s line, this shows that the psalm is primarily about the final king, the Messiah. The author of Hebrews, who cited Psalm 110:1 throughout his letter, uses this verse to explain to his Jewish audience why Jesus, the now-reigning heir of David, is also the ultimate priest; now that Jesus has arrived, Christian Jews may not legitimately return to ordinary Judaism in order to escape persecution, hoping that the old sacrifices will still suffice as atonement for sin, for they will not. There is a text from Qumran (11QMelchizedek) that also foresees Melchizedek as a heavenly judge and deliverer.

You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek. This oath was so important that the author of Hebrews refers to it five times:

- Hebrews 5:6 and 5:10 emphasise that this was Yahweh's declaration, not something that the Messiah claimed for himself.
- In Hebrews 6:20, the emphasis is on the idea that Jesus the Messiah serves as a living, active High Priest for his people.
- Hebrews 7:17 emphasises that the priesthood of Jesus the Messiah, according to the order of Melchizedek, is better than the priestly order of Aaron because it is eternal and will never end.
- Hebrews 7:21 emphasises that the priesthood of Jesus the Messiah, according to the order of Melchizedek, is better than the priestly order of Aaron because it was founded on a direct oath of Yahweh, unlike the priestly order of Aaron.

Psalm 110:5-7 - The Warrior King Will Be Victorious over His Enemies.

The final section takes up a common messianic theme of the OT: the ultimate heir of David will be the triumphant conqueror of the Gentiles. The scene of victory in battle here may portray the final judgement, but is more likely the overcoming of all the Gentile leaders, so that the peoples themselves can serve their new king, the Messiah: *<<but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked>>* (Isaiah 11:4). He will lift up his head in victory, ready to enjoy his rule: *<<Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord>>* (Psalm 27:6).

⁵ The Lord is at your right hand;
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

Psalm 110:5

The Lord is at your right hand. The favour and strength of the Messiah is aligned with and an instrument of the strength of Yahweh, the Lord. The form of the word Lord, Hebrew 'Adonay, is reserved for the deity in the OT; refer to the comment made on Genesis 18:3. Most of this section describes what he will do, and this most likely refers to the same person as the Lord. However, the image of the conquering king is a messianic image; and the messianic king is at God's right hand (v.1). This implicitly attributes deity to the messianic Lord: *<<For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace>>* (Isaiah 9:6). This kind of king contrasts with even the best of the Davidic line that Judah has experienced so far, because these titles show that this king will

be divine. Thus this cannot refer to, say, Hezekiah whose father Ahaz was king at the time Isaiah wrote this, who for all his piety was nevertheless flawed and only human.

He will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. With the authority mentioned in v.2, the strength of the Messiah extends out of Zion and brings the righteous judgement of God against even the greatest kings.

- 6 He will execute judgement among the nations,
filling them with corpses;
he will shatter heads
over the wide earth.
- 7 He will drink from the stream by the path;
therefore he will lift up his head.

Psalm 110:6-7

He will execute judgement among the nations. In his conquest, the Messiah will exercise his authority over all nations, bringing his judgement.

Filling them with corpses. This seems to anticipate the slaughter at the Battle of Armageddon; refer to Revelation 19:11-18.

Therefore he will lift up his head. While the rebellious nations of the world receive their judgement, the Messiah himself is refreshed, i.e. drink from the stream, and will be exalted, that is, lift up his head. Spurgeon commented, “His own head shall be lifted high in victory, and his people, in him, shall be upraised also.” Although Jesus had a great victory in his death, there is a marked contrast between that momentous occasion and his ultimate victory, for: <<*When Jesus had received the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit*>> (John 19:30).