

IS PSALM 110 A MESSIANIC PSALM?

Barry C. Davis

DID THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS violate the intent of the author of Psalm 110 when they identified the undesignated **יְהוָה** ("my Lord") of Psalm 110:1 (and hence the focus of the entire psalm) as the Messiah, that is, Jesus Christ?¹ This article investigates the legitimacy of the messianic interpretation of Psalm 110.

Before addressing the issue at hand, brief mention of two debated topics surrounding the understanding of Psalm 110 must be made.² The first issue is the time when this psalm was written, and the second concerns the identification of the author of the psalm. Most commentators hold one of three views about the date of the writing: pre-Israelite Canaanite origins,³ postexilic Israel-

Barry C. Davis is Assistant Professor of Bible and Hebrew, Multnomah Biblical Seminary, Portland, Oregon.

¹ Psalm 110 is the most frequently quoted or referenced psalm in the New Testament. New Testament authors directly cite Psalm 110:1, regarding **יְהוָה** (my Lord) sitting at the right hand of **יהוה** (the LORD) in Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34; Hebrews 1:13; and they allude to it in Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; and Hebrews 8:1. Also the author of the Book of Hebrews quoted Psalm 110:4 in affirming that is of the priestly order of Melchizedek in Hebrews 5:6; 7:17; and he made general reference to the psalm in Hebrews 5:10; 6:20; and 7:11, 15.

² Bateman presents a succinct but thorough overview of the major points of the debate surrounding these two significant issues (Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Psalm 110:1 and the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 [October–December 1992]: 438–53).

³ See Umberto Cassuto, "Biblical Literature and Canaanite Literature," *Tarbiz* 13 (1942): 211–212; J. H. Patton, *Canaanite Parallels in the Book of Psalms* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1944); H. H. Rowley, "Melchizedek and Zadok (Gen 14 and Ps 110)," in *Festschrift: Alfred Bertholet* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950), 461–72; H. G. Jefferson, "Is Psalm 110 Canaanite?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 73 (1954): 152–56. These and similar works typically argue either from a historical-precedent position, that is, the presence of a royal priesthood existing in Jerusalem before the Israelite conquest of the land, or from the presence of Hebrew vocabulary forms in Psalm 110 that may have Canaanite parallels.

ite origins,⁴ or preexilic Israelite origins.⁵ An analysis of the arguments for these views favors the third position, that is, the view that the psalm was written before the Exile.

Commentators also say the author of the psalm was either Zadok and David together,⁶ an unnamed poet-prophet,⁷ or David himself. The present author, along with others,⁸ favors Davidic authorship. This view is based on (a) the content of the psalm, (b) several New Testament references to David as the speaker of the psalm (Matt. 22:43-44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42-44; Acts 2:34-35), and (c) the superscription that links David to the psalm.⁹

Once Davidic authorship for Psalm 110 is accepted, a third question arises: To whom did David refer when, in verse 1, he used the term יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי ("my Lord")? Bateman identifies five options, the first four of which are earthly kings—King Saul, King Achish of the Philistines, King David himself, and King Solomon—and

⁴ Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941); and M. Treves, "Two Acrostic Psalms," *Vetus Testamentum*, 15 (1965): 81-90. This view typically advances Simon Maccabeus as the referent of the term יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי ("my Lord"), thus dating the psalm in the Hasmonean period.

⁵ S. Mowinkel, "Psalm Criticism between 1900 and 1935: Ugarit and Psalm Exegesis," *Vetus Testamentum* 5 (1955): 13-33; and L. C. Allen, *Psalm 101-150*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word 1987). A preexilic Israelite origin is advocated by most scholars today.

⁶ Rowley, "Melchizedek and Zadok (Gen 14 and Ps 110)," 461-72.

⁷ C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1907); E. J. Kissane, "The Interpretation of Psalm 110:1," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 21 (1954): 103-14; G. Cooke, "The Israelite King as Son of God," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 73 (1961): 202--25; G. R. Driver, "Psalm CX: Its Form[,] Meaning and Purpose," in *Studies in the Bible*, ed. J. M. Grintz and J. Liver (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1964), 17-31; J. G. Gammie, "A New Setting for Psalm 110," *Anglican Theological Review* 51 (1969): 4-17; V. K Homburg, "Psalm 110 1 im Rahmen des juda:ischen Kronungszeremoniells," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972): 243-46; and S. Schreiner, "Psalm CX and die Investitur des Hohenpriester," *Vetus Testamentum* 27 (1977): 216-22.

⁸ Arthur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, trans. Herbert Hartwell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 692-93; J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966), 295-97; J. Boyd, "The Triumphant Priest-King," *Biblical Viewpoint* 6 (November 1972): 99-110; M. Naumann, "VIII. Psalm 110," in "Messianic Mountaintops," *Springfielder* 39 (June 1975): 60-65; M. J. Paul, "The Order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4 and Heb 7:3)," *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987): 195-211; John Phillips, *Exploring the Psalms: Psalms 89-150* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1988), 190; Bateman, "Psalm 110:1 and the New Testament," 444-45; and Elliott E. Johnson, "Hermeneutical Principles and the Interpretation of Psalm 110," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (October-December 1992): 428-37.

⁹ The superscription לְדָוִד may be translated "by David," "for David," "to David," or "belonging to David." Therefore the superscription may not necessarily identify David as the author of the psalm, but yet it does not rule out Davidic authorship.

the fifth is a heavenly King, that is, the Messiah.¹⁰ Bateman correctly dismisses Saul and Achish as being improbable candidates for the attributions of Psalm 110 (Saul was dead at the time of the inauguration of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7, and Achish was a non-Israelite king), despite the fact that both had been referred to by David (on different occasions) as **יְדֹנָי** (1 Sam. 24:6, 10; 26:18; 29:8). Bateman also discounts Merrill's argument that David directed the psalm to himself with a formulaic term ancient kings used to refer to themselves.

Bateman argues that the referent of **יְדֹנָי** is David's son Solomon, stating that "after Solomon was coronated, he sat 'on the throne of the Lord' (1 Chron. 29:23)" and that "the one whom David called 'my lord' in Psalm 110:1 may well have been his son Solomon."¹¹

Regarding the possibility that David used the term **יְדֹנָי** to refer to the Messiah, Bateman concludes that the Masoretic pointing of **יְדֹנָי** rather than **יְדֹנָי** indicates that "David was directing this oracle from Yahweh to a human lord, not to the divine messianic Lord,"¹² since, Bateman says, "the form 'to my lord' (**יְדֹנָי לִי**) is never used elsewhere in the Old Testament as a divine reference."¹³ Bateman presents a strong case for his position, stating that 94 percent of the 168 occurrences of the various forms of **יְדֹנָי** refer to earthly lords, with the remaining occurrences being "when Joshua, Gideon, Daniel, and Zechariah addressed an angelic being as 'my lord' (Josh. 5:14; Judg. 6:13; Dan. 10:16, 17, 19; 12:8; Zech. 1:9; 4:4-5, 13; 6:4)."¹⁴ A case, however, can be made for the view that the referent of **יְדֹנָי** in both Joshua 5:14 and Judges 6:13 is **יְהוָה** (the LORD) Himself.¹⁵ Thus there is nothing to preclude

¹⁰ Bateman, "Psalm 110:1 and the New Testament," 445—52.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 448-49, n. 49. See Eugene H. Merrill, "Royal Priesthood: An Old Testament Messianic Motif" (paper read at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November 1991), 1-11; and *idem*, "Royal Priesthood: An Old Testament Messianic Motif," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 [January-March 1993]: 54-56. The arguments Merrill offers, however, do not outweigh the arguments that favor a messianic attribution for **יְדֹנָי**.

¹² *Ibid.*, 448.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ When Gideon met the angel of the Lord (Judg. 6:12) and Gideon referred to the angel of the Lord as **יְדֹנָי** (6:13, 15), the author of the Book of Judges identified the angel of the Lord as **יְהוָה** ("the LORD") in 6:14. It can be argued, however, that Gideon was unaware that the one addressing him was Yahweh when he referred to Him as **יְדֹנָי** ("my lord"), a term of respect.

the possibility that the referent of David's use of **יְהוָה** is the Messiah (and hence, Jesus, as the New Testament authors interpreted the referent).

This article presents three elements of an exegetical treatment of Psalm 110: poetic and structural analysis, contextual analysis, and theological analysis.¹⁶

POETIC AND STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

VERSE 1

This verse introduces the persons mentioned in the psalm—Yahweh, Adoni, and the enemy. Assonance is used to unite the first two cola following the title (**יְהוָה**, "to my Lord," is parallel to **לְיָמֵי**, "at My right side"). This device binds Yahweh and Adoni together, thereby showing that they are distinct from the enemy.

A second example of assonance begins in verse 1c and carries through verse 3. This is the repetition of the final **ךָ** ("Your") which highlights Adoni's ownership of His opponents ("Your enemies," who become "Your footstool," v. 1; "Your enemies," v. 2b), His ability to rule ("Your scepter," v. 2a; "Your power," v. 3a), and His relationship to His friends ("Your people"; "Your youth," v. 3). A further instance of the **ךָ** assonance occurs in verse 3 in the prepositional phrase **לְךָ** ("to You").¹⁷

Similarly, perhaps Joshua did not know that "the captain of the host of the LORD" was Yahweh when he addressed Him as **יְהוָה**, a title of respect (Josh. 5:14). However in Joshua 6:2 the author of the Book of Joshua did identify **יְהוָה** as Yahweh ("the LORD"). C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. James Martin [1868; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 63–64).

¹⁶ A text critical analysis reveals that if Psalm 110 is messianic in its entirety, then the Masoretic text proves to be highly reliable and may be used with confidence to exegete Psalm 110. Others, however, assume or attempt to demonstrate that the text of Psalm 110 is corrupt and in need of significant emendation. See H. F. Peacock, *A Translator's Guide to Selected Psalms* (London: United Bible Societies, 1981), 121; Th. Booij, "Psalm CX: `Rule in the Midst of Your Foes,'" *Vetus Testamentum* 41 (1991): 396–407; Cooke, "The Israelite King as Son of God," 218–24; and Kissane, "The Interpretation of Psalm 110," 104.

All areas of textual difficulty are cleared up by understanding the psalm not as a coronation psalm, or a psalm to be read at an autumnal festival, or some other kind of psalm (see the following paragraph), but as a messianic psalm from beginning to end.

Along with the messianic view of Psalm 110, Johnson has identified the following ten alternative proposals by different scholars for the occasion of the psalm: a New Year enthronement festival, a covenant renewal festival, a royal Zion festival, instructions for conquering Jerusalem, a celebration after conquering Jerusalem, a celebration after moving the ark to Jerusalem, the granting of the Davidic Covenant, instructions to the king as he went to war, a meditation on Psalms 2 and 21, and the coronation of Solomon (Johnson, "Hermeneutical Principles and the Interpretation of Psalm 110," 430, n. 5).

¹⁷ All translations are those of the present writer.

The Hebrew Scriptures link **יָשָׁב** (when defined as "to sit," not "to dwell") and **יְמִיִן** ("right side") on only four occasions (1 Kings 2:19; 22:19; 2 Chron. 18:18; Ps. 110:1). In two of the four (1 Kings 22:19 and 2 Chron. 18:18), **יְהוָה** ("the LORD") is the one pictured as sitting. Those who are depicted as being at His right side are angels, who are portrayed as standing. In the remaining two passages, in which someone other than **יְהוָה** is identified as sitting (Bathsheba in 1 Kings 2:19 and **אֲדָנָי** here in Psalm 110:1), that person is viewed as being highly important, royalty in fact.

Both uses of the phrase **אֲוֵיבֶיךָ** ("your enemies") in Psalm 110 (vv. 1 and 2) refer to God's enemies, not to the enemies of a human lord. Six, if not all seven, of the other uses of "your enemies" in the Psalter also refer to God's enemies, not to the enemies of a human ruler (8:2; 21:8; 66:3; 74:23; 89:10, 51; 92:9 [twice]).¹⁸ While not necessarily a strong argument, this observation does lend support to the assertion that in Psalm 110:1—2 refers to God, thus lending support to the messianic nature of the psalm.

Still another support for a messianic understanding of the psalm is the use of the word **רִגְלֵי** ("footstool") in 110:1. Elsewhere when the term **רִגְלֵי** refers to a footstool (1 Chron. 28:2; Pss. 99:5; 132:7; Isa. 66:1; Lam. 2:1), it is God's. Thus the likelihood is strong that the author of Psalm 110 also intended the word to be understood in the same way.

VERSE 2

This verse places the direct object (**מַטֵּה עֲזָרָה**, "Your strong scepter") at the beginning of the verse before the verb (**יִשְׁלַח**, "He will stretch forth") that governs it. In this way David dramatically emphasized Adoni's right to rule. He did this to set the stage for the powerful action Adoni must and will take, as stated in the remainder of the psalm. If Adoni were weak (which He is not), there would be no way for Him to defeat His enemies.

Moreover, that scepter, according to David, is to be extended (**יִשְׁלַח**, "He will stretch forth") by none other than Yahweh Himself. Furthermore Yahweh will act from the center of the place of His earthly rule, that is, Zion.

David then abruptly shifted the form of the verb from an im-

¹⁸The referent of the word "your" in Psalm 21:8 is debated. Most commentators argue that the enemies are enemies of the human king spoken of in that psalm (see Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word, 1983], 192). Dahood, however, maintains that the words are directed to the divine Lord rather than to the human king (Mitchell J. Dahood, *Psalms: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966], 1:131).

perfect (הִשְׁלֵם) to an imperative (הִרְדֵּךְ, "Rule!").¹⁹ As a result the reader is once again made aware of the significance that Yahweh places on Adoni's control over His foes. The abrupt change from the imperfect to the imperative emphasizes forceful action: "Rule in the midst of your enemies."

In addition to this, David's use of the imperative here serves another function as well. It forms the ending component of an *inclusio* begun with another imperative in verse 1, an imperative that also expresses strength ("Sit at My right side"). This *inclusio* separates the actions of deity from those of humanity seen in verse 3.

VERSE 3²⁰

The middle of this verse ("in holy ornaments, from the womb of the morning") acts as a "double-duty modifier." Dahood defines that operation as follows: "Also termed the 'two-way middle,' this device creates an interpenetrating and, as it were, fluid entity, in which phrases will go both with the sentence before and after with no break in the movement of thought."²¹

The people are said to be dressed "in holy ornaments," which elsewhere are used in association with the worship or praise of God (1 Chron. 16:29; 2 Chron. 20:21; Pss. 29:2; 96:9). These clothes, moreover, may be similar to those "holy garments" worn by Aaron when he entered the Holy Place. Although they might not be the same garments, they are suggestive of priestly garb and thus heighten the reader's awareness of priestly functions, which are noted in verse 4.

¹⁹ Outside of Psalm 110:2 the verb (הִרְדֵּךְ, "to rule") is linked either directly or indirectly to the Lord as ruler on two occasions: in Isaiah 41:2 (directly to God) and Lamentations 1:13 (indirectly by a fire sent forth by God). Curiously in the immediate context of both of these God-referenced uses the noun רֶגֶל ("foot") appears. In Isaiah 41:2 God called an individual "in righteousness to His feet," and in Lamentations 1:13 God spread a net as a snare for the feet of Jerusalem. Here in Psalm 110:1 the Lord made the enemies a footstool for the feet אֲדֹנָי ("my Lord").

²⁰ The phrase הִלְךְ ("your power"), in the first line of Psalm 110:3 occurs only eight times in the Old Testament. In all six instances of the phrase outside of the Psalter, the pronominal suffix (לְךָ, "your") refers to part of the creation. By contrast, both of the occurrences within the Psalter (59:12; 110:3) identify God as the exhibitor of the power (לְךָ). This, of course, assumes that אֲדֹנָי ("my Lord"), the referent to ("your") in Psalm 110, does in fact signify deity. However, the term 57.7 ("power or army") without the suffix is linked within the Psalter to both God and to what God has created.

²¹ Mitchell J. Dahood, "Poetry, Hebrew," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume* (1976), 670.

VERSE 4

Kraus correctly identifies the major break in the psalm at this verse. "Verse 4 first provides a new introduction to an oracle of God. The speaker assures us that Yahweh's statement is guaranteed by a declaration that is irrevocable and sworn."²² The verse stands not only as the central verse of the psalm but also as its central focus. Adoni is declared to be an eternal priest, not of the line of David, however, but of the "order" of Melchizedek.

Why did David insert this verse about Adoni (Messiah) becoming a priest, especially in light of the fact that in verses 1-3 David demonstrated Adoni's power as a divine, powerful King who in verses 5-7 will mightily exercise that power to the total destruction of His enemies? Perhaps David did this in order to show that Adoni's enemies will be slaughtered as sacrifices, that they will be devastated in the midst of a holy war, led by a holy King-Priest, who will bring them as slaughtered sacrifices to God.

VERSE 5

David linked both halves of the Psalm to the theme of Adoni's eternal and unique priesthood. In verse 3 David referred to **יְהוָה יוֹם** ("in the day of Your power"), and in verse 5 he repeated the words "in the day of" in the phrase **יְהוָה יוֹם אַפּוֹ** ("in the day of His anger"). In each case the "power" and the "anger" are Adoni's, which He will reveal in the midst of a battle against His enemies. Because these phrases precede and follow verse 4, which speaks of Messiah's eternal priesthood, they highlight the fact that a Melchizedekian priest is more than one who performs worshipful ritual. He is, in fact, One who does powerful and successful battle for the glory of Yahweh.

The expression "in the day of His anger" further supports a messianic view of Psalm 110. In this passage the suffix **וֹ** (His) refers to **יְהוָה** ("the Lord"). Elsewhere in Scripture the construct relationship between **יוֹם** ("day of") and **אַף** ("anger") occurs in only six verses (Job 20:28; Lam. 2:1, 21—22; Zeph. 2:2—3). In each of those cases the anger is God's. There is a strong possibility that the author of Psalm 110 also intended to indicate that the One who is angry (**יְהוָה אַף**, "the Lord") is none other than God.

VERSE 6

Three poetic devices are noted in this verse. First, David used

²² Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 350.

disambiguation²³ ("He will fill them with corpses") to explain graphically the meaning of the first part of the verse ("He will judge the nations"). The essence of judgment is the death of all who are judged. Second, David employed another example of repetition. He used יָהַרְגֵם ("He will smite")²⁴ in the second half of verse 5 and in the second half of verse 6. Adoni, the Melchizedekian Priest, will destroy kings, judge nations, and make corpses.

A third noteworthy literary technique in verse 6 is that of building to a climax. Verse 5 focuses on kings (individual rulers), the first part of verse 6 focuses on nations (whole people groups), and the second part of verse 6 refers to the "head,"²⁵ apparently one who rules over several peoples.

All three of these poetic devices reveal the greatness of Adoni, the Messiah. Adoni is qualified to judge, is capable of judging people, and is more than able to judge and defeat His enemies.

VERSE 7

Here David returned to a "refreshment" metaphor that he used in verse 3. In that earlier verse the willingness of the people to volunteer for Messiah's army was pictured as dew, which refreshes the ground. Here in verse 7, by contrast, the refreshment comes after the battle when, victorious and "tired" from the battle, Messiah stoops to drink water from a flowing stream. The last part of verse 7 provides an additional contrast--between the enemy of Messiah (v. 6) and Messiah Himself (v. 7). In verse 6 the enemy, viewed as רֹאשׁ ("the head"), is cut down and destroyed; in verse 7 the Messiah, in a totally opposite situation, lifts up His head (רֹאשׁ), thereby signifying that He has secured a complete victory.

A review of David's use of poetic and structural devices re-

²³ According to Berlin, disambiguation is the use of the second line of a parallelism to clarify the topic of the first line when the first line does not contain sufficient information to ensure that the reader understands the direction in which the text is moving (Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992], 96-99).

²⁴ The verb form יָהַרְגֵם ("to smite") appears in Scripture more frequently in the context of God being the One who does the shattering than in the context of humans being those who do the killing. Yet, because there are a number of passages in which humans appear as the subject of the verb, this verb by itself cannot be used with any confidence to support a messianic setting for Psalm 110. On the other hand the use of this verb does not negate the possibility that the Messiah is the primary focus of attention of this passage.

²⁵ The New American Standard Bible renders the singular רֹאשׁ (head") by the plural "chief men," and the New International Version translates the word as "rulers."

veals that this psalm is not as disjointed or as unwieldy as it may at first appear. David's focus was on the Messiah, particularly in relation to His special priesthood. David also showed by means of emphasis, repetition, disambiguation, and climax (among other methods) that Messiah is a kingly Priest who is more than able to defeat His enemies in battle.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Psalm 110 is the linchpin psalm of the first seven psalms of Book Five of the Psalter. Besides occurring in the middle of the seven psalms (Pss. 107—113), Psalm 110 joins two different groups of psalms together. Psalms 107—109 express anguished pleas for deliverance; Psalms 111—113 overflow with praise for Yahweh. Psalm 110, the connecting psalm, reveals that the Messiah is both a King and a Priest who gives victory to His people (see Fig. 1). Thus because God more than meets the grief-stricken cries of His people, He is to be praised.

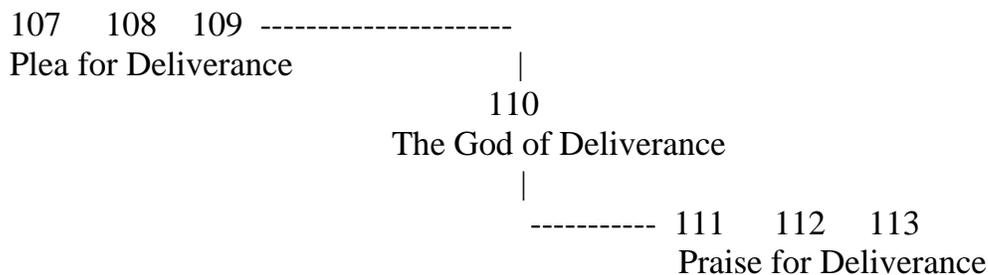


Figure 1. Psalm 110 as a Thematic Unifier of Psalms 107—113

As the center psalm between these two groups, Psalm 110 is naturally related to Psalms 109 and 111.²⁶ Psalms 109 and 110 exhibit similar words and concepts that link them together. Both are psalms of David (לְדָוִד מִזְמוֹר) and both direct much of their thought toward Yahweh (109:14-15, 20, 21, 26-27, 30; 110:1-2, 4-5). The phrase לְיָמֵיךְ ("at the right side") occurs in 109:6, 31 and in 110:

²⁶ For further information on the materials presented in this section, see Barry C. Davis, "A Contextual Analysis of Psalms 107-118" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity International University, 1996), 110-13, 148-50.

1, 5, although in these two verses in Psalm 110 it refers to the right side of deity whereas in Psalm 109 it signifies deity being at the right hand of a needy person to rescue him from those about to destroy his soul.

Also several parallel ideas exist in both psalms. The concept of judgment (but with different people involved) is noted in 109:7, 31 and 110:6. In addition the gathering of God's people in His honor is expressed in 109:30 and 110:3. Moreover, what is requested in Psalm 109 (i.e., the destruction of enemies) is fulfilled in 110:1, 5-6.

Several similar terms are used in both psalms. The word יהוה ("LORD") is used in both psalms of the self-existent One who has power over the adversary. A second term, ארץ ("earth, land"), appears in the context of the destruction of the enemy. From the earth, according to 109:15, the memory of the adversary is to be removed, and according to 110:6 the leader of the wicked is to be scattered over the earth. The word אֲדֹנָי ("my lord") is used in focusing either on the deliverance of the righteous out of the hand of the adversary or on the humiliation of the wicked (Pss. 109:21; 110:5). Also in 109:25 the last thing the adversaries do is shake their ראש ("head") side to side in reproach regarding God's servant. By contrast, in Psalm 110 the last thing God does after defeating the ראש ("head" or "chief") of His enemies (v. 6) is to lift His ראש ("head") up in victory (v. 7).

Certain contrasting ideas in these two psalms may be noted. Psalm 109:8 depicts an office or responsibility being taken away from the wicked; but 110:1 and 4 show offices being given to Messiah. Psalm 109:8 and 13 record the temporary nature of the wicked, but 110:4 speaks of the eternity of God. A contrasting use of water is seen in 109:18 (in terms of devastation—cursing enters the body like water) and 110:7 (in terms of refreshment).

In a similar fashion numerous ties exist between Psalm 110 and 111. Deliverance by the Messiah, seen in Psalm 110, is a basis for giving praise to God in Psalm 111. Three significant concepts link these psalms together: a gathering of people (110:3; 111:1), God's special relationship to His people (110:3; 111:9), and the defeat of nations (110:6; 111:6).

First, in Psalm 110 the gathering of God's people occurs within the setting of a battle. The people join together with the Lord to fight against and be victorious over their mutual enemies (110:3, 5-6). The gathering in Psalm 111 takes place after a victory has been won. The people gather together for what may be called a testimony meeting—a time for the people to hear the speaker in Psalm 111 praise God for who He is and for what He has accomplished (particularly for the deliverance He has pro-

vided for His people; 111:6, 9).

Second, in both psalms God is pictured as manifesting a special relationship with His people. Having a covenant relationship with them (111:5, 9), He centers His base of operations in their midst (in Zion) from which He exhibits His power against the adversary (110:2; 111:6). His people, in turn, rally around Him for war (110:3) and praise Him for the redemption He secures for them (111:6, 9). In both psalms, moreover, God's people are able to observe His power (לְיָיָהוָה, 110:3; יְיָ, 111:6) as He exercises it over those who are opposed to Him, particularly as He exercises it against the nations (110:6; 111:6).

Third, the authors of both psalms portray God as being more than able to defeat His enemies.

These terms and concepts point to the close relationship between Psalm 110 and Psalms 109 and 111. A study of Psalm 110 in connection with the remaining psalms of the Psalms 107-118 corpus also reveals points of similarity.²⁷ Thus Psalm 110, with its messianic orientation, is an important psalm in a strategic position within the Psalter.

THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

As noted earlier, many critical scholars argue that Psalm 110 relates to the enthronement ceremony of an earthly ruling king or the autumnal festival.²⁸ Driver suggests that the enthronement ceremony involves these steps:

- (i) mounting the future king on the royal mule;
- (ii) escorting him to Gihon . . . to drink of its water;
- (iii) the anointing of a prophet or a priest, accompanied by sacrifices;
- (iv) the acclamation;
- (v) naming him;
- (vi) the presentation "by" (or "on") the pillar;
- (vii) putting the crown and the "testimony" on his head;
- (viii) drawing up a "covenant" between the king and the people.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 29-336 (passim).

²⁸ A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1972), 2:767; and M. J. Paul, "The Order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4 and Heb 7:3)," *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987): 195.

²⁹ Driver, "Psalm CX: Its Form Meaning and Purpose," 28-29.

Two primary difficulties with this view should be noted. First, Psalm 110 contains only some of the above components of a coronation ceremony (perhaps only ii, iii, iv, and vii—and some of these are disputed). Second, and more devastating to the enthronement view, is the fact that "as far as the evidence goes, the ritual of the coronation ceremony was a really summary affair; and for the practice of commemorating the king's ascension by an annual festival there is no Biblical evidence whatever."³⁰

The autumnal festival view of Psalm 110, which is held by fewer critics than is the enthronement position, maintains, as Gammie writes, that "the setting of the psalms in relation to natural phenomena, and especially the autumnal rainfall, is as important as their setting in the cult."³¹ Importance is attached to natural phenomena, according to this view, because of the belief of the ancients that when they "heard the thunder of the heavens and saw the lightning, they believed that Yahweh, in the heavenly realm, was sitting in judgment on the gods of the nations."³² Furthermore the autumnal festival, held in October or November, was designed to ensure that God would respond kindly to the Israelites and end the drought season. Gammie therefore argues that the occasion of Psalm 110 "seems to have been a drought," and since the king was promised that he would "drink from a torrent along the way (vs. 7)," this implies that water was scarce.³³

The primary difficulty with the autumnal festival argument (apart from the fact that there is no biblical evidence of such use of this or any other psalm as a component part of the festival)³⁴ is that the argument is based solely on verse 7 and does not adequately take into account the numerous other promises made in the psalm itself.

Does the meaning of any psalm come from its usage or from its words when originally written? The fact that later interpreters "adjust the meaning of" (reinterpret) a psalm does not mean that the psalm originally contained that new thought.

Furthermore is Psalm 110 a royal and/or a messianic psalm? Although the psalm speaks of a king (vv. 1-2), it cannot be called a "royal" psalm for the following reasons: (1) No

³⁰ E. J. Kissane, "The Interpretation of Psalm 110," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 21 (1954): 104.

³¹ John G. Gammie, "A New Setting for Psalm 110," *Anglican Theological Review* 51 (1969): 4.

³² *Ibid.*, 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁴ Kissane, "The Interpretation of Psalm 110," 104.

earthly king is ever observed as seated at God's right hand (v. 1), (2) no earthly king has ever filled the role of an eternal Priest (v. 2), and (3) no earthly king is able to "judge the nations," as this King will do (v. 6).

Psalm 110, moreover, is the psalm most frequently quoted by New Testament writers, with the clear intention of affirming that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and the Melchizedekian King-Priest.³⁵ The theology that is derived merely from an assessment of verses 1 and 4 is far-reaching. The following points briefly highlight that theological development.

REGARDING PSALM 110:1

1. Jesus cited this verse to prove that Messiah is more than a mere physical descendant of David (Matt. 22:41–45; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44).
2. Peter quoted Psalm 110:1 on the Day of Pentecost to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 2:34–36).
3. The writer of Hebrews quoted the verse to argue that the Messiah (who is Jesus) is greater than the angels (Heb. 1:13).
4. The writers of the New Testament cited the verse in order to show that after Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension (Acts 2:33–35; Heb. 6:20), He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven.
5. In addition New Testament writers stated that God places His enemies under Jesus' feet (1 Cor. 15:25–28; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 10:13).

REGARDING PSALM 110:4

1. Jesus was given the title of High Priest, a title after which He did not grasp (Heb. 4:14–15; 5:10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 10:21).

³⁵ Johnson argues that even the first-century Jewish leaders considered the reference to יְהוָה in Psalm 110:1 to be prophetic of Messiah and to be used only of the Messiah and not of an earthly Davidic king ("Hermeneutical Principles and the Interpretation of Psalm 110," 432-33). Johnson notes that when Jesus posed the questions regarding how Christ can at the same time be David's son and David's Lord (Mark 12:35–37), "Jewish leaders could have met the challenge and resolved the dilemma in various ways. They could have denied that Psalm 110:1 referred to Messiah, but they did not. Or they could have rejected Jesus' interpretation of the verse that 'my lord' meant God, but did not. Had they held the historic reconstruction that 'my lord' meant someone positioned on David's throne, they could easily have removed the dilemma. For Solomon was both David's son and lord in this sense, but their silence conceded Jesus' point. Thus Jesus' interpretation of Psalm 110:1 confirms the view that David's words are a direct prophecy of the Messiah."

2. By being the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is the Source of salvation for all who believe in Him (5:9-10).
3. Jesus, having become a Melchizedekian priest, entered into heaven in order to show the way for believers to enter heaven (6:20).
4. By becoming a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, Jesus initiated a new order (7:17).
5. Jesus' priesthood, of the order of Melchizekek, is a greater priesthood than that of the Levitical order (7:15-21).

Thus the messianic theology of Psalm 110 is not based on an enthronement ritual or an autumnal festival. Furthermore the content of the psalm shows that it is purely messianic, in contrast to many other psalms. Also Psalm 110 contributes much to the understanding of messianic prophecy, having been recognized by the authors of the New Testament as a messianic psalm.

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Dallas Theological Seminary
3909 Swiss Ave.
Dallas, TX 75204
www.dts.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu