

Notes on Psalm 110

Messiah, the Priest-King

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This is the most often quoted Psalm in the New Testament. In addition to the three references in the Synoptic gospels, it is used by the writer to the Hebrews in chapter seven. Also, the references to the Lord being “at God’s right hand” have their ultimate source in this Psalm. See Acts 2:34, 35; Romans 8:34; 1 Corinthians 15:24, and many other places in the New Testament.

I. The Exaltation of Messiah – Verses 1-2

A saying of Yahweh to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand, Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” Yahweh will extend the scepter of Your strength from Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies.”

- *“A saying of Yahweh to my Lord:”*

David records a conversation between the Lord (*Yahweh*) and David’s Lord (*adonay*), that is, between God the Father and the Messiah. The verb “says” is *neum*, a word often used to depict an oracle or a revelation. In fact, this conversation took place in the Decree, where the plan of trinity for Messiah was determined.

This important statement is used by the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry to confound the arguments of His enemies rejected the truth the Messiah was God (Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42). David, by identifying the Messiah as “my Lord,” identified Him as God. The Pharisees correctly understood that Messiah was the son of David, but they did not understand that Messiah was superior to David. When David called Him “my Lord” he was acknowledging the deity of the Messiah.

Nevertheless, Messiah in His humanity will operate under the authority of the Father. The Father is pictured throughout this Psalm as the One Who acts, and the Messiah as the One Who receives the benefit of the action.

- *“Sit at My right hand, Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”*

In this decree Yahweh commands the Messiah, to be seated at Yahweh’s right hand, the place of honor and authority. This is the current position of Messiah. At His ascension He was exalted, though He has not yet had His enemies defeated.

The picture of the footstool is a strong one in the eastern culture. No greater degradation can be made than stepping on an enemy. When Messiah is victorious, by the power of the Father He will completely subjugate His enemies.

- *“Yahweh will extend the scepter of your strength from Zion”*

Here we have a shift of speaker. No longer is the Father addressing Messiah, but David speaks directly to Him, and this remains the perspective throughout the rest of the Psalm.

David indicates that it will be the Father who acts to bring Messiah to power in Zion. When Christ returns He will operate under the full authority of the Father in defeating His enemies and ruling His subjects. Zion is the location of the seat of His government. But His righteous rule, symbolized by His scepter, will extend well beyond the local government of Israel.

- *“Rule in the midst of Your enemies.”*

This statement is best understood as a prediction of Messiah’s coming rule, rather than as a command to rule.

The enemies of Messiah are the Gentile nations who come against Israel during Daniel’s 70th week. After subjugating the Gentiles, He will rule them “with a rod of iron.”

II. The Army of Messiah – Verse 3

Your people will be willing on the day of your battle. In adornments of holiness from the womb of the dawn, You will have the dew of Your youth.

- *“Your people will be willing on the day of your battle”*

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“Your people” can only mean Israel. The term “willing” was regularly used in the Hebrew language to refer to military service. The people of Israel will voluntarily turn out for war at Messiah’s final battle. This refers to the remnant of Israel that has been protected by God for the last 1,260 days of Daniel’s 70th week.

- *“In adornments of holiness from the womb of the dawn You will have the dew of Your youth”*

This description refers to the Messiah as leader of His willing army. The “holy adornments” are the trappings of His priesthood explained in the next verse. The phrase “from the womb of the dawn” may refer to the idea that was separated to the Lord’s service from His birth. The figure of the dawn continues with the word “dew.” His youth, probably a reference to His youthful appearance in His resurrected body, is personified as the early morning dew.¹

III. The Priesthood of Messiah – Verse 4

Yahweh swore² and will not change His mind, “Thou art a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.”

- *“Yahweh swore and will not change His mind”*

Continuing his statement to Messiah, David indicates that the Father has taken a binding oath. This unalterable oath indicates the sovereign nature of the decree itself. It cannot be changed.

- *“You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”*

In the decree the Father appoints the Son as a new kind of priest. The pre-law unity of priest and king in one person will be reestablished in the Messiah.³ Melchizedek was the king of Salem (Jerusalem) and priest of the Most High God (Gen. 14:18; Heb. 7:1). Prior to the establishment of the Levitical priesthood, the King-Priest was God’s method of relating to mankind. This will be re-established during the future kingdom on earth.

This does not mean, that the Lord Jesus will be operating in the Millennial temple as Priest. The Levitical priesthood will again be operative during the kingdom. Ezekiel predicted that it will continue (Ezekiel 40:46; 43:19). Israel, at least for the thousand years of the Millennium, will operate under the Levitical priesthood once more. The family of Zadok, as a reward for his faithfulness, will be given the high priestly duty (Ezekiel 44:15).

IV. The Victory of Messiah – Verses 5-7

The Lord is at Your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath.⁴ He will judge in the nations, He will pile up dead people, He will shatter the ruler over the whole land. He will drink from the wayside brook; then He will lift up *His* head.

- *“The Lord is at Your right hand”*

Again David shifts the object of his speech. Now he is directly addressing Yahweh, the Father. He states that Messiah is at the right hand of the Father, in agreement with the statement of verse 1 above. This is a reaffirmation of the authority of Messiah, indicating that He shares the Father’s rights to pursue His wrathful act.

- *“He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath, He will pile up dead people”*

¹ Some expositors take this not to refer to Messiah at all, but to the young men who presumably make up His people. (See *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* on this passage). But Alexander (*The Psalms Translated and Expanded*) provides conclusive evidence that the word *youth* here is best seen as a descriptive of Messiah rather than a reference to “young men.”

² The word “swore” is in the *ni’fal*, carrying the reflexive idea “to bind oneself.” It is derived from the same root as the number seven. In ancient times it was a common practice to bind a deal by the exchange of seven things. See Genesis 21:22-34 where Abraham seals a deal with Abimelech by giving him seven ewe lambs.

³ Alexander is undoubtedly correct when he says that, “. . . The essential idea is that of likeness or resemblance. This likeness consists primarily in the union of regal and sacerdotal offices.” (*Psalms*) David sees Messiah as one who is sovereign in His authority in both government and priestly realms. The union of the offices of priest and king in the Messiah was prophesied in other passages (see Zechariah 6:12-13).

⁴ This is the Hebrew word for *nose*, or *nostrils*. It came to be used because of the flaring of the nostrils when one gets angry.

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The kings are Gentile rulers. The day of His wrath is the second coming of Christ in judgment on the final generation of mankind before the establishment of His kingdom. In so doing the dead will be piled high.

- *“He will shatter the ruler over the whole land”*

The ruler over the whole land is the man of sin, who will be ruling over Israel at the time of the second coming of Christ. The term “land” here should not be translated “earth” as some do. It refers in the context to the place where Messiah establishes His authority, beginning with Zion, and extending first to Israel. It is true that He will rule the entire earth, but that does not seem to be the meaning here.

- *“He will drink from the wayside brook; then He will lift up His head”*

The metaphor is one who stops by the path to bow and drink from a stream. Messiah is here seen to be finished with His wrathful labors. He will have time to refresh Himself before He “lifts up His head” to rule.