

# **Two Messianic Psalms**

by

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## Preface

The messianic hope of Israel is foundational to the Christian faith. It would not be too much to say that without this hope, Christianity would never have come to exist. Threads of the messianic anticipation are to be found in the earliest documents of the Hebrew Bible. The protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15, generally recognized as the earliest glimmer of such a hope, is the first in a long series of such anticipations. Noah's prophetic words that Japheth would "dwell in the tents of Shem" (Ge. 9:27b) dimly hints at a future that would not be realized until the ingathering of the gentiles, predominantly from the west (cf. Ep. 3:6). Yahweh's covenant with Abram, that all the families of the earth would be blessed through his offspring, also points to the future (Ge. 12:3) as does Israel's dying blessing of Judah as the ancestor of a regal son (Ge. 49:10). Moses predicted that God would raise up a prophet like himself (Dt. 18:18-19), and while Joshua succeeded the famous lawgiver, he did not exhaust the potential of this prediction.

However, while threads of the messianic hope stretch backward into antiquity, two events gave primary shape to the messianic hope. These two events were Yahweh's covenant with David in the 10th century B.C. and Yahweh's judgment upon the nation in the exile of the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. In the first event, the covenant with David, God promised that the dynasty of David would endure forever (2 Sa. 7:16//1 Chr. 17:14; 2 Sa. 22:51; 23:5; 1 Chr. 28:6-7; Ps. 89:3-4, 26-29). The promises of God to the children of Israel that they would be given the entire land of Palestine forever (Ge. 13:15; Ex. 3:8, 17; 6:8) were to be established through the sons of David. There would be rest from all enemies and the terror or war (2 Sa. 7:10-11), and the kingdom of David would be established perpetually (2 Sa. 7:16). However, in spite of this seemingly irrevocable promise, the nation experienced the tragedy of exile because of repeated covenant violations. In the 7th century, the northern nation of Israel went into exile by Assyrian invasion (2 Kg. 17), and in the 6th century, the southern nation of Judah followed her northern sister, only this time to Babylon (2 Kg. 25).

Where was the promise to David? The poignancy of this question and the tension between the ancient promises and the present reality of exile seemed irreconcilable (Ps. 89:34-45). The poet asks, "O Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David" (Ps. 89:49)? Where indeed? The response to this question shapes the messianic hope of Israel. This question lies behind the writings of the prophets, who sought to explain the divine purpose behind the exile and the future that lay beyond it.

Psalms 2 and 110 generally are recognized as being the two psalms which most clearly hold forth the messianic hope. To be sure, they are not the only passages in the

Old Testament that bear upon the messianic hope. In fact, in the writings of almost any given prophet, there is, to a greater or lesser degree, this element. However, these psalms are significant, if for no other reason, than that they are the most frequently quoted passages in the New Testament in this regard.

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## Two Messianic Psalms

During the final appearances of Jesus our Lord to his disciples after Easter, he said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Lk. 24:44). Luke then narrates, “He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Lk. 24:45). For the early Christians, the Psalms were primary preaching material. In them they discerned the foreshadowings and predictions of the ministry of Jesus himself. The replacement of Judas by Matthias (Ac. 1:20), Peter’s sermon at Pentecost (Ac. 2:25-28, 35), Peter and John’s defense before the Sanhedrin (Ac. 4:11), the intercession of the church in the face of persecution (Ac. 4:25-26), and Paul’s preaching in Pisidian Antioch (Ac. 13:33-35) were all grounded in a Christian interpretation of various Psalms.

Two of the most important of these Psalms, both of which the New Testament ascribes to David, are Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. Both are quoted and/or are alluded to frequently in the New Testament, and it will be appropriate to explore them, both their original setting and how the earliest Christians made use of them in a Christian sense. It was Jesus himself who revealed this line of interpretation, and their specific treatments of these Psalms may well go directly back to the Lord himself. The many references in the New Testament to “the Scriptures” invariably refer to the Hebrew Bible, of which Psalms was the first book in the third major section, called (*Kethubim* = the Writings). The Psalms often were considered to be prophetic, and David himself was considered to be a prophet (cf. Ac. 2:30). As such, a study in messianic psalmody brings one right to the heart of the apostles’ use of Scripture.

### Background to Psalm 2 and Psalm 110

Psalm 2 has no superscription providing either a musical reference or an author. The early church believed it to have been written by David (Ac. 4:25). Psalm 110, on the other hand, has the superscription (*l’ david mizmor* = a psalm to David), and while this does not always indicate Davidic authorship,<sup>1</sup> Jesus himself attributes it to David (Mt. 22:43//Mk. 12:36//Lk. 20:42). All commentators agree that these psalms display court

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<sup>1</sup> The expression may be taken to mean either “by David,” that is, authored by David, or it may be taken as “for David,” that is, composed in honor of David or on behalf of David.

language and belong to the category of Royal Psalms, that is, psalms presumably used in state ceremonies, such as, coronations.<sup>2</sup> If David wrote them, they probably had a long history of usage in the royal coronations of the kings of Judah who ruled in David's dynastic line. As such, the "language would have been construed as courtly rhetoric, treating the modest empire of David as though it were the world."<sup>3</sup> Of course, there was more than rhetoric alone, for since the Davidic king reigns on behalf of God, who is in the heavens, then the nations of the earth are theologically his by right as well.<sup>4</sup>

### The Davidic King

The transition of the nation Israel from a tribal league to a monarchy actually culminates in David. To be sure, Saul of Benjamin was the first king. Due to the abuses of the priesthood (1 Sa. 8:3) and the military threat of their Canaanite neighbors (1 Sa. 12:12-13), the tribes asked for a king (1 Sa. 8:4-5, 19-20). Saul was duly anointed (1 Sa. 10:1), presented (1 Sa. 10:17-19, 24-25), and confirmed (1 Sa. 11:14-15) as the new king. However, even though Torah had envisioned the eventual selection of a king (Dt. 17:14ff.), the fact that the kingship of Saul came at the people's initiative rather than at God's initiative meant that the call for a king was a rejection of Yahweh (1 Sa. 8:6-18). In his farewell speech, Samuel implied, that the people had sinned in their request, and the people accepted his judgment (1 Sa. 12:19).

Saul's kingship, however, was not a radical break from the military leaders of the tribal league. Like them, he was a charismatic figure (1 Sa. 11:6). He made no known changes in the internal structure of the nation, and he organized no administrative machinery or bureaucracy. He gathered no large harem and did not maintain a large court. His headquarters at Gibeah were little more than a military camp, and on several occasions, he is not even given the title (*melek* =king) but is called a (*nagid* = chief, leader).<sup>5</sup>

David, by contrast, was a man "after God's own heart" (1 Sa. 13:14). Here was a man who would rise to the occasion, a man thoroughly dedicated to the holy wars of Canaanite conquest and to the faith of Yahweh. David would revolutionize the nation, taking it from the brink of disintegration to the heights of a successful empire. He would centralize the people's worship after the manner indicated in Torah (Dt. 12:8-14), and he would develop a royal court with all that such a court entailed. Even more important, David would be given an unconditional promise by God of a dynasty that

<sup>2</sup> E. Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 1 with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 19, 256.

<sup>3</sup> D. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973) 18.

<sup>4</sup> Kidner, 19.

<sup>5</sup> J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 185-186.

would last perpetually (2 Sa. 7:11b-16). His son would be God's son (2 Sa. 7:14a).

The Davidic king, then, was much more than a leader. His people's fortunes were bound up in his relationship with God. When he succeeded, the nation was blessed along with him, but if he failed, the nation suffered also (2 Sa. 24). He was truly, as was said of him, the "lamp of Israel" (2 Sa. 21:17; cf. 2 Kg. 8:19). He not only participated, but he also played a leading role in cultic worship, a role that was normally reserved for priests from the Levitical clan (2 Sa.6:17-18; 8:18)<sup>6</sup>. After David's death, his reign was always remembered as a golden age, and all succeeding kings were measured by him, positively or negatively (1 Kg. 14:8; 15:3-5; 2 Kg. 14:3; etc.).

### **Yahweh's Anointed, Yahweh's Son**

Special attention should be given to the double title with which the Davidic king was honored. In the first place, he was Yahweh's (*mashiah* = anointed, messiah). This title stems from the fact that Saul, and after him David, was inaugurated as the new king by the prophetic act of smearing him with oil (1 Sa. 9:16; 15:1). This prophetic ritual symbolized the gift of the Spirit to the king which empowered him to serve. To be anointed by the prophet was to be anointed by Yahweh himself (1 Sa. 10:1; 15:17; cf. 16:3, 12-13). The king, then, came to be called Yahweh's anointed, or Yahweh's messiah (1 Sa. 12:3a, 5; 24:6; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sa. 1:14, 16). This same terminology, initially used for Saul, was passed on to David (2 Sa. 19:21; 22:51; 23:1) and to his sons in the Davidic dynasty (2 Chr. 6:42).

The second title comes from the covenant God made with David. Yahweh's promise to the Davidic son was, "I will be his father, and he will be my son" (2 Sa. 7:14a). Initially, of course, this pledge referred to Solomon, but because it was coupled with the further pledge of a perpetual dynasty, the title applied to all of David's line, including David himself (Ps. 89:26-29). It is against this sort of background that Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 must be read.

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<sup>6</sup> The Masoretic Text in 2 Sa. 8:18 reads (*Kohanim* = priests), but the LXX reads (*aularchai* = high officials), while the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 18:17 reads (*rishonim* = officials), influencing some translators to opt for a different reading than the Hebrew text (so NIV, KJV). Most scholars, however, follow the Hebrew Text (so NEB, NAB, RSV, NASBmg, ASVmg), cf. P. McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel [AB]* (Garden City, NY:Doubleday, 1984) 255.

## PSALM 2

[author's translation from the Masoretic Text]

- 2:1 *Why are the nations restless,  
and the peoples plotting worthless schemes?*
- 2:2 *[The] kings of the land set themselves, and dignitaries conspire together  
against Yahweh and against his messiah.*
- 2:3 *“Let us burst their bonds,  
let us throw off their cords.”*
- 2:4 *The one dwelling in the heavens will laugh, Adonai will ridicule them.*
- 2:5 *Then he will speak to them  
in his anger,  
and in his wrath  
he will terrify them.*
- 2:6 *“But I have consecrated my king upon Zion, my holy mountain.”*
- 2:7 *Let me proclaim the decree of Yahweh:  
Yahweh said to me, “You are my son!  
I have become your father today.*
- 2:8 *Ask me, and let me give [the] nations  
[as] your inheritance,  
and [for] your property  
[the] ends of the earth.*
- 2:9 *You will break them with a rod of iron;  
Like a potter’s jar you will smash them.”*
- 2:10 *And now, you kings, be sensible;  
Be advised you rulers of the earth.*
- 2:11 *Serve Yahweh in fear,  
and exult ecstatically with trembling,*
- 2:12 *you men of the grave,  
Lest he be angry,  
and you are struck down on your way,  
for his anger flares up quickly.  
Fortunate are all those who seek refuge in him.*

**The Ancient Meaning of Psalm 2**

The second Psalm is a poem of holy war. It celebrates Yahweh as the heavenly

Man of War (cf. Ex. 15:3), and his Davidic king as his earthly general. Though enemy rulers plan their strategies, Yahweh remains in full control. The schemes of his enemies will be futile, for he has installed his king on Mt. Zion as his earthly vice-regent, and he has adopted the king as his own son. Total victory has been promised to the Davidic king. In view of this divine guarantee, the monarchs who choose to fight against him should be duly warned. They must understand that to fight against the Davidic king means to fight against God, and God's fatal wrath is easily aroused!

Usually, Psalm 2 is considered to be a coronation Psalm, recited in honor of the king at his enthronement. The king is obviously in the foreground, and the poetic vision, grounded squarely on God's royal covenant with David, views the Davidic king as possessing a divine guarantee of success among the nations. To be sure, the Psalm expresses an ideal. It speaks of how things should be, not necessarily how things are. Even in the time of David himself, the notion of Israel's universal supremacy among the nations of the world was not an actual reality, though of course, David's empire was certainly to be reckoned with. In the time of many of David's successors, the Psalm became even more idealistic as the fortunes of Judah rose and fell with the vicissitudes of ancient Near Eastern politics. It is the very idealistic character of the Psalm that lends itself to its future messianic interpretation by the early Christians.

### **First Strophe (2:1-3)**

The poet plunges directly into his subject, and he does so through the use of a rhetorical question. His query, "Why are the nations restless, and the people plotting worthless schemes," is not a plea for information, but rather, a comment on the futility of their efforts. It is so utterly foolish to plot against Yahweh and his anointed king, and in view of that folly, why should they even think to do so? Nevertheless, the enemies of God and his people muster their armies.

It appears that the enemies being described are under tribute to Israel, and the poet envisions all the nations of the land as the vassals of the Davidic king. Archaeologists have uncovered many ancient documents showing how wide was the range of such political agreements in the ancient world. The contracting parties took oaths in the name of their gods, and the conquering ruler made a treaty with the defeated king, allowing him to rule in a subservient position over his own people so long as he remained loyal to his suzerain and paid to him the annual tribute required<sup>7</sup>. In this psalm, the nations under tribute to Judah are envisioned as becoming restless in their role as vassals. They are plotting a war for independence, amassing their armies so as to defy their suzerain and break their chains of vassalhood.

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<sup>7</sup> See J. Thompson, "Covenant (OT)," *ISBE* (1979) 1.790-791.

### **Second Strophe (2:4-6)**

Yahweh's response to this enterprising mobilization is divine scorn. Of course, the idea of God scoffing is an anthropomorphism. As is not uncommon in the Old Testament, God is spoken of in human terms so as to emphasize his involvement in human history. His derision is preliminary to his anger. While he has remained hidden from the view of Judah's enemies, he is now preparing to reveal himself by intervention in actual events. It is not merely the Davidic king who will fight against the rebellious vassals, but Yahweh himself will enter the fray. As the shepherd David so well said, "The battle is Yahweh's" (1 Sa. 17:37, 45-47)! What the vassals had not perceived is that the Davidic king on Mt. Zion was not merely enthroned as a human potentate<sup>8</sup>. Instead, he had been established as king by Yahweh's own declaration. The throne of the Davidic king was also the throne of Yahweh himself (Ps. 132:13-14), and behind the Davidic king stood the Sovereign God.

### **Third Strophe (2:7-9)**

For the first time, the Davidic king himself speaks, rehearsing Yahweh's divine adoption decree. Yahweh had declared to the Davidic king, "You are my son! I have become your father today!" This declaration, of course, goes back to the Davidic covenant in which Yahweh declared to David, through Nathan the prophet, that he would preserve David's dynasty and would adopt David's descendent as his own son (2 Sa. 7:14). The people of Israel were guaranteed a safe residence in Palestine with peace from their enemies (2 Sa. 7:10-11a), and the Davidic dynasty would be established forever (2 Sa. 7:11b-12, 16).

In the coronation ritual, the word "today" would have been very significant. Since the promises were to David's royal line, the recitation of this Psalm at the enthronement would climax with the statement, "I have become your father today," and the "today" would naturally be taken as the day of coronation.

Then the poet extends the decree even further, for he says that Yahweh also guaranteed the nations of the world and the ends of the earth as part of the Davidic king's domain. Here is truly a universal ideal, an ideal that was never a reality in the politics of ancient Israel but which was still held forth as the best of all possible worlds. The power of the Davidic king would be irresistible. His opposers would be shattered like a clay pot is shattered with an iron rod. If Yahweh is the king of the whole earth (cf. Ps. 47:2, 7), then his son is the rightful heir!

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<sup>8</sup> Mt. Zion, God's holy hill, was identified with the City of David (2 Sa. 5:7), later with the temple hill itself (Ps. 132:13; Mic. 4:2), and also with the entire city of Jerusalem (Is. 10:24; Am. 6:1)

### **Fourth Strophe (2:10-12)**

Now follows some stern advice. If all the foregoing is true, the mutinous nations have only one hope -- to submit to Yahweh's anointed vice-regent in Jerusalem. If they are sensible, they will serve Yahweh and not fight against him. To worship Yahweh as the true God, and his messiah as the true king, is the only alternative to destruction. Their very mortality as "men of the grave" bodes evil toward them if they rebell.<sup>9</sup> To defy the Davidic king is to make oneself vulnerable to Yahweh's terrible anger.

The Psalm closes with a beatitude. This sort of blessing is common in the Psalms (cf. 1:1; 32:1-2; 33:12; 34:8; etc.), and it is invariably to be found in connection with people who, because of their allegiance to God and his ways, have been graciously blessed with happiness and good fortune. Some translators prefer "happy" and others "Oh, the blessedness of," but in all cases, the description focuses on the rewards in life for one who puts into practice whatever principle is being enunciated or who receives with thanksgiving whatever gracious gift God gives. Here, of course, the principle of life that is so rewarding is the dependency upon God for refuge. Kidner has truly summed up this Psalm by saying that while there is no refuge *from* God, there is certainly refuge *in* him!<sup>10</sup>

## **The Christian Interpretation of Psalm 2**

Psalm 2 became an important prophetic oracle from the Old Testament which Christians used to identify and explain the person, life and meaning of Jesus of Nazareth. There are four primary connections which Christians made between Jesus and this Psalm. First, they understood the decree of Yahweh to the Davidic king, "You are my son," to have its fullest meaning in Jesus, the Son of God. Second, they understood the restless, rebellious nations who defied Yahweh and his king to have their fullest meaning in the array of Jewish leaders and Roman authorities who sentenced Jesus to death for blasphemy and treason. Third, they understood the divine decree, "You are my son; I have become your father today," to have special reference to the resurrection, in which Jesus was raised to life by God, the Father. Finally, they understood the rulership of the Davidic king over the nations to have its fullest meaning in the eschatological reign of Jesus Christ with his people.

It will be helpful, before going further, to note that the New Testament

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<sup>9</sup> The translation of 2:11b-12a has long been problematic due to the difficulty of word division, the alternatives possible in vowel-pointing, and the alternatives possible in sentence divisions in the Hebrew text. The variations are as wide as "kiss the son" (NIV, KJV, ASV), "kiss sincerely" (NAB), "kiss the feet" (RSV, JB), "kiss the king" (NEB), "accept correction" (LXX, Vg) . and "men of the grave" (AB).

<sup>10</sup> Kidner, 53.

conception of the fulfillment of prophecy was somewhat broader than is popularly assumed. The traditional understanding of the fulfillment of prophecy is based on the model of prediction/verification, that is, a person or event is predicted by the prophet, and the prediction is verified when the anticipated person or event appears in the way that was foreseen. To be sure, many prophetic passages are interpreted in just this way (cf. Mic. 5:2; Mt. 2:5-6). This model, however, does not exhaust the New Testament's treatment of prophecy. Also important as fulfillments of prophecy are other models, such as, the clarification of enigmatic passages (cf. Ps. 110:1; Mt. 22:41-46), the fulfillment by an individual of something which was originally corporate (cf. Ho. 11:1; Mt. 2:15), and/or the recapitulation of Old Testament events in the New Testament as a sort of "history repeats itself" kind of model (cf. Je. 31:15; Mt. 2:17-18)<sup>11</sup>. As such, the idea of the fulfillment of prophecy in the New Testament cannot be exhausted in a single pattern. In fact, things which in the Old Testament were not stated in predictive terms at all can still be "fulfilled" in the New Testament.

This broader understanding of the interpretation of Old Testament literature lies behind the New Testament's use of Psalm 2. Such interpretation is called *sensus plenior*, that is, a deeper meaning in the passage underlies the more obvious meaning. This deeper meaning may not even have been fully understood by the Old Testament author himself (cf. 1 Pe. 1:10-12). However, even though the original author may not have intended the fuller meaning, God who inspired the prophetic word had this deeper meaning in view all the time!<sup>12</sup>

Psalm 2 voices an ideal that was never realized in the historical kingdom of Israel. While the ideal was held forth that the Davidic son was adopted as Yahweh's son, that his kingship was guaranteed, that the nations of the earth were his vassals by divine right, and that his power to rule was absolute, the realities of history fell considerably short of this ideal. Instead, the brutality of exile and the execution of the Davidic royal house pushed the ideal of Psalm 2 into the unknown future, and perhaps, pushed it out of history altogether. In Jewish apocalyptic thought, the ideal would not be realized until the end of the present age and the inauguration of the future age.

### **Jesus. the Son of God**

God set the pattern for interpreting Psalm 2 in light of the person of Jesus, for it is the divine voice from heaven which quotes the ancient declaration, "You are my

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<sup>11</sup> See the fine article by R. Longenecker, "'Who is the prophet talking about?' Some reflections on the New Testament's use of the Old," *Themelios* (Oct/Nov. 1987) 4-8.

<sup>12</sup> A rigid distinction is not intended here between *sensus plenior* and *typos* (= typology). Also, there are cautions to be added so that *sensus plenior* does not move beyond the authorization of the New Testament itself, cf. R. Martin, "Approaches to New Testament Exegesis," *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 224.

Son,” at the baptism of Jesus by John (Mt. 3:17//Mk. 1:11//Lk. 3:22; cf. Jn. 1:32-34)<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, this same declaration was made at Jesus’ transfiguration (Mt. 17:5//Mk. 9:7//Lk. 9:35;cf. 2 Pe. 1:17-18).

It is not surprising that the ideas of kingship, messiahship, the dynasty of David, and the title Son of God all should be linked in the person of Jesus throughout the New Testament. All these same ideas were linked in the ancient Psalm. The exalted figure in view is “the anointed,” that is, the messiah. He is the king of Israel (or Judah), he is in the family of David, and he is declared to be God’s Son. To be sure, there is a qualitative difference between the ancient Davidic king, who was the adopted son of Yahweh, and Jesus of Nazareth, who was the divine Son of God by nature. Furthermore, there is certainly a difference between the ancient kingly warrior and the gentle servant who did not come to fight (Jn. 18:36). Similarly, there is a difference between the ancient sovereignty over the political structure of Israel (or Judah), and the kingship of Jesus in the reign of God over a kingdom that was not of this world. Nevertheless, the *sensus plenior* of Psalm 2 points to Jesus of Nazareth, God’s divine Son, born in the line of David, anointed to conquer the powers of evil (Ac. 10:38), and crowned as the ruler of the kings of the earth (Rv. 1:5). When the High Priest put Jesus under oath, “Tell us, are you the Messiah, the Son of God,” Jesus answered directly, “Yes, it is as you say!” (Mt. 26:63-64).

The superiority of Jesus as the Son of God is emphasized in the Letter to the Hebrews. After explaining that the Son is the exact representation of God’s being, the writer calls attention to the declaration in Psalm 2, “To which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my son’” (He. 1:5)? Here, of course, the writer has in mind, not so much the ancient adoption of the Davidic king as Yahweh’s son, but the divine Sonship of Jesus in the *sensus plenior*.

### **Jesus Under Trial**

The idea of earthly kings mobilizing their forces against Yahweh and his messiah was a powerful and startling image. The early church understood the fullest expression of this rebellion to have occurred in the trial of Jesus. When Peter and John had been forbidden by the Jewish Sanhedrin to preach in the name of Jesus (Ac. 4:18), they gathered with their other Christian friends for prayer. In their intercession, they quoted the description in Psalm 2 regarding the nations and kings taking their stand against the Lord and his Messiah (Ac. 4:25-26). The *sensus plenior* of this passage is explained in their prayer as the conspiracy of Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel against Jesus, the one whom God had anointed (Ac. 4:27-28). The antagonism of the group described in Psalm 2 is described as that

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<sup>13</sup> Mark and Luke quote Ps. 2:7 directly, while Matthew puts it in the third person, “This is my Son.” John’s gospel does not describe the divine voice from heaven in the same way, but he obviously has the same event in mind.

which God “had decided beforehand should happen.” The “nations” in the opening lines of the Psalm were the Gentiles. The “kings” and “rulers” were Herod and Pilate. The “people” were the people of Israel. The “Messiah” was God’s holy servant Jesus.

Paul also alludes to this same sort of interpretation in 1 Corinthians, where he contrasts the wisdom of God with the wisdom of the world. The idea of wisdom appears in Psalm 2 in two places, first in a negative way by the opening question, “Why are the nations restless, and the peoples plotting worthless schemes?” Here, there is a profound lack of wisdom on the part of the nations who rebel against Yahweh. Later, the kings of the earth are advised to “be sensible” and to worship Yahweh in fear. The wisdom of the nations is vain in that they presume to fight against God, and this futility Paul sees in the worldly powers that were arrayed against Jesus, a worldly wisdom which “is coming to nothing” (1 Co. 2:6) and which God has made “foolish” (1 Co. 1:20). If the worldly potentates had known God’s wisdom, that is, if they had known what God was doing in Jesus, they would not have opposed him (1 Co. 2:8). Yet this divine wisdom was hidden from them, and they not only opposed Jesus, but they crucified him (1 Co. 2:7-8). Just as in the Psalm, God laughed at this folly, for in the resurrection, he established forever the kingship of his Messiah.

### **Jesus, Risen and Enthroned**

Since Psalm 2 is an enthronement or coronation Psalm, it is only natural that the early Christians, who already were convinced that Jesus was the Davidic king *par excellence*, should also make the connection between the enthronement of the Davidic son and the enthronement of Jesus. This enthronement they understood to be in the resurrection of the Lord. In Paul’s sermon at Pisidian Antioch, he proclaimed that what God had promised the fathers he had fulfilled by raising Jesus from the dead (Ac. 13:32-33). Special emphasis is placed upon the word “today”, and for Paul, the “today” was Easter morning. On the day that God raised Jesus from the dead, he confirmed Jesus’ divine Sonship, or in the words of Paul, Jesus was “declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead” (Ro. 1:4). It was not that Jesus was not God’s Son before his resurrection. Rather, his Sonship was confirmed in the most powerful of ways by the resurrection.<sup>14</sup> Paul also uses a similar idiom in his Colossian letter, when he describes Jesus as the “firstborn from among the dead” (1:18). This, of course, is not when Jesus became the Son of God. He was God’s Son from the beginning, preeminent over all creation (Col. 1:15). Yet in the resurrection, he is confirmed to be God’s Son by a divine act.

In the minds of the early Christians, the resurrection of Jesus is to be viewed as

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<sup>14</sup> I. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 226.

a single event with the ascension and enthronement of Jesus. This is not to deny that there were 40 days between the resurrection and ascension (Ac. 1:3), but it is only to say that the resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father should be viewed as a theological unity (Ac. 2:32-33; 5:30-31; Ro. 8:34; Ep. 1:20; He. 1:3) along with the work of the cross (He. 10:12; 12:2). The resurrection of Jesus is probably in view when the writer of Hebrews quotes the “today” in 1:5. It is the day on which Jesus was vested with His royal dignity as the Son of God, the day on which he was instated in position of sovereignty and invested with power<sup>15</sup>. Further, it is the day on which he enters into the fullness of his high priestly office (He. 5:4-5; 10:12). For the early church, the “today” of Psalm 2 was Easter morning!

### **Jesus the Ruler of the Nations**

Given the fact that the early Christians, in the manner of *sensus plenior*, understood the divine declaration of sonship to refer to Jesus, the Son of God, and the antagonism of the nations against Yahweh’s messiah to be the trial of Jesus, and the coronation and confirmation of Sonship to be the resurrection of Jesus, then it is not too surprising that they should also find the sovereignty of the Davidic king over the nations to be an anticipation of the eschatological rulership of Jesus. It is in this sense that the Apocalypse describes Jesus as the “ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rv. 1:5).

In the ancient Psalm, the second part of the divine declaration was that Yahweh would give to the Davidic king the nations of the world as a gift. Since Yahweh was King over the whole earth, his adopted son was his natural heir (Ps. 2:8). In Christian interpretation, this gift of sovereignty over the nations belongs to Jesus, about whom it is said, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever” (Rv. 11:15-17; 12:10). For those kings who are not sensible and who refuse to give allegiance to the Divine King, they will indeed be “struck down on the way” (Ps. 2:12; Rv. 11:18).

This Jesus, who was born among the Israelite people of God, was destined to rule the nations with an iron scepter (Ps. 2:9; Rv. 12:5). To be sure, this aspect of his sovereignty, by which he would terribly crush his foes, was not to come into force until the end of the age. Still, in the end, the Warrior-King will lead his armies against his enemies. Once more, the nations will rage (Rv. 19:19), but the Warrior-King will be totally victorious. He will strike down the rebellious nations and rule them with an iron scepter (Rv. 19:11-15). Furthermore, his authority over the nations will be shared with his people, just as the sovereignty of God the Father has been shared with Jesus the Son (Rv. 2:26-27). This, then, is the Christian meaning of Psalm 2.

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<sup>15</sup> F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 13.

## PSALM 110

A Psalm ascribed to David

[author's translation from the Masoretic Text]

- 110:1 *An utterance which Yahweh declared to my Adonay:*  
       *“Sit to my right*  
           *Until I lay your enemies [before you]*  
           *[to be] a footstool for your feet.”*
- 110:2 *Yahweh will extend your mighty scepter from Zion:*  
       *Rule in the midst of your enemies!*
- 110:3 *Your people [will be] volunteers on the day of*  
       *your battle;*  
*In majestic holiness [they will offer themselves as free-will offerings] from the*  
       *womb of the dawn,*  
*Your youths [gathered] to you as the dew.*
- 110:4 *Yahweh has sworn and will not relent:*  
       *“You are a priest forever after the manner of Melchizedek.”*
- 110:5 *Adonay [is] at your right:*  
       *He has shattered kings on the day of his anger;*
- 110:6 *He will execute justice among the nations;*  
       *He will fill [the battlefield] with corpses;*  
       *He has shattered [the] rulers over a vast land;*
- 110:7 *He will drink from the brook on the way;*  
       *On account of this he will raise [his] head.*

**The Ancient Meaning of Psalm 110**

Like Psalm 2, Psalm 110 is a poem of holy war. It anticipates the total victory of the great King of Zion over all enemies, a victory in which the King's subjects participate as eager volunteers for the battle. The Psalm is built around two divine promises to the King. One is the declaration of total victory, and the other is an oath of ordination which confirmed the King as a priest, making him both a political and a religious figure. How these oracles were conveyed is not explained, though it might have been through court prophets, such as, Nathan (2 Sa. 7:1ff.; 12:25) or Gad (1 Sa. 22:5; 2 Sa. 24:11).

Also like Psalm 2, Psalm 110 usually is considered to be a coronation Psalm, recited in honor of the kings of David's dynasty at their enthronement. The theme of military supremacy and the fact that God himself stands behind the Davidic king lend themselves well to the occasion. As such, the king was the vice-regent of God, serving as both king and priest for the nation.

However this Psalm may have been used in such ceremonies, it still must be pointed out that the primary thrust of the Psalm is *not* concerning a descendent of David's dynasty so much as it is concerning a superior to David whom he addresses as Adonay. If David is the poet,<sup>16</sup> then when he speaks of Yahweh and Adonay, he is addressing Superiors who are greater than himself. It would be too much to expect David to have been familiar with the triadic conception of God, such as one finds in the New Testament (i.e., Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), but the idea of God as a multi-dimensional Being, a complex One rather than a simple One, is not foreign to the Old Testament, even though no explanation is given<sup>17</sup>. There are three figures in the Psalm, then. There is Yahweh, Adonay, and the poet himself. To be sure, if this Psalm was used in coronation ceremonies for the kings of David's dynasty, the perspective of the audience might well have been somewhat different, that is, they may have viewed Adonay as the Davidic king himself who was being crowned rather than as a divine Being above the king. Nevertheless, the significance of Adonay as David's greater Lord was never lost, for in later Judaism, the Adonay of Psalm 110 was understood to be the coming Messiah.<sup>18</sup>

### **The First Oracle (110:1)**

The first of the two oracles is a promise of military supremacy. It was made by Yahweh to David's Lord, or as one translator has rendered it, "The Master whom I serve" (Knox). David's Lord was advised to sit at the right hand of Yahweh until all his enemies had been laid before him as a footstool for his feet. To sit at the right hand of Yahweh was to be enthroned in the place of highest honor and supreme power,

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<sup>16</sup> Critical scholars often deny that David is the author, inasmuch as the inscription at the head of the Psalm may merely mean that the Psalm was composed in honor of David. While this assessment of the inscription may be true so far as it goes and in fact may call into question the Davidic authorship of a number of Psalms bearing similar inscriptions, Jesus himself said that David was the author (Mt. 22:43/Mk. 12:36/Lk. 20:42). For evangelicals, this testimony is decisive.

<sup>17</sup> The plural form of (*Elohim* = God, gods), the most common designation for God in the Old Testament, as well as the plural form of (*Adonay* = Lord, lords), were pluralities of intensity, cf. W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 1.185; J. Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) 146-147. These common designations hint at a multi-dimensional character to the one God, as do also the special self distinctions scattered in various places in the Old Testament (cf. Ge. 19:24; Ex. 3:4; Ps. 45:6-7; Ho. 1:6-7; Zec. 3:2; etc.).

<sup>18</sup> A. Weiser, *The Psalms [OTL]*, trans. H. Hartwell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 692-693.

for the right hand was an ancient picturesque symbol of power (cf. Ge. 48:13ff.; Ex. 15:6, 12; Ps. 16:8; 20:6; 21:8; 44:3; 60:5; 89:13; 98:1; etc.). The seat for David's Lord was a throne, and the vision it conveyed probably was not unlike the thrones familiar to us from ancient Near Eastern archaeological discoveries. On the throne of Sennacherib, for instance, the throne was supported by carved figures of the captives in three registers, two supporting the throne seat and one supporting the arm rest.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Troops and Armies (110:2-3)**

Here the poet expounds upon the meaning of the oracle and its implications. Yahweh will extend the sovereignty of Adonay, his King, so that from Zion, the seat of the kingship, his authority will extend over all his enemies. The imperative voice, "Rule...," carries a sternness reminiscent of the closing advice in Psalm 2:10-12. On the day of the great battle, when Adonay goes out to fight against his enemies, his subjects will offer themselves willingly as soldiers, a volunteerism with overtones from the ancient Song of Deborah, in which the princes of Israel took the lead, and the people willing offered themselves (Jg. 5:2, 9).

The imagery is drawn from the early periods of Israel's national existence, when there was no standing army and all mustering of troops was made from the free citizens of the tribes (cf. Jg. 1:1-3; 3:26-28; 5:14-18; 6:34-35). Here, the volunteers are described as "free-will offerings," a vivid picture of total commitment to a cause bigger than themselves. Even the youth of the land would respond to the call for arms, and they are pictured as marching out at dawn in such numbers that they will be like the dew that gathers on the grass in the early morning.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Second Oracle (110:4)**

The second oracle is an oath ordaining the King to a permanent priestly office. The priestly ordination is after the manner of Melchizedek, the ancient priest-king of Salem in the days of Abraham (Ge. 14:18-20). As such, Adonay will be both a King and a Priest, and the priestly office will function outside the normal channels of heredity. This Royal Priest would not be ordained on the basis of his levitical family or because of his pedigree in Aaron's line. Instead, he was to be a priest by the oath of God.

Many scholars see the joining of kingship and priesthood in this single person

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<sup>19</sup> M. Dahood, *Psalms 101-150 [ABJ]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) 114. Similar affirmations are also made, as for instance, in the Amarna Letters (ca. 1375 B.C.) where the language is, "I am a servant of the king my lord, and the stool of his feet" (141:39-40), and "I am the dust of your feet" (195:5-10).

<sup>20</sup> The translation of this section is especially problematic, and the different English versions have struggled with it. Quite literally, the Hebrew text reads, "To you [will be] the dew of your youths." The NIV, for instance, seems to direct the statement toward the King himself in the sense that he will always retain his youthfulness, but the marginal reading, "Your young men will come to you like the dew" is to be preferred.

to be an implicit reference to the status of David after he conquered Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the fortress of the Jebusites, and it was the site of ancient Salem, the city in which Melchizedek was the priest-king. As such, when David conquered Jerusalem (also called Zion) and made it his own capital (2 Sa. 5:6-10), it is assumed that the titles of both king and priest were passed on to him and continued to be conferred on his sons throughout the dynasty. The Old Testament offers no comment as to whether or not this is true, but it is known that David assumed certain priestly functions when he moved the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sa. 6:17-18), and his sons were recognized as priests as well (2 Sa. 8:18). Yet this did not necessarily procure for David's line the right of priesthood. One of David's descendents, Uzziah, was severely judged by Yahweh for violating a priestly function (2 Chr. 26:16-21). It is better, therefore, to view the ordination to the priesthood as belonging to Adonay, David's greater Lord, rather than merely to David himself.

Surely the most important word in the declaration is the word *'olam* (= forever). Unlike the priests in the family of Aaron or the levitical clan, this priest would retain his office eternally!

### **Adonay, the Man of War (110:5-7)**

Picking up once more with the war theme, the poet promises the King that God will guarantee his protection by staying at his right side.<sup>21</sup> The shattering of enemy kings and the execution of divine justice through holy war will fill the battlefield with the corpses of the opposing armies. Both enemy king and enemy soldier will fall together over a wide expanse.

The Psalm ends but does not come to a final resolution. It closes with the vivid picture of the warrior Priest-King following up his victory, ever vigilant in watching out for the enemy. Due to the strenuous battle, he will stop to drink at the brook, but like Gideon's valiant three hundred, he will do so with his head up, always on guard (Jg. 7:5-6). Yet the battle is never in question. The perfect tense of 110:5 removes any doubt about the outcome. Though the battle is yet future, its outcome is so certain that it can be spoken of as though it were over.

## **The Christian Interpretation of Psalm 110**

Like Psalm 2, Psalm 110 was interpreted christologically by the writers of the

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<sup>21</sup> Two things should be noted here. First, the title Adonay is now used of Yahweh himself. As such, Yahweh stands at the right side of the great warlike Priest-King to insure his victory. Second, the designation "right" should be given its full symbolic force, cf. Weiser, 692, who translates it with a dynamic equivalency, "The Lord protects you." Technically, of course, if Adonay is to Yahweh's right (110:1), then the phrase here is a formal contradiction, but the reference of the poet is to power, not to position *per se*.

New Testament. They gave full weight to the Davidic authorship, and in fact, it is his authorship of this Psalm which, in conjunction with other Psalms, earns him the title of “prophet” (Ac. 2:30). In early Judaism, Psalm 110 was understood in various ways, sometimes as though God were speaking to Abraham, to David himself, or even to Hezekiah. It was not until about AD 260 that the rabbis began to interpret the Psalm in a messianic context. Thus, the identity of “David’s Lord” (Adonay) was enigmatic both in the Psalm itself and in its traditional Jewish interpretation.<sup>22</sup>

There are four primary ideas in Psalm 110 which the New Testament writers understood to have reached a *sensus plenior* in Jesus of Nazareth. The first is in the opening address, “Yahweh declared to Adonay....” Of first importance was the identification of Adonay as Jesus, the divine Son. Second, the opening oracle, “Sit to my right...,” reached its fullest sense in the exaltation and enthronement of Jesus through his resurrection and ascension. Third, the fact that Adonay was ordained by a divine oath to be a priest after Melchizedek’s order comes to its fullest meaning in the finished work of the cross and the eternal high priestly intercession of Jesus at the Father’s right hand. Finally, the total victory of Adonay over all enemies reaches its fullest meaning in his eschatological conquering of death and the subduing of the nations at Armageddon.

### **Great David’s Greater Lord**

The idea that the coming messiah would be from the family of David was widely held in the time of Jesus. To be sure, during the period of the Hasmonean priest-kings of the intertestamental period, the notion of a levitical messiah was put forth. The reign of Simon, the son of Matthias of Maccabean fame (2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC), was heralded as the dawn of the messianic age and the fulfillment of several Old Testament prophecies (cf. 1 Mac. 14:4-15). These pretensions were not allowed to go without reproof, however. Pharisaic opposition was strong, and by the time of Jesus, the terms “Son of David” and “Messiah” were virtually synonymous.<sup>23</sup> To be sure, the Qumran community retained the ideas of both a priestly and royal aspect to messiahship, but held that there would be two messiahs, a priestly, levitical messiah and a royal, Davidic messiah, somewhat after the pattern of Joshua and Zerubbabel (Zec. 3-4). However, the secularization of the high priesthood under Herod, who instated high priests by royal order rather than heredity, created a vast disillusionment among most Jews, and the Qumran community categorically rejected the current regime of high priests. The old hope of a Davidic messiah began to reassert itself.<sup>24</sup> By

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<sup>22</sup> Longenecker, 4.

<sup>23</sup> R. Klein, “Aspects of Intertestamental Messianism,” *The Bible in It’s Literary Milieu*, ed. J. Maier and V. Toilers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 191-203.

<sup>24</sup> D. Russell, *Between the Testaments* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965) 123-128.

the time of Jesus, it was a burning hope, as is apparent in the way the title Son of David was used of Jesus in the gospels (Mt. 9:27//Mk. 10:47//Lk. 18:38; Mt. 15:22; 12:23) as well as the way in which the messiah was assumed to be the son of David in other Jewish literature (Sir. 47:11, 22; 1 Macc. 2:57; Ps. of Sol. 17:4, 21-25; 4 Ezra 12:31-34).

It is against this background that one must read the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees concerning the opening lines of Psalm 110 (Mt. 22:41-46//Mk. 12:35-37//Lk. 20:41-44). In his conflict with the Jewish leaders, Jesus posed the question, “Whose son is the messiah?” For both Pharisees and scribes, the answer was obvious. “The son of David,” they replied. Jesus then followed up with the theological conundrum, “How then can David call the messiah his Lord if he is his son?” The Pharisees were stumped, for it was obvious that if David wrote the Psalm, then the Adonay in the first line was David’s superior, yet at the same time, based on other passages, the messiah was David’s descendent. Small wonder that the Jewish theologians withdrew from any further interrogation of Jesus! When David wrote the Psalm, who could he possibly address as his Lord except Deity? Implicit within this lyric, then, is that however great David himself was, there was still a greater one. Great David had an even greater Son, Jesus of Nazareth!

### **Exalted to the Father’s Right Hand**

The belief that Jesus was himself the Adonay to whom Yahweh said, “Sit to my right,” became bedrock interpretation for the early Christians. To them it signified that Jesus was exalted to the highest position, for as Paul said, though there were many lords and many gods in the Greco-Roman world, to believers there was only one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ (1 Co. 8:5-6).

The belief that Jesus was Adonay in Psalm 110 has its origin in the words of Jesus himself. The position of being at Yahweh’s right hand in the coming kingdom was obviously the position of ultimate power, designated only for the one God had chosen (Mk. 10:35-40). At his trial before the Sanhedrin, the High Priest put Jesus on oath to answer whether or not he was the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus responded, “I am--but in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One.. .“ (Mt. 26:63-64//Mk. 14:61-62//Lk. 22:67-69). While Jesus here alludes to Daniel 7:13-14, it is plain that he also has in mind a fulfillment of Psalm 110 when he uses the phraseology concerning the right hand of God. The longer ending of Mark’s Gospel closes with the interpretation that Jesus’ exaltation to God’s right hand occurred in the ascension into heaven (Mk. 16:19).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> It matters little for this study whether or not one takes the longer ending of Mark’s gospel to be original. The fact remains that the early church considered the ascension of Jesus into the heavens after his resurrection to be the

In the preaching of the early church, the enthronement of Jesus at the Father's right was part of the good news to be believed in order to be saved. Peter proclaimed it on the Day of Pentecost as the climax of his sermon (Ac. 2:32-36). It was precisely because Jesus was enthroned at the Father's right hand that he had authority to dispense the gift of the Spirit. The enthronement of Jesus meant that he was not only the Messiah, he was Adonay--the Lord! It was not that Jesus became Messiah and Lord at his resurrection and ascension (any more than he became the Son of God at that time). Rather, at his resurrection and ascension his messiahship and lordship were divinely confirmed by God. In this exalted position, he sits as both Prince and Savior, one who as a Divine Person is able to grant the opportunity for repentance and the gift of forgiveness for sins (Ac. 5:30-31).

The enthronement of Jesus at God's right was strikingly demonstrated at Stephen's martyrdom. While facing the fury of the enraged Sanhedrin, Stephen had a vision of the enthroned Christ. Looking up into heaven, he saw Jesus standing at God's right hand. Stephen's exclamatory description of the exalted Son of Man became his own death warrant (Ac. 7:54-58). Here is one of the few places in the New Testament where a prayer is directly addressed to Jesus instead of to God the Father in the name of Jesus (Ac. 7:59-60), and such an address implicitly places Jesus in the category of Deity.

The enthronement of Jesus at the Father's right hand became the standard way of expressing his sovereignty and lordship over all things. He stands above all rule, authority, power, dominion, and every title that can be given in either the present age or the future one (Ep. 1:20-21; Phil. 2:9-11). Everything has been placed under his feet (Ep. 1:22). He is exalted above the angels (He. 1:13; 1 Pe. 3:22), and he shares God Almighty's throne (Re. 3:21; 5:6, 13).

### **The Great High Priest**

The dual function of Adonay as both king and high priest in Psalm 110 was not missed by the early Christians, and in fact, the exaltation of Jesus in his ascension was also understood in priestly as well as royal terms. To stand at someone's right is not only to be in a position of authority, it is also to be in a position to speak. John, for instance, pictures Christ as one who is able to speak to the Father in behalf of his people's sins (1 Jn. 2:1). It is in this sense that Paul alludes to Psalm 110 when he explains that Jesus is at the right hand of God interceding for his people (Ro. 8:34).

The fullest development of this priestly fulfillment is in the Letter to the Hebrews, where it is a major theme. The atoning work of Jesus on the cross was a

high priestly function, as all Jews would understand. Yet there was a formidable problem in ascribing to Jesus a priestly role, since he was well-known to be from the clan of Judah, not Levi. Here the nature of the Melchizedek priesthood became deeply significant. In Psalm 110, Adonay was declared to be a priest by a divine oath after the manner of Melchizedek, who was not a Levite (nor even a Jew, for that matter). The priesthood of Melchizedek did not depend upon any of the criteria that normally would have been used in Jewish ranks, and yet even Abraham recognized the legitimacy of his priesthood (Ge. 14:18-20; He. 7:1-10). Thus, the author of Hebrews stresses that Jesus did not usurp any priestly functions; he did not take this honor by his own authority. Rather, just as Aaron was called by God and just as Melchizedek was called by God, so Jesus was ordained to priesthood by God's oath after Melchizedek's order (He. 5:4-6; 7:20-21). As a unique High Priest, sworn in by God, he effected salvation for all who would obey him (He. 5:9b-10). As such, Jesus has every priestly right (He. 6:19-20). His tribal ancestry makes no difference, because his priesthood does not depend upon it (He. 7:13-17).

Furthermore, the fact that God ordained another high priest after Melchizedek's order in Psalm 110 strongly implies that there was an inadequacy in the levitical and Aaronic priesthood. If the levitical priesthood had been effective, another ordination was pointless (He. 7:11-12). The fact that another ordination occurred by divine oath suggests that the traditional priesthood was weak and ineffective (He. 7:18-19). Jesus, as the new high priest, accomplishes what the old priesthood could not. He guarantees a better covenant (He. 7:22). Not only this, but he also is not hindered in his priestly duties by death, since he lives forever (He. 7:23-25). Unlike ordinary priests, who must intercede for themselves as well as for the people, this high priest is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, and exalted above the heavens (He. 7:26-27a). His high priestly duties are for others, for he is the perfect divine Son, ordained by God the Father's oath (He. 7:27b-28).

Even this does not exhaust the priestly meaning of Psalm 110, however, for there is the matter of sitting down at God's right. The priestly duties were normally conducted standing up, and the Aaronic priests never sat down in the sanctuary. There was no furniture for sitting except the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, and Yahweh sat there (Ps. 80:1; 99:1). Not only did priests never sit down, they continually offered repeating sacrifices (He. 10:11). Jesus, as the new great high priest, offered only one sacrifice for all and then sat down, an act that points toward the full effectiveness of his priestly work (He. 10:12). The fact that he is seated indicates that his work is finished (He. 10:14; 1:3; 12:2; of. 8:1).

### **Until All His Enemies Are Subdued**

Now that Christ has been seated at the Father's right hand, all that remains to be fulfilled in Psalm 110 is the subjection of all enemies under his feet. The original

lyric in the Psalm was that Adonay should sit at God's right hand "until..." and the early Christians understood this contingency to refer to the interval between the first and second advent of Jesus. Jesus would remain in heaven until the time appointed by God (Ac. 3:21), and since the ascension, Christ waits until his enemies are to be made his footstool (He. 10:13).

These enemies are to be understood in an eschatological sense. As in Psalm 2, the enemies are political powers that shall rise up against the Lamb (Re. 16:12-16). The volunteer armies of Adonay will be the faithful followers of the Lamb (Re. 17:12-14). The last great battlefield will be strewn with the corpses of the enemy (Re. 19:11-21). Just as the Psalm promised that the scepter of rulership would be extended from Zion, so the Lamb will stand triumphant on heavenly Zion with his faithful retinue (Re. 14:1).

Beyond the final eschatological battle, however, Paul points to one further significance which is to be interpreted in a spiritual way. The greatest enemy of all is not the collected kings of the world. Rather, the greatest enemy is death. In his resurrection, Christ conquered death, but in the great finale, death will be conquered for all those who belong to Christ (1 Co. 15:20-23). Because of his resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand, Christ already has been enthroned. From his throne, he will reign until all enemies have been subdued to him, and the last enemy is death (1 Co. 15:24-26). At that time, all dominion, authority and power will have been brought under the feet of Adonay, and the kingdom will be fully purged so that it may be offered up to God the Father. Of course, the fact that everything is put under the feet of Adonay does not include God himself, as Paul is quick to point out (1 Co. 15:27-28). Adonay, Jesus the Son of God, will always maintain his attitude of submission to the Father's will inasmuch as he is always the revelation of God's redemptive action. However, Cullmann is surely correct in saying that the Father and the Son are really one in this activity.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. S. Guthrie and C. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 293.