

The Church of the Servant King

Prophecy Series **(Proph13E_Prophecy in Job and the Psalms)**

Psalm 110 – A Prophecy of the Messiah’s Ascension and Glory

Introduction

The Lord says to my Lord: “*Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.*” The Lord will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, “*Rule in the midst of Your enemies.*” Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; in holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You as the dew. The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, “*You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*” The Lord is at Your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath. He will judge among the nations, He will fill them with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over a broad country. He will drink from the brook by the wayside. Therefore He will lift up His head.¹ (Psa 110:1-7)

This short Psalm is quoted directly or indirectly more often than any other Psalm by the writers of the New Testament. This Psalm speaks of Jesus as the ascended King, Priest and coming Judge over a future earthly kingdom. While it is true that our ascended Lord is the head of the spiritual body or “nation”² of the church today, at the time that David wrote this Psalm, David’s references in this Psalm were to Jesus’ rule and reign during that yet future period of human history we know as the Messianic kingdom – an earthly kingdom over which the Messiah rules from His heavenly throne. Later, Peter, Paul and the writer of the book of Hebrews would draw upon the exalted position of Jesus after His ascension to heaven as they encouraged believers with a vision of their Lord in a victorious position, i.e. seated in heaven at the Father’s right hand.

Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet and knew that *God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne*, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore, *having been exalted to the right hand of God*, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: “*The Lord said to My Lord. ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.’*” Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified. (Acts 2:29-36)

¹ All quotes in these notes are from the *New American Standard Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Word Publishing, 1995).

² By using the term “nation,” I am not referring to a theocracy with geographical boundaries as God had intended Israel to be in the past and as Israel will one day be in the future. Rather, I am referring to that spiritual universal body of believers known as the church to which Peter refers – “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a *holy nation*, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pe 2:9).

But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. *For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.* The last enemy that will be abolished is death. *For He has put all things in subjection under His feet.* But when He says "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Co 15:23-28)

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and *seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion*, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. *And He put all things in subjection under His feet*, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:18-23)

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that *at the name of Jesus ever knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* (Phil 2:8-11)

Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, *seated at the right hand of God.* (Col 3:1)

Who is the Author?

This may sound like a silly question to many, but it is an important question. Most Bibles include the superscription – "A Psalm of David." Therefore, that should settle the matter. However, the dominant view of many scholars today is that it was written by a priest, a prophet or by a court musician.³ According to this view, the first "Lord" would refer to God (Yahweh) and the second "My Lord" would refer to David or possibly one of his successors, thus a double meaning would be implied.

The promise of these words, then, would be the gradual triumph of the Davidic kingdom against all its foes and the establishment of a Judean hegemony over the Middle East. Each successive Davidite might see himself to a lesser or greater degree fulfilling the promise of the first verse.⁴

The ultimate realization of this promise according to those who adhere to this view is seen to occur through Jesus Christ and is interpreted as either the expansion of the church or the establishment of the future kingdom of God on earth. The particular interpretive angle would be dependent upon one's dispensational or non-dispensational persuasion.

³ Ronald B. Allen, *Rediscovering Prophecy, A New Song for a New Kingdom* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1983), 178.

⁴ Ibid.

However, I believe that the biblical evidence is overwhelming that David wrote the Psalm. Most convincing is the fact that Jesus Himself explicitly attributed its authorship to David. In Matthew 22:42-46, Jesus turns the tables on the religious leaders and asks them a question to the delight of the common folk who were listening to Him. Jesus asks, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" The religious leaders responded immediately, "The Son of David." Jesus then responded with logic that hangs upon the Davidic authorship of Psalm 110.

And He said to them, "Then how does *David in the Spirit* call Him 'Lord,' saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet"'? If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" (Matt 22:43-45)

Not one of Jesus' adversaries dared to answer since to do so would require the acknowledgement that Jesus was indeed Lord and the promised Messiah of all the Hebrew prophets. It is also interesting to note Jesus' stress upon the fact that David wrote these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. David did not invent this Psalm out of thin air, rather it was through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in David's soul Who illumined David's understanding of all previous divine revelation regarding the Messiah and provided fresh insight to David. Examples of prior revelation include all those passages we've studied to date in this series including, but not limited to, Genesis 3:15; 2 Samuel 7:11-16 (Davidic Covenant); Genesis 49:8-12, 22-26 (Jacob's blessing of Judah and Joseph); and Numbers 24:17-19 (Balaam's prophecy).

King and Priest (vv. 2-4)

One of the more amazing things about this passage is that David, writing in approximately 1000 B.C., is privileged to be given access through the Holy Spirit to divine communication in eternity past regarding an event that was yet future to David. Jesus, David's "Lord," had not even made His first Advent to earth, much less an ascension into heaven. Nevertheless, the words are spoken among the Trinity as if it were already an accomplished fact. At this point, you should be thinking about some of the attributes of God's essence and the doctrine of divine decrees that we have previously studied. For example, God's omniscience allowed Him to know from eternity past every decision that man would make to include the Fall of Adam and Eve and the positive decisions of His own Son toward God's plan for Him. Motivated by His perfect love, God the Father knew the perfect time to send His Son to pay for man's sin and He knew the manner in which His Son would die. He had the omnipotent power to resurrect His Son from the grave and accomplish His ascension to heaven in that resurrected body. By an act of His sovereignty, God the Father placed these facts (along with billions of others) into His decree for human history. Therefore, from the divine standpoint in eternity past, the resurrection, ascension and session of Jesus Christ as David's ultimate descendant, was an accomplished fact even though it was still future to David.

In His trial before the high priest, Jesus interpreted the words of Psalm 110:1 as a reference to Himself. He also adds words from Daniel 7:13.

But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Matt 26:63-64)

The result of such a claim in front of such a "righteous" audience was that the high priest tore his robes. If you can imagine the scene, obviously Jesus' hearers thought He had just committed blasphemy and had Jesus' statements not been true, He would have been guilty of blasphemy. For those who did not believe Jesus' words, the response was ridicule, scorn, and physical abuse (Matt 26:63-68). For those who did believe (and for those who today do believe) Jesus' words about Himself, there is a message of hope and victory. To His unbelieving hearers, Jesus' words seemed ludicrous coming from a son of a carpenter and a virtual peasant.

In verses 2-3 of this great Psalm, we see references made to the rulership of Jesus. God the Father commands the Son to take back His kingdom from His enemies with the word "rule." The Son will rule from "Zion" or Jerusalem. Jesus will be joined in His rule by "volunteers," i.e. believers and angelic hosts.⁵

But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matt 24:29-31)

But when the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. (Matt 25:31)

These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful. (Re 17:14) [*The terms "chosen" and "faithful" are used for believers. See Ro 1:7; Eph 1:1; 1 Pe 2:9*].

He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. (Re 19:13-15)

In order to participate in this battle on the side of Jesus, holiness is the requirement since the battle is judgment that is being administered to the wicked. "As the Israelites of old had to consecrate themselves to the Lord before going into battle, so at the consummation of the ages must believers be holy (cf. 2 Peter 3:10-11, 14)."⁶ The phraseology of verse 3b is poetic in nature and refers to the freshness, the sudden appearance, and the timing of the arrival of the saints who join with Jesus in the battle at the 2nd Advent.⁷ The terms "womb of the dawn" and the "dew" refer to the advent of a new day. It is interesting that the period of the 2nd Advent to include the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom is sometimes referenced by the phrase "the day of the

⁵ Believers of the Tribulation who were martyred and all believers who died prior to the Church Age will be resurrected to receive their resurrection bodies (Dan 12:13 cf. Re 20:4-5). The implication of Daniel 12:13 is that these believers will be resurrected prior to the Millennium, thus in association with Jesus' second Advent.

But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age. (Dan 12:13)

Then I saw thrones, and they who sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (Re 20:4-5)

⁶ Allen P. Ross, "Psalms" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 873.

⁷ Ibid.

Lord” (Isa 2:12, 17; 11:10; 13:6, 9; 28:5-6; Joel 2:1, 28-32; Zeph 1:14-18; I Thess 5:2). When one understands all of the events surrounding the 2nd Advent and the inauguration of the messianic kingdom from such passages as these and others, the poetic language of Psalm 110:3b makes more sense. What is phenomenal is that David had to possess an understanding of these facts surrounding the establishment of the messianic kingdom in order to paint a poetic picture concerning them. Otherwise, we could accuse David of being a man who loved to see beautiful words put together in a poetic way that had no basis in any reality. This doesn’t match all that we know of David; therefore, I believe David was fulfilling his role of prophet in addition to king.

In verse 4, God makes an oath on the basis of His own essence attribute – immutability. The Messiah was to be a priest as well as a king. In Israel, the priest was to be born from the house of Levi and the king from the house of Judah. So, how could Jesus be the fulfillment of this prophecy? As a descendant of David, Jesus was from the tribe of Judah; however, how could he also be a priest? The answer is not found in genetics, but in a priesthood that preceded Aaron and Abraham. That priesthood was the priesthood of Melchizedek. It was superior to the priesthood of Aaron not only because it preceded Aaron and Abraham, but because Abraham, Aaron’s ultimate genetic father, paid homage to and acknowledged the priesthood of Melchizedek. The writer of the book of Hebrews expounds on this topic in some detail in chapters 5, 6, & 7 of that book. The following points summarize the argument supporting the superiority of the priesthood of Melchizedek.

- ❑ Melchizedek, a Gentile king and priest of Salem, blessed Abram in the name of God for having defeated the Eastern alliance of kings led by Chedorlaomer.
- ❑ Abraham (the father of the Jewish race by divine appointment (Ge 15:13-21 & 17:5, 7-14) presented an offering of money (a tithe or tenth of all he had) to Melchizedek.
- ❑ Abraham, as the father of the Jewish race, was father to Levi, the head of the priestly tribe of Israel
- ❑ Since Levi was descended from Abraham and Abram offered a tithe to Melchizedek, the king/priest, then in effect Levi (who is to receive tithes as a priest of Israel) offered a tithe to the priest, Melchizedek.
- ❑ Therefore, the priesthood of Melchizedek is seen as superior to the priesthood of Levi.
- ❑ When Christ is declared to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek, then Christ is seen as superior to the priesthood of the Mosaic Law.
- ❑ Also, Melchizedek is interpreted as proving the eternity of the priesthood of Christ and its superiority to the Levitical priesthood.
- ❑ The argument to support this typological interpretation is that Levi (the priestly tribe under the Law) paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham, Levi’s forefather (see Heb. 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:17, 21).

A very good analysis of the Biblical view of the superiority of Jesus’ priesthood in the order of the Melchizedekian priesthood is provided by Leon Morris.

Jesus the Great Priest is now in the heavenlies (see Heb. 4:14; 6:19-20). He was called by God for this high honor, just as Aaron was (see Heb. 5:1-4), and Psalm 110:4 is the specific proof of His call (see Heb. 5:5-10). The superiority of Jesus as the Great High Priest is established by the “power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:15-19), the establishing oath (vv. 20-22), His permanent priesthood (vv. 23-25), and His superior sacrifice (vv. 26-28).⁸

The Victorious King and Judge (vv. 5-7)

In the last three verses of this Psalm, David pictures the victorious Messiah with God the Father as His shield at His right hand. In order to accomplish His victory at His 2nd Advent, the

⁸ Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978 –), vol 12, 68-73, cited in Allen, *Rediscovering Prophecy*, 184.

Messiah will be forced to execute kings (v. 5 cf. Re 16:16; 19:13-15) and judge nations (v. 6 cf. Joel 3:2, 11-14). The Messiah's campaign will be swift, violent, and deadly to His enemies. There has never been an event like it in the history of man.

He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. (Re 19:13-15)

I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehosaphat. Then I will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations. (Joel 3:2)

Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there. Bring down, O Lord, Your mighty ones. Let the nations be aroused and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. (Joel 3:11-14)

In verse 7, the Messiah is pictured as refreshing Himself with a drink of fresh water in the midst of the carnage and violence. This contrast is designed by the Holy Spirit through the prophet David to illustrate the fact that God is in sovereign control of the course of human history in spite of man's feeble attempt to oppose His will. The lifting of the head is a reference to His being exalted to a position of rulership over all the earth.

Similarity to Another Prophecy We've Studied

As we have seen in a previous lesson, Balaam, a pagan contemporary of Moses, was determined to curse Israel prior to her entry into the Promised Land on behalf of Balak, the king of Moab. Instead, Balaam became a means by which Yahweh blessed Israel. During his attempts to curse Israel, he makes one of the most astounding prophecies regarding the Messiah and Israel's future that had been made to that date. We know that the prophecy relates to the same time period as our passage, Psalm 110, since Balaam tells us that the events which he foresaw relate to the "latter days" (Num 24:14). Then, his prophecy mentions some of the very things we have seen in Psalm 110.

I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a star shall come forth from Jacob, a scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be a possession, Seir, its enemies, also will be a possession, while Israel performs valiantly. One from Jacob shall have dominion. And will destroy the remnant from the city. (Num 24:17-19)

The picture of the judgment associated with the Messiah's 2nd Advent was a part of the earliest revelation to Israel, even prior to their entry into the land of Promise (i.e. the Abrahamic Covenant). Balaam's prophecy was perhaps the first recorded battle cry of Israel.⁹

Conclusion

⁹ This analysis is wonderfully presented in Ronald Allen's *Rediscovering Prophecy* (pages 192-3) which has been previously cited.

In this Psalm, there are three revelations that David heard from the Father to the Son. First, Jesus is the waiting *King*, seated at the right hand of the Father (v. 1). Second, He is the eternal *Priest*, not through a human genealogy, but in the manner of Melchizedek (v. 4). Third, He is the coming *Judge* Who arrives with His holy army to establish His kingdom (vv. 2-3, 5-7).¹⁰

If one uses the alternative interpretation discussed in the introduction to this lesson, then can this Psalm be referring to one of the battles of the kings of Judah, or even David himself? Should we see this Psalm fulfilled in them? If so, what is the possible connection between this Psalm's fulfillment and verses 1 and 4 which refer to the Messiah exclusively? If one does conclude that verses 1 and 4 refer to Jesus Christ, "should we brush through them quickly and say that these verses use a military image for the conquest that Christ makes in the hearts of men, that the battlefield is a purely spiritual one? Can such really be the interpretation? Do soul-winners not only 'collect scalps,' but also 'shatter rulers' and 'heap up corpses' as well?"¹¹ Such an interpretation obviously fails to synthesize this passage with so much other Biblical revelation we have seen in this study about the Messiah and His future coming as King, Priest, and Judge. It forces the passage into an allegorical mold characteristic of the amillennial view of human history.

For all the reasons previously cited in this lesson, this Psalm should be interpreted as a clear prophecy of the victory of Jesus at His 2nd Advent to include the inauguration and establishment of the Messianic kingdom. Any other interpretation falls short at some point.

An Interesting Footnote

During the Civil War, the North drew encouragement from the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" written by Julia Ward Howe. The renaissance or reformation of dispensational thought of the last half of the 19th Century had not yet occurred. The "Battle Hymn of the Republic" drew heavily from images and themes found in Psalm 110 as well as other passages. Psalm 110 mentions the battle as "the day of Your Power" (v. 3) and "the day of His wrath" (v. 5). John references "the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Re 19:15). In Jacob's blessing of Judah, Jacob refers to this day with the words "he washes his garments in wine, and his robes in the blood of grapes" (Ge 49:11b). John indicates that "He [Jesus] was clothed with a robe dipped in blood" (Re 19:13).

Mine eyes have seen the glory
Of the coming of the Lord,
He is *trampling out the vintage*
Where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightening
Of His *terrible swift sword* –
His truth is marching on.

The major portion of believers during the Civil War era were amillennial in orientation and would have found the hymn to express the crusade-like aspect of their cause to bring about reform of the nation in preparation for the Lord's advent. The minority of believers who were dispensational in orientation would have perhaps been inspired as they drew comparisons to the Lord's sweeping conquest at His 2nd Advent and the sweeping conquest of the South that they hoped to achieve. Regardless, the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" provides a wonderful illustration of the concepts and truths found in Psalm 110 regarding the 2nd Advent of our Lord and has served as a source of inspiration for believers in the United States for over 150 years.

¹⁰ Allen, *Rediscovering Prophecy*, 186.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 186-7.