

WHO IS DAVID'S LORD? ANOTHER LOOK AT PSALM 110:1

by
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Although just seven verses long, Psalm 110 is the psalm most frequently quoted and alluded to in the NT.² Yet it is seemingly one of the most difficult to interpret. Scholars have proposed numerous hypotheses in an attempt to identify the psalm's original setting.³ Some of these proposals have been little more than imaginative conjecture. Others have been reasonable attempts to reconstruct the psalm's origin. Still there is no real consensus on the identity of the psalmist's Lord, and therefore no consensus on the subject of the psalm.⁴

Recognizing that a precise *Sitz im Leben* may be out of reach, this essay will attempt to explain the meaning of Psalm 110:1 without

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²Psalm 110 is cited in Matt 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; Luke 20:42–43; 22:69; Acts 2:34–35; Heb 1:13; 5:6; 7:17, 21 and alluded to in Mark 16:19; John 12:34; Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 5:10; 6:20; 7:3; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2. Interestingly, only the first and fourth verses of Psalm 110 are referred to in the NT. In addition to those listed above, Hay sees several other less clear allusions to Psalm 110 in the NT. He also discusses the psalm's use by early Christians in non-canonical literature (David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1973]).

³Johnson lists three autumn festivals and seven historic occasions which have been suggested as the background for Psalm 110 (Elliott E. Johnson, "Hermeneutical Principles and the Interpretation of Psalm 110," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 [October–December 1992]: 430, n. 5). For helpful surveys of these proposed settings, see Dwight Dongwan Kim, "Is Christ Sitting on the Davidic Throne?: Peter's Use of Psalm 110:1 in His Pentecost Speech in Acts 2" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993), pp. 26–36; David Alan Jones, "A Theology of Psalm 110" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1981), pp. 10–22. Kraus may be only slightly overstating the case when he remarks that "no other psalm has in research evoked so many hypotheses and discussions as Psalm 110" (Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], p. 345).

⁴Hence the statement by Crim that "probably no other Psalm has suffered more at the hands of emendators and commentators than this one, and there is still very little agreement as to its interpretation" (Keith R. Crim, *The Royal Psalms* [Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1962], p. 113).

speculating about its exact historical setting. This will be done by exegeting the text, examining its literary context, and surveying the major interpretative possibilities. In order to properly understand the psalm, the identity of the person referred to as “my Lord” in verse one must be determined. Three main interpretations of David’s Lord will be examined. The Davidic interpretation sees “my Lord” as a reference to David himself. The Solomonic view identifies “my Lord” as David’s son Solomon. And the Messianic interpretation understands “my Lord” as referring to David’s ultimate son the Messiah. The NT’s use of Psalm 110:1 will also be considered as the essay argues for the interpretation which seems to have the fewest difficulties.

TEXT OF PSALM 110:1

The LORD says to my Lord:
 “Sit at My right hand
 until I make Your enemies
 a footstool for Your feet.”⁵

The psalm’s superscription states that it is a *לְדָוִד מִזְמוֹר* (“psalm of David”).⁶ Some scholars have questioned Davidic authorship of Psalm 110, but most evangelicals believe that David wrote this psalm.⁷ As Kidner points out,

Nowhere in the Psalter does so much hang on the familiar title *A Psalm of David* as it does here; nor is the authorship of any other psalm quite so emphatically endorsed in other parts of Scripture. To amputate this opening phrase, or to allow it no reference to the authorship of the psalm, is to be at odds with the New Testament, which finds King David’s acknowledgement of his ‘Lord’ highly significant.⁸

⁵Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the NASB, 1995 ed.

⁶Gesenius states that the *lamed auctoris* regularly denotes a psalm belonging to David as the author (E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed., rev. A. E. Cowley [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910], p. 419). See also Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 207, n. 70.

⁷Eissfeldt discounts the accuracy of the superscriptions in general (Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. R. Ackroyd [New York: Harper & Row, 1976], p. 452). But as Butler notes, “Intrinsic to the critical position is a low view of the validity of the titles to the psalms. There is hardly a point at which there is more critical unanimity than in the rejection of the titles as having been added at a much later date, and thus being of no value in determining authorship” (Jay Butler, “An Exegetical Study of Psalm 110” [Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1980], p. 7). Other suggestions for authorship of the psalm have included the prophets Nathan and Gad. However, the most common alternative to Davidic authorship is to assign the psalm to an unnamed poet or prophet.

⁸Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries

There is little reason to doubt Davidic authorship of the psalm, and for the purposes of this article such will be assumed.

Overall Psalm 110 has a fair number of textual difficulties, and numerous emendations have been suggested.⁹ However, most of these difficulties are found in verses three, six, and seven.¹⁰ Verse one is free from any significant variants.

The LORD Says to My Lord

The expression יהוה אָמַר ("Yahweh says") signifies a divine oracle.¹¹ It is found at the head of a sentence only here in the Hebrew Bible, but it is quite common in the prophetic literature where it is often found at the end of a divine oracle and occasionally in the middle of a prophetic announcement.¹² This expression is emphatic and marks what follows as a declaration from Yahweh.

The recipient of this oracle is identified as David's Lord. The basic idea of לַאֲדֹנָי ("to my Lord") involves the superiority of the one addressed to the one speaking.¹³ In this case, the one addressed is not said to be superior to the speaker (Yahweh) but rather to David. Nearly all

(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), pp. 391–92. Kim offers several lines of reasoning in support of Davidic authorship. His evidence includes the validity of the superscription, the ability of David to write poetry, Jewish tradition, the affirmation of Jesus, and the testimony of Peter ("Peter's Use of Psalm 110:1," pp. 20–26).

As Kim and others have noted, the NT authors consistently attribute this psalm to David (Matt 22:43–45; Mark 12:36–37; Luke 20:42–44; Acts 2:34–35). While it is technically true that the NT writers say David "spoke" the psalm, it seems very unlikely that they would consistently say David spoke the psalm if someone else authored it. Furthermore, Christ himself stated that David spoke the psalm "in the Holy Spirit" (Matt 22:43; Mark 12:36).

⁹Mitchell Dahood appears to virtually rewrite the psalm by means of textual emendation. See his *Psalms III: 101–150*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 112–20.

¹⁰Edward J. Kissane, "The Interpretation of Psalm 110," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 21 (April 1954): 104.

¹¹אָמַר is almost a fixed technical term for a prophetic oracle from God (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 5 vols., rev. Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm [Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000], s.v. "אָמַר," 2:657).

¹²A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, 2 vols., New Century Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 2:768; Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 751. A similar phrase, אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה ("the sovereign Yahweh says"), is found at the beginning of Isaiah 56:8.

¹³Butler, "Psalm 110," p. 24; Dahood, *Psalms 101–150*, p. 113. In addition to Psalm 110:1, לַאֲדֹנָי occurs twenty-one other times in the OT (e.g., Gen 24:36; 1 Kgs 18:13; 1 Sam 24:7).

commentators are agreed that the psalmist's Lord is a king of some kind.¹⁴ The precise identity of this individual will be addressed later in this article.

“Sit at My Right Hand”

David's Lord is instructed to sit at the right hand of Yahweh. The verb *ישב* has a fairly wide range of meaning in the OT. It can mean to “sit,” “dwell,” “stay,” or “remain.”¹⁵ Wilson notes that “in reference to God, the vb. normally indicates heaven rather than earth as the place of God's dwelling. Yahweh is viewed as sitting enthroned in heaven or as dwelling there (Ps 2:4; 29:10; 113:5).”¹⁶ Although Yahweh is often pictured as seated in heaven, this command should not be viewed primarily in terms of spatial proximity but rather as connoting the unusual exaltation of David's Lord.¹⁷ Throughout the ancient Near East, the right was commonly considered the position of honor, privilege, and preference.¹⁸ In the OT, Yahweh's right hand stresses his majesty and power, especially his power to save and sustain his people.¹⁹ Yahweh's right hand is powerful to deliver his people (Ps 118:15–16) and to punish his enemies (Exod 15:6, 12).

On at least one occasion, Bathsheba was invited to sit at the right hand of her son Solomon (1 Kgs 2:19). This does not mean that Bathsheba became a co-ruler with Solomon or that she began to reign with him in any sense.²⁰ Rather, it indicates Solomon's desire to grant her a

¹⁴E.g., Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, rev. ed., Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Nelson, 2002), p. 111; Allan M. Harman, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 1998), p. 362; Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, pp. 348–49; James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1994), pp. 350–51; Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), pp. 272–73; Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), p. 697.

¹⁵Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (reprint ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), s.v. “*ישב*,” pp. 442–43 (hereafter cited as BDB).

¹⁶*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. “*ישב*,” by Gerald H. Wilson, 2:551 (hereafter cited as *NIDOTTE*).

¹⁷Butler, “Psalm 110,” p. 25.

¹⁸*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “*יָמֵינוּ*,” by Frederic Clarke Putnam, 2:467; Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand*, p. 52.

¹⁹Kim, “Peter's Use of Psalm 110:1,” p. 57. Putnam summarizes, “Nearly everything that is reckoned to God—both attributes and actions—is also accorded to his right hand, so that, especially in Proverbs and Psalms, Yahweh's right hand has become a metonymy for God himself” (*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “*יָמֵינוּ*,” 2:468).

²⁰Compare the request of James and John to sit the one at Christ's right hand and the other at his left in the kingdom (Mark 10:35–41). It is unlikely that they were

position of honor or respect.²¹ To sit at the king's right hand was an uncommon privilege. Outside of Psalm 110, no one in the OT is ever said to (or commanded to) sit at the right hand of Yahweh.²² Even the kings of Israel are never described as sitting at God's right hand. This is a unique command. David's Lord is instructed to take a position of unusual honor alongside the deity.

“Until I Make Your Enemies a Footstool for Your Feet”

The metaphor of a footstool is most likely taken from the custom of the ancient Near East in which a victorious king placed his foot on the necks of his conquered foes.²³ It indicates the complete subjugation of those who have been defeated to those who have overcome them. Davis correctly points out that elsewhere in the OT when the image of a footstool is used the footstool always belongs to God.²⁴ However, this observation does not require the footstool to belong to deity in this passage. Such is true only if context indicates that David's Lord is deity.

In this case, the ones defeated are described as the enemies of David's Lord. The word **בֹּאֵי** can signify either a personal enemy or a national one. Verses five and six refer to kings, nations, and rulers being defeated. This would seem to indicate that in verse one national enemies are most likely in view. Yahweh declares that he will make the king's enemies a footstool for the king's feet.²⁵

The preposition **עַד** (“until”) can indicate the time *before* an event

asking to reign with Christ as co-rulers. They were most likely seeking positions of greater honor above the other disciples.

²¹Kim, “Peter's Use of Psalm 110:1,” p. 59. This may also have indicated Solomon's predisposition to hear Bathsheba's intercession on Adonijah's behalf. See Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand*, pp. 54–55.

²²Jeffrey de Waal Dryden, “Psalm 110 in New Testament Christology” (Th.M. thesis, Covenant Theological Seminary, 1999), p. 13.

²³Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Psalms* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan/Richview Press, 1964), p. 511. After the Israelites captured five Amorite kings, Joshua invited his military commanders to put their feet on the necks of these kings (Josh 10:24).

²⁴E.g., Ps 132:7; Isa 66:1; Lam 2:1. Barry C. Davis, “Is Psalm 110 a Messianic Psalm?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (April–June 2000): 164. See also Dryden, “Psalm 110 in New Testament Christology,” p. 14; Fred L. Horton, Jr., *The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century A.D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, no. 30 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 28–29.

²⁵The verb **שָׁטַח** means to set, make, or appoint something (BDB, s.v. “שָׁטַח,” p. 1011).

takes place (Ezek 33:22), the time *until* it takes place (Ps 104:23), or occasionally the time *during* which an event takes place (2 Kgs 9:22).²⁶ It can also “mark a relative limit beyond which the activity of the main clause still continues” as it does in Psalm 112:8.²⁷ Here in Psalm 110 it signifies the time until an event occurs, but it does not necessarily mean that David’s Lord will cease to occupy a position of honor after his enemies have been defeated. Though the text does not address the issue, it seems likely that the king will continue to be honored after his enemies have been put down. In summary, Psalm 110:1 contains an oracle in which Yahweh addresses the psalmist’s Lord and instructs him to take a seat of honor at his right hand until Yahweh has defeated the king’s foes and placed them under his feet.

LITERARY CONTEXT OF PSALM 110:1

In order to determine the meaning of Psalm 110:1 more precisely, it is necessary to consider the literary context in which it is found. This will be done at two levels. First, this verse will be examined in light of the rest of Psalm 110. Then, it will be helpful to consider the relationship of this psalm to the psalms found in its immediate literary context.

Psalm 110:2–7

²The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying,
“Rule in the midst of Your enemies.”

³Your 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.

⁴The LORD has sworn
and will not change His mind,
“You are a priest forever
according to the order of Melchizedek.”

⁵The LORD is at Your right hand;
He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath.

⁶He will judge among the nations,
He will fill them with corpses,
He will shatter the chief men over a broad country.

⁷He will drink from the brook by the wayside;
therefore He will lift up His head.

Verse two confirms the fact that David’s Lord is some type of

²⁶Waltke and O’Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, p. 215.

²⁷Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, p. 110.

king. The word translated “scepter” in many versions elsewhere usually speaks of a rod or a staff such as that carried by a shepherd.²⁸ Here it is found in connection with a word that means “strong” or “mighty.” The resulting construct signifies the king’s royal authority as pictured in his scepter. Yahweh promises to extend the king’s authority from Zion (Jerusalem), and he instructs David’s Lord to rule in the midst of his enemies. The fact that the king is told to rule in the midst of his enemies does not imply that the victory over them predicted in verse one is incomplete. The king’s enemies have been brought into subjection to the king, and he is now in a position to rule over them.²⁹

Verse three is notoriously difficult to translate.³⁰ In this section, the king’s people are said to offer themselves willingly to the king. They do so most likely for the purpose of battle.³¹ These willing people are further described as being adorned “in holy array.”³² In this context, “holy array” may indicate that the king’s people are dressed in preparation to serve their king. Reference to their youthfulness probably signifies the strength of the king’s army. VanGemeren aptly summarizes the intent of this verse:

The people come voluntarily on the day of battle, as in the days of Deborah (Judg 5:2, 9). They consecrate themselves, are fully prepared,

²⁸E.g., Exod 4:2. See *NIDOTTE*, “מִטְּוֶה,” by David M. Fouts, 2:924. The word used in Psalm 110:2 is מִטְּוֶה instead of מִטְּוֶה, which is the more common term for scepter. However, both terms occur in Ezekiel 19:11 in a parallel usage, so a strong distinction should not be pressed.

²⁹Davidson and Gesenius both understand the imperative “rule” as an assurance that the king will rule rather than as a command (A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901], p. 87; Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, p. 324). The intended sense may be that Yahweh has conquered the king’s foes, and he now invites the king to rule over them.

³⁰There are six textual problems in this verse and several unusual grammatical constructions. Helpful discussions of these difficulties can be found in Butler, “Psalm 110,” pp. 30–38; Jones, “Theology of Psalm 110,” pp. 44–51; and Jinkyu Kim, “Psalm 110 in Its Literary and Generic Contexts: An Eschatological Interpretation” (Ph.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2003), pp. 287–92.

³¹Hence the NIV’s translation: “Your troops will be willing on your day of battle.”

³²The phrase “in holy ornaments,” “in holy array,” or “in the beauties of holiness” is elsewhere found in connection with the worship or praise of God (Davis, “Psalm 110,” p. 165). See, e.g., 1 Chr 16:29; 2 Chr 20:21; Ps 29:2; 96:9. In these passages, it occurs in the singular and refers to the “splendor of his (God’s) holiness.” A textual variant in Psalm 110:3 has prompted some commentators to translate the text as “upon the holy mountains.” But in addition to departing from the MT, the LXX and the Vulgate do not support this change (Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, p. 394). The translation “in holy ornaments” or “in holy array” seems appropriate in light of the mention of priesthood in verse four, but such a translation does not require the king’s volunteers to be priests.

and place themselves at the service of the king. They will be as abundant as “dew” (cf. 2 Sam 17:12) at dawn. They are youthful and hence valiant for battle. The king’s army is prepared, strong, and numerous.³³

Verse three indicates what kind of army the king will have in the day of battle.

Verse four introduces a second divine oracle. Yahweh assures the king that he has sworn and will not change his mind about the content of this oracle.³⁴ He then declares that David’s Lord is a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.³⁵ No Israelite had ever held the offices of king and priest simultaneously. These two offices were kept separate by the requirement for priests to come from the tribe of Levi and kings to come from the tribe of Judah. The fact that this was something new and different may be the reason Yahweh introduces it with an oath. The text indicates that David’s Lord does not follow in the tradition of the Levitical priests. Instead he is a priest after the manner of Melchizedek (Gen 14). Furthermore, his priesthood is said to be perpetual or unending. In Exodus 40:15, the Levitical priests are given a priesthood which is described as “a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations” (לְדֹרֹתָם עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתָם). The modifier לְדֹרֹתָם seems to limit the Levitical priesthood to “their generations.” In Psalm 110:4, no such modifier is used, and therefore אֲתֵּדָבֶרֶן לְעוֹלָם should probably be taken in the general sense of “a priest forever.”³⁶ David’s Lord is not only a king. He is also a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Scholars are divided over the subject of verses five and six. Some

³³*Psalms*, p. 698.

³⁴Kidner states: “If anything is stronger than a divine oracle it is a divine oath...here further strengthened by the pledge that God *will not change his mind*” (*Psalms 73–150*, p. 395). On several occasions similar oaths are found in connection with promises related to the Davidic covenant (Ps 89:4, 35–36; 132:11; cf. 2 Sam 3:9).

³⁵Rowley argues that while verses one through three are addressed to the Davidic king, verse four is addressed to Zadok and is meant to legitimize his priesthood in Jerusalem (H. H. Rowley, “Melchizedek and Zadok [Gen 14 and Ps 110],” in *Festschrift, Alfred Bertholet*, ed. Walter Baumgartner, et al., [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950], pp. 466, 469–70). Rowley’s interpretation lacks evidence to support it, and few scholars have adopted it.

³⁶Dryden, “Psalm 110 in New Testament Christology,” pp. 18–19. The exact meaning of “a priest forever” is difficult to determine based on grammar and syntax alone. One’s understanding of the priest’s identity will influence the interpretation of this phrase. If the king-priest is an earthly ruler, the phrase will probably be taken to mean that the king is a priest for life (e.g., Terrien, *Psalms*, p. 753). If the king is identified as the Messiah, it will probably be understood as a reference to his eternal priesthood (e.g., John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson, 5 vols. [reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.], 4:295).

identify the subject as the king.³⁷ Others believe it is Yahweh.³⁸ There are two main arguments in favor of seeing the king as the subject of these verses. First, viewing the king as at the right hand of Yahweh in verse five creates a parallelism with the instruction for the king to sit at Yahweh's right hand in verse one. In both places David's Lord is pictured as sitting at Yahweh's right hand. Second, nearly all scholars see the king as the subject of verse seven, yet the text does not indicate a change of subject between verses six and seven. If the king is identified as the subject of verses five, six, and seven, this difficulty is avoided.³⁹ In addition to these arguments, several weaker ones have been occasionally suggested.⁴⁰

Arguments in favor of Yahweh as the subject of verses five and six address the two issues above and generally appear more convincing. First, elsewhere in the Psalms Yahweh is said to be at the right hand of Israel's king.⁴¹ For example, David wrote: "Because [Yahweh] is at my right hand, I will not be shaken" (Ps 16:8).⁴² Second, abrupt subject changes occur rather frequently in the psalms. Therefore, it is quite possible that an unmarked change of subject occurs between verses six and seven.⁴³ Third, Yahweh is the one who makes the king's enemies a footstool for his feet in verse one, so it seems appropriate to see Yahweh crushing kings and judging nations in verses five and six. And fourth, several manuscripts have the variant יהוה as the subject of verses five and six. If Yahweh is the subject of verses five and six, then he is at the king's right hand ready to fight on the king's behalf. In these verses, Yahweh devastates rulers and nations as he fights the enemies of the king.⁴⁴

³⁷Jesse Boyd, "The Triumphant Priest-King" *Biblical Viewpoint* 6 (November 1972): 107–9; Davis, "Psalm 110," pp. 166–67.

³⁸Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, pp. 351–52; VanGemeren, *Psalms*, p. 699.

³⁹However, this view seems to create a similar difficulty between verses four and five. According to this view, in verse four the king is addressed ("You are a priest"), but in verse five Yahweh is addressed ("The Lord [i.e., the king] is at Your right hand").

⁴⁰See Butler, "Psalm 110," p. 43; Jones, "Theology of Psalm 110," pp. 56–57.

⁴¹In addition, Kidner points out, "There is no need to seek consistency between Yahweh's 'right hand' in verse 1 and the King's in verse 5. The scene has changed from throne to battlefield, to present this new aspect of the partnership" (*Psalms 73–150*, p. 396, n. 1).

⁴²Also see Psalm 109:31, where David is probably the "needy one."

⁴³As noted above, if a change of subject does not occur between verses six and seven, then a change of subject must occur between verses four and five.

⁴⁴There is no indication here that the king is passive or uninvolved. No doubt, the king is present and involved to at least some measure, but the passage only states what Yahweh will do.

The verb יָרַב occurs in both verses five and six and signifies the violence with

In verse seven the subject is once again David's Lord.⁴⁵ The king is said to "drink from the brook beside the way," a statement probably depicting his refreshment after conquest.⁴⁶ The psalm concludes with a statement that the king will "lift up his head." This signifies that total victory is his.

Relationship to Nearby Psalms

Davis has called Psalm 110 "the linchpin psalm of the first seven psalms of Book Five of the Psalter."⁴⁷ He contends that Psalm 110 provides a transition between two groups of psalms (107–109 and 111–113), and that it presents "the reason why these groups of psalms are juxtaposed to each other."⁴⁸ Davis sees Psalms 107–109 as depicting God's people in distress and their cries for deliverance, Psalm 110 declaring that God will give victory to his people, and Psalms 111–113 recording praise for Yahweh who is able to deliver his people from their enemies.⁴⁹ Therefore, according to Davis, Psalm 110 provides an answer to the Israelites' cries for deliverance and a reason for God's people to praise him.

While Davis's observations are frequently insightful, his theory about the relationship of these psalms to each other should probably be somewhat nuanced. Psalm 107 does not include a plea for God to deliver his people from their present circumstances. Instead, it tells of times when God's people called out to him and were delivered from their foes.⁵⁰ As such, it may set the stage for the two psalms that follow,

which Yahweh will overcome kings and rulers. Van Dam offers "beat to pieces" as a gloss for this verb (*NIDOTTE*, "יָרַד," by Cornelis Van Dam, 2:920).

⁴⁵Some critics, noting the thematic change from verses six to seven, have suggested that several lines must have been lost between these verses (Moses Buttenwieser, *The Psalms*, Library of Biblical Studies [New York: KTAV Publishing, 1969], p. 795; Artur Weiser, *The Psalms*, trans. Herbert Hartwell, Old Testament Library [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962], p. 697). This suggestion is without support and is unnecessary.

⁴⁶This does not necessarily imply that the king was either weak or fatigued (see Butler, "Psalm 110," p. 49; Jones, "Theology of Psalm 110," pp. 60–61). The text simply says that he drinks.

⁴⁷Davis, "Psalm 110," p. 168. Cf. idem, "A Contextual Analysis of Psalms 107–118" (Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1996), p. 162.

⁴⁸Davis, "Contextual Analysis of Psalm 107–118," p. 163.

⁴⁹Davis, "Psalm 110," p. 168; idem, "Contextual Analysis of Psalms 107–118," pp. 162–63.

⁵⁰The theme of this psalm seems to be "Then they cried out to Yahweh in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress" (see vv. 6, 13, 19, 28).

but it is in a different category from these psalms.⁵¹ It is not a request for deliverance, but rather a record of God delivering his people when they cried out to him in the *past*. In contrast to this, Psalms 108 and 109 depict God's people pleading for deliverance from their persecutors in the *present* (108:6; 109:21).⁵² Davis has pointed out that Psalm 110 supplies an answer to such pleas. God will rescue his people and crush their enemies in the "day of his wrath."⁵³

Davis identifies Psalms 111–113 as psalms of praise to Yahweh for his deliverance.⁵⁴ While it is true that all three psalms begin with "praise Yahweh," overall Psalm 112 does not seem to be praising Yahweh for his deliverance as much as it is describing the righteous man who is blessed by God.⁵⁵ For this reason, its connection to Psalm 110 is tenuous. Psalms 111 and 113 are focused on praise to Yahweh, but it is unclear whether or not this praise is directly related to the defeat of enemies described in Psalm 110. Davis's work on the relationship between Psalms 107–113 is helpful overall. However, the connections between these psalms may not be quite as strong as he contends. Therefore, it seems best to approach Psalm 110 as a self-contained unit with no necessary connection to the psalms around it.

SURVEY OF THE MAJOR INTERPRETATIONS

This survey will be limited to views which see Psalm 110 as originating during the early monarchy.⁵⁶ Three main positions will be

⁵¹Kim correctly argues that Psalm 107 does not belong in the same category with Psalms 108–110 ("Psalm 110 in Its Literary and Generic Contexts," p. 141).

⁵²Interestingly, Psalm 108 includes a request for God to save with his "right hand," and Psalm 109 refers to Yahweh standing at the "right hand" of the needy (cf. Ps 110:1, 5). Another connection with Psalm 110 is found when the psalmist laments that God is not going out to battle with Israel's army and expresses hope that God will someday trample down Israel's enemies (108:11–13; cf. 110:5–6). Davis notes numerous thematic and lexical connections between Psalm 107–113 ("Contextual Analysis of Psalms 107–118," pp. 148–62; idem, "Psalm 110," pp. 168–70).

⁵³See also Erich Zenger, "The Composition and Theology of the Fifth Book of Psalms, Psalms 107–145," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 80 (September 1998): 90.

⁵⁴"Contextual Analysis of Psalms 107–118," pp. 162–63; idem, "Psalm 110," pp. 168–70.

⁵⁵Zenger proposes that Psalm 112 is placed near Psalm 110 in order to direct the reader to see in the righteous man of Psalm 112 the king whom Yahweh has called to his right hand in Psalm 110 ("Fifth Book of Psalms," p. 91). However, this proposed relationship between the two psalms is unlikely.

⁵⁶Hay notes that the general consensus of scholarship favors a date in the early monarchy (*Glory at the Right Hand*, p. 19). The term "early monarchy" is used to avoid excluding scholars who question Davidic authorship but see the psalm originating during or around the lifetime of David.

examined based on their understanding of the king's identity. The primary arguments for each position will be summarized and evaluated.

Davidic Interpretation

Although the NT consistently applies this psalm to Christ, a number of scholars have argued that the king of Psalm 110:1 is none other than David himself.⁵⁷ Merrill contends that David is both the author and the subject of the psalm.⁵⁸ He explains:

The honorific "my lord" was a common way of addressing royalty or even socially superior individuals who were less than royal.... The term no doubt became so formulaic that a king could use it even of himself. That is, "my lord" came to mean nothing more than "I" or "me" when employed by the royal speaker.⁵⁹

To support this claim, he tries to demonstrate that the OT provides precedent for such a use by noting that God refers to himself as *אֲנִי* in several passages (Job 28:28; Ezek 13:9; 23:49).⁶⁰ Merrill points out that over time the significance of "my Lord" was gradually reduced to "Lord." He therefore suggests that in Psalm 110:1, David may be saying: "Yahweh said to (the) lord," referring to himself as king under that honorific title.⁶¹ However, it is unclear whether the reduction of "my Lord" to "Lord" when referring to deity lends much support to his position. Concerning the use of "my lord" by humans, Merrill is forced to confess, "Apart from Psalm 110:1...the text in dispute, there is no other clear reference in the Old Testament to an individual addressing himself in this manner."⁶² This admission seems to

⁵⁷E.g., Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, pp. 114–15; A. Cohen, *The Psalms*, rev. Rabbi E. Oratz, Soncino Books of the Bible (New York: Soncino Press, 1992), pp. 371–73; A. F. Kirkpatrick, ed., *The Book of Psalms* (reprint of 1910 ed., n.p.: Scripture Truth, n.d.), pp. 664–65; Eugene Merrill, "Royal Priesthood: An Old Testament Messianic Motif" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (January–March 1993): 50–61. Brueggemann appears to see Psalm 110 as written about David and by extension about the success of the Davidic dynasty (Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997], p. 606). Similarly, Broyles believes the psalm was originally composed for the preexilic Davidic kings (Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, New International Biblical Commentary [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999], p. 414).

⁵⁸"Royal Priesthood," p. 55. Allen sees David as the subject of the psalm, but he attributes the psalm to a court poet (*Psalms 101–150*, pp. 114–15). This is more common than the theory which sees David as both author and subject of the psalm.

⁵⁹Merrill, "Royal Priesthood," pp. 54–55.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 55. This form literally means "my Lord."

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 55.

significantly undermine his theory about David addressing himself as "my lord."

Interpreters who see David as the subject but deny that he wrote the psalm do not have to wrestle with this problem.⁶³ However, Psalm 110:4 provides another difficulty for the Davidic interpretation regardless of the psalm's authorship. Verse four states that the king is also a "priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Merrill and others have tried to show that the Davidic kings functioned as priests outside the Levitical order. They believe that as members of the Melchizedekian priesthood, these king-priests served directly under God.⁶⁴

Merrill notes that the idea of a royal priesthood was common in the ancient Near East and was not completely foreign to Israel's experience.⁶⁵ He points out that the OT records numerous examples of the Davidic kings performing priestly functions. For example, when the ark was brought to Jerusalem David blessed the people in the name of Yahweh, wore a linen ephod, and sacrificed both burnt offerings and peace offerings (2 Sam 6:13–18).⁶⁶ Concerning this incident, Merrill claims that to suggest David "did not actually participate as a priest goes against the clear intention of the text."⁶⁷ He further notes that Solomon offered up burnt offerings at Gibeon and offered sacrifices on several other occasions (1 Kgs 3:4; 8:5, 64). Like David, Solomon also blessed the people in the name of Yahweh (1 Kgs 8:54–

⁶³They generally understand an unnamed poet or prophet to be addressing David as "my lord."

⁶⁴Armerding believes that this is confirmed by the fact that the psalmist's lord is invited to sit at the right hand of Yahweh (Ps 110:1). He therefore concludes, "It seems plain that David himself was the chief sacrificial and priestly intermediary between Yahweh and the people during his reign" (Carl Edwin Armerding, "Were David's Sons Really Priests?" in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], p. 82). Armerding has also attempted to demonstrate that, based on 2 Samuel 8:18, David's sons were priests of a non-Levitical order. However, Wenham has shown that due to the possibility of textual corruption in 2 Samuel 8:18, the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 18:17 which reads "chief officials" instead of "priests," and the translations of 2 Samuel 8:18 found in several early versions, the title attributed to David's sons in 2 Samuel 8:18 should be translated something like "administrators (of the royal estates)" (G. J. Wenham, "Were David's Sons Priests?" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 87 [1975]: 79–82).

⁶⁵Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 265; idem, "Royal Priesthood," p. 57. On the existence of royal priesthoods outside of Israel, see Helmer Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, trans. John Sturdy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), pp. 36–38, 105–7.

⁶⁶Merrill calls this event "the strongest suggestion of Davidic royal priesthood" ("Royal Priesthood," p. 60).

⁶⁷Ibid.

61). These actions are viewed by some as clear evidence of Solomon's priesthood. Even in the rebuke of Uzziah, Merrill sees confirmation that the kings of Israel and Judah were involved in priestly activity. He holds that Uzziah was rebuked not for trying to perform the function of a priest, but rather for overstepping the limits of his own priesthood and infringing on the ministry of the Levitical priests (2 Chron 26:16–20).⁶⁸ The passage does not deny that Uzziah was a priest, but it shows that his priesthood, like that of all Davidic kings, was not of the Levitical order. Therefore, according to this position, in Psalm 110:4 David is declared by Yahweh to be a priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

There are several problems with the arguments which have been used to support this conclusion. The fact that David and Solomon blessed the people of Israel in the name of Yahweh is hardly proof that they were functioning as priests. There is no reason to confine blessing the nation to a priestly function. As kings of Israel, it seems quite appropriate for David and Solomon to bless the theocratic nation in the name of Yahweh. With regard to David wearing the linen ephod, this too does not require him to be a priest. While still a youth and not a priest, Samuel was described as "a boy wearing a linen ephod" (1 Sam 2:18). Like Samuel, David may have worn an ephod to express his devotion to Yahweh.⁶⁹ While it is true that David and Solomon offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, these sacrifices could be made by any Israelite. They were not restricted to the Levitical priests.⁷⁰ In 1 Kings 8:1–5, it is quite clear that elders from every tribe of Israel sacrificed sheep and cattle along with Solomon. Offering animal sacrifices was not an activity limited to priests, and so it did not indicate that the offerer was a priest. On the other hand, there is no evidence that any king ever entered the holy place of the temple and offered incense on the altar of incense.⁷¹

Proponents of the Davidic interpretation have not been able to prove that David performed functions that distinctively pertained to priests. Furthermore, as Rowley has correctly noted, "What is required

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 60–61. See also Mike Shofner, "The Davidic Dynasty and Royal Priesthood: A Theological Issue" (S.T.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001), pp. 34–35.

⁶⁹M. J. Paul, "The Order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4 and Heb 7:3)," *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (Spring 1987): 197.

⁷⁰See Leviticus 1–3 where the Law states that Israelites from every tribe were to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings.

⁷¹Paul, "Order of Melchizedek," p. 197. When Uzziah tried to do this he was rebuked by Azariah (2 Chr 26:16–20). None of the kings of Israel and Judah appear to have had the ability to offer sacrifices which could not be offered by any other Israelite.

is not evidence that the king played a priestly part in certain festival rites, but that he ordinarily exercised the functions of the priest, and was truly the priest *de facto* as he was the king.⁷² No OT passage clearly states that David or the Davidic kings possessed any kind of priesthood. The interpretation which sees David as the king of Psalm 110:1 does not appear to be able to handle the fact that verse four states that this same king is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Solomonic Interpretation

Slightly less common than the Davidic interpretation is the view which sees David writing Psalm 110 in reference to his son Solomon. Bateman argues on the basis of the vowel pointing in verse one that David must have addressed an earthly lord rather than a heavenly one. He notes that the form “to my lord” (לֵאדֹנָי) is *never* used elsewhere in the OT as a divine reference.⁷³ He also points out that nearly all of the 168 forms of “my lord” (אֲדֹנָי) that occur in the OT refer to human lords. The few that do not refer to humans refer instead to angelic beings, but never to deity. Bateman explains that Masoretic pointing distinguishes between divine references (אֲדֹנָי) and human references (אֲדֹנָי).⁷⁴ Therefore, when one finds the form אֲדֹנָי a divine reference can be expected, and when the form אֲדֹנָי appears a human (or possibly angelic) reference can be expected. In his discussion of Psalm 110:1, Bateman concludes, “The phrase ‘to my lord’ (לֵאדֹנָי) apparently indicates that David was directing this oracle from Yahweh to a human lord, not to the divine messianic Lord nor to himself.”⁷⁵

Bateman admits that it may seem difficult to imagine the king of Israel addressing any other human as “my lord.” However, he notes that David addressed both king Saul and Achish of the Philistines as “my lord the king” after he had been anointed by Samuel but before he ascended to the throne (1 Sam 24:8; 29:8). After David was installed as king of Israel, the only earthly ruler that he could have possibly addressed in this fashion is Solomon. Bateman notes that Solomon was

⁷²“Melchizedek and Zadok,” p. 471.

⁷³Herbert W. Bateman IV, “Psalm 110:1 and the New Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (October–December 1992): 448. This form occurs twenty-one other times in the OT.

⁷⁴Ibid. According to Bateman, ninety-four percent of the 168 forms refer to humans, and the other six percent refer to angelic beings. The distinction Bateman argues for is commonly recognized as being at least *generally* true (*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. “אֲדֹנָי,” by Otto Eissfeldt, 1:61–63; *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. “אֲדֹנָי,” by Ernst Jenni, 1:24–29).

⁷⁵“Psalm 110:1 and the New Testament,” p. 448.

honored as king by Adonijah while David was still alive (1 Kgs 1:49–53).⁷⁶ Apparently Solomon was a coregent with David for several years before David's death, and Bateman speculates that David may have composed Psalm 110 specifically for Solomon's second coronation in 971 B.C.⁷⁷ If this is so, then as Gundry suggests, Psalm 110 may have been written for the purpose of legitimizing Solomon's claim to the throne.⁷⁸

Bateman presents what seems to be a strong case for the Solomonic interpretation. However, on closer examination the distinction he argues for based on vowel points may not hold up as an absolute rule, and even if it does hold up, it cannot rule out the Messianic interpretation. Davis has attempted to show that the distinction Bateman draws between אֲדֹנָי ("my lord") and אֲדֹנָי ("my Lord") while generally true, is not always true. He notes that אֲדֹנָי occurs in at least two OT passages where the referent is Yahweh.⁷⁹ In Judges 6:13, Gideon addressed the angel of Yahweh that appeared to him as אֲדֹנָי, but the following verse indicates that Gideon was speaking with Yahweh himself. Likewise, in Joshua 5:14, someone initially identified as "the captain of Yahweh's army" appears to Joshua and is addressed by him as אֲדֹנָי, but a few verses later, the narrator of the passage identifies this "captain" as Yahweh (6:2).

Although Joshua and Gideon both addressed Yahweh with the term normally used for human lords, the argument can be made that in both cases these men did not realize at first whom they were addressing.⁸⁰ By pointing out these two exceptions, Davis has questioned whether or not Bateman's distinction should be universally applied, but he has not proven that the OT contains a clear text in which a person knowingly addresses Yahweh as אֲדֹנָי. Therefore, although Davis has called some of Bateman's evidence into question, he has not decisively disproved the validity of his distinction.

Even if Bateman's distinction between the two terms holds up as an absolute rule, he still has not demonstrated that David could not

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 450, n. 53.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 451. Solomon apparently became coregent with David in 973 B.C. He was coronated a second time shortly before David's death in 971 B.C. (Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, pp. 244, 248; cf. 1 Chr 29:22–28).

⁷⁸Robert Horton Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel*, Novum Testamentum Supplements, vol. 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), p. 228.

⁷⁹Davis, "Psalm 110," pp. 162–63.

⁸⁰Davis concedes that this is quite possible (ibid., pp. 162–63, n. 15). See also David M. Howard, Jr., *Joshua*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1998), p. 158; Herbert Wolf, *Judges*, in vol. 3 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 419–20.

use the weaker term (מָשִׁיחַ) to refer to the Messiah. Bateman readily admits that David's understanding of the Messiah was limited due to his place in the progress of revelation.⁸¹ If this is so, then this raises the question, "Did David realize that the coming Messiah would be God himself?" If David understood that the Messiah would be one of his descendants, he may not have thought of the Messiah in terms of deity or have referred to him using a term reserved for Yahweh.⁸² In other words, even if Bateman's distinction holds up, David could very well have used the term מָשִׁיחַ with reference to the Messiah.

The interpretation which sees Solomon as David's Lord is no more able to explain how Solomon could be called a priest than the Davidic interpretation can explain how David could be called a priest. Neither position is able to handle the text of Psalm 110:4. Additionally, the Solomonic interpretation finds difficulties in the language of verses five and six. These verses describe Yahweh crushing kings, judging nations, and heaping up the dead in the day of his wrath. Although Yahweh is said to do these things, the king being addressed must be involved in the battle or the promise makes little sense. Yet, Solomon apparently never participated in a major war or battle during his reign.⁸³ This is a significant problem. If Solomon never engaged in battle while king, it is hard to see how verses five and six could be an assurance to him. While the Davidic interpretation finds difficulties in Psalm 110:4, the Solomonic interpretation cannot adequately explain the text of Psalm 110:4–6.

Directly Messianic Interpretation

While the previously discussed views identify David's Lord as an earthly king, this position sees David speaking directly about the Messiah in Psalm 110.⁸⁴ One of the few difficulties with this view is the

⁸¹"Psalm 110:1 and the New Testament," pp. 449, 452–53.

⁸²The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day knew that the Messiah was to be a son of David, but they did not attribute deity to the Messiah (Matt 22:42; Mark 12:35). Jesus cited this psalm in order to push the Jewish leaders toward the conclusion that the Messiah is not only the son of David but also the son of God. Just how much David understood about the nature of the Messiah is difficult to determine, but at very least Jesus used Psalm 110 to demonstrate that David knew his descendant would be his superior.

⁸³Martin Noth states: "[Solomon] failed to add to his father's inheritance. There is nothing in the records concerning any military enterprise on the part of Solomon, and in fact he probably did not engage in war at all" (*The History of Israel*, 2nd ed. [New York: Harper & Row, 1960], p. 205).

⁸⁴This position is generally recognized as the traditional view. It has been held by many scholars both past and contemporary. For example, Calvin wrote, "Having the testimony of Christ that this psalm was penned in reference to himself, we need not

fact that it requires David to have a fuller understanding of the Messiah than is often thought possible at his point in history.⁸⁵ No OT passage written prior to David indicated that the Messiah would sit at Yahweh's right hand, rule from Jerusalem, and be a priest after the order of Melchizedek. So how did David know about these messianic truths? The difficulty, though real, is not insurmountable. As the king of Israel and a writer of Scripture, David may have known more about the Messiah than was recorded in Scripture or revealed to Israelites in general at that time. Furthermore, if verses one and four of Psalm 110 introduce prophetic oracles from Yahweh, David may have received new revelation about the Messiah in connection with the composition of this psalm.

One of the strengths of the directly messianic position is its ability to handle the NT uses of Psalm 110:1. The Synoptic Gospels record an incident in the life of Christ which is difficult to understand apart from a directly messianic interpretation of Psalm 110.⁸⁶ The Gospels tell of a day when Jesus was teaching in the temple courts. The Gospel writers describe a specific interchange between Christ and the Jewish leaders that centered on the interpretation of Psalm 110:1. After answering several questions posed to him by Jewish leaders, Jesus asked them about the identity of the Messiah. The Jewish leaders acknowledged that the Messiah is David's son. Jesus then quoted the text of Psalm 110:1 and asked the Jewish leaders how David could call his son "Lord." At this point, the Jewish leaders could have answered Jesus'

apply to any other quarter for the corroboration of this statement; and, even supposing we neither had his authority, nor the testimony of the apostle, the psalm itself would admit of no other interpretation...the truths here stated relate neither to David nor to any other person than the Mediator alone" (*Psalms*, 4:295–96). Other proponents of this view include: Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. David Eaton, 3 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 3:161–76; Davis, "Psalm 110," pp. 160–73; Harman, *Psalms*, pp. 361–63; Johnson, "Interpretation of Psalm 110," pp. 428–37; Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, pp. 392–95; Kissane, *Psalms*, pp. 509–15; Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, 55 vols. (reprint ed., Saint Louis: Concordia, 1955–86), 13:228–348; J. J. Stewart Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 2 vols. in 1 (reprint of 4th ed., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 2:296; William S. Plumer, *Psalms* (reprint of 1867 ed., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1990), pp. 972–75.

⁸⁵The clearest OT references to a future Davidic king are located in the prophets (e.g., Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Hos 3:4–5). Similar reasoning has caused some scholars to question the Davidic authorship of Psalm 51. For example, Dalglish believes that the concepts of sin, bloodguiltiness, regeneration, and "the spirit of holiness" found in Psalm 51 were unknown in the Davidic era, and for this reason among others, he argues that David could not have written Psalm 51 (Edward R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Patternism* [Leiden: Brill, 1962], pp. 223–24). This kind of reasoning appears to beg the question.

⁸⁶The event is described in Matt 22:42–45; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44.

question a number of different ways. They could have denied that the passage had anything to do with the Messiah, but they did not. If they had understood “my Lord” as a reference to David or Solomon, the Jewish leaders could have explained that the primary or perhaps exclusive referent of “my lord” was a historical king, and therefore resolved the dilemma. But they did not. Instead their silence conceded Jesus’ point.⁸⁷ David prophesied about his “Lord” the Messiah in Psalm 110:1, and he recognized that the coming Messiah, though his descendant, would be his superior. Jesus and the Jewish leaders agreed that Psalm 110:1 was a direct prophecy about the Messiah.⁸⁸

Like Jesus, Peter also assumed a messianic interpretation of Psalm 110:1. In his Pentecost speech, Peter cited this verse as part of his argument that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33–36). Because Peter alluded to Psalm 132:11 in this same context (v. 30),⁸⁹ some scholars have argued that sitting at the right hand of Yahweh in Psalm 110:1 should be identified with the promise of an heir to sit on the Davidic throne in Psalm 132:11.⁹⁰ Bock notes that the verb commonly translated “sit” occurs in both Acts 2:30 and 34. He believes that by linking these two psalms together, both verbally and contextually, Peter implied that being seated at God’s right hand is synonymous with being seated on the Davidic throne.⁹¹ Robertson’s understanding of Christ’s messianic reign differs from Bock’s in some respects, but he agrees with Bock about identifying the Davidic throne with Christ’s being seated at the right hand of Yahweh. Robertson explains:

It is difficult to imagine any way in which Peter could have expressed more pointedly that Jesus Christ’s current exaltation fulfilled God’s promise to David that his descendant was to reign as the anointed one of Israel.... Jesus Christ “literally” is the descendant of David. He sits “literally” on David’s throne, since from both the Old Testament and the New Testament perspectives the “throne of David” is to be identified with the throne of God.⁹²

⁸⁷Johnson, “Interpretation of Psalm 110,” pp. 433.

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 432–33. Hay notes that this was also the universal opinion of early Christians (*Glory at the Right Hand*, p. 30).

⁸⁹In Psalm 132:11, the psalmist recounts Yahweh’s promise to David to put one of his descendants on the throne. Cf. 2 Sam 7:16.

⁹⁰Darrell L. Bock, “The Reign of the Lord Christ,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 49–52. Kim does not agree with Bock’s position, but he has a very helpful discussion of this theory (“Peter’s Use of Psalm 110:1,” pp. 132–56).

⁹¹“Reign of the Lord Christ,” p. 49.

⁹²O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), p. 221.

Robertson and Bock both see Psalm 132:11 and 110:1 as fulfilling God's promise to David that his throne would be established forever (2 Sam 7:16). They therefore conclude that both psalms are speaking about Christ sitting on the Davidic throne in direct fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.

In reply, it should be noted that Peter's allusion to Psalm 132:11 indicates nothing about the time when Christ would begin to sit on the Davidic throne.⁹³ Peter used this verse not to prove that Christ is currently on the Davidic throne, but to demonstrate that God's promise to David demanded that the Messiah be raised from the dead. Peter alluded to Psalm 132:11 in his argument that Jesus had been resurrected and that his resurrection fulfilled OT prophecies about the Messiah. On the other hand, Psalm 110:1 was cited by Peter to prove that because Jesus had ascended to heaven to be exalted to the right hand of God, he is not only David's Messiah but also David's Lord (Acts 2:33–36).⁹⁴ Peter cited the two psalms in order to prove two different things about Jesus. The theory that these two psalms both speak about Christ being seated on the Davidic throne cannot be proved from Acts 2. The main truth that can be seen in Peter's use of Psalm 110:1 in Acts 2:34–35 is that Peter (and apparently his audience) clearly understood the text to be a direct prophecy about the Messiah.

Taking their cue from Psalm 110, numerous other NT passages describe Christ as seated at the right hand of God.⁹⁵ No NT author ever suggests that David, Solomon, or any other historical king ever sat down at the right hand of God, and in light of what the NT says about Christ sitting at God's right hand such a suggestion would seem inappropriate.⁹⁶ As seen above, there are several difficulties with identifying the king of Psalm 110 with any historical king of Israel. But nothing in the text of the psalm prohibits identifying this king-priest as the Messiah. This is the way Christ and the NT writers consistently understood the psalm. Therefore, a directly messianic interpretation of Psalm 110:1 seems the most viable position.

⁹³Elliott E. Johnson, "Response [to 'Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism' by Darrell L. Bock]," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), p. 102.

⁹⁴Peter's conclusion was that Jesus is "both Lord and Christ" (v. 36).

⁹⁵The primary references to Christ sitting at the right hand of God include the following: Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2.

⁹⁶For example, Hebrews 1:3 states Christ sat down at the right hand of God after he made purification for our sins, and Hebrews 8:1 seems to connect Christ's sitting at the right hand of God with his unique position as the great high priest. Both of these passages make sitting at God's right hand appear to be a position reserved for Christ alone.

CONCLUSION

Psalm 110:1 contains an oracle in which Yahweh addresses David's Lord and instructs him to take a seat of honor at his right hand until Yahweh has defeated the king's enemies and brought them into complete subjection to the king. The remainder of the psalm includes an invitation for the king to rule in the midst of his conquered enemies. It also tells about the king's army of willing soldiers, identifies the king as a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and describes Yahweh's destruction of the king's enemies. It concludes with a picture of the king drinking from a brook and lifting his head in victory.

In this essay, the literary context of the verse was considered with the primary focus being centered on the text of the rest of the psalm. Arguments in favor of the Davidic and Solomonic interpretations of Psalm 110:1 were surveyed and evaluated. Several difficulties with these two positions were pointed out including the fact that neither David nor Solomon could rightly be called a "priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." This article has argued that the directly messianic interpretation of Psalm 110:1 is best able to handle the text of the psalm.

Furthermore, the NT's use of Psalm 110:1 consistently affirms a directly messianic understanding of the psalm. The NT shows that Jesus and the apostles considered Psalm 110:1 to be a prophecy about the Messiah. Jewish leaders who interacted with Jesus on this subject and those who heard Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost also appear to have held this view. No one in the NT ever suggests that Psalm 110 was written about David or any other historical king. Combined with the exegetical and contextual arguments against the Davidic and Solomonic views, the NT's use of Psalm 110:1 strongly supports the view which sees this text as a direct prophecy about the Messiah.