

## Psalm 110

*The LORD Gives Dominion to the King.  
A Psalm of David.*

- <sup>1</sup> The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand  
Until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'  
<sup>2</sup> The LORD will stretch forth your strong scepter from Zion,  
Saying, 'Rule in the midst of your enemies.'  
<sup>3</sup> 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.  
<sup>4</sup> The LORD has sworn  
And will not change His mind,  
'You are a priest forever  
According to the order of Melchizedek.'  
<sup>5</sup> The Lord is at Your right hand;  
He will shatter kings in the day of his wrath.  
<sup>6</sup> He will judge among the nations,  
He will fill them with corpses,  
He will shatter the chief men over a broad country.  
<sup>7</sup> He will drink from the brook by the wayside;  
Therefore he will lift up his head.

*David the Psalmist:* This Psalm is ascribed (or dedicated?) to David, the poet, singer, and king. David knew there would be a greater king from his heirs (2 Sam.7).

*Kings and Priests:* In Israel, the roles of king and priest were strictly separated.

*Melchizedek:* A mysterious figure who appears in Genesis 14:17 – 24. His title/name means 'king of righteousness.' He was king of Salem (meaning 'peace'), the precursor city to Jerusalem. He was 'a priest of God Most High' (Gen.14:18). He shared bread and wine with Abraham after God gave Abraham victory to deliver Lot, Sodom, and Gomorrah from foreign kings.

### Jesus and Psalm 110 in the New Testament

If we regard this Psalm as a chapter, it is the single most quoted chapter of the Old Testament in the New Testament:

- (v.1) 'The LORD said' (Mt.22:44; Mk.12:36; Lk.20:42, 43; Acts 2:34, 35; Heb.1:13)
- (v.1) 'Sit at My right hand' (Mt.26:64; Eph.1:20; Col.3:1; Heb.1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2)
- (v.1) 'Until I make' (1 Cor.15:25; Eph.1:22)
- (v.4) 'The LORD has sworn' (Heb.7:21)
- (v.4) 'You are a priest' (Heb.5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:17, 21)
- (v.5) 'In the day of His wrath' (Rom.2:5; Rev.6:17)

Comparison to this English poem:

*Ozymandias*

by Percy Blythe Shelley (1818)

I met a traveller from an antique land,  
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert... Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal, these words appear:  
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

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## Questions

1. (optional) Read Shelley's poem *Ozymandias*.
  - a. It is ironic. A statue made of a great king now stands broken, in ruins, on its way to turning back into the sand of the desert. It reigns over a desert, over nothing. Yet he made boastful claims.
  - b. Psalm 110 is also about a king, the greatest of all kings.
2. (optional) Remember that biblical poetry rhymes concepts, not primarily sounds. Each of you please pick a rhyme and tell the rest of us how the rhyme works.
3. Assuming that King David wrote this Psalm, why would he do so? Why would he want insight into the future king?
  - a. He saw himself sin (Ps.51; 2 Sam.12). He knew that he had a corrupted human nature just like everyone else. He wanted someone who was perfectly faithful to God, who could even fix the human problem.
  - b. Notice how different that is from almost all politicians today? Candidate Trump, when he was running said, 'I alone can fix it.' Granted that all politicians say things like that, but most say, 'We can do this together.' Overpromising solutions to people's fears is dangerous, and demagogue-ish. We must never do that, or be taken in by it.
  - c. I think one of the people who best understood this was J.R.R. Tolkien. The final episode in *The Lord of the Rings* series is called *The Return of the King*. It's about evil finally being defeated, of a great war ending, and the shadows lifting from the land. And finally, there is the crowning of a man named Aragorn as the long-awaited king who brings peace. Here's how Tolkien describes it: "But when Aragorn arose all that beheld him gazed in silence, for it seemed to them that he was revealed to them now for the first time. Tall as the sea-kings of old, he stood above all that were near; ancient of days he seemed and yet in the flower of manhood; and wisdom sat upon his brow, and strength and healing were in his hands, and a light was about him. And then Faramir cried: 'Behold the King!'...In his time the City was made more fair than it had ever been, even in the days of its first glory; and it was filled with trees and with fountains ... all was healed and made good, and the houses were filled with men and women and the laughter of children, and no window was blind nor any courtyard empty." (*The Return of the King*, p.304)
4. Who establishes the authority and reign of this king?
  - a. YHWH, which is the covenantal name of God behind the translation 'the LORD.'
  - b. Who is YHWH speaking to? Who is 'Adon,' 'my Lord'?
    - i. Ancient rabbinic interpretations say Messiah, David, and Abraham.
    - ii. If this is a singular person, then it could really only be the Messiah.
    - iii. Another clue: 'Scepter': This kingly symbol is first used in Genesis 49:10: 'The scepter shall not depart from Judah.' So if the tribe of Judah – of which David was – is meant to bear the kingship for all of history, then this can only be the Messiah, the final king.
    - iv. Another clue: 'From Zion': The reign of the Messiah would ripple outward over the world. This is based on a pattern God repeated. Jerusalem on Mount Zion was a new Eden, since Eden was a mountain (Ezk.28:13 – 14; the four rivers from Eden diverged, according to Gen.2:10 – 14, which implied elevation). Adam and Eve and their children were meant to spread out over the world, spreading God's wise and good reign. Since humanity took a long detour on that mission, the Messiah would have to restore it.
    - v. Another clue: Jesus claimed this for himself when he riddled and frustrated the Jewish leaders of his day.
    - vi. What does the right hand mean? Does God have a right hand? No. It's the ancient expression for being in a position of strength and/or honor. YHWH Himself will advance the reign of the Messiah.
  - c. Who are his enemies (v.1, 2)
    - i. Other people who resist him, sure.
    - ii. The spiritual forces against him, like Satan.
    - iii. The part of us that opposes him.
    - iv. What does 'under your feet' mean? They'd be defeated and humbled.
  - d. Who are 'your people' (v.3)?
    - i. Volunteer freely: stand up and be counted, be used, be deployed in the reign
    - ii. Womb of the dawn: birthing of a new era
    - iii. As the dew: lots of it, like dew on the ground, glistening on the morning

- e. Illus: Mitsuo Fuchida. September of 1949. Former Lieutenant Commander Mitsuo Fuchida, the lead bomber of Pearl Harbor and a national hero since 1941, gave his life to Jesus. He changed his allegiance from Emperor Hirohito of Japan, to Jesus. He read the account of Jesus' crucifixion and his prayer to God on behalf of those who were murdering him, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Fuchida's conversion to Jesus aroused contempt, but he began to travel throughout Japan sharing his newfound faith. In 1952 he turned down the position of chief of staff in the new Japanese air force and in 1957 declined the honored position of Minister of Defense. For twenty-five years Fuchida crisscrossed Japan as well as the United States claiming Jesus as the one hope for our fear-filled, violence-prone world. On his many speaking trips to America he was well-received and shown respect by top U.S. military officials, but many in Japan and the U.S. doubted his faith. Fuchida was invited to Pearl Harbor in December 1966, for the observance of the 25th anniversary of the attack. He visited the war memorial erected over the sunken USS Arizona where 900 American sailors still lie entombed. It was a sober moment for Fuchida; there he knelt and prayed. Four years later he wrote, 'I would give anything to retract my actions of twenty-nine years ago at Pearl Harbor, but it is impossible. Instead, I now work at striking the death-blow to the basic hatred which infests the human heart and causes such tragedies. And that hatred cannot be uprooted without assistance from Jesus Christ.'
5. What does it mean that God will make the king into a priest also (v.4)?
    - a. Normally, in Israel, kings could not be priests. Priests could not be kings.
      - i. They were different tribes. Kings came from Judah. Priests came from Levi.
      - ii. There was a separation of powers. The state could not monopolize worship.
      - iii. There was even historical precedent to keep kingship and priesthood separate. King Uzziah of Judah once became arrogant and 'entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense' (2 Chr.26:16). The priests opposed the king. King Uzziah did not back down. Leprosy broke out on his forehead, and he remained a leper until he died, and he was 'cut off from the house of the LORD' (2 Chr.26:21).
    - b. How, then, could Psalm 110 declare that the king would also be a priest?
      - i. He would not be a Levite. He would be from a different family, and be of a different order of priest.
      - ii. He would be of the order of Melchizedek, who was both a king and a priest.
      - iii. Who was Melchizedek? That guy showed up in a picture of Christus Victor, Christ as Victor. Abraham took a small 318 man army and delivered Lot and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah from the foreign king who had taken them captive. So after this warfare victory experience, Abraham comes back and encounters Melchizedek, king of Salem (peace), a Canaanite who was not like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. God, through Melchizedek, celebrates communion with Abraham. They have bread and wine. So it's like Christ as king, delivering his people from their enemies, and Christ as priest, who celebrates communion with God.
      - iv. Abraham trusted in God's goodness and believed God's faithfulness, which enabled him to deliver people from being enslaved. Jesus trusted in God's goodness and believed God's faithfulness, which enabled him to deliver people from being enslaved to sin, death, and the devil.
    - c. Why do we need a priest?
      - i. Because the kingship and priesthood were always meant to be merged anyway.
      - ii. Because we needed a better priesthood than the one in Israel. In Israel, the priests were connected to the temple and the sacrificial system. They helped out in the overall picture of sending sin into God, because God in the temple was acting like a dialysis machine. 'Give me your impurity, and I will give you My purity.' The priests collected the impurities and sent them into God, so God could both send them far away (the scapegoat into the wilderness) and consume them (the sin offering goat).
  6. How does this Psalm help us relate to Jesus? How do we relate to Jesus as king? Jesus as priest?
    - a. Jesus as King
      - i. Kings deliver their people from those who take them captive. Jesus delivers us from the devil, but also from the corruption of sin in us (Rom.7:14 – 25).
      - ii. Kings rule and declare what is good and what is evil. Jesus does that.
      - iii. Kings judge. Jesus does judge, in the sense of declaring verdicts, truth.

- iv. Kings are meant to uphold God's commandments. Jesus did, perfectly.
- b. Jesus as Priest
  - i. Jesus is a priest because he takes our impurities and gives us back purity in the deepest sense.
  - ii. Jesus mediates between God and us. He reveals the Father to us (Mt.11:25 – 27; Lk.10:21 – 24; Jn.14:6 – 21; Heb.1:1 – 3; Col.2:9). He presents us to the Father (Heb.9 – 10; Rom.8:26 – 39).
- 7. What do we learn about how this king will judge the world (v.5 – 7)?
  - a. Other kings, pretenders, false authorities
  - b. They will cede their authority. There cannot be multiple sources of authority.
  - c. If any oppose this king, they will be like corpses. There are real consequences.
  - d. Illus: Aragorn taking the authority of the steward, Denethor of Gondor. Denethor was driven mad. He committed suicide. That's what it means to oppose Jesus. Because Jesus redeems and fulfills who we are as human beings, opposing him is committing suicide.
  - e. Why does it finish on this note of the king drinking water from a river? Perhaps just to remind us that the king is truly human! Perhaps to give a picture of peace, finally, after the enemies are defeated. There is no other detail that would make this relevant geographically or militarily or spiritually.
- 8. Application
  - a. The United States will one day be in ruins. If it was ever great, it will no longer be so. But we are not to despair. For we serve Jesus as king. We serve the kingdom of God.
  - b. When we face discouragement, know that God is still at work, extending the reign of King Jesus. Let's not give up!
- 9. Extra note: Rabbi Tovia Singer argues that the Christian New Testament tampers with Psalm 110. He argues that Matthew is making this up. The church made its own translation and quoted from its own translation to prove its point. There is no Septuagint scholar who holds to that. Even though the Torah was translated earlier, the rest of the Hebrew Bible had been translated by the middle of the first century BCE. There is manuscript evidence and other quotations. The official rabbinic law sanctioned the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek by different Jewish communities before the time of Jesus. So they were quoting from a widely used Greek translation of their day. The books existed and since they were writing for an audience, what did they often do? They quoted from existing Greek translations of their day.