

## The Great King-Priest of Psalm 110

### **Introduction:**

In an article entitled “‘Ugly’ Christ on cross is too much to bear for art judge” (8-8-08), Roger Maynard noted that Australia’s most prestigious prize for religious art had been overshadowed by controversy over one of the paintings in the competition. The controversy around a painting of Christ on the cross and the inscription “Only Woman Bleed” led to one of the judges resigning in protest. The Sydney academic Christopher Allen stood down from the judging panel of the Blake Prize for Religious Art because of the “deliberate ugliness” of the work, by the artist Adam Cullen.

Cullen, who won Australia’s Archibald Prize in 2000, said of Dr. Allen: “How can he be so offended? It’s just a Jew on the cross – all the other entries would be of a Jew on two bits of wood.” Evidently Adam Cullen has never had a personal encounter with the King-Priest portrayed in Psalm 110!

- Psalm 110 is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament, vs. 1 (at least 25 times) and vs. 4 (5 times). It shines Christologically as bright as the noon-day sun. Here King David plays the role of poetic prophet, receiving from God in heaven a revelation of the coming Messiah that joins company with Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53.
- In Matthew 22:42-46, our Lord, in a confrontation with the Pharisees, turned the tables on them by citing this psalm when He asked, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They said to Him, “*The Son of David.*” He said to them, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying: ‘*The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”*’? “If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?” And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.” (NKJV).

- Here with unmistakable clarity Jesus: 1) affirms Davidic authorship of Psalm 110, something some liberal scholars reject, 2) affirms the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Scripture and 3) makes clear that Messiah, a human descendant of David, would be more than just a man. So crucial was this event in the life of Jesus that all 3 synoptic gospels see fit to record it (Matt. 22:41-46; Mk. 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44).
- Psalm 110 is a purely Messianic, prophetic psalm with *Yahweh* as the speaker throughout. The language and themes are so exalted and magnificent they cannot be applied appropriately to any mere human. Luther was so taken by it he wrote 120 pages of commentary on it (Boice, 896). This “Lord” (*Adonai*) is a King-Priest. This Lord sits at Jehovah’s right hand, watches Jehovah strike down all His enemies and is an eternal High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20). Yes, He is human for He descends from David. And yes, He is God for He has co-authority with the LORD and His priesthood is of eternal duration. The psalm bubbles with eschatological overtones as God’s people look forward to the great and climatic victory of their King-Priest.
- Even the Jews of Jesus’ day believed Psalm 110 was messianic. They just did not see how awesome Messiah would truly be both in His person and His work. James Boice, however, captures beautifully what this psalm is all about when he says, “Psalm 110 is entirely about a divine King who has been installed at the right hand of God in heaven and who is presently engaged in extending his spiritual rule throughout the whole earth. It tells us that this divine Messiah is also a priest, performing priestly functions, and that additionally he is a judge who at the end of time will execute a final judgment on the nations and rulers of this earth (vol. 3, 893).
- The psalm naturally and easily divides into 2 stanzas with each stanza functioning as a divine oracle. The pattern in both is the same: there is a promise and result. Stanza one

rejoices in Messiah as the great King in the manner of Ps. 2. Stanza 2 exalts Messiah as the Great Priest after the order of the mysterious Melchizedek. He is coronated as King in vs. 1-3 and consecrated as Priest in vs. 4-7. We are wise to take off our shoes, for we are surely walking on holy ground.

### **I. Messiah Jesus is our great King. 110:1-3**

- Stanza one sings of *Yahweh* and His chosen King. David overhears a heavenly conversation between the Lord (*Yahweh*) and David's Lord (*Adonai*), between the Father and His Messiah-Son. Here the Father makes 3 promises to His Messiah-Son: 1) I will defeat your enemies (v. 1), 2) extend your kingdom (v.2), and 3) give you a great army (v.3).
- Verse one, in particular, played a significant role in the New Testament as the identity of Jesus as the Messiah is made plain.
  - 1) As noted a moment ago, Jesus cited this verse to prove that Messiah is more than a mere physical descendant of David (Matt. 22:41-45; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44).
  - 2) Peter quoted Psalm 110:1 on the Day of Pentecost to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah-Lord (Acts 2:34-36).
  - 3) The writer of Hebrews quoted the verse to argue that the Messiah (who is Jesus) is greater than the angels (Heb. 1:13).
  - 4) The writers of the New Testament cited the verse in order to show that after Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension (Acts 2:33-35; Heb. 6:20), He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven.

5) In addition New Testament writers stated that God the Father places His enemies under His Son Jesus' feet (1 Cor. 15:25-28; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 10:13).

- In this psalm God clarifies and makes plain just how He would fulfill His great promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 that He would thru David's son, "establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (v 13, 16).

**1. He is enthroned by God. 110:1**

- Of this opening phrase Patrick Reardon says, "In all the Psalter, is there a line more precious and beloved than this?" (*Christ in the Psalms*, 127).
- "Yahweh said to my Adonai." Jehovah says to Messiah. Says is a word often used to note a divine oracle or word of revelation. Note that *Yahweh* and *Adonai* stand as one in opposition to those who are enemies (2X in vs. 1-2) of both! To oppose God's King-Priest is to oppose God as well.
- Sit at My right hand – "sit" is an imperative. The "right hand" is the place of honor, authority, and power. The Messiah-King is granted His power and authority from God by virtue of who He is (King) and what He does (Priest). This King-Priest fully participates in divine royal dignity and power. Echoes of Philippians 2:9-11 are ringing in this statement.
- Footstool is a symbol of complete and total victory. God's chosen King will place his feet on the necks of His defeated enemies and all of this is the work of Jehovah. In the New Testament this promise is applied to the risen Christ no less than 7 times (Acts 2:32-36; 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20-21; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:13; 8:1; 10:12-13).
- Oh what difference there is between God's evaluation of His Son and those on earth who mock Him, ridicule Him, and make little of Him. How much more wonderful it is to sit

with Him on His throne than to be crushed under His feet. You will, all will, experience one or the other.

**2. He is empowered by the Lord.      110:2-3**

- Verses 2-3 proclaim a great reversal. The world's evaluation of this King-Priest is set on its head by heaven. Men may reject Him as Lord, and in so doing they set themselves in opposition to God Himself.
- The Lord sends forth the rod of your strength out of Zion. "Rod of your strength" is better translated "your strong scepter" (*NASV*), or "your mighty scepter" (*ESV*). Further, the phrase is at the beginning of the verse for emphasis. "Your strong scepter, Jehovah shall send." The scepter is a picture of the King's domination, strength, power and authority. Note once again this is Jehovah's doing! This strong scepter extends from Zion but it does not stop until all His enemies are His footstool and He rules in their very midst!
- Rule in the midst of your enemies – "Rule" is another imperative. Messiah will sit with His feet on His enemies neck and He will rule as King right there among them.
- Vs. 3 Your people shall be volunteers In the day of Your power. Messiah Jesus will have willing volunteers who freely join Him in the day of battle. Cheerfully and promptly they obey Messiah's commands, consecrating themselves in "holy array" (*NASV*). These are they who have realized his greatness and seen His superiority. Gladly they surrender all to do anything and all that He would ask. Nothing is too much for me to do or give for this King. They are prepared, strong, and ready!
- In the beauties of holiness (*ESV*, "in holy garments"). What follows is subject to varying interpretations. This phrase may refer to the fact that as their priestly king is holy, so His servants are to be holy. Exodus 19:6 and Revelation 5:10 both identify Messiah's

followers as a “kingdom of priests.” We will share in His reign and we share in His service.

- From the womb of the morning, You have the dew of your youth. This phrase is unclear as to its precise meaning. It could be describing the freshness and enthusiasm of His large army of volunteers. It may even refer to their beauty, brilliance and attractiveness as it relates to their holy garments. However, it is also possible that it is our eternal King-Priest who is the object of this picture. If this is correct, we should back up and apply to Messiah the whole of the description beginning with the phrase, “In the beauties of holiness.” Our King-Priest is thus portrayed as clothed in royal, priestly apparel perpetually preserved in His youth and vigor. This King-Priest does not grow old, tire or faint. He does not need a break, timeout or mid-day nap. He is perpetually and forever empowered by the very life of God in Him. He goes forth in youthful vigor, holiness and glory as the head of a great host who willingly follow Him everywhere He goes and anywhere He sends them. Yes he is a King-Priest forever.
- Walter Chantry captures well how we should respond to the King of vs. 1-3. “Anyone who has caught a glimpse of the heavenly splendor and sovereign might of Christ would do well to imitate the saints of ages past. It is only appropriate to worship him with deep reverence. You may pour out great love in recognition of your personal relationship with him. He is your Lord. You are his and he is yours. However, you are not pals. He is Lord and Master. You are servant and disciple. He is infinitely above you in the scale of being. His throne holds sway over you for your present life and for assigning your eternal reward. A king is to be honored, confessed, obeyed and worshiped.” (Boice, 895).

## II. Messiah Jesus is our great High Priest. 110:4-7

- The union of the offices of king and priest was never realized in the Old Testament era, and yet it is prophesied and anticipated not only in Psalm 110, but also in Zech. 6:12-13. There the Word of God reads, “Then speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying: “Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, And He shall build the temple of the LORD; Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD. He shall bear the glory, And shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.””
- Here in Psalm 110 our text indeed takes an unexpected turn. To unite the office of king and priest was simply not on the Hebrew radar screen and yet... back in Gen. 14:18-20 there was a King-Priest from Salem (Jerusalem) by the name of Melchizedek. He shows up out of nowhere and is gone in a flash. He is only mentioned 3 times in the Bible: 1) Gen. 14; Psalm 110 and the book of Hebrews. There he is mentioned no less than 8 times. Now, in this central verse of Psalm 110, this King-Priest of Peace and Righteousness steps forward front and center. A more perfect type of Christ is found nowhere else in all of the Bible.
- Like verse one, verse 4 was crucial in developing the Christology of the New Testament. There we see:
  - 1) Jesus was given the title of High Priest (only expressedly stated in Heb.), a title after which He did not grasp but that the author of Hebrews clearly saw belonged to Him (Heb. 4:14-15; 5:10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 10:21).
  - 2) By being the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, Jesus is the mediator and source of salvation for all who believe in Him (5:9-10).

- 3) Jesus, having become a Melchizedekian priest, entered into the presence of God in order to show the way for believers to enter heaven (6:20).
- 4) By becoming a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, Jesus initiated a new order (7:17).
- 5) Jesus' priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek, is a greater priesthood than that of the Levitical order which followed Aaron (7:15-21). It is eternal in Him and will never end.

**1. His priesthood is irrevocable.      110:4**

- Verse 4 is the heart of the psalm. It sends a seismic shock throughout our spiritual system with its beginning: "The Lord has sworn." Here is a solemn divine promise or oath. The sense is, may I die if I break my word or renege on my promise. If anything is stronger than a divine oracle (v. 1), it is a divine oath!
- To reinforce the binding nature of the oath the LORD adds to His oath, "I will not relent", "I will not change my mind."
- And what is the promise the LORD makes to Messiah, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, ("King of Righteousness"). You and no other. You and only you. As Melchizedek was a King-Priest in his day you shall be a King-Priest forever! No one will ever succeed or come after you. By God's decree it is stated. By God's decree it is so.
- Messiah would be a priest like Melchizedek. He would be a priest for all nations, not just Israel. He would be a King-Priest, combining two offices. His reign would be without beginning and without end, just as Melchizedek, in that his origin and destiny was not known either. And as Abram saw Melchizedek to be associated with the victory God had



given him, so Messiah will be victorious in battle against His foes, a matter now to be discussed in verses 5-7.

## 2. **His priesthood is invincible.**            **110:5-7**

- The last 3 verses of Psalm 110 transitions us from the book of Hebrews to the book of Revelation.
- Our great High Priest is not a wimpy or weak priest. He is a militant priest as are His followers. He is a Warrior Lamb! Our great King-Priest Jesus is no sissy or mama's boy. The playground bullies of the world, both spiritual and physical, meet more than their match in this "divine bodyguard."
- Evidently Satan and his evil minions need to be reminded who my "big brother is." He is Messiah-King-Priest Jesus. Sitting at God's right hand should strike terror to His enemies as it brings joy to His people.
- "The day of His power" (v. 3) is now identified as "the day of His wrath" (v.5). There is a fixed day and time when He will be made known for just who He is. Revelation 6:16-17 calls it "the great day of the wrath of the Lamb." Moving from the right hand of Jehovah six bold affirmations are declared concerning what this King-Priest will do to His enemies. While this King-Priest is an advocate for all who follow Him, He is a deadly adversary to all who oppose Him.
  - 1) He will execute (*NASV, ESV*, "shatter", break to pieces) kings in the day of His wrath (v.5).
  - 2) He shall judge (*ESV* "execute judgment") among the nations (note Ps. 2:8) (v. 6).
  - 3) He shall fill the places [the nations] with dead bodies (corpses). This language anticipates the Armageddon judgment of Rev. 19:17-21 (v. 6).

- \* 4) He shall execute the heads (Heb. “*rosh*”, sing.) of many countries. Lit. “the head over many lands.” Is Gen. 3:15 and the protoevangelium in the shadows? (v. 6). I believe so! The head of the old serpent and all who follow in his lying, deceitful, and evil path will be crushed by the thorned crowned head of a risen King-Priest.
- 5) He shall drink from the brook by the wayside (NASV). Following his great victory, He is refreshed as He returns to His throne (v. 7).
- 6) Therefore, He shall lift up the head (Heb. “*rosh*”). In verse 6 a head is cut down, executed, “crushed” (!) recalling the language of Gen. 3:15, a promised proclaimed in Rom. 16:20. Now, another head, the head of a crucified, risen King-Priest is lifted up, raised, exalted. And why?
- Because this King Priest:
- as Heb. 5:9 says is the author of eternal salvation.
  - as Heb. 6:19 says is the hope we have as an anchor of the soul.
  - as Heb. 7:16 says has the power of an endless life.
  - as Heb. 7:22 says is the guarantee of a better covenant.
  - as Heb. 7:25 says is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God thru Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (cf. Rom 8:34).
  - as Heb. 7:26 says is holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners and has become higher than the heavens.
  - as Heb. 9:14 says, by His blood... offered Himself without blemish to God to cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

- as Heb. 9:26-27 says appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself... offered once to bear the sins of many.
- as Heb. 10:12 says after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting til His enemies are made His footstool.
- as Heb. 10:19 says makes it possible for us to have boldness to enter the Holy of Holies by His blood.

**Conclusion:**

A perfect kingdom needs a perfect King.

A perfect temple needs a perfect Priest.

Jesus Our Great King-Priest

- 1) There is a great High Priest  
Who saw that sin would cease  
To whom saved ones from every tongue  
Will one day come  
Before the Lord we'll sing  
Made perfect thru our King  
Believing hearts find promised grace  
Salvation comes
- 2) And like Melchizedek  
Our Priest forever set  
We'll honor Him in perfect praise  
Our voices raise  
This one our sin atoned  
Now sits upon His throne  
The Priest who is our Shepherd King  
We'll reign with Him

**Refrain**

Here heaven's voices sing  
Their grateful anthem rings  
To our Great Priest and Awesome King  
Our praises rise  
All glory, wisdom, pow'r,  
Strength, thanks and honor are  
To our great King, our Priest on high  
Forever more