

Psalms: The Liturgical Approach: Coronation Psalm (Psalm 110)

Author: Dr. Bruce Waltke

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Bruce Waltke examines Psalm 110 through a liturgical approach, identifying it as an Old Testament coronation psalm that functioned as a libretto for ancient Israelite royal rituals. He highlights the psalm's profound significance in New Testament Christology, where it is cited and alluded to extensively to establish the divinity, messianic kingly authority, and eternal Melchizedekian priesthood of Jesus Christ. Waltke analyzes the structural rhetoric of the psalm, noting its alternating parallelism, two-stanza division, and thematic connections to ancient Near Eastern coronation poem conventions. He then provides a verse-by-verse exposition, explicating key imagery such as sitting at God's right hand, enemies as a footstool, the willing army like morning dew, and drinking from the brook along the way.

Outline

I. Introduction and Opening Prayer

A. Opening Prayer

1. Approaching God within covenantal structures
2. Prayer for spiritual enablement, cleansing, and holiness through Christ

B. Context within the Liturgical/Cultic Approach to the Psalms

1. Definition of cultus: external expressions of religion
2. Moses provided sacred personnel, institutions, seasons, and site
3. David transformed Mosaic ritual into opera (libretto set to temple music)
4. Psalm 110 as a coronation liturgy alongside Psalm 2

II. New Testament Importance and Usage of Psalm 110

A. Overview of New Testament Prominence

1. Most cited and alluded to psalm in the New Testament (3–5 direct verse citations, 25+ allusions)
2. Core foundation for New Testament Christology (establishing Christ's deity and ascension)

B. Key Gospel Contexts

1. Jesus testing the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 22 / Mark 12 / Luke 20)
 - a. Trap regarding Roman imperial taxes (Pharisees and Herodians)
 - b. Sadducees' question on resurrection and Levirate marriage
 - c. Lawyer's question on the greatest commandment
 - d. Jesus' counter-question: "Whose son is the Messiah?"
 - i. David calls the Messiah "my Lord" (v. 1)
 - ii. Proves Messiah is not merely David's human descendant, but God incarnate
2. Jesus' trial before the High Priest (Mark 14:61–64)
 - a. Confession of sitting at the right hand of power
 - b. High Priest's charge of blasphemy leading directly to the crucifixion

C. Apostolic Sermons, Epistles, and Early Creeds

1. Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2): Ascension and outpouring of the Holy Spirit
2. Book of Hebrews: Purification for sins, sitting at God's right hand, and Melchizedekian priesthood (Hebrews 1, 7)
3. Pauline Epistles:
 - a. Romans 8: Continuous intercession at God's right hand
 - b. Colossians 3:1: Heavenly identity of believers raised with Christ
 - c. Ephesians 1: Universal kingdom over all rule and authority
4. 1 Peter 3:22: Submission of angels, authorities, and powers
5. Church Creeds and Liturgy: Apostles' Creed ("seated at the right hand of God"), Nicene Creed, and Ascension Sunday

III. Translation and Literary Form of Psalm 110

A. Translation Overview of Verses 1–7

1. Verse 1: Divine oracle to David's Lord ("sit at my right hand...")
2. Verses 2–3: Extension of scepter from Zion and volunteer army as morning dew
3. Verse 4: Irrevocable oath regarding eternal priesthood like Melchizedek
4. Verses 5–7: Cosmic judgment of kings and refreshing brook along the way

B. Genre, Form, and Literary Features

1. Poetic imagery and parallelism (army as morning dew, victory as drinking from wadi)
2. Prophetic utterance inspired and set to music
3. Setting: Ancient Israelite coronation liturgy

C. Parallels with Ancient Near Eastern (Assyrian) Coronation Poems

1. Based on research by John Hilbers (Esarhaddon texts, c. 675 BC)

2. Common structural features:

- a. Introductory formula ("The Lord says to my Lord")
- b. Subdivision into two main oracle sections (vv. 1 and 4)
- c. Shifts in speakers (God, Prophet/David) and addressees (King, Congregation)
- d. Antiphonal performance in temple ritual (responsive voices)
- e. Common coronation motifs: sitting at right hand, enemies under footstool, universal dominion, willing supporters, unrepenting oath, eternal royal/priestly roles

IV. Rhetorical Structure and Symmetry

A. Alternating Parallelism (ABC / A'B'C')

1. Stanza 1 (vv. 1–3):

- a. A: Introduction to divine citation (v. 1a)
- b. B: Divine citation / Enthronement (v. 1b)
- c. C: Prophetic reflection / Holy war and willing army (vv. 2–3)

2. Stanza 2 (vv. 4–7):

- a. A': Introduction to irrevocable oath (v. 4a)
- b. B': Divine citation / Melchizedekian priesthood (v. 4b)
- c. C': Prophetic reflection / Global judgment and final victory (vv. 5–7)

B. Structural Symmetry and Numerical Balance

- 1. Hebrew word count: 74 words in verses 1–3, 74 words in verses 4–7
- 2. Demonstrates divine order, governance, and cosmic control

V. Detailed Verse-by-Verse Exposition

A. Superscript and Verse 1: Divine Oracle of Enthronement

1. Superscript: "A Psalm of David"

- a. David speaks as a prophet anticipating Christ's resurrection and ascension
- b. Non-Davidic dating theories lack historical consensus

2. Divine Name and Prophetic Speech (na'um)

- a. Yahweh: Eternal, unchanging, self-existent God
- b. Na'um: Technical term for inspired prophetic utterance ("oracle of Yahweh")

3. "Sit at My Right Hand"

- a. Sitting as posture of official authority and judgment (historical background of academic chairs, papal cathedra, royal seats)
- b. Right hand: Position of highest honor, portico of justice in Jerusalem temple, administering divine covenant law
- c. Typological fulfillment in Christ's ascension and universal reign

4. "Until I Make Your Enemies Your Footstool"

- a. Hebrew "until" indicates a continuing, perpetual state of reign
- b. Historical parallel: Egyptian footstools (Tutankhamun) depicting bound foreign captives

c. NT application: Christ reigning until all enemies, including death, are subjugated (1 Cor 15:25–27; Eph 1:22)

B. Verses 2–3: Extension of Rule and the Volunteer Army

1. Extension of Scepter from Zion (v. 2)

- a.** Mighty scepter (mace of iron) expanding outward from Zion as center of earth
- b.** Spiritual execution: Church's weapons are prayer and gospel witness

2. Volunteer Army (freely/willingly) (v. 3a)

- a.** Arrayed in holy splendor/garments (priestly purity)
- b.** Accordance with Deuteronomy 20 holy war regulations (only willing volunteers)
- c.** Exegetical connection to 1 Corinthians 15:29 ("baptized for the dead" / stepping into martyr ranks)

3. "Womb of the Morning" and Morning Dew (v. 3b)

- a.** Metaphor for divine, heavenly origin and daily renewal of God's people (Micah 5:7)
- b.** Poetic reflection on Flanders Fields (Joyce Kilmer poem reference)

C. Verses 4–7: Eternal Priesthood and Final Victory

1. Irrevocable Oath of Priesthood (v. 4)

- a.** Difference between conditional prophecy (Jeremiah 18) and unconditional divine oath
- b.** Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (antedating Levitical/Aaronic priesthood)

2. Divine Presence and Cosmic Judgment (vv. 5–6)

- a.** Shift to Adonai at right hand, shattering opposing kings
- b.** Universal judgment among nations and defeat of evil rulers (fulfilled at Second Coming)

3. Drinking from the Brook and Lifting the Head (v. 7)

- a.** Image of quenching thirst at a gushing wadi while in pursuit of victory
- b.** Connotes unflagging perseverance and stamina (analogy to Roman military siege persistence)
- c.** Lifting the head: Symbol of final triumph, exaltation, and consummate victory